“MISS I JUST DON’T FEEL LIKE READING TODAY”: URBAN ABORIGINAL AND BLACK NOVA SCOTIAN YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND WELLBEING

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Abstract

This research study explores the reciprocal relationship between education, health, and wellbeing for urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners. The purpose is to identify health and wellbeing factors that influence and correlate with their perceptions of education. The research was guided by an Indigenous research methodology. The social determinants of health, critical race theory, and tribal critical race theory create a theoretical framework. The Mi'kmaq Medicine Wheel defines health and wellbeing. Four focus groups: five junior high Black learners; five high school Black male athletes; three young urban Aboriginal females not in school; four urban Aboriginal youth attending the Friendship Centre, tell stories that reveal (1) learner identities are constructed as antiquated personas, (2) subtle acts of racism and colonization are tolerated and resisted, (3) poverty is a key determinant of racialized learners' schooling, and (4) teachers' capacity to build relationships informs learners' opportunities to earn a good education.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, and Black Nova Scotian youth.

I believe in you

Believe in yourself

Believe in one another

Acknowledgements

To the Creator

To Norma Eileen Dixon Goree and Darrell Stewart Goree

They made a way out of no way

To my strong tall trees Dawn Ella, Jillian, Bianca, Tovah, Gabriel, Eli, Orson,

For giving me a reason to try and try again

To my grandchildren Miah, Xavier, Ryson, Kyla, Riel, Amirah, Roman, Layel,

For giving us all hope

To Elder Bill for leading and holding my hand to my Indigenous identity

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Run through the tape!

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Chapter One: Introduction

Part of the Indigenous methodology for researching involves acknowledging and including the researcher in the project – in other words, the methodology makes the assertion that the researcher is not inherently neutral. The researcher influences and is influenced by the object of their investigation. Therefore in using an Indigenous methodology the researcher must take into account their own non neutral perspectives and how their own values, paradigms, and experiences may shape their research and their findings (Absolon, 2011).

Growing up I received many important teachings on the relationship between education, health, and wellbeing, simply by watching my mother, aunties, and grandmother. Together, with several other women, once known as the Happy Gang Club, they held monthly kitchen meetings. Throughout the years, these women responded to various social and economic problems common within the Black community. I remember my mother and the other women buying on-sale and at times, gently damaged canned goods, to store in their cupboards. Then early on Christmas Eve, they came together to assemble the Christmas food hampers. In each large cardboard box they placed a frozen utility turkey, two loaves of white bread, a twenty pound bag of potatoes, several cans of this and that, along with a box of Moirs chocolates. Later that evening, the food hampers were delivered to Black families throughout the city. The Happy Gang Club also provided small bursaries to Black high school graduates whose aim it was to continue their studies to the post-secondary level. Despite the fact that only a couple of the club members possessed a high school diploma and that food insecurity was often an issue within their own homes, these women and Elders upheld their self-imposed mandate to serve the Black community by promoting education, health, and wellbeing. Through their role modelling, I came

to appreciate the reciprocal relationship between education, health, and wellbeing that embraced the physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual elements of self, family, and community.[1]

An Invitation to My Vantage Point[2]

I begin by telling this particular story for the following reasons. First, it honours the wisdom and politicized praxis of the women Elders whom I knew and loved as a young child. Second, it emphasizes the significance of informal or self-education which is essential to Indigenous ways of knowing. Third, with this story I aim to introduce the natural reciprocity that exists in the relationship between education, health, and wellbeing and how it first became known to me. Lastly, and importantly, I hope that my story will entice you, the reader, into a relationship with me, the researcher.[3] My hope is that my story will help you to connect with the people and communities who are the focus of this research project. Urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotians are the people who look like me and have similar stories to tell.

Brayboy (2005) states, "For many Indigenous people stories serve as the basis for how our communities work" — our stories being outlines of our "theories of sovereignty, self-determination, and self-education" (p. 427). The teachings I shared in the opening story certainly became known to me through self-education and are indeed integral to my theory that health and wellbeing are closely linked to success in education. In addition to the vital importance of self-education are our stories involving the formal public education system and the ways that it shapes and informs our lives.

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[1] Beginning a research paper with a personal story is common practice when employing an Indigenous research methodology (Absolon, 2010; Dion, 2009, Wilson, 2008).
[2] Following in the shadow of Tuhuli Smith (2012) I reframe the place and space of my oppression into the location of my vantage point.
[3] This treatment of storytelling is reflective of Wilson (2008).

In this research project urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners tell stories that speak to their experiences and perceptions regarding the relationship between their education, health, and wellbeing. This is important because literature on the schooling experiences and educational outcomes of Aboriginal and African Nova Scotian learners indicates we should be very concerned (James eta al., 2010; Lee, 2009; Milligan, 2006; Thiessen, 2009). And, as one Black female junior high project participant succinctly stated, "You're not gonna do well if you don't feel well." Her insight points in the direction of exploring the role of health and wellbeing in relation to negative educational trends, such as early school dropout, common among historically racialized learners.[4]

My Relationship to the Research

It was in my first year of teaching when I came to consider the significance of the relationship between education, health, and wellbeing for historically racialized learners. It was clear that the Black learners in my classroom were undergoing a noticeably different schooling experience than their White peers. Their academic performance left me feeling confused and frustrated because with few exceptions the Black learners lagged significantly behind. This was not reflective of who I knew them to be outside of school, which was clever, mature, quick-thinking, and respectful. The number of Black learners who signed up to see the resource teacher and were on Individual Program Plans (IPP) was troubling. Then there were my observations on their general malaise. They often seemed exhausted at the start of each new day; they slouched in

[4] As Nova Scotia is one of the first places in North America to experience European colonization and slavery, I use the term historically racialized to bring attention to the ways that racialization for Mi'kmaq/Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotians is specific to their being descendants of the first storytellers and holding the oldest stories of colonization and racialization in Canada.

the chair, displayed low levels of concentration and were easily triggered into loud outbursts. This was a contradiction to their extra-curricular performance as athletes, artists, and musicians.

Turning now to my teaching experiences, in regard to Aboriginal learners, I come to the shameful confession that I had absolutely no knowledge of who they were. Somewhere between kindergarten and junior high, the urban Aboriginal learners' socio-cultural identity had been ignored, stripped away, or otherwise rendered invisible to the extent that being an Aboriginal learner appeared to be insignificant to the school community of administrators, teachers, and classmates. In retrospect, it seems that it meant nothing to the schools, I taught in, to have Aboriginal learners. One consequence of their invisibility was that although I was aware that urban Aboriginal learners encountered many of the same learning challenges and social barriers as the urban Black Nova Scotian learners, as well as a host of other issues specific to their Indigeneity, I was not able to respond to them in a culturally competent manner. As their classroom teacher, never was I held accountable for their academic progress or lack thereof. In fact, there was never any mention of an Aboriginal learner being in any of my classes or in the school community. I have since come to believe that the vast majority of urban Aboriginal learners' are victims of a hidden curriculum that coerces them into assimilating to the extent of having their Aboriginal identity, including culture, traditions, history, and important critical issues such as sovereignty, erased. Perhaps this is the trade-off for the teachings of a Western education, albeit in the colonizer's language? My observations in both cases caused me to reflect on what aspects of the historically racialized learners' educational life were potentially problematic and might be related to their ultimate success or failure at school.

Wisely, I questioned my ability to teach, but more importantly I began to suspect that I represented an education system that positions urban Aboriginal and Black learners to fail and as

well convinces these learners that they are somehow responsible for their own failure. On this latter point, my suspicions were credited by several of the project participants, who blamed themselves for not having a high academic standing. One Black female junior high participant stated, “We know what to do we just don’t do it.” I question the validity of this statement in light of the fact that this same participant and several others spoke of their frustration in not receiving the instructional support they needed to perform at their academic best. Thus, if academic success is merely about applying what they already know, then “Why don’t they just do it?”

Being a high school drop-out myself, who later in life became an educator, and had also mentored my own six children through the formal education system, I refused to despair. Instead, I delved into the resources of my mind to understand what I might bring to the dilemma of dispirited schooling and low academic outcomes of historically racialized learners. I thought of my passion for incorporating the fundamentals of good health and wellbeing into the lives of my children and how that equipped them with the stamina required for pursuing their education. This inspired me to consider the significance of health and wellbeing in the schooling and education of the above learners.

Arguably, the basics that underlie a learner’s ability to concentrate and engage remain the same throughout time— a nutritious diet, rest and sleep, safe and adequate housing, support and encouragement. However, for historically racialized learners, whose families and communities have endured long-standing histories of social, economic, and political oppression, acquiring such basic necessities have never been easy. Moreover, the feminization and racialization of poverty is more and more decreasing what once were accessible pathways leading to education, health, and wellbeing for communities like my own (Galabuzi, 2006; Wallis & Kwok, 2008).

Therefore, while racism and poverty are likely to be present in the everyday lives of today's historically racialized learners, as they have been in my own, there are radical differences to consider in the current discourses concerning what defines their basic needs for educational success. The present neo-liberal political economy replete with such things as social media, multi-national corporations, fast-food drive thrus', super prisons, and high speed technology, are converging in ways that make their pursuit of a good education exclusive to this space and time in which we now live. Therefore, any prescription for student health and wellbeing must be in sync with the specificities of their lives.

Education, Health, Wellbeing: A Reciprocal Relationship

Within Nova Scotia, it is widely known that learners from Aboriginal and African Nova Scotian communities experience a myriad of negative schooling experiences which have been shown to lead to school disengagement, low educational outcomes, early school dropout, and low rates of high school graduation (Black Learners Advisory Committee [BLAC] Report, 1994; Lee, 2009, Paul, 2000; Thiessen, 2009). A research study conducted by Thiessen (2009) reports that among Nova Scotian learners in grades three to nine, the overall average scores for African Nova Scotian and Aboriginal, mainly Mi'kmaq learners rank the lowest. In reading assessments, the former scored the lowest with the latter tailing closely behind. Both are on par with having the lowest level math scores among all groups of learners. African Nova Scotian learners are those most below grade level for their age. They receive the most test adaptations and are overly represented as learners on an IPP.[5]

[5] For more information on an Individual Program Plan go to: https://studentservices.ednet.**ns**.ca/sites/.../**program-planning**-process.pdf

The African Nova Scotian community has expressed grave concerns about the number of Black learners whose programs of study are based on IPPs (Fells, 2004; Lee, 2009; "Number of Black students," 2009). While an IPP is administered to learners by way of a school team approach that involves the learner's parents or guardians, there remains a number of issues (Lee, 2009). One of the most problematic is that a learner who goes from grade to grade with an IPP does not earn the necessary high school credits required for admission into the provinces' post-secondary institutions. While the education system knows who these learners are, often not even the learner or their family recognizes that the piece of paper that they receive at graduation is not the one that will get them into post-secondary school. Certainly, the wider community does not know how many of our Black learners are predestined to meet the new challenge of securing a gainful and promising future with an IPP graduation certificate (Lee, 2009).

Thiessen (2009) provides a similarly grim predication for the educational futures of Aboriginal learners. Also bearing down on their low academic scores are the socio-cultural schooling issues impeding their progress. One example is a lack of culturally specific supportive services (Aboriginal Liaison staff, Nova Scotia Department of Education, Personal Communication, November 20, 2012). Moreover, the current number of Aboriginal Student Support Workers, working in the community high schools, was deemed to be insufficient for meeting the schooling needs of the urban Aboriginal learners in North End Halifax (Kitpu Youth Coordinator, Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre, Personal Communication, November 10, 2012).

The purpose of this project is not to evaluate initiatives set-out by the Halifax Regional School Board [HRSB] and the Nova Scotia Department of Education, who in recent years have developed initiatives, programs, and policies to address some of the negative schooling and

educational outcomes specific to Aboriginal and African Nova Scotian learners (BLAC, 1994; Halifax Regional School Board, 2006, 2007; Lee, 2009; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2002, 2008, 2010, 2011). Notwithstanding, what emerges from the literature, key contact persons working with the above youth, and the participants' voices (in this project) is that historically racialized learners require a wholistic treatment of education. In other words, they require education that attends to all of the dimensions of their health and wellbeing.

Similar to educational outcomes, health outcomes for Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian communities are disproportionately poorer when compared to the Euro Canadian population (Enang, Edmonds, Amaratunga, & Atwell, 2001; James et al. 2010; Statistics Canada, 2012; Waldron, Price, & Eghan, 2014). History has shown that health and wellbeing are often closely linked with the quality of an education. First hand stories have exposed the health related atrocities and abuses at the province's Indian Residential and Day Schools (Knockwood, 1992; Paul, 2000). This is also true of the racially segregated schools that delivered an inferior form of education to Black Nova Scotians (BLAC, 1994; Hamilton, 1992, 2007; Hamilton & Preito, 1989; Pachi, 1987). The formal education system has in effect dramatically negatively impacted the health and wellbeing of generations of Aboriginal and Black learners. Arguably, intergenerational trauma is one of the consequences of these legacies of systematic abuse (Bombay, Matheson, Anisman, 2009). Both communities know what it means to be denied an education, to have a lack of education undermine their opportunities for a good life, and for education to be the catalyst for generations of un-wellness within their communities. As well, the education system, by way of historically denying Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotians equal opportunities in education, has also lessen their capacity to receive many of the concomitant benefits such as gainful employment, steady income, job security, private health insurance and a

sense of equality, inclusion, and full citizenship. And, so it goes, that as one generation after another struggles for educational equity; one generation after another struggles for financial security, which is key to building a foundation for individual, family, and community health and wellbeing. For many Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotians the profundity of this cycle is experienced in a diminishment of health and wellbeing from the individual to the collective.

Purpose of this Research Project

1. Better understand the experiences of urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian youth in Nova Scotia public schools through the perspectives of the students themselves.
2. Identify what factors contribute to positive or negative feelings about schooling and education for urban Aboriginal and Black youth, in order to more accurately determine where adjustments can be made to create more positive outcomes.
3. Learn from this research some of the things that teachers, principals, and schools can do to create learning environments conducive to the wellbeing of urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners, as well as other racialized learners.
4. To further the dialogue around the impact of economics, health, and wellbeing on the education of urban Aboriginal and Black youth.

This project explores the perceptions and experiences of urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners in relation to their pursuit of a good education.[6] It works from the perspective

[6] My definition of a good education includes learners' experiencing equal participation, meaningful engagement, and academic success that is unique to each individual and at the same time comparable to the top percentile. A good education prepares learners to take on the problems, dilemmas and issues of their era. Fanon says it best**,** "Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it."

that for the above learners the relationship between education, health, and wellbeing is dynamic, multi-dimensional, interdependent, and reciprocal. Hence, defining precisely the places where matters specific to education begin and end, in relation to matters of health and wellbeing, is not practical nor is it easily done. Instead, the focus of the project was to listen to their stories and to hear the participant's voices' with the hope and intention of identifying what it is they need to enhance their capacities to take-up a good education. It is imperative that the perceptions of these learners be dissected in order to diagnose the problem and start treating the issues. Moreover, this project comes at a crucial time when economically the *gap between the rich and the poor* is widening and urban Aboriginal and Black communities must establish strong supports for their youth in the education system so that they might have a foothold in the upward climb out of systemic poverty.

Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature

Literature that explores the reciprocal relationship between the education, health, and wellbeing of urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotians is limited. The strategy for rooting-out relevant literature involved probing numerous related subject fields. This includes government publications, (most notably from the Nova Scotia Department of Education), local newspaper articles and other types of grey literature, web sites, National Film Board of Canada films, research studies, theses, dissertations, books, personal communication, and conferences. As much as possible, I sought out literature that *talks-back* to the specificities of the experiences of the communities in question. A review of the literature is primarily an exploration in trying to understand what has gone on for the last two hundred plus years that created the predicaments in education, health, and wellbeing that urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners are now positioned within. Thus, the key subject areas are Education and Health Studies. History is also significant because of the clarity it brings to some of the current socio-economic conditions within the above communities. Featured throughout the literature is the salience of racialization and Aboriginal status.

Education for Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotians

The literature reveals that many of the schooling experiences and education outcomes of today's urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners falls in-line with their respective peers throughout Canada (Brathwaite & James, 1996; Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine. 1997: Dion, Johnston, & Rice, 2012; James, 2012; Mackay & Myles, 1995). In the case of Nova Scotia, educational inequities within the formal education system are awash with the legacy of racism and the poverty it often brings (BLAC, 1994; Hamilton, 1992 & 2007; Knockwood, 1992; Pachai 1987; Paul, 2000). When one considers the immemorial presence of the Mi'kmaq

Nation and the four centuries of African presence -any reparations in schooling and education are relatively recent undertakings which have received mixed reviews at best ("Number of Black students" 2011; Fells, 2004).

Arguably, for the parents and communities of urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotians, one of the most significant issues is academic performance. Unfortunately, statistics that track their school success and failure, e.g., school suspensions, expulsions, and academic grades are not accessible in the public domain, if at all. Nevertheless, the academic disparities of Mi'kmaq/Aboriginal and African Nova Scotian learners is revealed by Thiessen's report (2009) which determines that the reading and math scores for the above racialized learners are disproportionately lower when compared to their White peers. Unfortunately, Thiessen's (2009) data does not account for the urban Halifax population. Lee's (2009) report does account for Black learners attending schools in the urban core. Both Lee (2009) and Thiessen (2009) make reference to the disproportionate percentage of Black learners who are on IPPs. Further to the matter of IPPs, Lee (2009) highlights the concerns of Black parents, reporting that they are worried that an IPP restricts their children to a second rate future education. This, of course is a reasonable assumption to infer (Fells, 2004).

Several provincial government publications speak to long-standing critiques concerning the delivery of formal education to Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners (BLAC, 1994; Halifax Regional School Board, 2006, 2007; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2002, 2011). These documents represent research, initiatives, policies, and programs created to address the educational disparities commonly experienced by learners in the above communities.[7] The Nova Scotia Department of Education has further responded to the respective communities' calls for

[7] For a list of relevant publications go to the following websites: Black Nova Scotians - http://acs.ednet.ns.ca/publications and also for Mi'kmaq- http://mikmaq.ednet.ns.ca/.

educational redress by instituting councils and divisions, e.g., African Canadian and Mi'kmaq Services divisions within the department. Both are mandated to "enhance the education system" (Nova Scotia Department of Education, p. 3) for learners in the above communities. As well, the Halifax Regional School Board developed policies to address some of the negative schooling experiences of Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners (Halifax Regional School Board, 2006; 2007). These policy documents were produced with the aim of leveling the playing field. One example is the Race Relations Policy (Halifax Regional School Board, 2007).

Specific to the education of Black Nova Scotians there are two key government reports (BLAC, 1994; Lee, 2009). Though dated, the BLAC Report (1994) remains the most comprehensive research available on the public education experiences of Black learners in Nova Scotia. The quality of this report lies in the first-hand accounts of Black learners, parents, Elders, and community activists representing the province's forty-plus Black communities. The BLAC Report (1994) documents factors leading to the continuing underachievement of Black learners. This report reads with an authenticity reflective of the grass-roots demand for educational equity, out of which this report was born. The BLAC Report (1994) resulted in a diversity of recommendations, ratified by all three levels of government.

Fifteen years following the BLAC Report (1994), the Nova Scotia Department of Education funded a qualitative research study titled Reality Check (Lee 2009). It sought to determine "what is working and what is not" (p. 8) by investigating twelve programs that had been incorporated specifically to address recommendations that came out of the BLAC Report (1994). Unfortunately this report was unable to conclude about the academic performance of Black Nova Scotian learners. The reason stated for the dearth of this vital information was attributed to the provinces' school boards' having limited quantitative academic data on African

Canadian learners. Hence, Lee's (2009) report is unable to address some of the primary concerns of Black parents and community members: which is to say, who among Black learners is underachieving, how many are doing so, in what subject areas is this happening, and what are the salient factors underlying the poor educational outcomes of Black learners. One of the main recommendations coming out of Reality Check (2009) is for the provincial school boards to collect relevant academically specific data on the four thousand learners of African descent.

The Nova Scotia Department of Education works closely with Mi'kmaq communities on and off-reserve to provide a provincially standardized education to Aboriginal learners.[8] One key government publication of interest is the Minister's response to a series of dialogue sessions held with the Mi'kmaq communities and key organizations, including the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2008). The Minister's report states that structure and policy changes were needed to improve the level of service it provided to Mi'kmaw and other Aboriginal learners (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2008). Unfortunately, the actual dialogue sessions which informed the Minister's response were not available on the government publications website. Therefore, I have not been able to access the voice of the Nation, only the Minister's response. Hence, specific to the provision and delivery of formal education to off-reserve urban Aboriginal learners in Nova Scotia, my search for literature came up empty.

Local newspaper articles provide a broader sense of the controversies surrounding the delivery of education to racialized communities (Jones, 2007; Lightstone, 1992; MacDonald, 1998; McLaughlin, 2000; Nicoll, 2005; Sparks, 2006). Here one finds a continuous and for the

[8] In Nova Scotia the Mi'kmaq First Nations and Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey deliver education programs and services among participating First Nations. For more information go to http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?nid=859779

most part contentious public discourse on the topic of racism within the province's public education system. Though the mainstream newspapers often represent the opinions of the status quo, the manner in which the issues are represented tends to document many of the Black Nova Scotian communities' perceptions of whom, and what, lays at the root of the problem of educational inequities. Furthermore, newspapers offer insight into the wider community's perceptions of what action should be taken to rectify the racialized disparities in education.

In 2009 the Nova Scotia Department of Education collaborated with researchers from Harvard University with the aim of collecting data on student achievement (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2011). The Achievement Gap Initiative (AGI) /Tripod Surveys give voice to the perceptions of learners in sixty-six schools throughout Nova Scotia. Arrays of graphs provide a diversity of information and insights into the everyday lives of the learners who are the focus of this project. Unfortunately, the survey results that were available to me do not provide quantitative data on the actual number of learners from the above two communities who are failing, quitting, and being pushed out school.

A Closer Focus on the History of Education for Aboriginal Learners in Nova Scotia

Critical to the delivery of formal education to Mi'kmaq and other Aboriginal peoples in Nova Scotia is the history of Indian Residential Schools [IRSs]. It is yet still impossible to determine the full impact that IRSs have had on Aboriginal learners, their families and communities. Isabel Knockwood is a Mi'kmaq Elder and author who earned a degree in anthropology and is working on her second master's degree. She holds an honorary doctorate in civil law. She is a survivor of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School. Knockwood was one of the first to talk about the ways that residential schools created a legacy of educational disadvantage for Aboriginal people in Canada (Knockwood, 1992). Marie Battiste is an

Indigenous scholar and daughter of the Mi'kmaq Nation. Battiste writes, "In effect, education did little except equip Aboriginal youth with resentment and cynicism and erodes human consciousness within the Aboriginal community (Baptiste, 1995, p. xiii). The above scholars are unequivocal in their stance for educational redress. They call out for a public education that encompasses open and honest discourses on Canada's colonial history.

Daniel Paul is a Mi'kmaq Elder and historian. Paul's book, *We Were Not the Savages* (2000) is an insider's retelling of Canadian history. He broadens the scope of the impact of IRSs with a rendering of the Indian Day Schools in Nova Scotia, which in many respects were comparable to the IRS, barring the additional confines and abuses that the boarding school imposed upon the children and youth. Paul draws from the writings of White historians and academics to reframe the history of early European settlement (in Canada) and its impact on the Mi'kmaq people, their land, and Nation. Importantly for today's Mi'kmaq learners, his revision of our Nation's colonial past offers an Indigenous lens from which today's Aboriginal learners can reassess their vantage point. With this Indigenous worldview Aboriginal learners can engage in the re-search of Indigenous peoples' histories. In Paul's opinion it is not the *Indians* who deserve the descriptor of *savage*. Through the author's account of post-contact history in Nova Scotia, we gain insight into the underpinnings of colonization and the ways it sought to dispossess the Mi'kmaq Nation of their sovereignty which according to treaty rights includes an education second to none (Bedwell-Doyle, 2010).

A Closer Focus on the History of Education for Black Learners in Nova Scotia

A detailed account on the overall history of Blacks in Nova Scotia is taken-up by Pachai (1987). A more succinct version, with a grass-roots sensibility, is provided in the BLAC Report (1994). Both sources document the ways in which the Nova Scotia government legislated and

operated a system of public education that was mandated to provide substandard education to Black learners. The BLAC Report (1994) quotes Winks (1971) stating that between 1918 and 1954, "only the most blind of school inspectors could have pretended that separate education was also equal education" (BLAC, 1994, p. 22). Looking through the insider's lens of Black Nova Scotian film-maker Sylvia Hamilton, we become privy to the relationship between racism, colonialism, and the educational disparities that are so common in Black Nova Scotian communities today (Hamilton, 1992, 2007; Hamilton & Prieto, 1989). The *whitestream*[9] erasure of Black Canadian culture and history still remains an issue in the delivery of formal education to the province's Black population.

It is important to note that though the formal education system manifested uniquely different experiences for Mi'kmaq/Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners (BLAC, 1994; Knockwood, 1992; Lee, 2009, Paul, 2000) the literature convincingly asserts that the underlying reasons for the educational disparities, common to both communities, rests upon similar racist ideology and discriminatory practices. The systemic and institutional racism that informs, shapes and imposes social, economic, and political limitations on both communities, past and present, in many ways has done so through the formal education system. Delivering a second-rate education to Aboriginal and Black communities has been a hallmark of Nova Scotia's education system.

A Briefing on Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing

Health studies research and literature on Aboriginal peoples in Canada is largely referenced to First Nations people living on-reserve in rural communities (First Nations Regional Health Survey; 2008/10; National Council of Welfare, 2007). Therefore, the transferability of

[9] Wilson (2008) states that whitestream is a term used by some Indigenous scholars to denote the hegemonic mainstream Euro-Canadian culture.

health statistics to relatively small urban centres is questionable. One noteworthy exception is the Aboriginal People's Survey (Statistics Canada, 2012). The focus of the survey is on social and economic conditions of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit who are living off-reserve. Education, employment and health are areas of special interest.

There is still much to be gained in perusing health information on Mi'kmaq/Aboriginal youth living on-reserve in Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotia Health Districts and First Nations communities collaborated to "identify the current health priorities, needs, and challenges of Mi'kmaq people in Nova Scotia" (Horizons, 2008, p. i). In this report five youth health priorities are listed: (1) education, (2) drug &/or solvent misuses and abuse, (3) alcohol misuse/abuse, (4) bullying &/or violence, (5) physical activity & recreation (Horizons, 2008). An important part of this research involves a youth web survey which accounts for forty-nine youth representing six of the thirteen on-reserve communities in the province. Interestingly, the youths' voice is consistent with the overall survey results which identify mental health as their number one priority in health and wellbeing. Finally, *The Aboriginal Population Profile for Halifax* (Milligan, 2006), states that half of the study participants self-reported having one or more chronic diseases.

A collaborative mixed-methods research study conducted at the University of Prince Edward Island (PEI) explored Mi'kmaq children's' perceptions of health, determinants of health, their current health behaviors and health needs (Critchley et. al., 2007). Though this study is specific to Mi'kmaq children living on-reserve in PEI, the focus on Aboriginal youth perceptions of health and education is particularly relevant to this research project. The authors state that "approximately 50% of Aboriginal children, both on and off-reserve live in poverty (Critchley et al., 2007, p. 217). The research findings reassert that poverty and racism are constant forces

operating in the lives of Mi'kmaq children and youth. Emergent themes include emotional and mental health, success in school, spirituality, self-esteem, and self-identity. This study concluded by stating that researchers have an obligation to "seek out the voices of (Mi'kmaq) children and youth" (2007, p. 229) when conducting studies concerning their welfare. Missing is a critical lens to analyze the poverty that arguably needs to be addressed in order for substantive changes in health and wellbeing to occur.

A Briefing on Black Nova Scotians Health and Wellbeing

Enang and colleagues (2001) report that the health and wellbeing of African Canadians is in a state of crisis. The above researchers compiled a synthesis of relevant health information as it pertains to the African Nova Scotian community. Disproportionately higher levels of heart disease, stroke, some cancers, high blood pressure, diabetes, and other serious health related conditions were found to be commonly high among this population. A more recent mixed-methods research project on the health and wellbeing of African Canadians in Halifax, Toronto, and Calgary (James, et al., 2010) explores the significance of racialization to health and wellbeing. Numerous variables such as age, ethnicity, generational presence within Canada and gender were employed in order to contrast and compare the myriad of pathways that encompass individual and community health and wellbeing. Racism and the violence that it creates in the lives of Black people is the main area of focus however, many other social determinants of health are revealed to be harnessing their health and wellbeing. Youth are highlighted as a sub-group of special interest and concern within this report.

Mental, Emotional, and Social Health: The New Focus

Current health studies literature on racialized youth increasingly points in the direction of mental and emotional health and wellbeing. If we are to apply present knowledge of the

relationship between poverty, stress, and mental health and wellbeing (Raphael & Mikkonen, 2010; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003), there should be little doubt that the mental health and wellbeing of urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian youth is in need of urgent attention. Lovell & Shahsiah (2006) speak out about the scarcity of literature on the mental and psychological wellbeing of Canadian youth of colour. Their report, *Mental Wellbeing and Substance Use among Youth of Color* (Lovell & Shahsiah, 2006) provides a clear snapshot of how youth of colour are coping in their everyday lives. For example, 57% of the participants stated that "not having enough money" (Lovell & Shahsiah, 2006, p. 8) is their main cause of stress. On the topic of depression, 40% expressed that they felt "powerless in overcoming the difficulties in life" (2006, p. 9). The above report asserts that racism is a social determinant of health and that it can be a major factor in forming mental illness for racialized Canadian youth.

In recent school promotion health literature, emotional health and social health are emerging as critical areas for addressing student achievement (Weare, 2000). Ware states, "Emotional intelligence is essential to our ability to think clearly" (2000, p. 6). In addition, the latest research on social capital suggests that emotional and social intelligence are understood to be core competencies that one must possess in order to excel in the 21st century (McKenzie, 2011).

Looking at social health and the ways that it can transition into schooling success is the focus of a report by Dion, Johnston, and Rice (2010). Here the voices of urban Aboriginal learners within the Toronto District School Board exemplify how important it is that schools provide culturally specific opportunities for fostering social health. The Aboriginal participants expressed that seeing their way of life represented in the curriculum and participating in school events helped to empower them, raised their self-esteem, and served as a strong motivator for

envisioning success. Moreover, the above report (2010) illustrates the ways that emotional and social wellbeing is vital to all school-based curricula. These two areas of wellbeing transitioned the urban Aboriginal learners from a state of disengagement to accepting leadership roles, concomitantly transforming their schooling experiences into positive educational outcomes.

A Health Lens that Seeing Youth

Hutchinson and Stuart (2004) conducted a review of health literature specific to the social determinants of health for urban youth. The authors devised a framework that in the final analysis concluded that our society's highly technical and culturally diverse environment presents unique challenges for today's urban youth. Closely connected are the research findings from Sarangi, Khalid, and Stuart's (2005), who reveal the primary social determinants of health for urban racialized youth are directly correlated to their socio-economic positioning which includes such factors as racism, housing, and income. Both of the above studies offer insight into the ways that poverty challenges urban racialized learners in the public education system.

Finally, significant to a review of the literature are the array of articles, websites, and video files found on the World Wide Web. Comprehensive timelines and key statistics on the current state of Aboriginal education and health (MyNVIT, 2012; Stewart, 2014) provide reliable and relevant contextual information. As well, a series of you tube videos featuring topics about the health and wellbeing of African Nova Scotians living in North End Halifax (North End Matters, 2012) were invaluable for gaining first-hand information about the community. While sometimes questionable with regard to its reliability, the web is a bottomless source of purposive information. It has revolutionized the dissemination of education and health information, some of which has been useful in developing an understanding for this research project. The last word goes to a personal address from Professor George J. Sefa Dei (OISE tube, 2012) speaking on the

importance of learners receiving a relevant education. The timing is critical for those learners who depend on a public school education to prepare them for the challenges besetting their present lives and for the future of their communities.

Chapter Three: Analytical and Theoretical Frames

The Mi'kmaq Medicine Wheel: An Analytical Frame

"What do you mean by health?" The aim of this research project was to explore the meaning that urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners place on matters of health and wellbeing in relation to their schooling and educational progress. Due to the historical and current social positioning of these two groups of learners, any definition of health and wellbeing that is applied to their lives should be wholistic and at the same time, provide a critical lens for a social, economic, and political analysis. Hence, health and wellbeing are situated in accordance with key concepts found within the wholism of the Mi'kmaq Medicine Wheel and as well by applying the critical lens of the social determinants of health.

The Mi'kmaq Medicine Wheel is a sacred artifact that represents the Mi'kmaq worldview. This wholistic belief system is represented by a circle, divided into four quadrants, with a cross inscribed at its centre. The seasons, the races of humanity, and the cardinal directions, are examples of the corresponding elements that rest within the quadrants. Health and wellbeing are represented in the Mi'kmaq Medicine Wheel according to physical, mental, emotional and spiritual ways of knowing. The boundaries are fluid and all living and non-living things are continually interacting and impacting one another (Halifax Regional School Board, 2011). In fact, nothing is static or exempt. Importantly, the history of the Mi'kmaq First Nation and its people is implicit within this framework. Health and wellbeing from this perspective is defined as "the overall well-being of an animate object that includes not only the physical and mental aspects but also the spiritual and emotional" (Doucette, Bernard, Simon, & Knockwood, 2004, p. 4). The Mi'kmaq Medicine Wheel serves as a cyclical, limitless, and flexible symbol for healing and for teaching about health and wellbeing (Doucette et al., 2004). The Mi'kmaq

Medicine Wheel lays the foundation for creative ways to explore, understand, and respond to the health and wellbeing of urban Aboriginal, Black Nova Scotian and other racialized learners.

For understanding issues surrounding the health and wellbeing of historically racialized learners, the Mi'kmaq Medicine Wheel is useful because of the inclusion and subsequent insight it offers into the realms of emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing. Both are areas of health and wellbeing within the public education system that need to be teased-out to a much greater extent than this master's level research project can provide. However, an inclusion of the above quadrants offers a fuller meaning to the relevance of health and wellbeing in relationship to the racialized learners in question. The wholistic perspective permits an acknowledgement of some of the forces that damage emotions and crush the spirit while in the throes of earning an education. It has been my experience that when our spirit for learning is crushed, we tend to face our greatest impasse in taking-up the daily challenges of pursuing a formal education. In contrast, when public education includes the spiritual there is a subsequent synergy toward wholeness, change and balance (Doucette, et al., 2004) For example, a participant in the Kitpu Youth focus group talked about the spiritual significance of doing yoga, as a high school credit course. This happened during a time in her life when she was experiencing problems at home. Here the physical act of doing yoga uplifted her spiritual wellbeing in inexplicable ways (and vice versa).

Coupled with a wholistic understanding of health and wellbeing, as per the Mi'kmaq Medicine Wheel, is the grounding that a critical health lens can offer in exploring and analyzing the educational needs of urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian youth. For this, an understanding of the social determinants of health is best employed. Next is a description of the

social determinants of health framework and how this critical health lens lends support for this research project.

Social Determinants of Health: A Critical Lens

The social determinants of health rest upon evidence-based research that identifies the social and economic factors that create disease and poor health outcomes. A key aim of social determinants of health research is to map the pathways of how social structures link to health. The pathways are a complex interplay that involves material, psychosocial, behavioural, and bio physiological factors (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010, p. 11). The level at which these factors receive support reflects a subsequent measure of health and wellbeing. Further, a social determinants of health life course perspective tracks health and wellbeing according to specific requirements for particular stages in life (Reading, 2003). The life stages perspective is meaningful for this project because of the focus on youth, who are by nature at the front end of their life cycle. Hence, "spending on health, education, and general wellbeing is inverse, with the least amount spent in early life and the greatest investment at end of life" (Reading, 2003, p. A-2). Monetary and other resources directed toward the education and health of racialized youth is a prudent investment for the future vibrancy of their families, communities, and for betterment of the country.

Education is widely recognized as a key social determinant of health because of its relationship to employment, job security, and income (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). As previously stated, improving educational outcomes is an important step in improving health and wellbeing and vice versa. Two decades ago, in an article on the educational challenges of Aboriginal youth, Mackay and Miles (1995) argued that the importance of a high school graduation certificate cannot be overstated. Surely, this is even more-so the case for

today's Aboriginal learners. A social determinants of health framework is useful for gaining an understanding of how education fits into the larger picture of what social, economic, and political forces are at play in the lives of racialized learners.

Figure 1 shows fourteen social determinants of health that Mikkonen and Raphael (2010) determine to be most relevant for Canadians. The fourteen SDH are categorized into five general areas.

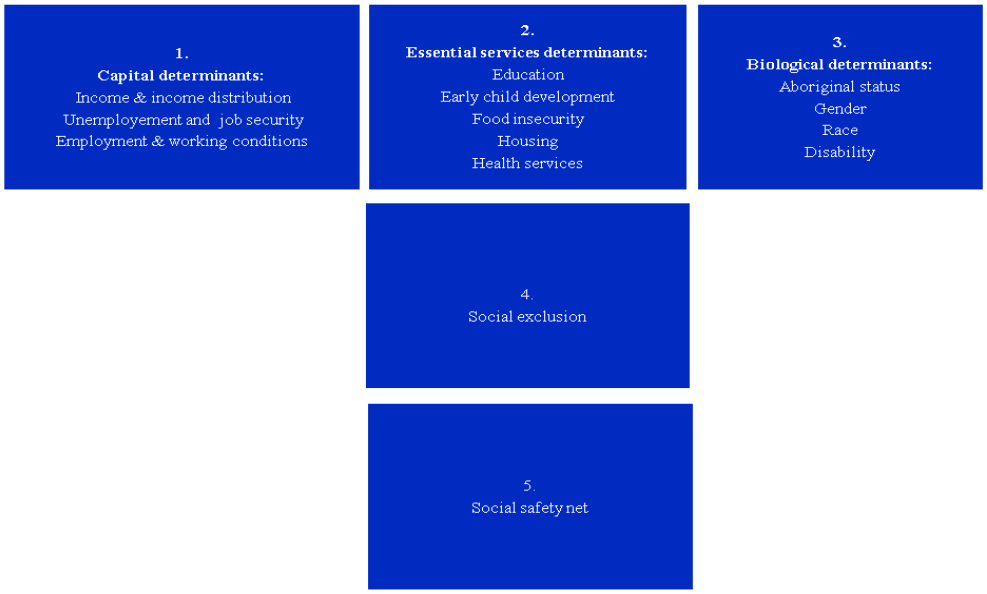

Figure 1. Text is taken from Mikkonen & Raphael (2010) The Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts.[10]

The above social determinants of health framework is used in this project because of its politicized lens for understanding the social policies or lack thereof that have a significant bearing on the quality of life for historically racialized learners, their families, and communities. Contrary to popular health discourses that target individual lifestyle behaviours as the underlying reasons for early morbidity and mortality, a social determinants of health analysis offers a

[10] The social determinants of health (text) shown in Figure 1 is taken from Mikkonen & Raphael (2010); inserted into my own diagram

counter-claim by revealing how social structures' impact biology and conclude that lifestyle habits are not the most significant causal factors in disease and longevity (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010; Waldron, Price, & Eghan, 2014). In short, a social determinant of health analysis does not blame the people with poor health for having poor health. In the words of Wilkinson and Marmot (2003), "the social determinants of health are the social and economic conditions that make people ill and in need of medical care in the first place" (p. 7).

Parallel Injustices in Figure 2 shows some of the root political, economic, historical, and social forces underlying the social determinants of health for Mi'kmaq and Black Nova Scotians.

Black Nova Scotians	**Mi'kmaq Nation**
Slavery	Slavery
Race riots	Government bounties issued for the scalps of Mi'kmaq children, women, men
Segregated schools	Indian Residential Schools & Indian Day Schools
Forced migrations & segregation	Enforced reservation system
Substandard housing	Substandard housing
Denied full legal rights & citizenship responsibilities	Denied full legal rights & citizenship responsibilities
Barred from burial church cemeteries	Burials restricted to own burial grounds
Forced relocations	Forced relocations
Denied full employment	Denied full employment
Ancestral lands denied and expropriated	Indigenous lands expropriated & treaties ignored, disregarded, and dishonored
Intergenerational trauma	Intergenerational trauma
Children apprehended and placed in White homes	Sixties Scoop

Figure 2: Parallel Injustices (BLAC, 1994; Hamilton, 2007; Knockwood, 1992; Mensah, 2010; Paul, 2000).

Research that explores the social determinants of health for Aboriginal peoples in Canada is presented by Reading (2003), who unpacks the social determinants of health in accordance to life stages. This approach teases out the innumerable ways that factors such as socio-economics, education, housing, and employment may cumulatively play in impacting the health and wellbeing of individuals as they transition from one life stage to another. Reading & Wien (2009) claim that their "[I]ntegrated Life Course and Social Determinants Model of Aboriginal Health depicts life stages, socio-political contexts and social determinants as nested spheres of origin, influence and impact; each affecting the other in temporally and contextually dynamic and integrated ways" (Reading & Wien, 2009, p. 25).

Research identifying the specific social determinants of health for urban Aboriginal people living in Nova Scotia is unavailable (Reading & Wien, 2009). However, ample research exists on the prevailing "circumstances and environments as well as structures, systems and institutions" (Reading &Wien, 2009, p. 7) that many Aboriginal people in Nova Scotia contend with on a daily bases. This research is informative in regard to the current state of their health and wellbeing. Statistical data on the urban Aboriginal population confirms that their low income rating is disproportionately higher than the province's non-Aboriginal population (Milligan, 2006). Further, *The Nova Scotia Child Poverty Report Card* (Lesley, 2010) estimates that Aboriginal and other racialized children have three times the risk of living in poverty compared to White children living in the province (p. 10). Such are the statistics that stand as indicators for the social determinants of health of urban Aboriginal learners in Nova Scotia.

A pilot study by Waldron, Price, and Eghan, (2014) explored the social determinants of health for the residents in Halifax's North End. Specific to the Mi'kmaq and African Canadian communities in this area, several social determinants of health such as discrimination, violence,

employment, income, social support networks, program, services, and transportation were shown as compromising positive health and wellbeing outcomes (Waldron, Price, & Eghan, 2014, p. 21).

Based upon limited but growing literature on the social determinants of health for African Nova Scotians, the low income rate is "significantly higher" for this population (Waldron, Price & Egan, 2014, p. 19). Shocking it is to learn that almost 40% of Black women in Nova Scotia live in poverty and that Black children in Nova Scotia make up 19% of the 44% percent total, of Canadian Black children living in low income households (Waldron, Price, & Eghan, 2014, p. 19). Two social determinants of health that are cited for the inequities operating in the lives of Black Nova Scotia women are racism and lower levels of education. Intrinsic to matters involving income, unemployment, underemployment, and unequal pay scales are manifestations of racism in the labour force (James et. al., 2010; Mensah, 2010, Waldron, 2010). Thus, for historically racialized learners' education, health, and overall wellbeing exist in a feedback loop with the social determinants of health. Hence, all school based curriculum, teacher pedagogy and practise, education policies, and educational environments need to be reconstructed using the social determinants of health paradigm.

Critical Theories

To better understand the manner in which racism and colonialism informs the lives of urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners, relevant elements of critical race theory [CRT] and tribal critical race theory [Tribal Crit] are now drawn upon. Aiming to tease out the saliency and impact of racialization on today's historically racialized learners requires analytical and theoretical tools that offer a diversity of perspectives. To appreciate the effective application of these two theories for this research project it is useful to know their genesis.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory took shape in the late 1980s when African American legal scholars challenged US legal jurisprudence and scholarship for not producing the anticipated strides in social equality that the civil rights movement had set in motion (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). The first CRT theorists posited that race was under theorized as a topic of scholarly inquiry and set upon constructing a theory and praxis that springs from the experience of racialized people (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). CRT is grounded in the everyday practical ways that race, racialization, and racism impact the lives of people of colour. It is this relationship between the theorists and the experiences of the people that brings clarity, meaning, and praxis to CRT. For this generation of racialized learners, CRT continues to offer a set of theoretical tools for understanding and then addressing racialization in education (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004)

Dixon and Rousseau (2005), two of the founders of CRT identify six unifying themes defining CRT in the field of US law (p.9). Briefly stated, CRT:

1. Posits that racism is endemic to American society
2. Rejects legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy
3. Insists upon a contextual historical analysis of the law
4. Insists on experiential knowledge of people of color and references communities of origin
5. Is interdisciplinary
6. Works to end racial and all forms of oppression

Critical race theory exposes the hegemonic assumptions of normal typified by whitestream Euro-Canadian ways of knowing. Institutions and their operating systems, such as law and education typically involve innumerable assumptions of what is and is not *the norm*. In relation to this

research project the status quo meaning of *normal* came to the forefront in the stories told by the focus group participants. What was considered to be normal within the sphere of public schooling was often in conflict with their ways of being. Moreover, the participants were prone to maintain and act-out their meaning of normal, despite the backlash. Several focus group participants spoke of feeling out of place in their classrooms. Some suspected that racism set their ways of being apart from the *normal-majority* but they were reticent to make accusations because, for the most part, it was their intuition that was informing their perceptions, i.e., regarding subtle racism. Critical race theory brings a race-based critical analysis to assumptions of normal. The deconstruction of normal is one of the hallmarks of critical race theory.

Critical Race Theory and Education

Some of the first to theorize and write of CRT in education were Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995). They did so using the constructs already established in the field of US law, the central tenet being that racism is endemic within society and in the field of public education. The intersection of the two fields, law and education, is one of the core themes of CRT, it being interdisciplinary in scope. The constructs of CRT in law and CRT in education overlap. Some of the central themes of CRT in law which have also become entrenched in education are the property value of whiteness, the inclusion of voice, and color-blindness (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). For this research project the key concept of voice is important because it gives those most affected by racism the opportunity to enter the dominate discourses on public education. This is especially important for racialized youth whose voices are often marginalized.

Critical race theory seeks to include and validate the experiential knowledge of people of colour. This is referred to as the scholarship of *voice*. Voice embraces the narratives, antidotes, and personal stories of Indigenous, African, and others who are racialized and

otherwise marginalized. Their personal accounts serve as evidence for the existence and impact of racialization, and as well, voice is a counter-discourse for the stories of the dominant group. CRT relies on storytelling and narratives to expose, analyze, and challenge ideas about race, racialization, and racism.

From the onset of this research project, which explores the relationship between education, health, and wellbeing of urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners, there has been an uncompromising commitment to include their voice. The voice of historically racialized learners is too often absent when policy-makers are considering their needs in order to achieve positive educational outcomes. Their experiences and perceptions should be considered when meaningful changes to current and future schooling practises are the objective. Because CRT privileges the voice of people of colour; it focuses the lens on the situations where, and times when, the voice of racialized learners is ignored or missing. CRT takes a decisive position that within the field of education, which includes the everyday practices involved in schooling, race tends to privilege those who are able to claim the property of whiteness. For all others, there are varying challenges and barriers. It is critically important that initiatives and changes be made with the needs of historically racialized learners in mind and policies be informed by their voice.

The grounded theorizing of CRT makes it an accessible tool for exploring and unpacking the racialization of urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners. CRT acknowledges that racialization can be and often is experienced differently, not only between different races, but also experienced differently for people of the same race (Lynn & Parker, 2006). CRT creates a space for all racialized youth to be included and validated in their experiences of racialization; every person's experience matters. It is not a matter of being too dark or too light, rich or poor; every story counts in a meaningful way. And yet, CRT does not

commit its own colour-blindness by positioning the stories of all racialized persons and communities, as bearing the same weight of racial oppression. To do so would discredit specific kinds of targeted racialization, such as anti-black racism, exemplified in the phrase *driving while Black*. Another important example is the heinous rampage of the missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada. These are the types of issues that today's historically racialized learners are confronting on a daily basis.

In closing, critical race theory has at its core the principle of taking action or praxis. CRT insists upon theorizing and conducting research that inspires positive changes in the lives of people who are subjected to the oppressive systems, institutions, and attitudes that maintain and enforce all manner of privileges attached to white supremacy. CRT centres racialization in all strategies for taking action.

Tribal Critical Race Theory

Brayboy (2005) is a North American Indigenous scholar and originating theorist of tribal critical race theory. The author positions the theory as "rooted in the multiple, nuanced, and historically – geographically – epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities" (pg. 427).

Tribal critical race theory emerged from critical race theory. Commonly referred to as Tribal Crit, the theory has a similar orientation to critical race theory in its ultimate intention to eradicate social injustice. Tribal Crit is not a carbon copy of CRT because it articulates that for Indigenous peoples it is not racism that is endemic to Western societies but colonialism, of which racism is part and parcel (Brayboy, 2005). This attention to colonialism serves to keep the focus on the uniquely enshrined legal/political, nation–to-nation relationship that exists between First Nations and the colonial nation-state (Brayboy, 2005) The author describes Tribal Crit as a

theoretical and analytical lens that is useful for addressing issues informing the lives of Indigenous peoples in terms of their self-determination, self-identification and tribal sovereignty (2005).

There are nine tenets that outline the theory's central principle. While the fundamental concepts were conceived in a context specific to the issues impacting the lives of Indigenous people living in the US (much the same as critical race theory is to African Americans), Brayboy (2005) posits that the following nine tenets of Tribal Crit be generally applied:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, white supremacy, and a desire for material gain.
3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of [our] identities.
4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.
5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.
6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.
7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.
8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.

9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change.

Tribal Crit offers an analytical and theoretical framework for addressing everyday experiences, as well as the overarching issues impacting Aboriginal people, their communities, and nations. Brayboy (2005) speaks of the current educational discourses which freeze Indigenous cultural identity into Eurocentric understandings of what it means to be Indigenous and at the same time resists Indigenous peoples' human right to cultural production (p. 434).

This moved me to question to what degree might the colonising hegemonic stronghold articulated by Tribal Crit, account for the urban Aboriginal participants' reticence to verbalize their Aboriginal identity? Brayboy (2005) makes the vital point that in addition to supporting Aboriginal knowledge in the form of oral histories and lessons on Indigenous artifacts and artistry, public schools and the teachers working in them, should be engaging with urban Aboriginal learners as current and future producers of knowledge, Indigenous and otherwise.

Important to this project, CRT and Tribal Crit offer a multipurpose lens for problematizing the ways that long-standing histories have informed White supremacy and systematic racism in the education of urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotians. Though CRT and Tribal Crit are specific to their respective populations, there are indeed places of convergence. First, experiential knowledge is deemed a legitimate source of data; succinctly stated, "Theories, through stories and other media are roadmaps for our communities and reminders of our individual responsibilities to the survival of our communities" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 427). In the case of CRT, data is collected by inclusion of voice, which is commonly described as antidotes, narratives, and stories. In the case of Tribal Crit, oral knowledge and stories that hold the traditions, beliefs, as well as myriad and varied ways of being Indigenous, develop data.

Comparatively speaking, both theories value the experiential knowledge of those who are racialized. Secondly, while each of these theories has a specific focus, for all intent and purposes, in view of this particular project, colonialism and racism represent two sides of the same problem, (with the noteworthy emphasis on the legal/political positioning of Indigenous people). In the case of schooling and education both theories serve to bring attention to the pervasiveness and magnitude of White supremacy, sometimes exacted through racism and sometimes through colonialism, or perhaps all the time exacted through both. Thirdly, colour-blindness is a concept that both theories share. Fourthly, it is the commitment of both theories to take an action-oriented praxis to all research. CRT and Tribal Crit insist on building capacity, finding meaningful solutions and making life somehow better for the people involved. Finally, both theories support the vision that urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian youth need the competencies of both academic knowledge and cultural knowledge to embark upon adulthood. In this regard, they need teachers, who look like them, teach them. CRT and Tribal Crit agree that for successful mentoring, role modeling, and teaching, having teachers who look like the learners they teach, is essential for both academic and cultural knowledge to be fully absorbed.

Together - Stronger

For this research project, I draw from both theories. While maintaining respect for the history, scholarship, and intent and purpose of each, dovetailing the two (whenever appropriate), is the turn taken for this research. Unravelling the vortex of how racialization informs the education, health, and wellbeing of urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners requires looking through the frameworks of both critical theories of racialization. Because of their histories, pin-pointing the exactitudes of colonialism and racism for these two groups of learners is often like trying to hit a moving target. For example, racialized identification among my own

family members varies from Black, mixed-race, light-skin, non-status, urban Indigenous, and varied combinations encompassing all of the above. For many years, "Black" was the only word my family identified with. I often wonder, from where did the others come and what made them necessary? Perhaps one reason is that skin tone is not the only signifier of racialization. More recent theorizing of CRT is seen as "a set of shifting bottoms and rotating centers, where not one category (e.g., race, social class, and sexual orientation) dominates but where there are multiple ways in which they operate" (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 262).

In Figure 3 elements of CRT and Tribal Crit are juxtaposed to the four quadrants of the Mi'kmaq Medicine Wheel. Here one can see how some of the key concepts of CRT and Tribal Crit may relate to the education, health, and wellbeing of historically racialized learners.

- Mental: Theorizing of race, racism, and racialization engages the intellect in thought provoking ways that exposes constructions of racialization
- Physical: The praxis aspect of both theories seeks to decolonize societal institutions such as law and education; seeking the rectification of socio-economic deprivation from racialization
- Emotional: The scholarship and practical inclusion of the *Voice* of the oppressed, allows for a cathartic expression of the micro and macro aggressions that attack emotional wellbeing. When voice is honored and restored we tell our stories of racialization and racism.
- Spiritual: With intellect engaged, social and economic wellbeing meaningfully addressed, and capacity of voice restored, the spirit is healed, hope is renewed, and self-determination is empowered. In Figure 3 below the four quadrants of the Mi'kmaq

Medicine Wheel, as outlined above are juxtaposed with key concepts of critical race theory and tribal critical race theory.

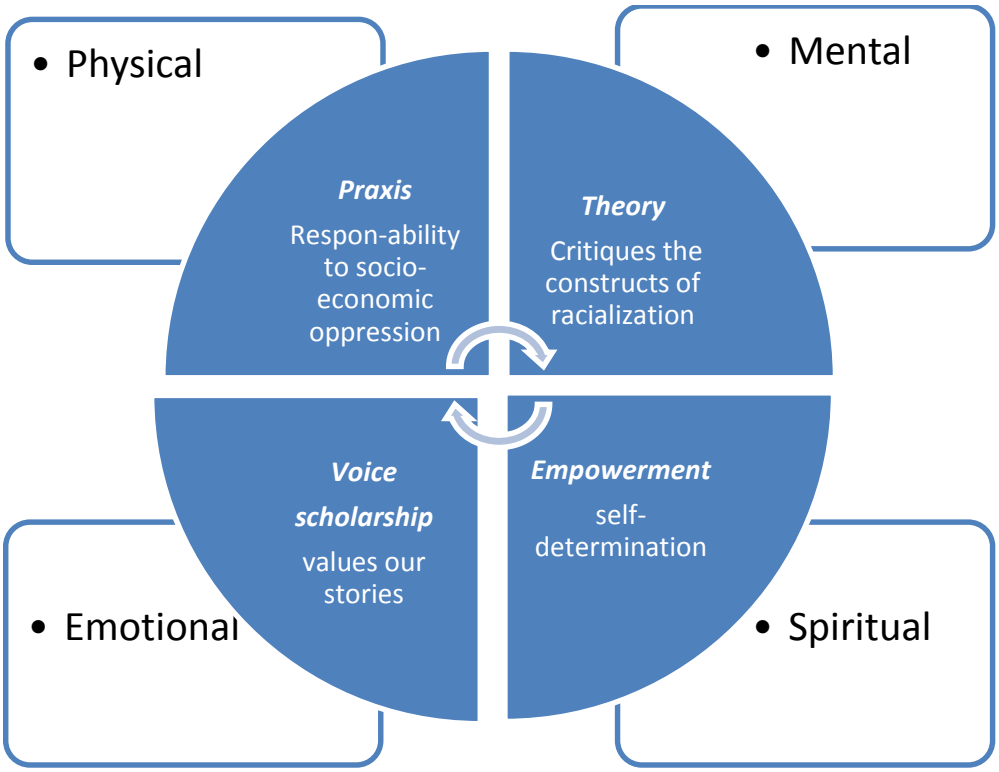

Figure 3: Key concepts of critical race theory and tribal race theory placed within the four quadrants of the Mi'kmaq Medicine Wheel.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Ontology	**Epistemology**	**Methodology**	**Axiology**
*Multiple realities	*Knowledge systems exist in their context or in relationship: cultures, worldview, times, language, histories, spiritualties, the cosmos,	*3Rs: Respect Responsibility Relational accountability *Spiritual significance	*Being accountable to your relations
*An object or thing is not as important as the relationship one has to it. *Reality is relationships		*Must adhere to relational accountability	*Ensure respectful and reciprocal relationships
*Reality is in the relationship one has with the truth		*Build more relationships that share power	*Responsible in choosing the topic where we build relationships. *We are accountable to the relationships we form

Figure 4 – Summary of key elements in Wilson (2008) Indigenous research paradigm.

This is an exploratory qualitative research project that employs the key concepts of relationship, spirituality, and storytelling from within an Indigenous research methodology. Indigenous scholar Shaun Wilson's (2008) understanding of an Indigenous research methodology is heavily drawn upon in devising the methodology. The diagram above (Figure 4)

is a succinct representation of Wilson's (2008) conception of an Indigenous research paradigm: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology.

Relationship Is Reality

The key conceptual ideas informing this methodology derive from Wilson's (2008) understanding of *relationship* as embraced within an Indigenous research paradigm. This includes the 3 Rs of an Indigenous research methodology: Respect, Relational Accountability, and Responsibility. When speaking of his understanding of the significance of Relationship, Wilson (2010) states, "We are not in relationships, we are relationship" (Wilson, 2010). This statement brought to mind something that my Uncle Blair, an Anglican priest, once said: "We came into existence because of a relationship and from that initial spark onward; we strive to re-experience the spirit, the fusion, the energy, of that first relationship" (Rev. Blair Dixon, Personal Communication, August 25, 2013). This understanding of the significance of relationship reaffirms Wilson's (2008) own that Relationship is reality.

Wilson (2008) posits that Relational Accountability is the core of an Indigenous research paradigm. Throughout the unravelling of this research project, I strove to build Relational Accountability with everyone and everything involved. This required a reflexive praxis informed by Respect and Responsibility with all aspects of the project. Because this project involved working closely with young people, Relational Accountability was key to building a respectful rapport and for insuring that their voices were honoured.

In following Wilson's (2008) treatment of an Indigenous research methodology, it is necessary that I make known the salient relationships that have shaped the methodology for this research project. The land Nova Scotia and my community of North End Halifax; my long-time friend and Metis Elder Bill Lewis, my family and my thesis committee are the significant

relationships that provided the teachings for conducting this project according to an Indigenous methodology. Below I try to explain the ways that each of the above relationships were meaningful in this regard.

The primary relationship that informed the methodology for this research project is my community North End Halifax. It is my relationship to this land, its people and its relevant histories that compelled me to conduct research that aims to bring attention to the difficulties and disparities of urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners. The land holds the history of my Aboriginal and African ancestors. This land is home to seven generations of my great, great, grandmothers' family. It is also the place where I was born and where I raised my six children. Old North End Halifax is the place where I first developed my sense of identity within the context of race, class, gender and community. Wilson (2008) states, "Who I am is where I'm from and my relationships" (p. 80). In other words, if the place, e.g., my community, was other than where and what it is, my relationships would be different and so would this methodology. My relationship to my community made it possible and necessary to conduct the research through a wholistic and critical theoretical lens and as well, to do so with a particular set of methods.

Using an Indigenous research methodology placed upon me a responsibility to do what I could to perceive reality through an Indigenous paradigm. For this, I have relied on the guidance of my friend, Metis Elder Bill Lewis. Indigenous ways of knowing, seeing and doing were made available to me through Elder Bill's patient relaying of stories, oral history, traditional knowledge and attending ceremonies. By his patient mentoring and lived-example, I learned much, and came to appreciate the importance of proper protocol in matters involving the urban

Aboriginal community. Elder Bill was pivotal in having two local Aboriginal organizations collaborate on this project.

An essential part of this methodology was having the guidance and support of my thesis supervisory committee. Dr. Carl James, my thesis supervisor, unapologetically takes up the complex discourses of racialization in education, be it subtle, overt, historical, systematic, institutional, or otherwise. His sensibility and knowledge on matters of race, ethnicity, racialization and racism are of the utmost importance to this project because of the ways that racialization is manifested through myriad processes of education. In addition, the support and insights that I have received from supervisory committee member Dr. Susan Dion have been pivotal for aiding my thinking and helping me gain an understanding for the breadth of educational issues concerning urban Aboriginal learners. Both Drs. James and Dion are tireless champions of social justice for Aboriginal, African, as well as other learners, who because of such things as sexual orientation, gender, class and being differently-abled, are often marginalized within the classroom and public education system.

This project's methodology was also significantly shaped by relationships with my six children. They pushed the boundaries of my thinking, asking me to reconsider the ways that my perceptions of racism and poverty may not be the most relevant for understanding the issues that beset the education, health and wellbeing of today's historically racialized learners. Witnessing their transition through the education system, I came to know that there are many areas of their struggle that I cannot fully appreciate. Nothing represents this point more than their relationship to technology, which has greatly broadened their experience of the world. Cyber bullying and pornography are just one click away. So too are the actual real-time archival speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King. Now that my children are young adults, I have witnessed how their access

to technology greatly ties into their employment, level of income and quality of life. Participants in one focus group talked about being on the wrong side of a digital divide that privileges only those learners who can afford to own a computer. I was surprised to learn that their participation in social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and in many cases their high proficiency in gaming, has done little to equip them with the knowledge and skills required to be proficient in the area of information and computer technology for the purposes of high level education and future employment opportunities.

The land of my ancestors, my community, my friend and Elder Bill Lewis, my thesis committee, and my family, from all these relationships I received the insight, guidance and support needed for understanding, engaging with, and relating to an Indigenous paradigmatic approach that places relationships at the centre of reality. The next meaningful concept discussed in reference to the methodology is that of spirituality.

Spiritual Dimension

The epistemological meaning of an Indigenous research methodology lies in the spiritual expression of knowing, doing, and being (Ermine, 1995). I interpret this to mean that the spirit works from the inside out. Although spirituality was seldom openly discussed with the focus group participants, as the researcher, spirituality was integral to always seeking an Indigenous methodological approach to finding the deeper meaning that the participants attach to their stories about their schooling and education.

In relation to Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian communities the significance of spirituality is embedded within their histories, cultures, and traditions. As well, spirituality is evident in their struggle for social justice. The Mi’kmaq community holds traditional ceremonies on a regular basis. This includes weekly sweats, annual POW WOWs, and many other gatherings

that emanate from the realm of the spiritual. One only has to look at the ways that the spiritual dimension informs the political struggles of Aboriginal people to appreciate the importance that they place upon spirituality. [11]

Similarly, Black Nova Scotians have relied on a spiritual agenda to persevere through centuries of oppression. The Black church in Nova Scotia, commonly referred to as the strength of the Black community has been in operation since the early 1700s. To appreciate the significance of the spiritual to this community, one should read the history the Black church's involvement in all matters pertaining to political, economic, and social equality in Nova Scotia (Pachai, 1987). The early church was the bedrock for early political movements.

While spirituality can be expressed in many different ways, it is only fitting to recognize the role that spirituality has played in the histories and triumphs of the above colonized and racialized people. For this methodology, the spiritual dimension is employed as part of the wholistic lens for understanding the perceptions and experiences of historically racialized learners in Nova Scotia. Perhaps a story will make clear the essence of the spiritual dimension in the lives of Black learners. Though not a story that embraces spirituality in any traditional sense of the word, it does help to represent what I mean by spirituality when considering the wellbeing of historically racialized learners in the area of schooling and education.

Many years ago, I worked as a student teacher in a prekindergarten class in a school located in the Old North End of Halifax. The majority of learners were Black Nova Scotian. The classroom teacher was a White woman who had taught this same class for twenty-five years. I considered this woman to be a very committed educator. She told me that when the students in her class completed the year (this being their first year of formal schooling) they were more

[11] The Mi'kmaq community in Nova Scotia was central in the resistance movement at OKA, Burnt Church, and now the fracking demonstrations in New Brunswick. In all of these movements the land is the defining matter at stake.

advanced readers than students in the fourth grade. She was distraught because the fourth grade students had been in her class, just four years earlier. She witnessed one generation after another become less competent readers - they were taught to be illiterate.

The above testimony continues to trouble me. I often question how the above situation affected the spiritual wellbeing of the students? For it seems that of all the elements: physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional, the above happening was a spiritual matter that would cause them to despair (and at such an early age). This story is one of many that compelled me to integrate the spiritual into this methodology.

Through this project, I explore how the spiritual dimensions of knowing and doing might inform a sense of identity for learners such as these. In James et al. (2010) Black Nova Scotian adults talked about some of the ways that racialized micro aggressions negatively impacted their health and wellbeing. With the benefit of hindsight, they realized that, over the span of time, from their youth to their adulthood, innumerable racialized micro aggressions had devalued their sense of identity. Their stories serve as *red flags* for appreciating how important it is for today's historically racialized learners to have the spiritual tools they need to withstand the never ending assaults on their developing sense of self. In short, they need a shield to deflect the gaze of Eurocentric othering. Many times throughout this project the focus group participants spoke of racialized micro aggressions. For example, jokes made at their expense, being excluded or isolated from class. These were common experiences that happened in the classroom, principal's office and school yard. When a young person's identity is routinely undermined, downtrodden, and ignored their spirit is wounded; all too soon their health and wellbeing will follow.

Qualitative Methods of Inquiry

"Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). This research project is an exploratory qualitative research inquiry. In speaking of the recent turns in qualitative inquiries, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that qualitative research aims to "make sense of the terrifying conditions that define daily life at the first decade of this century" (p. xii). Now, well into the second decade of this century, daily life continues in much the same way. The expectation and hope is that research has the capacity to alleviate human suffering. I selected a qualitative method of inquiry because it embraces a critical perspective that targets the voices of marginalized people; reveals the social construction of the engendered other; encourages the reflexivity of the researcher and insists that the researched community benefits from their involvement in the research project (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Importantly, qualitative methods of inquiry can bring the voices of historically racialized youth into spaces typically denied to them. It allows them to articulate the challenges and barriers that limit their potential for earning a good education. Inclusion of the stories of historically racialized learners is critical and vital in the movement toward achieving educational equity in Nova Scotia. A fundamental concept of qualitative methodologies is that societal norms are socially constructed, can be deconstructed and in due course, reconstructed. This trajectory of knowledge and praxis means that nothing in society needs to remain as is. Anything and everything is subject to change. The idea that society can be reconstructed is a concept that motivates and inspires the mind and spirit to conduct research for the purpose of changing the existing social order. Racialization in the public education system is a primary example of a way of being that can be reconfigured through qualitative research.

Qualitative methods of inquiry place expectations upon the researcher to significantly shape the research project in the direction of reducing the *space* between the researcher and those being researched. The researcher must create ways to merge presence and voice with conscious reflexivity. The challenge is to embody a critical interpretation of one's self (the researcher) while conducting the research project. In other words, I am to be determinedly aware of what I am bringing to the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 124). "Writing up" (the field notes) and "writing down" the narrative" (p. 124) is key in the pursuit of finding the meaning in the data.

Finally, a key principle of qualitative research is that it must benefit the communities involved in the research project. The benefit can take numerous forms but should always reach toward the goal of increased equity and social justice. Because of the pervasiveness of exploitative research conducted in Aboriginal and Black communities, this principle is especially important to this work.

Finding ways to benefit the focus group participants was challenging without a research budget. However, this was somewhat accomplished by providing refreshments during the focus group sessions, arranging Elder support, and providing referrals to community supportive services. Some of the participants stated that they benefited from their involvement in the project. One Black female junior high participant stated, "I think us four, because we're here now; we can try to make a difference [in their classroom] but the rest of them. I don't know." Hence, in this instance participant engagement was an empowering experience. Another participant wrote on the focus group feedback form, "I enjoyed it because I could express myself and say what was on my mind and I got to eat!!!"

Recent turns in the current field of qualitative research state that qualitative researchers have a responsibility to steadfastly push for innovative methodologies that direct research in

"matters of equity and social justice" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 1.). Indigenous studies are currently one of the five major streams of qualitative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 54). Both qualitative research inquiries and Indigenous methodologies are oriented toward research that cares about and connects with people's struggles and moreover, expects change to be a by-product of the research.

Community Collaboration

Following an Indigenous research methodology places a responsibility upon the researcher to inform and secure support from the communities involved in the research project. Drawing upon the core concepts of Respect, Responsibility, and Relational Accountability, together with the above elements of qualitative methods of inquiry, I garnered support for this project from the following community organizations.

Healing Our Nations.

Healing Our Nations is an Aboriginal community-based health organization serving the Atlantic region. The main office is located in the Halifax Regional Municipality. This organization's goal is to rediscover pride, traditions, and spirituality (Healing Our Nations, n.d.) of Aboriginal people in the Atlantic region. Child and youth development is one of their main areas of focus. In 2006 Elder Bill Lewis introduced me to the staff for the purpose of collaborating on this research. Several years later, in the fall of 2012, prior to conducting the focus groups, I met with the new Director and the Community Educator. I provided them with a research information package (1) Recruitment poster – Appendix A; (2) Parental consent forms - Appendix B; (3) Participant consent/assent forms - Appendix C; (4) Focus group questions - Appendix D. The organization agreed to provide ongoing support.

Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre.

The Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre is located in North End Halifax. Its mandate is to provide structured based programming to the urban Aboriginal community in the Halifax Regional Municipality. In October 2012, Elder Bill Lewis, who is a board member, introduced me to the Kitpu Youth Co-coordinator at the Centre. I provided a research information package (Appendices A, B, C, D). The Youth Co-coordinator agreed to recruit members of the Kitpu Youth Group to participate in this research project. He also offered a space for the focus group session and refreshments.

Black Educators Association.

The Black Educators Association (BEA) is located in North End Halifax, several doors away from the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre. Their mandate is to provide educational support to African Nova Scotians. In early October of 2012, I met with the President and gave him an information package (Appendices A, B, C, D). BEA agreed to collaborate and provided support in several ways. They were instrumental in the recruitment of participants, provided the use of their board room and provided refreshments.

YMCA Healthy Teenze.

The Healthy Teenze program is funded by the Halifax YMCA and runs out of the Community Y building, which is located in North End Halifax, one block north of the Black Educators Association and of the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre. Healthy Teenze is an after-school program that provides a space for community youth to receive tutoring and engage in sport, leisure, and art activities. I met with the Program Coordinator and provided him with a research information package (Appendices A, B, C, D). He agreed to support the project by hosting a focus group session. On the night of the scheduled focus group, no youth attended the

session. I attempted to set up a second focus group session but it did not come together for various reasons such as time restraints and space availability.

Community YMCA.

The Community Y Basketball Program operates out of the Community Y building which is located in North End Halifax (same building as the Healthy Teenze). A long-standing community member and supporter of the basketball program arranged for several basketball players to participate in a focus group session. The Community YMCA provided the space for the focus group and served refreshments.

Focus Groups – Data Collection

> Focus groups offer unique insights into the possibilities of critical inquiry as deliberative, dialogic, democratic practice that is always already engaged in and with real-world problems and asymmetries in the distribution of economic, cultural, and social capital (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 547).

Data collection through the facilitation of focus groups is consistent with both an Indigenous research methodology and qualitative strategies of inquiries. In regard to the data collection process, it was important to create spaces whereby the focus group participants felt safe, supported and believed. CRT and Tribal Crit come into play here because of how these theories encourage and honour the inclusion of the voice of racialized youth. Believing that there can be strength in numbers, the focus groups provided an environment for empowerment and support. With the aim of facilitating focus groups that adhered to Relational Accountability, the sessions were held in the community and at well-known community-based organizations. These spaces were familiar to the focus group participants. In other words, the sessions took place in as natural

a setting as possible. Secondly, the issues that were discussed in the focus group sessions were clear and predefined. All of the participants could speak to their experiences of schooling and their pursuit of earning a good education. Using focus groups as the method for data collection was especially effective for this study for the following reason,

> Participants in this type of research are, therefore, selected on the criteria that they would have something to say on the topic, are within the age-range, have similar socio-characteristics and would be comfortable talking to the interviewer and each other (Rabiee, 2004, p. 655).

The focus groups were comprised of individuals who already knew one another, either through a basketball team, youth group, being learners in the same class, or friends and neighbours. This type of youth supportive environment "brings forth material that would not come out in either the participants' own casual conversation or in response to the researcher's preconceived questions" (Morgan, 1998, p. 21).

Morgan (1998) raises two practical reasons for choosing focus groups as the method of data collection. Time and money are both factors that had to be considered for collecting the data for this project. With these limitations in mind, it was important to find a method of data collection that would allow as many voices as possible. Thus, conducting focus groups, for this study, was a reasonable choice over interviews or participant observation.

In total there were four focus group sessions. Focus group session's numbers one, two, and four, were audio recorded. In focus group number three, notes were taken during the session (more detail on each of the four focus groups follows). The audio recordings were downloaded to a USB and later transcribed into Word documents. The transcripts were saved on the same USB as the recordings. The transcripts and USB original audio recordings are stored in the

researcher's (my own) personal computer. I am the only person with the password to unlock the computer (it is password protected). The notes from focus group number three were transferred into a Word document on the same computer.

The Focus Groups

Junior High Black Learners – Focus Group 1. The first focus group session was held on November 6, 2012 at the Black Educators Association office. Present were five Black Nova Scotian youth: three girls and two boys, between the ages of thirteen and fifteen. All are grade eight learners at a junior high school located adjacent to the historical Black communities of North Preston, East Preston, and Cherry Brook.

The focus group session was audio recorded and lasted for slightly over one hour. Because of the age of the participants, I proceeded slowly. First, I explained the purpose, aims, possible risks, and benefits associated with the project. I talked about how the session would proceed. I emphasized the importance of trust and confidentiality. I asked each participant if they would agree to keep confidentiality, everyone did. Each participant submitted a signed parental consent form. In addition, I collected participant signed consent/assent forms.

Before beginning the focus group discussion, I explained why I was audio recording the session and what would happen with the collected data. I read aloud the focus group questions (Appendix D) allowing time for each participant to think about the questions before responding. This allowed for a high degree of cross-talk, which meant letting go of the expectation that all ten focus group questions would be covered. Instead, I allowed the session to go at its own pace; hence there was an atmosphere of safety, ease, and comfort. BEA provided refreshments, which added to creating a comfortable atmosphere.

At the end of the focus group session, I provided each participant with BEA brochures and the business cards of the BEA staff. This opened up to a general conversation about educational incentives available to them as Black learners. I described the post-secondary funding available to African Nova Scotian learners through the Nova Scotia Department of Education. Each participant was given a thank-you card.

Kitpu Youth Group Learners – Focus Group 2. Four youth of Aboriginal ancestry participated in this focus group session held on November 22, 2012. There were three males and one female between the ages of sixteen and nineteen. Three of the participants attended the local high school. The remaining participant (female) had recently graduated from the same high school. The focus group session was held at the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre. The Kitpu Youth meet on a daily basis at the Friendship Centre to engage in cultural activities, sports, art, and leisure. In attendance with the youth participants was the Youth Coordinator, who is a member of the Mi'kmaq Nation Eskasoni, in Cape Breton. The youth participants requested that the Youth Co Coordinator be present for the focus group session.

The session lasted approximately one hour. I explained the purpose, aims, risks, and benefits of the project. I also instructed the group that I would be audio taping the session. We talked about the importance of trust and confidentiality. The participants agreed to respect and keep confidentiality and to having the session audio recorded. I provided everyone with a copy of the focus group questions. Everyone submitted a signed consent/assent form. I also explained the next steps following the focus group session. We sat around a large table. The Kitpu Youth program served refreshments.

Throughout the focus group session I asked the interview questions. Taking turns, each participant responded. Sometimes the answers to the questions sparked conversation that often

took us in a new direction. The atmosphere was pleasurable and calm. At the end of the session I thanked each person and provided thank-you cards.

Young Urban Aboriginal Women - Focus Group 3. Three young urban Aboriginal women aged sixteen to nineteen participated in a focus group session on November 27, 2012. Two of these young women are Mi'kmaq and one is Maliseet. The Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre provided the space for this session. The session lasted for approximately one hour. This session was audio taped however, the recording was unusable. I took written notes during the session and it is these notes that were analyzed for the research findings. I explained the purpose, aims, risks, and benefits of the project study, to the participants. We discussed the importance of confidentiality and trust. All of the participants agreed to respect confidentiality. I collected signed consent/ forms. None of the three young women were currently attending school. While the interview questions were provided and read in the same fashion as in the other sessions, because none of these participants were enrolled in school, this focus group session unfolded quite differently than the others. The session was more in the line of having a conversation about the lives of young urban Aboriginal women and their past experiences of being a learner. Upon completion of the session the participants were given a thank-you card.

Senior High Black Male Athletes - Focus Group 4. Five members of a Community Y Basketball Team, all Black Nova Scotian males, between ages fifteen and seventeen participated in the fourth focus group. It was held on November 31, 2012 at the Community YMCA. Four participants were learners who attended the same high school. The remaining participant had recently graduated from this same high school.

At the beginning of the session, parental consent forms were collected from the participants under sixteen. In addition, all of the youth signed their own consent/assent form. The

participants were told about the purpose and aims of the study. I provided copies of the interview questions. The session was audio recorded and lasted approximately one hour. Upon completion of the session the participants were given a thank-you card. They also were given the option of choosing a Black focused book. Several books, compliments of the African Canadian Services Division had been donated.

Data Analysis

During the focus group sessions the participants were asked to respond to ten pre-set questions (Appendix D) that were posed in a semi-structured manner. The questions acted as a guide for leading discussion. The focus group transcriptions and notes were thematically coded and categorized according to emergent themes. A discourse analysis (Gee, 2006) approach was employed to analyze the data for themes and meanings embedded within the participants' stories.

Recruitment

The initial recruitment strategy was to advertise this research project by placing posters throughout North End Halifax. Posters were visible in the following community locations: recreational centre, health clinic, the employment centre, place of worship, friendship centre, parent resource centre, public library, parent resource centre, and educational organizations. I also gave posters to key individuals within the community. Two weeks after I had postered the above community spaces, I still had not received a single telephone call or E-mail. It is at this point in time that I petitioned York University Ethics Board and requested that I recruit by another method, i.e., the snowball method. This involved having key community persons put out a call for participants. This method of recruitment was successful.

Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion

Community Membership Is Meaningful

All of the focus group participants had a close relationship with their lived-in communities. Many of the participants attended the same schools and had developed relationships with many of the same teachers and principals. Participants accessed many of the same community resources and generally knew one another and/or had family members who were acquainted.

The participants had an abiding sense of community. All were members of a space that they called *my community*. This sense of community fostered a rapport and comradery that was evident by the manner in which the participants interacted during the focus groups. A level of trust, caring, ease and mutual support came through in their relationships with one another. Engaging with one another in their respective focus groups, the participants exhibited social wellbeing through the understanding of a shared culture. This shared feeling of cultural sameness facilitated a more fluid environment where the participants could be themselves and communicate authentically.

In this chapter four emergent themes are explored. The first deals with (1) urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners' identities, "personas" and outdated learner profiling. Identity is then explored from a number of perspectives, including through the lens of race, poverty, and relationships. Also, in this same section and keeping identity in focus, are brief discussions highlighting an area of concern that emerged from each of the focus groups. Next are discussions on the topics (2) racialization, (3) poverty, and (4) relationships with teachers.

Urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian Learners Identities, Personas and Learner Profiling: Random School Shaping's

The urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian participants largely developed their self-identities as learners by way of their relationships with teachers and less so with school administrators and peers. Everyday schooling experiences shaped the participants' self-image and contributed to their beliefs about their learning ability and natural aptitude. The level of success or failure that participants experience in schoolwork; their student/teacher relationships and their extracurricular involvements translated into their beliefs about their capacity to learn, engage with peers, and participate in the world outside of their community. Contributing into their self-image are the spoken and unspoken messages that their teachers and schools reflect back to them; the kind of learner they perceive historically racialized learners to be.

This chapter begins by exploring the emergent issues pertaining to the participants' learner identities. It includes the topics (1) racialization and racism, (2) poverty, (3) lack of cultural representation in the curriculum, and (4) cultural isolation in the classroom. Collectively and overall, the participants constructed identities, scaffolding them together using their experiences in school. All of the above issues contributed to a vacuum of education supports for the participants. These factors influenced the school life for each participant in myriad ways, from tangible quantitative measures, like test scores to the intangible outcomes, like stress, aggression, and depression. Their identity is reflective of a learning persona, a prebuilt, antiquated learner profile of Aboriginal and Black learners.

The learning personas of urban Aboriginal and Black learners, respectively, are ones that reflect the urban racialized perceptions of teachers and administrators. It can influence the allocation of teachers' limited resources, for example, the teachers' time, extra help,

extracurricular opportunities etc. Learners who are deemed to be "A" students may receive a different level of the teacher's effort, attention and resources than a learner deemed to be a "D" student. In this way the existence of a learning persona as it relates to the urban Aboriginal and Black learner is relevant since it can influence how a teacher interacts with the learner. When the focus group participants described their experiences and feelings about school, certain common themes and sentiments presented themselves, suggesting they share an identity as it relates to education. Thus a profile starts to form. The profile takes on a persona which is constructed and imposed on the participants. They recognize it as one that follows them within their educational settings. The participants see that they fall under the persona – whether they truly fit the description or not.

The persona of urban Aboriginal and Black learners informed the educators' approach to teaching as much as it informed the participants' sense of self. In many cases participants talked about experiences where teachers made assumptions about their educational aptitude or potential, whether it be related to a factual assessment of the learner's education level or not. Thus the persona is transactional; it lubricates interactions and imitates intimate knowledge of the individual learner's actual learning profile.

The following statement makes the point that for some participants their learner identity is in a class of its own.

> I know outside is outside, school is school. I treat them like two different things. So whatever I have to do with outside school I don't bring it inside school cause it's not (inaudible) school is not a part of my outside life. It's what I have to do to push forward in life [SHBAML]. [See Appendix E for key to focus group participants' quotations].

This participant has constructed his school life and home life to be mutually exclusive. One difficulty with this way of thinking is exposed with the words of another participant from a different focus group.

> I feel like…like separating us, like we don't live in fragmented lives. School life and your home life are separate parts but they're all part of your life. And so, if one is defunctioning and not well, then it's gonna, it's gonna spill over everything else [KYGLF).

Both statements demonstrate awareness that their school life has a bearing on their wellbeing. Moreover, bridging the divide between the two environments may conceivably reduce pressure and stress. In other words, the more congruence that exists between home and school, the stronger the safety net for historically racialized learners. And it follows that the stronger the safety-net the greater possibility for their wellbeing and schooling success. At times, the participants told stories that represented a positive self-image, one that did not fit the profile of the antiquated and racialized urban Aboriginal or Black learner.

Participants in all four focus groups indicated many times they think of themselves as committed, enthusiastic and engaged learners. Seeing herself as intelligent, creative and capable a participant confidently stated, "I'm good at math" [JHBLF]. In another focus group an equally assured participant proclaimed, "I'm a writer, I write poetry" [SHBAML]. Their voices impart a sense of confidence in their knowledge and skills in the above areas of study; and defines them as capable learners. These learners have different strength areas but similarly feel they are strong learners in their respective areas.

Beliefs like these are sometimes at odds with the persona of the racialized urban Aboriginal and Black learner. The intersection of the persona with a participant's true identity is

significant and represents a point where a participant starts to feel the internal conflict and stress associated with school and education. This was brought to the surface by a participant whose response to the question, what do you need in order to do better in school? Answered, “I would be smarter” [JHBLM]. His answer implies that being smart is an innate characteristic that only some learners possess and school is the testing ground for discovering such mysteries as who is good at math and who can write poetry. Conventional thinking would have it that school is the place where learners go to become smart. The participant’s statement implies that school has become the place where smart people go to be smart and he does not fit the profile. In other words, presently, he does not feel smart enough to meet the demands being placed upon him at school. We need to ask ourselves what affect this might have on his spiritual and emotional wellbeing? But also ponder the query as to where does a historically racialized learner go to get smart, if not school?

A participant gave an example of a situation and happening at school where the intersection (teacher persona and learner identity) presented itself and the experience then shaped his sense of self. “But you do feel different when there’s not a lot of Black kids in your class” [SHBAML]. This participant described an elementary school experience when he was often the only Black learner in his class. Now, a learner in high school and an athlete, he thought back to that period of his life and (repeatedly) referred to himself as “the wild Black kid.” The connection between his emotional experience of “feel[ing] different” and his self-identification as the “wild Black kid” in his class, suggests that his behaviour was a reaction to his feelings. Judging from the way he juxtaposed being Black with acting wild, it may follow that he thinks if he were White, he would not have felt different in that class(s) and the “wild Black kid” would never have needed to exist. Though several years have passed he was still holding on to many of

the same feelings, e.g. anger, frustration, confusion, resignation. His wellbeing, during his time in elementary school, had been negatively impacted by the othering experience of having been constructed as the wild Black kid. His teachers and peers, at that time, did not reflect back to him, who he knew himself to be in other social contexts. Thus, reacting as a "wild Black kid" may have been a healthy response to the isolation, exclusion, and objectification.

Participants in the young urban Aboriginal women focus group gave examples of the ways that poverty factored into their identities as learners. A participant talked about being in high school and not having hot water at home. She did not have access to the basic resources that were necessary for the daily engagement of learning. Many times she boiled pots of cold water and then transferred the pots of hot water to the bath tub. Only to find that the water in the tub would be cold by the time she got into it. Because of this situation she was often absent from school. Her grades were good and she attended classes on the days that she was able to bathe. But without a continuous supply of hot water at home, she could not sustain the daily routines and rituals expected of a young woman in high school. Her learner persona had little to do with her aptitude, attitude, or academic ability. She missed many classes but it was through no fault of her own. Economics often masked a participant's real interest or drive for education since without economic means, there was often challenges in accessing education. This point was demonstrated further by another participant, who astutely observed that regarding school attendance, "I need my materials, I need to have my clothes, and be able to get ready and be clean" [SHBAML]. Thus, without access to basic necessities and resources such as hot water, it was not possible for the former learner to remain an engaged student. Health-wise, the connection between hot water and physical health and wellbeing is obvious but there are also mental and spiritual elements of health that need to be recognized. The daily grind of living

without hot water is a mentally exhausting endeavor for anyone, let alone a young person. Moreover, there is the internal shame that comes with not being able to keep oneself clean as one would like.

As for another participant in the young Aboriginal women's focus group, it was what she did not say that I found important. Reluctant to attend the focus group, she thought that not being enrolled in school meant she had nothing to contribute to the discussion. Hence, this participant was the most uncommunicative of all the project participants because she was convinced that her opinion was no longer valid. Nevertheless, her presence represented the countless learners who have lost their official learner status as a result of being poor. One must not forget that there are myriad benefits and a value system, e.g. social, economic, and political, that is attached to being a student enrolled in a learning institution. Historically racialized learners are as proud to be students as any other group of learners. Being homeless meant that the above participant had to quit school. Her learner identity and learner persona had, in effect, been revoked as a consequence of being homeless and poor. It is a blessing beyond measure that this young urban Aboriginal woman, in her silence, gave voice to the historically racialized learners who prefer to be sitting in a classroom but because of the social determinants of health impacting their lives are robbed of the privilege to be identified as a student.

Some stories told by the Black male athletes spoke to the ways that the culturally biased Eurocentric curriculum, in conjunction with a lack of Africentric history and cultural representation, informed their self-identity as learners. One participant talked about what he perceived to be the miniscule effort of his school to acknowledge African history and culture.

"Literally all we had was a hand drawn picture of a very bad representation of the Black community on our walls" [SHBAML]. Another participant in the same focus group shared, "We didn't talk about Martin Luther King. We didn't talk about Rosa Parks" [SHBAML]. A third participant added, "The kids in our school are completely clueless about African history" [SHBAML]. Perhaps not heard in this account is the sadness and resignation that comes through in their actual voices. The above young Black men know that they too have a history worth championing, e.g. Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and African history. However, it is clear to them that in the estimation of their schools, African histories warrant just enough tokenism to remain at the low end of the continuum of distinguished histories and cultures. This leaves an impression that African culture and history holds significance for them alone. On this matter, one of the participants said of their White peers' ignorance of African history, "They don't care about Black people they just care about themselves" [SHBAML]. The health implications speak to self-esteem and self-worth. Moreover, how is it possible that teachers are still not incorporating relevant Aboriginal and African history and culture into their practise, pedagogy, and curriculum? The above participants were fully aware that for this knowledge to be absent – teachers were making a conscious choice to not teach it. While there may not be a plethora of teaching materials, ample resources do exist for those teachers who want them. Therefore, these project participants were left with the difficult knowledge "I am somebody but my school does not care."

Another dynamic that shaped the participants' identities as learners was linked to their schooling experiences which involved a lack of fairness and justice. A participant expressed disappointment that the administrators at her school had failed to take up their responsibility to address her teacher's subtle racism. Her thinking was that, "They probably didn't take it

[teacher's racism] as serious as they should have" [JHBLM]. Another example involves a teacher ignoring and taunting a participant about not being able to answer questions in math class; despite the knowledge the participant had a learning disability. She described her reaction being, "I freaked out at him, got super mad, told him off, and walked out and went straight to the office. They [the administration] didn't really do anything" [KYGLF]. Her complaint to the school principal resulted in little action taken. For both of the above participants the focus of attention was on the behaviour of their respective teachers. In my view, the greater abuse of power rests with the schools' principals for failing to reprimand the teachers. Both participants were left feeling disregarded.

In each of the above cases, the learners' actual voices reflected a lack of expectation and hope that their grievances would be addressed in a meaningful way. It is important to note that the first participant imagined her principal to dismiss her concerns because, "We're Black kids and we all gonna think that [the teacher] is racist" [JHBLM]. Both incidents are examples of the kinds of micro aggressions that wear down the learners' spirit and dampen expectations that schooling can be a positive experience. On the surface, these happenings may appear to be matters open to discussion and debate as to what really happened. However, there is a power differential at play. In the final analysis it is the school principals' responsibility to ensure that teachers adhere to a higher standard of professional conduct. Without which, there is a loss of confidence that historically racialized learners are safe and appreciated within their schools.

Comparatively speaking the urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian participants' schooling experiences were not homogeneous. One noticeable difference was that all of the Black learners made direct references to the ways that they perceived their skin colour factored into receiving differential treatment from teachers and principals. "And they act like the White

kids don't do it" [SHBAML], was a common theme in many of their stories. In stark contrast, the urban Aboriginal participants did not articulate receiving differential treatment. One analysis may suggest this to mean that teachers' treatment of Aboriginal learners is on par with their treatment of White learners. Based on personal experience, I doubt this to be the case. Having witnessed the pervasive invisibility of urban Aboriginal learners within the classrooms and schools that I worked in and also based on the reluctance of the urban Aboriginal participants to claim their Indigenous status, I submit that the invisibility of the urban Aboriginal learners is comparable to the skin tone racialization of the Black learners. Hence, for the urban Aboriginal participants socio-cultural invisibility in the classroom is differential treatment. The insidiousness of this manifestation of racialization lies in the everyday erasure of their legitimacy as a sovereign people. For Black Nova Scotian learners' differential treatment based on invisibility is not the type of racialization they encounter. Regardless, both groups of learners hovered somewhere between their self-perception of who they believe themselves to be, and the learner persona that they carry with them throughout their schooling and education. The common experience for both can be summed up by, "When you are being stereotyped you lose a part of yourself "[KYGLF]. Regardless of skin tone, all of the participants experienced being constructed and thought of in the broad sense as "other" and thus differential treatment is endemic.

Having discussed learner identities, "personas," and profiling. The next section provides a brief look a specific issue of concern that arose within each of the different focus groups.

Kitpu Youth Group

One of the main concerns coming out of the Kitpu Youth focus group was regarding the inadequate level of information technology instruction they were receiving at school. As well,

they were frustrated that their teachers were not abreast of the kinds of futuristic skills they perceived would be mandatory to be successful in the 21st century job market. Consider the words of this participant,

> Like before the, like (inaudible), eighty things you could do. Now, there's a billion things you could do. In elementary they said, 'You could be a doctor, a lawyer.' You could be this, or just basic jobs you see every day. But there are jobs you don't see anybody doing, are some of the highest paying jobs that you can get [KYGLM]

The participants made it known that there is a digital divide at the high school level. Learners whose families can afford to own the technology e.g. computers, laptops, computer software, and high speed internet were the same who undertake high school level computer courses. The learners who could not afford to own the technology tended to not pursue the computer technology courses. The Kitpu Youth Group was cognizant of the importance of being literate in computer technology but did not have the financial means to own the *tools of the trade*. In their view, their lack of competent computer skills meant that their teachers had failed to teach them what they needed to know. Moreover, because the participants are well versed in social media they could relay stories about everyday people, like themselves, who became wealthy entrepreneurs due to their computer and technology skills. The participants were frustrated that they were not being given the tools to engage and compete at an equivalent level of study. They considered themselves to be learners who are capable and deserving of a more rigorous program of study than what they were presently receiving. They were frustrated that they were being denied an equal opportunity to enter into the field of information technology because they knew this was an opportunity lost for their future prosperity.

Senior High Black Male Athletes

All of the Black male participants self-identified as athletes and all relayed a sense of confidence in their ability to be high achievers on the basketball court. Concomitantly, they were proud to high school students. This participant describes it thus, "I think school's pretty good, cause really it's just the point where you have yourself. People don't really, aren't as involved as they use to be and I like it better that way" [SHBAML].

As learners at the high school level they took responsibility for their own school success. One participant stated, "I get the support I need when I need it cause this is the point where you do things for yourself" [SHBAML]. The general consensus was that to succeed in school, "you have to believe that you are smart" [SHBAML]. In addition to seeing themselves as athletes, these participants also identified as writers and artists. All claimed to have personal attributes and intelligences that they perceived were not fully recognized by their teachers and schools but overall they were pleased with their progress.

Conversely, a major topic of discussion among the participants was their negative schooling experiences as Black learners when in elementary and junior high school. They talked about not feeling welcomed in their classrooms and schools and described their relationships with their teachers to be without affection and lacking in trust. For more than one participant there were times when they had been removed from their school and placed in alternative schooling situations with random expectations. Based on the stories they shared, it appears that Black boys have a schooling experience that is unique. One participant talked about having been involved in such a varied and large number of schooling situations that by the time he was a learner in junior high school his knowledge of schools and how they operate, was more advanced than most of his teachers. These young Black athletes divided their schooling into two camps of

experience. Elementary and junior high school were described as emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually taxing. The toll that their early schooling exacted upon their wellbeing should not be pushed aside for it is obvious that the need to talk about their past schooling experiences remain.

Young Urban Aboriginal Women

The urban Aboriginal female youth participants described themselves as competent learners. At the time of the focus group session, none were enrolled in school. All planned on continuing their education, "When things get better" [YUAWL]. Notwithstanding, they were clear about their future aspirations. For one participant the goal is to complete high school, for another it is to attend university, and for a third participant, it is to earn a college certificate in hairdressing. All placed a high value on the potential that a formal education could have on their quality of life. They said that achieving their educational goals will also allow them to help support one another and their families.

These participants talked about the importance of "sticking together." The mutual support gave them hope, helped them to overcome social and financial barriers and moved them further toward achieving their personal goals. They supported one another by sharing housing, food, care and companionship. These young women build their capacity for resourcefulness by singularly and collectively engaging in self-education and entrepreneurship. One participant made earrings and sold them by word of mouth to people in the community. A second participant talked about providing childcare services in exchange for room and board. They were not shy to talk about their ability to adapt and survive the challenges in their lives. Their ingenuity and intelligence was obvious in their level of survivance.

All three participants attributed poverty to their not being currently enrolled in school, however, they did not discuss their poverty state in relation to their Aboriginal status. The participants expressed passion and commitment to earning a good formal education but because of socio-economic forces much beyond their immediate control, e.g., poverty, lateral violence, and unstable housing, their formal education was placed on hold. These participants felt that they had no option but to set aside their educational goals for a later time.

Junior High Black Learners

> …We're labelled as the baddest class in the school. So we kind of got used to it and now it's in our heads that we're the baddest class in the school. So we just give up and be the baddest class in school [JHBLF].

The junior high Black participants self-identified as the following: two are competitive athletes, one a writer, five have aspirations to learn a second language, e.g., French, Spanish, and Chinese, three play musical instruments, e.g., clarinet and saxophone. In addition, three were self-appointed peer advocates for their classmates who are routinely bullied. Nevertheless, these same participants held the perception that their teachers have labelled them as the baddest class in the school. Some in the group did not take offence to the label itself because they agreed that their classroom behaviour was often inappropriate. What they struggled with was having been grouped together in the first place. They articulated that they merely met the low expectations put upon them as learners. The participants perceived that their teachers tended to relate to them as part of this baddest group and not as individuals, reinforcing the theory that teachers have an unconscious or conscious persona of the Black learner. The female participants talked about feeling trapped. They were concerned that this group identity would forever be part of their learner persona.

Ironically, all of the participants were at a loss when it came to explaining why their classroom behaviour was often extreme. Moreover, they perceived that their behaviour was hindering their academic success. They conjectured that their classroom behaviour was somehow specific to their being Black learners but they could not articulate why this might be so. During the focus group they talked about ways that they might model another alternative. Having now analyzed the situation as detrimental to their academic success they wanted to re-create their identities as Black learners.

None of the participants disclosed any potential benefits associated with being part of the "baddest class." However, an analysis of the benefits may shed an understanding on why they continued to behave in ways that reinforced this negative group identity. They talked about how some force compelled them to stay connected regardless of, or despite, the negative repercussions of the label put upon them. One can hear the frustration in the voice of this Black female junior high participant, "Sometime I be a part of it but I try not to – I try, but it just happens." Arguably, it is the group that bears the weight of this objectification and while it can hold them back individually, it also serves as an effective buffer to experiencing racialization on an individual level. Considering the vulnerability of junior high school Black learners[12] and the experience of the "wild Black kid" it may be safer to be part of the baddest group than not.

Racism

As much as the histories of Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotians are distinct and unique, they share parallels of similarity, racism being one. Of particular interest to this research project, the data reveals that racialization is particularly meaningful to the schooling and educational

[12] Participants in the 16 – 19 age focus groups identified junior high school as a particularly difficult time when they felt vulnerable and out of control.

experiences of the Black participants. Meanwhile, the exclusionary forces of poverty are greatly undermining the schooling and educational success of the urban Aboriginal female participants.

Race, Racism, Racialization: By Any Other Name, It's the Same Schooling

Racialization as it relates to the focus group participants was evident in the stories they told about school. The aspects of racialization and racism that emerged from the data include (1) participants' reticence to name racism, (2) ubiquity of subtle racism, and (3) expulsion of Black males from their classroom.

> I can't say for sure that it's racial stereotypes because there are other things that happened that could affect how I'm treated at school but when I was in the program at school it felt like I was treated different. It could be something else [SHBAML].

The above statement was made by a Black male athlete. His words reveal confusion as to what caused his differential treatment when he was in elementary school. He talked about giving his teachers the benefit of doubt and posited that racism was but one option for his perceived maltreatment. The other possible options he did not mention. He goes on to say, "I'm just as bad as them if I jump to that conclusion and I was the only Black kid in the class. So then, I felt like I wasn't supposed to be there anyway" [SHBAML]. The meaning behind his words point to the conflicting thought processes that were common among some of the participants in their discussions about racism and schooling. The above participant articulated that race — not gender, not class, not abilities, not sexual orientation — was the underlying reason for why he did not feel wanted in the classroom and yet, he does not say the word "racism." Why not?

This participant was clear that his feeling, intuitions, and suspicions of racism were neither appropriate nor adequate justification for making an accusation of racism at his school. This was of great surprise and interest to me. In my years of public schooling Black students

were confronting “racism” on a daily basis. However, for these participants knowledge from relevant past experiences had convinced them that a charge of “racism” was difficult to prove. Moreover, at the end of the day, an accusation of racism could result in repercussions that may position them on the defensive. Not one participant told a story about confronting racism at school. These historically racialized learners were not prepared to make accusations of racism without clear undisputable evidence. One reason participants gave for refraining from making accusations of racism at school was their fear of being told “you’re playing the race card” [KYGLM]. To avoid this, participants did not openly confront racism at school, regardless of its perceived validity. As earlier stated some imagined the views of their teachers and principals to be, “We’re Black kids and we all gonna think that” [JHBLM].

Racial slurs, blatant stereotyping, and outright racial discrimination were not issues that any of the participants talked about experiencing at school. Subtle racism however, was present in their stories. While most of the participants’ relayed incidents where subtle racism was clearly indicated, few had the confidence to speak-out with conviction. Their insufficient knowledge of how subtle racism operates in schooling and education tended to silence them. Subtle racism was difficult for them to identify, analyze and articulate. While most of the participants perceived their schooling experiences as being notably different than their Euro-Canadian peers, they refrained from informing their teachers of attitudes and actions that they perceived to be racially motivated.

“Obviously, there’s always going to be racism” [KYGLM]. Coupled with the participants’ reluctance to name racism, was their certainty that racism would always exist. In all four focus groups, the above statement was made and reaffirmed. While it was not established how much the participants knew about the history of racism, it was clear that they were aware

that racism had existed for a very long time and that racism oppressed and dehumanized their ancestors for centuries. Based on their knowledge of racism and experiences of racialization they came to the conclusion that racism would exist forever. Therefore, the elimination of racism was a topic that they did not want to discuss. Their responses and general attitude communicated that the everyday racialization of Aboriginal and Black learners produces no grave and immediate danger to their wellbeing. Hence, talking about the elimination of racism is a waste of their time.

"Mostly I…cause I'm Black" [JHBLM]. This statement was made by a junior high Black male participant, in reference to his experiences of being expelled from the classroom, which he said happened often. When making the above statement he showed no outward signs of anger or indignation. His words were said as a matter of fact, one chapter in his story of being a Black male learner. His perception for why he was expelled from class, more often than other learners, was simply because he is Black.

"They don't really want me in class" [SHBAML].Two of the Black male athletes also talked about their experiences of being frequently expelled from their classrooms and schools. One participant, now in the eleventh grade, dated his experiences of chronic expulsion back to early elementary school. All perceived that their expulsions were linked to being Black. They did not include their gender as part of their analysis. They spoke of their class and school expulsions without bravado or silliness, but in a serious tone of voice that conveyed a level of resignation and sadness. As well, all of the other focus group participants were solemn when listening to their Black male peers. The classroom and school expulsion of Black males appears to affect the wellbeing of all Black learners, albeit to different degrees.

"Why should I care about this little Black kid" [SHBAML]? This participant was of the opinion that being Black is the primary reason for why his elementary school experience was

difficult and challenging. He believed that his elementary school teachers had no compassion for what he described as mental anguish which he experienced as a Black learner in a classroom of White learners. Common among the Black male participants was the realization that their elementary schooling experiences were noticeably different when compared to their White male counterparts. They talked about being young and feeling befuddled as to why this was so. Now, as learners in senior high school, they accepted that race significantly informed their early years of schooling.

"They treat the White kids like they're royalty" [JHBLF]. The point this participant was making is that teachers at her school treat White learners better than they do the Black learners. The word "royalty" emphasizes that White learners were not treated marginally better but exceedingly so. The reference to royalty connotes power, status, authority and being a member of an elite caste. It means that they were granted a licence to operate outside the rules, and includes a guarantee of stability and comfort. Because their differential treatment was based on being White, there was nothing that any of the participants could do to bridge the difference. Hence, an undertone of pain and sarcasm came through in voice.

Another participant, in the same focus group, talked about teachers regarding the White learners as "angels." This fits with the views of a participant from the senior high Black athletes focus group who stated White learners "can do no wrong." Their comments suggest that if there was ever a question as to who should be relied upon or believed, a White learner or a Black learner, the pendulum is likely to swerve toward those positioned as royalty and angels. Moreover, all of the above comments serve as a sound rationale for why the participants were so reluctant to accuse their White peers, teachers, and school administrators of racism.

Aboriginal Participants and Racialization

As stated earlier within this paper the racialization of the urban Aboriginal participants was not linked to the colour of their skin. As articulated by Brayboy (2005) the racialization of Aboriginal people is more specific to the destructive force of colonization. This is not to disclaim that physical characteristic, such as skin colour, factor into the racialization of Aboriginal people. However, for the participants in this study, skin color was secondary to other issues. The "status" of the urban Aboriginal project participants covered the range of having great grandparents to having no parents claiming Aboriginal status. It ranged from their being in possession of a government status card to there being little chance of ever securing one. From having lived on a reserve to never having seen one of the thirteen Mi'kmaq reserves in Nova Scotia. The urban Aboriginal research participants were not persons of colour, nor were they the media driven stereotype of Aboriginal youth. All were on a journey and in a process of recovering their Indigeneity. Not one of the urban Aboriginal participants chose to self-identify as Aboriginal. The Kitpu Youth Coordinator, who recruited the participants, clarified their status for the purpose of recruitment for this research project. Problematizing Aboriginal status is an important undertaking for this and future research because of its relationship to racialization.

The Kitpu Youth participants did not tell personal stories about their experiences of racialization at school. One participant said that he did not personally experience racism in his school but had witnessed other learners at his school being racially targeted.

> Personally I'm not dealing with anything. I know some of the less popular are. Students of like Asian. [Other students] make racial comments behind their backs. Just joking, to other people, but never between Black people, Native people, or anyone else. Not just Asian. Others too. [KYGLM].

While the phrase “not just Asian. Others too” is ambiguous, this learner was fully aware that a person’s physical characteristics, such as skin colour, have a pronounced bearing on which learners, at his school, experienced racialization. Racialization based on skin colour was relatively easy for the above participants to identify. However articulation of racialization was not as easy when physical characteristics did not fit the stereotype.

As the following participant makes clear, racism, and racialization can miss their target when the physical characteristics do not fit the stereotype (which was the case for many of the urban Aboriginal participants). This participant received racist slurs that were specific to an ethnicity that is not one of her own.

> Especially in my high school, it was a very interesting experience because I was confronted by racism. The person thought I was from a different culture, didn’t like that culture, and would yell those insults at me [KYGLF].

The urban Aboriginal participants did not articulate the ways that they were racialized. Subtle racism, took its own unique turn with the racialization they experienced at school. The Kitpu Youth Coordinator helped to shed light on some matters of interest.

> A lot of people in the East Coast especially suffer negative effects of residential school, negative effects of what I term invisible racism. Because there’s a lot of ways that racism is exacted on Aboriginal people that is permitted by our general society and it’s never questioned [Kitpu Youth Coordinator].

The Kitpu Youth Coordinator’s words are included here for reasons that are pertinent to why the Aboriginal participants did not self-identify and told no stories about their racialization. His experience is different than that of the urban Aboriginal participants. He grew up on his home reserve where two decades of self-education taught him that “in a very intrinsic way,

Aboriginal people learn … completely different from the educational system" [Kitpu Youth Coordinator]. As well, he holds a university degree. Hence, he was confident of his Mi'kmaq identity, knew the Nation's history, and practised the Mi'kmaq traditional ways of being. Importantly, he was able to articulate the myriad ways racialization impacted his schooling. In his work with the Kitpu youth, the Coordinator disseminates teachings on the racialization of Aboriginal people. However, true to Indigenous methodologies his teachings will take hold when the youth are ready.[13]

Though it is difficult to substantiate, it is important to discuss how the invisibility of the urban Aboriginal participants is synonymous with their racialization. Their schooling experiences are riddled with limitations directly pertaining to the loss of their language, land, and sovereignty. All of which are integral to their experiences of schooling and education, and all of which have been denied them, due to racism. It needs to be repeated that their racialization, in formal education and public schooling, is founded within the framework of colonialism (Brayboy, 2005).

Poverty: Many Layers of Lack

Only a few of the participants were eager to tell stories about the ways that poverty informed their schooling and education. With the Black Nova Scotian learners there was almost a culture of silence on the topic of poverty. In general, poverty was a topic that most participants were not comfortable discussing.

Some of the participants did talk about what they understood to be the basic necessities required for being successful at school and the repercussions, when they were lacking. The issues

[13] Since the writing of this thesis, the Kitpu Youth Group has been terminated due to government funding cut-backs.

that these learners articulated include (1) homelessness and student evaluation, (2) no computer accessibility and completion of assignments, (3) personal care and school attendance, (4) school environments' reflection on learner's identity, and (4) school disengagement and poverty. The one notable exception to the dearth of discussion on poverty was with the young urban Aboriginal women participants who spoke candidly about poverty, the violence it ensued on their lives, and how poverty and violence truncated their schooling and education. The reasons for the lack of willingness to discuss issues of poverty are not adequately explained in this project. It is widely known however, that Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotians are positioned far below the low income cut off line (Mensah, 2010; Milligan, 2006). A common sense reason would suggest that this topic is too sensitive for young people to discuss candidly. Further, in a focus group situation, this is a difficult topic to discuss abstractly and not divulge personal information that could be embarrassing.

One participant reflected on a time when she was homeless but was still expected to complete her work as though being without a place to live presented no obstacles to completing school assignments. "I only missed one or two assignments in one or two of my classes and my grade went from like a ninety to a fifty" [YUAWL]. She expressed disappointed that her teachers did not take into consideration the ways that unstable housing created disadvantages in her performance as a learner. From that time and onward she viewed the education system differently than before she had that experience.

> Just like in that moment, it taught me that there was something seriously wrong with it [the school system] but I was still there to learn so I did. I learned things that actually made me better [KYGLF].

After the above incident, she no longer assumed that her lack of resources would be taken into consideration when teachers evaluated her work. Her faith that teachers evaluate learners according to merit had been tainted.

While most of the participants were uncomfortable talking about poverty, evidence of poverty seeped in through in their stories. A participant stated the following.

> A lot of the assignments we do you have to access them at home because they don't give out the sheets for you to do them. The only way you can do them is through the internet. But you have to have a computer for that. But a large amount of people do not have computers [KYGLM].

Poverty was implicit when participants talked about not owning computers. Some participants argued that not having a computer created considerable difficulties for completing assignments.[14] They expressed anger and frustration that their grades were diminished because without the use of a computer, their finished product was not on par with those learners who owned computers. They countered their teachers' assumptions that computers were readily available at the school library. Their rebuttal was that school computers were not easily accessible because of food insecurity, transportation, and home responsibilities. All examples are likely to have further linkages to living in a state of poverty.

Finally, and most importantly the participants pressed the point that many learners had not received the level of computer training needed in order to complete high school level assignments. Not having a home computer placed them at a disadvantage for acquiring

[14] The gravity of this matter is difficult to appreciate until one does not have a personal computer, internet access to that computer, and up-to-date software and spyware. Halfway through my M.Ed. program my MacBook crashed. It took me five months before I was able to afford another computer. My workload, stress, and quality of work reflected this set-back. Moreover, two of my children who live close by own computers and I had twenty-four access to a computer lab. Without access to these resources I would have been unproductive.

Information Technology knowledge and skills at school. Lack of resources laid a burden on these learners to perform without the necessary tools. Hence, poverty was at the crux of their disadvantage. Interestingly, most of the participants owned a cell phone. However, in today's society a cell phone is often viewed as a safety device for youth and their parents.

Some participants emphasized the importance of having the personal care products and clothing that they believed necessary for attending school. In particular, one participant talked about having new jeans and "tees" for the first day at school. "I have to have my clothes. I have to have stuff so I can get dressed and ready and clean" [SHBAML]. For this participant and others, having access to the basic resources that allowed them to feel and look good while at school was essential for them to want to be at school. Obviously, access to such basic necessities is challenging to acquire whenever poverty is an issue at home.

A few participants talked about feeling uncomfortable with aspects of their school environment that they perceived reflected a state of poverty. "Our school is so dirty" [JHBLF]. They talked about several internal and external areas of their school environment that they assessed to be unkempt and dirty. They stated that their school's lack of resources represented a type of poverty that reflected a state of poverty upon them. They took this to mean that their school is poor and by proxy, so are they. In addition, they talked about their school lacking in basic resources, such as paper and needing the student body to fund-raise, in order to buy basic materials. A participant stated, "Like our school cannot even afford paper." They were embarrassed of these aspects of their school environment. They did not talk about poverty as being a personal experience. That they drew a relationship between poverty and dirtiness is interesting and may provide some indication for why they resisted talking about poverty from a personal point of view.

In contrast, the young Aboriginal women told stories that revealed myriad ways that poverty undermined their schooling and education. “I washed my good sweater and jeans the night before. We didn’t have any heat. So the next day they were still wet. So I didn’t go to school” [YAWF]. Her words are reminiscent of the earlier participants who pointed out the significance of dressing *right* for school. Considering the value this Western corporate society places on brand name clothing, I venture to say that it is the rare young person who will persevere through their schooling years without having culturally appropriate clothing.

The young Aboriginal women participants were fully aware that being able to attend, participate, and stay in school, was dependent on their ability to find solutions to the challenges and barriers related to poverty. Their stories revealed that schools had no concern nor interest in providing them with some of the basic necessities required for learning and wellbeing. They recounted personal experiences whereby their teachers or the school might have intervened by providing some basic support but failed to do so. The resources they needed to support their education included stable affordable housing, educational funding, supportive services, and a reliable source of income.

Further, complicating the issues brought on by systemic poverty in their lives was the violence it ensued. They experienced poverty and violence as two sides of one problem. Family, lateral, partner, and what I would call state violence were all present in their stories about schooling. The poverty and violence that these young women were contending with, most times on their own, was not part of the school’s agenda for addressing student wellbeing. Another hindrance to their schooling success was the state surveillance of their families. One participant described times when she and her siblings “jumped out the window to get away from the woman from Children’s Aid” [YUAWL]. They also described incidents when they witnessed the

victimization of their mothers, who in all cases, is their Aboriginal parent. Familial relationships suffered from intergenerational trauma; the turmoil of which had no immediate end in sight.

Importantly, any reduction of poverty would also remove a measure of the violence that gravitates toward them specifically because they are female, poor, and Aboriginal. When it came to the urban Aboriginal youth participants, this Kitpu Youth male participant summed it all up when he said, "A lot of the times the problems that the school talks about are not the kinds of problems I have" [KYGLM].

Relationships

The majority of participants communicated that within their schools, the key relationships that effect their overall wellbeing and academic achievement are the relationships they have with their classroom teachers. In this next section the participants talked about (1) teachers' qualities, (2) learners 'appreciation, (3) learners taking initiatives to build relationships with teachers, (4) teacher boundaries, e.g., rules of engagement for teachers, (5) teachers' support, and (6) teachers' care in the neo-liberal economy.

"School is stressful for students and teachers. We should help one another" [KYGLM]. The majority of the junior and high school participants talked about their teachers in ways that show a high degree of compassion. Never did they speak of their teachers in an insulting manner. Their stories often had an attitude of kindness and empathy for teachers, especially in regard to their workload and stress. In their opinion the best teacher-student relationship is one of reciprocity, whereby teachers and learners support one another. Here, the participants showed themselves to possess a degree of maturity beyond their young ages.

All of the participants had clear understandings of what they perceived to be a good teacher. Their words included such descriptors as: not-racist, interactive, not strict, and "good

teachers that push us" [SHBAML]. As might be expected there were those who recalled good experiences of a teacher student relationship. For example, this Black male athlete stated,

> I'm actually having a good time, because most of my teachers are nice to me. Like my math teacher, like he's nice. He just wants everyone to do well and my science teacher, she's nice. Like, I pretty much have good teachers [SHBAML].

Many of the participants spoke in positive ways about their classroom teachers. Some teachers were praised for their kindness while others were appreciated for their capacity to bridge the power gap between teacher and learner, as the following quote illustrates.

> I had a teacher that was amazing…what I liked was that when he came to talk to me he would get down on one knee. And what I realize now, was that he had enough respect to get rid of I'm better than you, be like how can we get this assignment done?" [KYGLF].

On the other end of the spectrum there were comments like the following, from the same participant (above). "I had another teacher, like would say awful things. Like, he would tie me to a truck and drive me down the road" [KYGLF].

The participants wanted their teachers to interact in meaningful ways. They yearned to hear their teachers' praise. When asked what makes you feel better at school, a participant answered, "When the teacher says that you're doing a good job" [JHBLM]. A female participant in the same focus group stated, "When I get a good phone call home, I get so happy" [JHBLF]. Gaining an appreciation for the impact teachers' praise and support, or the lack thereof, can have on a learners' attitude is revealed in the words of this participant, "They [teachers] say they care about you but they don't" [SHBAML]. Later he continued, "I don't care about them" [teachers] [SHBAML]. The above statements are indicative of the level of impact that teacher's care and attention can have on a learners' emotional health, both positive and negative.

Interestingly, one participant talked about taking a proactive approach to building relationships with teachers, whom she perceived did not like her. Being proactive, she engaged with the teachers who she saw as potential barriers to her success. She aimed to appeal to their sensibilities and was cognizant that her time and energy was an investment in her educational success. "I like to talk to the teachers I have problems with. I like to bond with them, have a connection with them, so it's not so hard in class" [JHBLF].

Her performance was deliberate and specifically intended for convincing her teachers that she is a learner who is worthy of their focus, time, and effort. (It is worth noting that this learner is one who is associated with the "baddest class"). Being well aware of the power teachers hold over learners, to have a good or bad day at school, which includes their authority over grades, this participant decided that it was in her best interest to be proactive and take the lead. She was well aware of the Black learner persona and was proactively taking part in its dissolution.

Listening to their stories, it became clear that some participants perceived their teachers to lack the emotional capacity to take the initiative to build relationships with them. What can only be described as racial bias, immaturity, and lack of professionalism were some of the character traits that were revealed in the participants' stories. All are likely to be prohibiting teachers from doing the work necessary to bond with historically racialized learners. Regardless of how *unpacked* their classroom teachers' knapsacks may or may not have been, some of the participants felt it necessary to take the lead in building relationships with their teachers.

"I'm a kind person; I get along with my teacher" [SHBAML]. This statement was made by a participant who also talked about making an effort to get along with his classroom peers. His past experiences and intuition informed him that not being connected could result in disagreements and stress that could only make his time at school more difficult. Taking a

proactive stance was a significantly better option than waiting and hoping that teachers will make the effort to connect, build trust, and rapport. Their efforts to draw teachers nearer into positive relationships are one example of the ways that these learners sought out and executed opportunities for positive relationships at school.

In regard to health and wellbeing, as commendable as it may be that some of the learners take the lead in building positive relationships with their teachers, their efforts would presumably result in increased stress. Considering all the barriers and challenges that historically racialized learners contend with on an everyday basis, placating teachers' egos should not be on their minds. Busying themselves with strategies for connecting with dissonant teachers is an example of the add-on emotional workload that some historically racialized learners put forth to micro-manage their schooling relationships. The end phrase, "so it's not so hard in class" [JHBLF], suggests that school is a difficult place to flourish and to earn high grades, when relationships with teachers are anything less than positive. The participants acknowledged that their relationships with their teachers influenced their attitude, ability to perform, energy level, sense of accomplishment, and future aspirations. Every day the participants confronted the dilemma of whether or not to expend time, energy, and effort to build relationships with teachers who display little to no interest in them.

Typically, when teachers build relationships with learners they remain steadfast in their position of power and authority. It is within this context that teachers interact in casual ways with learners, such as making jokes and teasing. Several of the junior high Black participants reported that they did not enjoy bantering back and forth with their teachers because they were never sure of the dividing line between what is and what is not permissible to say to a teacher. For some participants such casual interactions with their teachers often caused them anxiety and stress.

They spoke about how the joking and teasing only flows comfortably in one direction, namely from the teacher to learner. One participant stated, “He jokes around so much and sometimes I don’t know if he’s serious. And, sometimes if he’s not joking around I say the wrong thing and then, but it’s not my fault” [JHBLF]. She continued, “I can say ‘I want you to stop’ but he just smiles and says ‘Am I making you mad” [JHBLF]? This participant and others said they are reluctant to ignore or shun teachers who joke with them because this might result in disciplinary action. The comment, “Child, what are you smoking?” made another participant uncomfortable because of what the statement implied.

A blurring of teacher and learner boundaries served to make the participants anxious of what might be said that would either place them *in trouble* with the teacher or shame them in front of their peers. The participants preferred that their teachers be supportive and respectful but not relate to them as equals. Many felt vulnerable and without the skills to ward off teachers’ negative comments. Participants in both age groups wanted their teachers to relate to them in a mature way and to provide their best teachings in knowledge and skills.

One important element that appeared throughout all of the participants’ stories was a need for their teachers to work with them in a cooperative manner. “We just need some cooperation from the teachers” [JHBLF]. The view of many participants was that a little more cooperation from their teachers could exponentially improve their capacity for higher grades. The participants did not expect teachers to work harder but instead they wanted their teachers to work with them in a spirit of collaboration. They did not want or need their teachers to rescue them. In fact, one participant scoffed at being in a school where little was expected of his abilities. His idea of a good teacher is one who brings out the learners’ best. However, this requires a certain

kind of relationship with teachers. They expressed a need and desire to have their teachers recognize and facilitate their abilities toward academic success.

"Make me work for something, an award, time on the computer, or something at the end, or money" [JHBLM]. The above statement was expressed with a high degree of frustration and hope. The participant needed his teachers to show appreciation for him as a learner; to give him something meaningful in return for his participation and effort. This sentiment was an undertone in all of the participants' stories. They talked about a disparity in reciprocity between what they had given to their teachers and what their teachers gave back to them. In their experience of public schooling, both teachers and learners show up at the start of each school day and perform their part. Yet teachers hold power and control over them, choose the curriculum, and receive a monetary benefit. The participants felt that they invested relatively equal amounts of time and effort but with consistently disappointing grades and tumultuous relationships throughout the school day, they tend to reap very few benefits. Moreover, all but a few participants spoke of school being a stressful environment most of the time. One participant described her public school experience in the following way, "You're being pushed into this place where people are being mean to you and sitting for long periods of time" [KYGLF]. While they value and believe that a good education is a worthy goal, the daily practice of schooling leaves them with a feeling that school may be more for the teachers' benefit than for their own. Another learner stated, "It seems like the people who are trying to keep school going are the people that are benefitting with money" [KYGML].

Participants talked about needing teachers to appreciate their commitment and efforts toward earning a good education. They want their teachers to understand that they do not set out to perform poorly. The participants communicated that they are applying their best efforts and

bringing to bear everything they have in order to succeed. Some participants talked about teachers making comments indicating that they doubted the participants' commitment to earning a good education. A participant stated, "I don't know if they know how smart I am, but I think they know that I'm smart. But I don't think they are really listening" [JHBLF].

Several participants expressed frustration and anger over what they believe to be their teachers' perceptions that their primary reason for attending school is something other than to earn a good education. Some participants talked about the ways that teachers excluded them from the atmosphere and environment of learning. Without any overt signs of discipline or punishment, they were simply not called upon to answer a question, or were skipped over when others were receiving extra help. These kinds of subtle exclusionary actions confirmed that they are neither royalty nor angels. A Black male athlete stated,

> I would argue my point. 'Like, well, why would I be goofing off? I wouldn't be goofing off if I knew what I was doing.' And they would be like 'Ask questions.' And I would be, 'I did, my hand was raised for twenty minutes…my arm was about to break from the stress' [SHBAML].

It is important that teachers maintain a consistent belief that historically racialized learners are performing at their best. The participants certainly perceived themselves in this way. Teachers' trusting them to come to school to learn and participate to their highest potential is the cornerstone for building a relationship of cooperation, collaboration, and reciprocity.

All of the participants reported that their teachers do not appreciate their unique intelligences.

> School basically just looks for that [generalized] type of intelligence and tries to shape everybody… into that type of intelligence. …There are many other ways to

> have intelligence but they're not really recognized cause mainstream societies, like, dismiss the type that's not smart [KYGLM].

The participants understood that there are some types of intelligences that schools do not value. They wanted their teachers to develop curriculums and pedagogies in ways that integrate their intelligences; their ways of being and knowing, into the classroom, school, and wider school environments.

They also wanted their teachers to do away with the eroticization of Aboriginal and Black people. Some participants felt stereotyped, objectified, and generally made to feel that their ways of being were something other than normal. A participant was angry at his teachers for allowing his White classroom peers to stare at him, day after day, week after week. He needed his teacher to not only intervene but to have established a classroom environment where his objectification was unacceptable. Moreover, their staring caused this participant to react by "hollering" [JHBLM], at the White learners in his class. This in turn, caused the teacher to holler at him. He stated that when it comes to Black and White learners being disciplined for inappropriate classroom behaviour, "They [teachers] look at us more" [JHBLM]. This participant and several others were frustrated because teachers were slow to pick-up on when White learners were disrupting and irritating Black learners but were quick to respond when the situation was the reverse.

All of the Black participants reported that their teachers' race was a factor in the quality of their relationships with teachers. Describing what she understood to be the difference between her relationship with White and Black teachers, this junior high Black female participant stated, "It's like they're not surprised when you act like that, so they don't give off that negative energy. But with the White teachers it was a different story" [JHBLF]. She did not suggest that Black

teachers had lower expectations. The participants articulated that the difference can be found in the ways that Black teachers communicate and develop a rapport with Black learners. This extended also to Black principals. Having a Black principal increased their sense of belonging. The participants felt that Black teachers and principals understood the reasons why they relate to the school environment differently than White learners. Some participants stated that having Black teachers in their schools reduced their experiences of racism at school. The following statement makes this point quite well. “But…this year, I don’t think there’s any real racism, kind of, going on with the teachers, because we have Black teachers” [JHBLF]. The participants felt that Black teachers make for a significantly more positive schooling experience overall, including an increased sense of safety and belonging.

In contrast, the urban Aboriginal participants did not comment on the race of their teachers or principals. Once again, this absence of a critical discussion on race, now in the context of teachers, is not to suggest that Aboriginal learners have no preference in the race, ethnicity, and status of their teachers. There was simply no reference point in which to have the discussion. This alone speaks volumes as to the need for having Aboriginal teachers, principals and school personnel visible in urban schools. None of the participants were aware of ever having an Aboriginal teacher.

Some of the participants talked about the ways that their grades affected relationships with their teachers. A few expressed confusion about the grades that they received. Thus, they lost confidence in their teachers’ evaluation and assessment of their school work. A participant stated, “I called the teacher over and asked how come his is right and mine’s wrong? He’s like, ‘My bad.’ And just leaves it alone. I was like, ‘how often does this happen’ [KYGLM]?

Several participants felt that the grades they received for their investment of time and effort was discouraging and disappointing. Others were frustrated that throughout their whole school career they received low marks and grades. This Kitpu Youth male participant stated,

> Some kids, like since I've known from elementary, always have gotten the highest grades. And whenever I'd compare myself to them, they're not too much smarter than me, they always seem average to me. I never really got why that was [KYGLM].

Hence, regardless of his determination and applied effort, his teachers' assessment of his school work remained low. Another participant felt that not only were her academic efforts consistently undervalued but her character was maligned in the process. "Certain people go into another room to do math and stuff. I'll ask, 'can I go in'? And, he'll say, 'no' and I'll ask, 'why' and he'll say 'I'm not smart enough'" [JHBLF]. This type of response from their teachers was emotionally and spiritually devastating.

Several participants were confused as to what they were supposed to gain from completing innumerable assignments that had little or no relevance to their lives.

> I know so many people who are good at something. A different thing that is not in the school curriculum. But this school doesn't accept that. And, they get terrible grades because of it. And, they're not able to do what they want to do because the school considers it not, like, I don't know [KYGLM].
>
> Another participant chimed in, "Yeah, educational" [KYGLM].

Finally, in regard to the participant's relationship with teachers, one participant was indifferent to the notion that teacher' care is fundamental to earning a good education. Instead, he took up what might be described as a neoliberal philosophical

stance that business principles were what should underlie a successful education. “Well, it’s a business relationship. They’re there to help me. I’m there to help myself” [SHBAML]. For this participant the focus of the teacher-student relationship should be less about teachers’ care and more about an exchange of services. In his opinion, teachers’ care and all that it connotes, was secondary to having teachers perform in ways that relate to learners as partners in the business of education. The basic principle is such that teachers are employed for one specific purpose, which is to produce an end product; learners who can compete with the best learners anywhere. For him, whether his teachers show affection, or not, was irrelevant in comparison to having them fulfil the conditions of their employment contract. This new relationship is based on a business model that uses business principles. All the talk about caring teachers was a distraction.

Racialized learners have a concomitant role to play in the teacher-student business relationship. According to the above participant, this new relationship would permit learners to insist upon a level of independence and autonomy that produces student success. All that matters is productivity and success. The elimination of an expectation of teacher care would set a new relationship standard. After decades of seeking teacher care, this historically racialized learner is seeking something new. The teacher-student relationship with the greatest probability of producing a positive difference in his educational outcomes is one whereby capitalistic business principles come first, and caring comes later, if at all.

As much as the participants cared for their teachers, they were skeptical that the calibre of education that their teachers were delivering would adequately prepare them for lucrative employment in the 21st century. All of the project participants spoke of needing to find ways to

expand the limits of their current level of academic knowledge. They did not see teachers as the conduit. Some doubted that their teachers were providing an education that would transition them into a high quality of life situation. Like the canary in the coalmine, the young urban Aboriginal female participants were already experiencing this shortfall of the public education system.

Wholistic Education

In figure 5 the emergent themes of Identity, Poverty, Racism, and Relationships are positioned within the health and wellbeing quadrants of the Mi'kmaq Medicine Wheel.

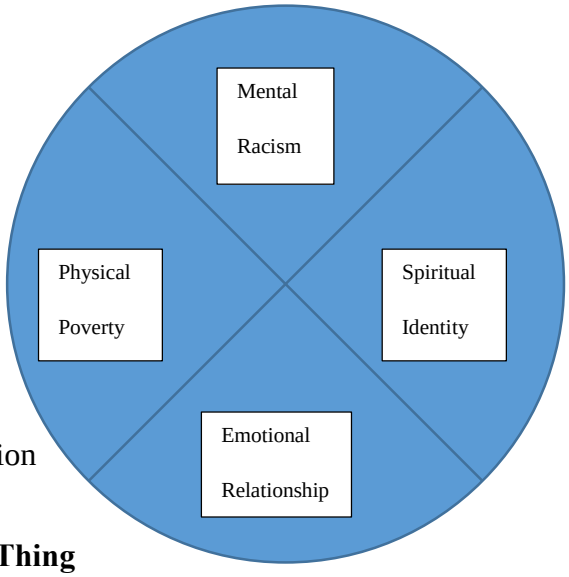

Figure 5 Wholistic Education

Identity: It's a Spiritual Thing

Sense of self is brought by inward reflection. Identities being a complex concept for young people suffice to say that identity is formed through the culmination of many inputs and necessarily relies on the individual to ultimately own and claim it. Since one's identity is an intangible asset, it falls within the spiritual realm, but intangible though it may be; it drives interactions and relationships and has very concrete effects. The project participants expressed feelings around the concept of identity and described themselves in ways that demonstrated their sense of identity both as individuals and as a community. The participants' feelings and thoughts

around the concept of identity were deeply felt and personal, again underscoring the link between identity and the spiritual dimension of student wellbeing for historically racialized learners.

> I remember there was a period of time where school was just like, both at one point, like the most awesomeness place that I could go, and so was good for me. But other times, was like, I wouldn't call it this then, but looking back on that then, feel spiritually and emotionally deprecated and feeling like I was like losing something [KYGFL].

The above statement brings to life the significance of the spiritual dimension of health and welling in schooling and education. The role of spirituality is apparent in the participant's experiences of schooling. Having to accept years of mediocre grades, finding the courage to bond with middle class White teachers, completing assignments without owning a computer, not having hot water to bathe nor clean clothes to wear; these represent some of the spirit crushing circumstances that participants in this study dealt with on a daily and long-term basis. Despite such challenges, they persevered, remained hopeful, and continued to press-on with the aim of earning a good education.

The project participants called for a paradigmatic shift in schooling and education. I believe that a focus on spiritual education must be a part of this calling. Spiritual education is non-denominational and strives to support the inward wellbeing of all learners. In other words, for urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian students, schooling and education must become safe so that the inner person can participate. When the spiritual or inward person feels the space is unsafe they will not fully participate. Urban Aboriginal and Black youth had learned to keep

their spiritual, vulnerable inner person, out of their schools because of the violence and damage that a racially insensitive education can inflict on their humanity.

Hence, I believe that a relevant politicized schooling, provided through the channels of formal education, is needed to facilitate these learners through our Western neo-liberal and technologically advanced *polite* Canadian society (Gilmore, 2015). If they are to build their capacities in ways that will bolster their spirit and inform their ways of being for the 21st century, a wholistic relevant politicized public education is necessary, from grades kindergarten and onward. To continue forward with the assurance of earning a good education, foster good health, and to enjoy a state of wellbeing for themselves, families, and communities this prescription is necessary. The present generation of racialized learners do not have the time to grow to an age of maturity before critically engaging with the economic, social and political forces underlying their social positioning. Hence, the words of one young urban Aboriginal woman participant comes to mind. When asked why it is that some participants do not talk about difficult issues she said,

> Well, I think that when you are in them, you don't want like, to talk about them, because of the way that they make you feel. When you are out of this way of being, you can reflect and tell the story.

The times we are living in dictate that an urgency for critical politicized teaching be the new standard for delivering education to all learners but especially for those learners who need to hold on to another day of their education.

Poverty: It's a Physical Thing

The participants in this research project, as well as all historically racialized learners, need to be given the analytical tools to problematize and decolonize the social construction of

poverty as it relates to their physical needs. Without this knowledge they tend towards silence when it comes to discussing the ways that poverty impacts on a physical level.

One of the manifestations of poverty that informed the lives of the urban Aboriginal participants is found in the ways that colonization enacts poverty. The impact, on a physical level, is even deeper than the absence of basic necessities. Poverty is responsible for the loss of Aboriginal identity in the sense that it can be difficult to feel a sense of pride when you live in a society that values peoples' identity based on their material wealth. Having your identity stolen, denied, and decided upon in accordance with the worldview of the colonizer attacks physical health and wellbeing in inexplicable ways. This identity theft is an attack on the physical health and wellbeing of Aboriginal learners' way of being. Hence, the deconstruction of poverty is a reconstruction of their identity and will lead to a resurgence of their physicality.

Urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners need to develop an understanding of poverty within the context of a critical health lens, like the social determinants of health. This is needed so that historically racialized learners will not blame themselves, their families, or communities for poor health and wellbeing. On this note, not one participant reported eating three meals a day. In fact, not one participant ate both breakfast and lunch on school days. While this project cannot point to poverty as the cause for their not eating throughout the day, clearly, the project participants were not consuming enough nutrients to perform at their learners' best. Considering the history of public education, e.g., discriminatory laws, practices, and the public policies of past and present social injustices in relationship to the health and wellbeing of the above communities, the time is now for the department of education to deliver the necessary funding for schools, at every level, to provide nutritious breakfast and lunch programs to urban

Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners. When educational inequity lies at the crux of learners coming to school hungry, the responsible thing to do, is feed them.

Racism: It a Mental Thing

It was a shock to hear the focus group participants' consensus that there will always be racism, that they question themselves to no end before coming to a conclusion that they are being racialized at school, and that they seldom make the decision to confront racism at school. For these reasons, I see racialization as a matter of mental health and wellbeing. To witness what is almost a blasé resignation to the ways racialization informs their schooling and education leaves me to ponder the mental exhaustion they are experiencing in trying to understand what is happening to them and why.

The slippery elusiveness of subtle racism makes it difficult to discern. During my early years of schooling, racial name calling and blatantly biased curriculum made racism easy to identify. For this present generation, subtle racism defies the five senses. Subtle racism is not as obvious as the overt forms of racialization in the past but it too destroys mental health and wellbeing. Historically racialized learners need to be taught the specificities of subtle racism so that they can develop strategies for talking back to the ways it constructs them as other. Watching Hollywood movies that glamorize the brutalization of their ancestors does not educate them about the wily ways of subtle racism in today's classrooms and schools. The theorizing of critical race theory and tribal critical race theory can offer todays historicalized racialized learners the framework and principles to decolonize and analyze this 21st century racism.

The subtleness of today's racialization moves at the pace of the current technology. Therefore, this generation and those yet to come must be provided the ways of knowing required for the theorizing to deconstruct and decolonize subtle racism. Historically, racialized learners

need to sit at the theorizing tables where the topic of discussion is subtle racism. It is the job of today's educators to provide today's learners with the support, care, and space they need to do this critical work. Today's racialized learners must be given the time and space to think about and come to know this latest mutation of racism. Using the resources of their minds to contemplate and define the meaning that subtle racism and racialization has in their own lives and the life of their communities is needed if they are to confront subtle racism in meaningful ways. Talking to one another about subtle racism and the ways that it is impacting their education, health, and wellbeing is this generation's necessary and important social justice work.

Relationship: It's an Emotional Thing

Relationships set the tone for emotional health and wellbeing. All of the participants shared that their relationships with teachers had a significant impact on the way they felt about school, other learners, and themselves. Teachers need to know that racialized learners are making an effort to connect with them. They are consciously engaging in the hope that they will be seen as intelligent learners with great learning potential. They are vulnerable to their teachers' approval and being misunderstood or mislabelled is an emotionally unhealthy experience for them.

Somehow we need to find ways to make the academic progress of historically racialized learners less dependent on the approval of their classroom teacher. The present dynamic, whereby teachers hold the power to build or shun a relationship with a learner, is an emotionally volatile situation for the above learners. Especially in elementary schools, where one teacher rules the classroom domain, year of a bad teacher-student relationship can leave everlasting emotional scars. Classrooms today need to be shared spaces where racialized learners have the opportunity to build relationships with people who share their worldview. The often heard

teacher's claim, 'This is my classroom' needs to become the sentiment of a bygone era. An invitation to public school classrooms should be extended to siblings, community people, Elders, peers, and parents. Opening the classroom space means opening the space for more relationships and diversification of care for the emotional wellbeing of historically racialized learners.

How can urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners build relationship with teachers and peers that are good, meaningful, and reciprocal? And how can they let go of detrimental relationships; in a good way? It is vitally important that we insist upon having all teachers demonstrate that they have a capacity to care for historically racialized learners. If they do not, or cannot – they are not a good fit for the job of teaching urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian youth. The student-teacher relationship is the conduit to learning in the public school setting. This relationship has the potential to propel a young learner in any given direction. Because teachers leave an imprint on young hearts and minds, we can no longer risk marring their emotional health and wellbeing for the sake politeness or fear.

This research points to the ways that the emotional health of urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners is so impressionable that a derogatory remark from a teacher, even in jest, can leave an emotional scar. In some cases it had been years since the remark was made and still the learners could recall the exact words that were spoken. This type of interaction creates a breeding place for insecurity and low-self-esteem in the learner. Teachers should be professional and purposive when building relationships with learners who come to the classroom with many challenges, and who are seeking acceptance, kindness, and assistance. The teacher-student relationship of racialized learners is an emotional thing.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and References

The participants in this research project know, in theory, that health and wellbeing play an important role in their capacity to earn a good education but they do not fully understand how their people's histories continue to affect their performance and situations in today's classrooms. They do not know that there are systematic forces creating the historically racialized learner personas that they inherit when they walk through the school doors. They do not know that the knowledge of politicized relevant education will allow them to see through a new paradigm. Instead of believing "I was the wild Black kid" they may reflect and conclude "I was a good student but my persona was that of a wild Black kid."

Urban Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian learners need a wholistic learning environment that provides for their basic needs including food, rest, and mutually satisfying relationships. They require teachers to deliver a relevant politicized curriculum which speaks to the realities of the current world. Aboriginal and Black youth need a curriculum that is modernized with up to date injections of Mi'kmaq/Aboriginal and Black Nova Scotian history and current contributions. The problem is not addressed with a single grade ten African history or Aboriginal studies unit because the problem is pervasive in the delivery of all content, not just in the delivery of Aboriginal and Black content. The wholistic, relevant, politicized education I imagine is one that operates from a foundation of health and wellbeing principles and is fully integrated within the curriculum outcomes. All of the curriculum must be contextualized so as illuminate the social location of historically racialized learners.

The last word goes to the junior high Black male who wants his schools to, "treat everybody equal."

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Appendix A - Recruitment Poster

Are you a
Black Nova Scotian or Mi'kmaq?
Or another Aboriginal or African heritage?
Age 14 – 16 and living in HRM?

A research study on
Health, Well-Being and Education
will be taking place in November 2012.

Be in on the conversation!

I want to hear what you have to say about being a student in our schools.
You can be in school, dropped out of school, pushed out of school,
or in school limbo (not sure what your situation is).

- **What kinds of issues are you dealing with at school?**
- **Are your intelligence and gifts recognized at school?**
- **Is there a relationship between feeling good and doing well in school?**

What you say will be kept confidential.

This is a master's research study.
Giving a voice to your experiences and ideas.

(Pizza will be served)

If you are interested, please contact Toni Goree:
Student researcher: toni_goree@edu.yorku.ca
Or call or text me at 416-320-5557

Appendix B – Parental Consent Form

Study Name: "Miss I Just Don't Feel Like Reading Today:" Mi'kmaq and Black Nova Scotian Youth Perceptions of the Relationship between Health, Well-being, and Education.

Researcher: Toni Goree, Candidate Masters of Education Program, York University
e-mail address: Toni_Goree @ edu.yorku.ca.

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this research study is to explore the relationship between health, well-being, and education for Black and Mi'kmaq youth living in the Halifax. The aim is to better understand how these youth perceive the role that health and well-being has on their schooling outcomes. The youth aged 14 to 16, involved in this study will have an opportunity to give their views on the research topic. The findings from this study will be reported in the above researcher's Masters in Education thesis. As well, the research findings will be presented to the Mi'kmaq and Black Nova Scotian communities and may be published and presented in relevant journals and conferences.

What the participants will be asked to do in the research: Black Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq youth will be invited to participate in one focus group. At the focus group session there will be six youth from their cultural group and the researcher. The focus group will be held at a community location, for example the public library or the friendship centre and last for approximately one hour. During the focus group session the researcher will ask the participants to respond freely to several questions related to their perceptions, insights, and experiences on the role that health and well-being has had on their schooling and education. The focus group sessions will be audio recorded and transcribed. Participants do not have to respond to any question or take part in any discussion that they do not want to engage in.

Risks and discomforts: The foreseeable risks or discomforts to the participants are minimal. However, talking about schooling experiences may cause some participants to feel emotional discomfort, e.g. anger, sadness. To address this situation, prior to conducting the focus groups, the researcher will give each participant and their consenting parent or guardian, a hand-out with the contact information for counseling and supportive services that are available and accessible within their communities.

Benefits of the research and benefits to the participants: This research study offers Mi'kmaq and Black Nova Scotian youth an opportunity to collectively engage in a meaningful discussion about the role of health and well-being in the pursuit of their education. As well, participating in a focus group is an experience that is likely to enhance their knowledge, experience, and skills. Their participation in this study will help to raise awareness of the pathways and barriers impacting the education of these youth.

Voluntary participation: Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Participants may choose to stop participating or refuse to answer particular questions at any time. Should anyone choose to stop participating, this decision will not influence the relationship or the nature of the relationship with the researcher, or staff of York University either now or in the future.

Withdrawal from the study: Participants may stop participating in the study at any time and for any reason. A decision to do stop participating, or to refuse to answer questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event that you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed whenever possible.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. Participants in the focus groups will be asked to respect confidentiality and not repeat what was said within their focus group session. All written notes will be stored on the researcher's personal computer which is accessible by a private password. The focus group research data will be collected on audio recordings. The audio recordings will not be associated with identifying information. The audio recordings will be safely stored in a locked facility and only the researcher will have access to this information. All data from the audio recordings will be kept in a secure location until the researcher's thesis is completed and defended; anticipated to be within one year, after which all data will be erased, deleted, and shredded.

Questions about the research: If you have any questions about the research in general or about your child's part in the study, please feel free to contact myself Toni Goree by e-mail Toni_Goree@edu.yorku.ca (416-320-5557) and/or my graduate thesis supervisor Dr. Carl James by e-mail. CJames@edu.yorku.ca. and/or the York University Graduate Education Program office by e-mail EPeterson@edu.yorku.ca. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office or Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University, telephone 416-0736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca.

Legal rights and signatures:

I_____(parent/guardian please print) consent for my son / daughter _____(please circle the appropriate one) to participate in the "Miss I Just Don't Feel Like Reading Today:" Mi'kmaq and Black Nova Scotian Youth Perceptions of the Relationship between Health, Well-being, and Education research study conducted by Toni Goree, and supervised by Dr. Carl James of York University.

I have understood the nature of this project and give my consent for _____ (please print youth's name) to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature_____ Date_____
Parent, or Legal Guardian, or Children's Aid representative

Signature_____ Date_____
Investigator/Researcher

Appendix C – Consent/Assent Form

Study title: 'Miss, I Just Don't Feel Like Reading Today:" Mi'kmaq and Black Nova Scotian Youth Perceptions of the Relationship between Health, Well-being, and Education.

Researcher: Toni Goree. (E-mail address: Toni_Goree@edu.yorku.ca) or call 416-320-5557.

Introduction: Are you a Black Nova Scotian or Mi'kmaq youth who has something to say about the ways that health, and a sense of well-being impacts your effort to get an education? If so, you are invited to participate in a research study that is exploring these issues.

Background and purpose of the study: For some groups of youth it is very difficult to get through the public education system. Some young people have to give up because they don't get the support they need. For many Mi'kmaq and Black youth - graduating from high school has not been possible because of the issues they face on a daily basis. This study is trying to find out to what extent health and a sense of well-being impacts the education of Black and Mi'kmaq youth living in Halifax.

Things that will happen in this study: If you agree to be in this study you will be either a Mi'kmaq or Black Nova Scotian female or male, between the age of fourteen and sixteen. You will be invited to participate in a focus group where there will be the above named researcher and six participants from the same cultural group. The researcher (above) will lead the session by asking the group to discuss several questions about their perceptions, experiences, and insights into how health and well-being is linked to their schooling and education. The focus group will last for approximately one hour and will be held at a community center such as the public library or the friendship centre. The focus group session will be audio recorded.

Things that can go wrong: Sometimes when people talk about negative experiences they have strong emotions such as anger or sadness. In order to support the participants in this study, everyone involved will be given a hand-out with the contact information for counseling and supportive services offered within their community.

Possible benefits: Participation in this study may provide you with an opportunity to talk with other youth from your community about how health and well-being can be used to improve your situation at school and also further your chances of getting a better education. Being part of a focus group enhances your knowledge, skills, and experience in articulating your ideas. As a community member you are also taking a leadership role by speaking out and seeking ways to achieve a higher level of success in education.

Voluntary participation: It is your decision to participate in this study. You may stop at any time or refuse to answer any questions at any time. If you decide to stop participating in this study you will not be treated any differently than if you had continued. There is no negative consequence attached to deciding to no longer participate.

Withdrawal: You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You can stop at any time. If you join the study, but later decide that you do not want to continue, you can just tell your parent, guardian, or the researcher that you want to stop. There are no negative consequences attached to withdrawing from this study.

Confidentiality: All information collected about you in this study will be kept secret. When the study is finished, the researcher will write a report about what was learned. This report will be presented to you and members of your community. Parts of the report may also be presented at conferences and published in certain journals. This report will not say your name or that you were in the study. All of the information collected during the study will be locked-up in a secure

location. Upon completion of the research study, all of the information about the study will be destroyed.

Questions about the study: If you have any questions about this study please feel free to contact myself Toni Goree, by e-mail Toni_Goree@edu.yorku.ca. Or you can contact my supervisor, Dr. Carl James by e-mail CJames@edu.yorku.ca and/or the York University Graduate Education office by e-mail EPeterson@edu.yorku.ca.

Signatures:

My name at the end of this form means that I agree to be in a study called "Miss, I Just Don't Feel Like Reading Today:" Mi'kmaq and Black Nova Scotian youth Perceptions of the Relationship between Health, Well-being, and Education.

Name: _____ (please print).

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness: _____Date:_____

The above subject will receive a signed copy of this assent form.

Appendix D – Focus Group Questions

1. Do you think there is a relationship between your health & well-being, and getting good grades in school? If so, can you talk about this relationship, how does it work for you? Do you think your teachers, principals, and the education system, should be responsible for your health and well-being? To what extent?
2. Speaking as a young Aboriginal person, what kinds of issues (at school) are you dealing with that are affecting your ability to feel good and do well when you are at school? (Repeat question as per focus group with Black youth). Are your teachers, principals, and other school staff aware of these issues? Have they addressed them? How so? What has been some of the outcomes?
3. What are the most important things that you need in order to do well in school? Who do you think should provide these things? Are you getting what you need? Why or why not?
4. While at school, are there things that you do to make yourself feel better; particularly with the aim to be a better student, or get better grades?
5. How would you describe your past and current relationships with teachers, principals, and other school staff? Do these relationships affect your ability to learn and do well in school? What about relationships with your friends? What about students from other communities? How would you describe the relationship your family has with your teacher, principals, and school. How do these relationships impact on your education?
6. What are some of the ways that you enjoy learning and showing what you know? Is your intelligence and any of your other giftedness recognized in the classroom and in school? What do you know how to do that you are most proud of? What changes would you make so that Aboriginal/Black students could have more success when they are at school?

7. What would you like the school staff to understand about you? About your family? About your community? How do you think we could get this message to them?
8. What do you think are the essentials in order to bring about a good quality of life for your future? How about the essentials for a good quality of life in your community?
9. What kinds of information about health and well-being do you get at school? What kinds do you need and/or want? From whom would you like to get this information?
10. Is there anything that has not been discussed that you would like to talk about?

Appendix E – Focus Group Participants

Focus Group	Number of participants	Age/school attachment	Gender	Racial Identification	Key	Date of focus group
1. Junior High Black Learners	5	13-15 age Grade 8	3 female 2 male	Black Nova Scotian	JHBLF JHBLM	November 6, 2012
2. Kitpu Youth Group Learners	4	16-19 age 3 in high school & 1 recent graduate	1 female 3 male	Urban Indigenous	KYGLF KYGLM	November 22, 2012
3. Young Urban Aboriginal Women Learners	3	16-19 age Not currently enrolled in school	3 female	Urban Indigenous Mi'kmaq and Maliseet	YUAWF	November 27, 2012
4. Senior High Black Athlete Learners	5	16-19 age 4 in high school & 1 recent graduate	5 male	Black Nova Scotian	SHBAML	November 31, 2012