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Exposing and Closing the Knowledge Gap in Canada for Indigenous People: What is working to support Indigenous students in schools today from an Indigenous perspective

by

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Abstract

The major focus of this project explores what factors enable Indigenous people to continue in education despite all the barriers they face. Furthermore the research looks at how the education system can continue to improve to support Indigenous people through post-secondary. Moreover, the research looks at what the implications to government and educators are now that the TRC (2015) recommendations have been released and how they are being implemented. Most importantly my research was done in collaboration with Indigenous peoples through a sharing circle and interviews using Indigenous research methodology which is holistic, sacred and honors Indigenous knowledge.

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Chapter 1: Issue or Problem Statement

The Canadian education system is failing Indigenous people and has been for the last 300 years. Indigenous people in Canada are three times more likely to drop out of high school than non-Indigenous people. The dropout rate among First Nations people living off-reserve, Métis and Inuit aged 20 to 24, is 22.6% compared to 8.5% for non-Aboriginal people" (Statistics Canada, 2015). These statistics are alarming and when combined with the fact that Indigenous people are the most disadvantaged and marginalized population in Canada and the fastest growing demographic it is extremely concerning. In Canada, educational standards are very high and to make a "good living" requires a post-secondary education which most Indigenous people do not have. On reserves there are few schools close by, and little incentive to invest in education because there are so few opportunities for employment. Subsequently, students often have to travel away from their communities to complete schooling which usually ends prematurely because of loneliness, racism and financial strain when attending these mainstream schools (Richards, 2006).

The mental health of Indigenous students in the education system also needs to be seen as a contributing factor in low student success (Stewart, 2017). Furthermore, western notions of mental health and mental health interventions including social work and psychology also need to be examined when in relation to Indigenous well-being. For example, Indigenous psychologist Dr. Suzanne Stewart (2017) contends that western trained counsellors face challenges when working with Indigenous people because their approaches are often culturally inappropriate. Consequently, Indigenous students are pathologized and labeled which is contrary to Indigenous paradigms of holistic healing (Stewart, 2017). However, Indigenous social worker and educator Cyndy Baskin (2016) contends that *all* social workers can benefit from learning helping

approaches that are holistic and centre on building relationships rather than diagnosing to increase student well-being.

Unfortunately, the underfunding of Indigenous education by the federal government also contributes to low student success rates. For example, First Nations leaders and advocates, including the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the First Nations Education Council (FNEC), state that Federal funding for Indigenous education is "20 to 30 percent lower than provincially funded mainstream education" (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013, p.3). Consequently, this has resulted in a lack of qualified teaching staff and inadequate and dilapidated facilities which makes attending school even less desirable for Indigenous students on reserves (Kirkness, 1999).

<div align="center">**Historical Context**</div>

To understand the current reality of Indigenous people in education today it is necessary to understand the history of education for Indigenous. The history of the education of Indigenous people in Canada since colonization is marked with racism, abuse, death, low graduation, struggle and disease which has contributed to the intergenerational trauma and underrepresentation of Indigenous students in the education system today (Nagy and Sehdev, 2016; Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC], 2015). The colonialists who came to North America believed that the best way to "civilize the Indians was through educational experiments" (King, 2012, p.103). For example, in 1892, United States army captain Richard Pratt made a speech at a national conference stating that assimilation could be accomplished if you "kill the Indian in him and save the man" (King, 2012, p.107). The residential schools started off as day schools but they were deemed ineffective for assimilation because Indian children still had access to their culture and community (King, 2012). Therefore, to increase

assimilation the residential schools became boarding schools located off the reserves and in 1850

it became compulsory for children aged 6-15 to attend (King, 2012). Furthermore, First Nations

parents who refused to co-operate with this new "law" were punished with imprisonment (King,

2012).

Over the next 100 years in Canada residential schools would take away 150,000 Native

children from their parents, culture and community for "education" (TRC, 2015). In these

deplorable institutions run by the federal government and administered through the Catholic,

Presbyterian and United churches, Indigenous children suffered mental, emotional, physical and

spiritual abuse (Nagy and Sehdev, 2016). Furthermore, underfunding, malnourishment, sexual

and physical assault and overcrowding as well as inadequate staffing led to high mortality rates

in these residential schools (Nagy & Sehdev, 2016). For instance, there was an estimated 30%

mortality rate nation-wide and up to 50% in Alberta (King, 2012).

Legacy

My research which is based on Indigenous research methodology is informed by my own

identity as a Mi'kmaq/Celt woman, my educational experiences as well as my role as a social

worker in the Indigenous Community. Indigenous research methodology privileges self-

disclosure through storytelling or narrative; therefore I will begin with my own story, which is

how I opened the sharing circle with the participants involved in this research project. Sharing

our stories for many Indigenous people is a way to introduce ourselves, break down boundaries

and build relationships with one another (Baskin, 2016).

My name is Tsitra Mckay; I was born in Bracebridge Ontario and raised in Toronto. My

family is from Miminagash Prince Edward Island which as far as we know was the first

community to make contact with the Europeans. My spirit name is Nji Ja Gamiju Weyeykwe and

my family is the wolf clan. Although I have a mixed ancestry I find that I identify with my Mi'kmaq ancestry more than my Celtic ancestry because I was raised by my mother who is Mi'kmaq and was able to pass on traditional teachings. However, those teachings did not come easily to her because her mother had been taught to be ashamed of her own Mi'kmaq identity. For instance, my aunties dyed and curled their black hair and bleached their skin to look as white as possible, and my mother was called a dirty Indian at school even though she tried hard to blend in. Furthermore, it is unfortunate that my mother, aunties and uncles were not encouraged to go beyond basic education which has been common experience for many Indigenous people. For instance, even though children spent up to eight years in residential schools they were only provided with basic education that would be evaluated around a grade three level (TRC, 2015). Today the legacy of low educational attainment continues as noted by Sinclair (2009) who contends that "…our collective experience as Aboriginal people in a colonial racialized country has left us little time for the luxury of graduate and post graduate education…"(p.21).

My own journey in education was tumultuous and broken like many other Indigenous people which I could trace back to the continued impact of colonization. For example, I am the first person in my family to even walk in the door of a University, let alone graduate. I began my journey into social work through the Community Health Worker Training Program (CHWTP) at Anishnawbe Health in Toronto in 2010. This program developed out of a need for trained Indigenous community workers to address some of the issues facing the Indigenous community. The Community Health Worker Training Program offered me a bridge into post-secondary education. It also offered me a chance to connect with the community, learn more about Indigenous culture and knowledge, gain more education and skills and create a better life for my children. Learning how to be a Community Worker through Indigenous-centred teachings in a

supportive environment was a life changing and an invaluable experience. Through my training at Anishnawbe Health I learned about the impact of colonization on the Indigenous community that contributes to the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the CAS, criminal justice system, poor mental health and addiction, poverty, homelessness, disease, and lateral violence and low education (Baskin, 1999; Hart, 2009; Sinclair, 2009, Thomas & Green, 2007). More importantly however, I learned about myself as an Indigenous woman.

After completing the Community Health Worker Training Program, I was able to apply to the George Brown College Community Worker Program for my second year through a bridging partnership with Anishnawbe Health. After I completed the Community Worker program at George Brown I transferred to York University to do a Bachelor of Social Work. However, I was very disappointed that I was the only Indigenous student in any classes that I was taking in the social work program. There are now a few more students but overall Indigenous students are still underrepresented at this level of education and in this area of work. This underrepresentation again can be traced back to the impact of colonization and the residential school system (Baskin, 2016; Sinclair, 2009)

Having a mixed ancestry makes me feel like I have my feet in both worlds which can be very confusing and hard to reconcile at times like it is for many "mixed blood" people (Baskin, 2016). For instance, there have been times that I have spoken up against a misconception about Indigenous people or expanded some of the knowledge being presented in class or been asked about my heritage and had to face the looks of disbelief and the "funny you don't look like one" line we often hear. I have also been told by professors that I do not have to be the "token Indian" in the room when I do share my identity. This is a common story by Indigenous students and there was a time when I almost dropped out because I did not think that I could take it anymore.

The idea of having to justify or prove Indigenous identity is also a common story for many Indigenous people and can be traced back to discriminatory legislation and social policies like the *"Indian Act"* created in 1876 by the Federal Government of Canada that defined who and who was not an "Indian" (Sinclair, 2009).

Although my own early education was difficult because of the inappropriate or lack of Indigenous perspectives in the classroom, it was still shocking to learn that so few social work students in post-secondary education knew the history of Indigenous people in Canada. However, understanding that integral to colonization was an "assimilationist agenda" of education which erased Indigenous history from the text books helped me put their lack of knowledge into context (Thomas & Green, 2007 p.94). For example, Indigenous scholar Michael Hart (2009) explains that in the area of education, Indigenous knowledges are marginalized while "Eurocentric scholars identify their knowledge as superior" (p.27). Furthermore, Indigenous scholars maintain the complicity of social work of being involved in the colonial project of "upholding the status quo" (Jeffery, 2007, p.435). Unfortunately, it is also this lack of knowledge that the goals of social work were founded on which still informs the work we do today (Jeffery, 2007). These goals simply are, "that populations outside bourgeois identity [like Indians] required civilised subjects to manage and control their desires" (Badwall, 2016, p.7). Subsequently, social workers have always been complicit in reproducing and upholding dominant "bourgeois ideologies" through our practice which is reliant on Western notions of universal or global truths and knowledge that stems from imperialism and liberalism (Jeffery, 2007).

We Are Sorry

Recently, there has been an attempt to address the past wrongs of the Residential School system through the *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement* (IRSSA) which is an agreement in collaboration with the federal government, the United, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Catholic churches and residential school survivors. The settlement agreement was finalized in 2006 and provided for individual "Common Experience Payments" and an "Independent Assessment Process" (Czyzewski, 2011). Furthermore, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC] was established in response to the terms of the Indian Residential School Settlement agreement in 2008 as a collective measure. The mandate of the TRC was to promote awareness of the impact of the residential school system through the gathering of witness statements which took 5 years to complete and resulted in 94 calls to action, many of which focus on transforming the education system.

Despite the traumatic history of education in Canada and the continued marginalization and racism Indigenous people face in the education system, Indigenous people have identified education as one of the keys to alleviating disadvantages such as poverty, low self-esteem, addictions, crime and unemployment (Kirkness, 1999/2013). Therefore, my research looks at what factors enable Indigenous people to continue in the education system despite all the barriers they face. Furthermore, it will look at how the education system can continue to improve to support Indigenous people until post-secondary. Moreover, the research will look at what the implications to government and educators are now that the TRC (2015) recommendations have been released and how are they being implemented.

The following chapters will provide a literature review on the topic of Indigenous educational experience, followed by a detailed explanation of my research methodology and research design. This will lead to the next chapter which is based on the findings from a sharing

circle and personal interviews from Indigenous students, educators, social workers and

community members. Finally, a discussion and conclusion section based on these findings will

be presented where the research will be summarized to illustrate what changes should be made to

better support Indigenous students in the education system based on participants'

recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Literature Review

The main purpose of the literature review is to provide an overview of the literature surrounding the current reality of Indigenous education in Canada today. More specifically, the literature review investigates the factors that contribute to Indigenous people's experience in accessing education in Canada despite the barriers they face. The literature review also privileges Indigenous authors that have done research or have experience in education which is consistent with Indigenous research methodology in that it honors Indigenous knowledge and experience which is the methodology used for this research project. Indigenous research methodology also recognizes that Indigenous knowledge is unique and that the greatest source of information is gathered through narrative and storytelling by Indigenous people (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2011; Wilson, 2008).

Federal government policies regarding Indigenous education in Canada were also examined as the federal government is responsible for the education of Indigenous people and for matters dealing with "Indians, and lands reserved for the Indians," under section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act 1867* (Simeone, 2011 p.22). This obligation is evident through treaties signed between 1871 and 1910, which commit the federal government to "maintaining schools and providing educational services to signatory First Nations" (Simeone, 2011, p.22). The Ministry of Education in Ontario, responsible for provincial Indigenous education initiatives were also examined because of the high percentage of urban Indigenous people attending provincial schools.

Themes uncovered in this literature review investigating the factors that enable Indigenous people to access education despite the barriers they face included: acknowledging the historical trauma of Indigenous peoples through colonization and the residential school system,

social policies in education and the economic benefits of supporting Indigenous people, as well as educators' responsibility to learn about the history of Indigenous people in Canada, and creating a new story through incorporating cultural perspectives in the class room (Baskin, 2016; Deer, 2009/2013; Dion, Johnson & Rice, 2010; Hardes, 2006/2013; Kirkness, 1999/2013; Koleszar-Green, 2007; Nagy & Sehdev, 2012; Thomas, 2005; TRC, 2015).

Acknowledging Historical Trauma

Residential schools absolutely devastated Indigenous people and today many "former students continue to live out the horrifying impact of these schools" (Thomas, 2005). Today, there are over 80,000 survivors of the residential schools and Indigenous authors, scholars, educators, researchers, and community members agree that acknowledging historical trauma is absolutely imperative to healing in the classroom (Baskin, 2016; TRC, 2015; Dion, Johnson & Rice, 2010). For example, Dion, Johnson and Rice (2010) contend that Indigenous students confront a system with little understanding about the history of the residential school system. Furthermore, teachers report that they feel unprepared to teach Indigenous history or culture in the classroom because of their lack of knowledge and training in Indigenous history (Dion, Johnson & Rice, 2010). Consequently, school staff are unprepared to respond to the challenges that Indigenous students bring with them like mistrust, poverty, and intergenerational trauma caused from colonization (Dion, Johnson & Rice, 2010; Koleszar-Green, 2007; TRC, 2015).

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC] (2015), "too many Canadians know little or nothing about the deep historical roots of these conflicts". "This lack of historical knowledge has serious consequences for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and for Canada as a whole" (p.8). Furthermore, the TRC (2015) believes that this lack of knowledge contributes to poor public policy decisions and reinforces racist attitudes. Subsequently, to the

TRC (2015) history is integral to reconciliation. Therefore, the TRC (2015) goals were to capture a full account of history through testimony from the victims of the residential school system as well as acquiring all relevant documents from churches under the terms of the Settlement Agreement (TRC, 2015).

However, according to Czyzewski, K. (2011) the "abuse that occurred behind the walls of the institutions that were the residential schools is certainly no secret" (p.2). Documented abuse from staff in residential schools included being physically assaulted, malnourished, forced to do hard physical labour, providing inadequate clothing, exposure to the elements, and forced separation from family and siblings (Czyzewski, K. 2011). King, (2012) contends that the public became aware of the deplorable conditions of the residential schools that Indigenous children suffered under when the Meriam report was released in the United States in 1928. Similarly, in Canada, the Hawthorne report which was published in 1966-67 began to raise awareness of the social problems in the Indigenous community as a direct result of assimilative policies like the residential schools (King, 2012). This is corroborated by Abele, Dittburner, & Graham, (2000/2008) who view the Hawthorn Report as influential policy research in the area of Indigenous education.

Although it generally contended that the Hawthorn report is problematic because of its deficit lens of Indigenous people, it does point to the failure of the federal government to provide an adequate education through the residential school system (Abele, et al. 2000/2008; King, 2012). Even though authors may not agree on the Canadian public's level of awareness of these atrocities they do agree that "all were made to live in *fear* (Sinclair, 2009) and were disconnected from language, spiritual and cultural teachings, family, community, and a nurturing

environment" which still impacts the community today (Hon. Senator Murray Sinclair cited in

Czyzewski, 2011 (p.2); King, 2012 TRC, 2015).

Social Policies

Another theme that was common in the current literature was how social policy has

impacted Indigenous people's education (Abele, et al. 2000/2008; Castellano, Davis & Lahache,

2000/2008). Indigenous education policy has gone through many changes over the years

resulting in education initiatives from discourses between Indigenous organizations and the

federal government. For example, after the release of the Hawthorne report which raised

concerns about how marginalized Indigenous people were in Canada, a period of political

activism for Indigenous organizations and one of the most important ideas surrounding

Indigenous education came from a paper that was produced by the National Indian Brotherhood

[NIB] which is now known as the Assembly of First Nations in 1972. Their report, called

"*Indian Control of Indian Education*" outlined the importance of involving Indigenous people in

their own education (Abele, et al. 2000/2008). Furthermore *"Indian Control of Indian*

Education" (1972) stated that Indigenous people should not be viewed as a homogenous people

in regards to education but rather that education needs to vary according to community and

background or tribe (Abele et al, 2000/2008). This spurred policy development and discourses to

move away from the assimilist approach to education to integrating Indigenous culture in

education (Abele, et al. 2000/2008). Subsequently, policy reform after the release of this report

by NIB is marked by the recognition of the word "Control" as meaning self-government which

includes education (Abele et al. 2000/2008).

One of the biggest studies that investigates all aspects of Aboriginal life and informs

policy formation in Canada is the 3,500 page report The Royal Commission on Aboriginal

People (RCAP). RCAP began in 1990 and took 5 years to complete and gathered testimony from Indigenous people all over Canada which showed how the federal governments' assimilationist policies has failed Indigenous people (Battiste, 2000/2008). However, RCAP also made several recommendations and highlighted the successful educational policies that have been implemented and has become an invaluable tool to negotiate educational structures and funding (Castellano, Davis & Lahache, 2000/2008). For example, after RCAP was released, funding increased from the federal government in the 1990's (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013). Subsequently, new Indigenous programs and educational initiatives were developed. For instance, $130 million dollars was allocated to special needs education annually and $268 million dollars over 5 years as well as $75 million dollars in ongoing funding was promised in the 2008 budget for Indigenous education (Drummond and Rosenbluth, 2013).

Many authors note however, that communication problems, lack of adequate funding and the removal of Indigenous education from main political discourses has resulted in Indigenous education initiatives remaining fragile and inadequate (Abele, et al. 2000/2008; Czyzewski, 2011; Sinclair, 2004). For example, Drummond and Rosenbluth (2013) note that federal funding for Indigenous education is underfunded compared to provincially funded schools. More specifically, while provincial schools receive approximately $11,000 per student per year federally funded schools on reserves receive about $6000 per student. Consequently, this has resulted in a lack of qualified teaching staff and inadequate and dilapidated facilities which make attending school even less desirable for Indigenous students on reserves (Kirkness, 1999/2013). Furthermore, Kirkness (1999/2013) points out that this financial dependence of Indigenous people on the allocation of these funds maintains a relationship of dominance by the federal government over the lives of Indigenous people. This is corroborated by Williams (2008), who

notes that a problem in the administration of these funds also creates a barrier for Indigenous students who are at the mercy of the political climate. For instance, the allocation of funds for education at this time for status Indians is done through band offices with little to no training in the distribution of academic funding (Helin & Snow, 2010). Understanding funding policies in education can also be difficult because the administration and funding levels vary by provinces in Canada and there is no national education standard or funding formula to which provinces adhere (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013). Furthermore, students are also often not aware of funding and consequently the funding does not often get to potential students.

Thereare an estimated 50,312 Indigenous students in provincial schools; therefore, their educational experiences are also examined in this literature review. Fortunately, the Ontario "Ministry of Education has identified Aboriginal education as a key priority" (Dion, et al., 2010). Subsequently, in 2007, the Ministry of Education in Ontario developed a First Nations, Inuit and Metis Policy Framework which pledged to work collaboratively with Indigenous people and organizations to develop innovative programs that are able to meet the needs of Indigenous students in urban areas (Dion, et al. 2010). From this policy framework, the Urban Aboriginal Pilot Project developed which focused on enhancing student achievement, increasing partnerships with Indigenous organizations, developing curriculum resources and providing professional development (Dion, et al. 2010). From this two year pilot project the Aboriginal Education Centre (AEC) was established and the Aboriginal Community Advisory Committee began in the Toronto District School Board to support Indigenous students (Dion, et al, 2010).

Similar projects in provincial schools across Canada to address the achievement gap were noted in the literature. For example, in British Columbia the First Nations Advisory Committee was established to work with school boards to develop resources and support Indigenous

students and school staff in Vancouver (Williams, 2000/2008). Furthermore, since the Federal

government has adopted integrationist approaches to education, other provinces including

Manitoba, Nova Scotia and the Yukon Territory have adopted structural policies that take

"Aboriginal education into account" (Fettes & Norton, 2000/2008, p.44). These commitments

and initiatives are extremely beneficial; authors Helin and Snow (2010/2013) explain that

Indigenous youth are the fastest growing demographic in Canada, which means that they will

need to fill the labour gap created from retirees. For example, it is estimated that by 2026,

600,000 Indigenous youth will be entering the labour force (Helin & Snow, 2010/2013).

Subsequently, if Indigenous youth obtained the same level of education as non-Indigenous youth,

it is estimated that the GDP of Canada would increase by 3.5 billion dollars (Helin & Snow,

2010/2013).

Educators Responsibility to Learn

Another theme that was uncovered in the literature was that many Indigenous students

face racism and discrimination from teachers and colleagues which is detrimental to their success

in school (Baskin, 2016; Hardes, 2006/2013; Kirkness, 1999/2013; Koleszar-Green, 2007). Ruth

Koleszar-Green (2007) shares her stories of going to mainstream school experiencing racism and

being physically assaulted by students and the target of derogatory remarks by teachers. She

explains that this racist treatment is in part due to a lack of knowledge from colonization and

Eurocentric education that does not recognize or honor Aboriginal knowledges or experience

(Koleszar-Green, 2007). Her story of racism experienced in the education system is a common

theme in the current literature. For example, Indigenous author Sean Wilson (2008) explains how

most Indigenous kids he knew growing up were in remedial level classes. Wilson (2008) goes on

to share that his sister was automatically placed in remedial level in high school. However, his

mother went into the school to meet the principal to get her changed to the academic stream.

During the meeting, Wilson (2008) notes that the principal stated that he was unaware the

student has a white mother and that "of course she should be in the academic stream" (p.24). His

sister went on to get a doctorate from Harvard University, which would not have been possible if

his mother had not directly challenged school officials (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous author and

educator Cindy Baskin (2016) also shares stories about having conversations with Indigenous

students, friends and colleagues who have directly experienced racism in schools especially if

their skin was "darker" or they looked like what people expect Indigenous people to look like.

      Inappropriate comments from teachers and school staff from teacher's lack of

knowledge was also a major concern for parents and students because it contributes to incidents

of racism and a relationship of disrespect. For example, in the report "*Decolonizing our Schools*

in the Toronto District School Board" by Susan Dion, Krista Johnston and Carla Rice (2010),

students give testimony about these incidents. In the report (2010), one student states that she

was told by a teacher "you don't look like an Indian", another contends that they were told "I

thought sharing was in your culture" while another Indigenous student was embarrassed by a

teacher who stated "apparently school is not for these people" (p.32). Unfortunately, these

incidents appear common which contributes to Indigenous student's unwillingness to self-

identify, "underachievement" and high drop-out rates (Dion et al., 2010).

However, Dion et al. (2010) also recognize that many teachers and support staff in the school

system are willing to learn about Indigenous history in order to better support students.

Furthermore, they note that in order for teachers to enhance their knowledge they must be

supported through professional development workshops, sample lessons and appropriate

resources which is consistent with TRC recommendations. This is evident through the

collaborative approaches between faculty that are beginning to be adopted by schools across the country to create respectful dialogue between staff and students (Gardner, 2008).

Creating a new story

Decolonizing education was another consistent theme throughout the literature by Indigenous educators, social service workers, and community members (Baskin, 2016; Deer, 2009/2013; Dion, et al., 2010; Hardes, 2006/2013; Hart, 2009; Kirkness, 1999/2013; Koleszar-Green 2007; Nagy, & Sehdev, 2012; Sinclair, 2004; TRC, 2015). For instance, Michael Hart (2009) explains that "colonialism is driven by a worldview and processes that embrace dominion, self-righteousness and greed, and affects all levels of Indigenous peoples' lives" (p. 26). He continues to explain that in the area of education, Indigenous knowledges are marginalized while "Eurocentric scholars identify their knowledge as superior" (p.27). This idea is echoed by Raven Sinclair (2004) who notes that there is no room for Indigenous knowledge in educational institutions and that decolonizing pedagogy is imperative because accepting that western thought is automatically "relevant and valid" as well as "universally applicable" has serious detrimental impacts on Indigenous people because it negates Indigenous worldviews (p.51).

Educational institutions that have incorporated Indigenous worldviews into their classrooms have seen an increase in attendance, grades, self-esteem and connection to community (Dion, et al. 2010). For example, according to Dion et al. (2010) one student reports that when she started receiving support from the Aboriginal Education Centre she was able to envision the future and feel positive about herself. Furthermore, teachers noted that there was more engagement in the classroom and that Indigenous students reported being happier and more "at home" in schools (Dion et al. p.29). Frank Deer, (2009/2013) explains that Indigenous people

are still being subjected to the dominance secured by the colonizers through "Confederation" which formalized their ownership of Canada (p.387). He notes that instead of an accurate history being taught in schools that reflects the failure of fiscal transfer obligations by government, Indigenous people are often viewed as underachieving because of their own failure. Therefore, he agrees that, transforming Eurocentric curriculum and incorporating culturally appropriate programming into the curriculum of mainstream school is an effective way of addressing "educational underachievement" (p.388). Furthermore, Kirkness (1999/2013) stated that "An Indian philosophy in education in many ways is more valid and universal than the one that prevails in educational circles today" because it offers children more than a one sided view of history that honors the values and accomplishments of …"Canada's original inhabitants" (p.12). Kirkness (1999/2013) also agrees with other Indigenous authors that the involvement of Indigenous people in education has resulted in greater retention rates, improved attendance, resurgence in Native languages being taught and the inclusion of relevant curriculum. Based on these findings, it does appear authors believe that it is possible to create a new story in education for Indigenous people that closes the "achievement" or knowledge gap by decolonizing the classroom through incorporating Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum.

Truth and Reconciliation, Gaps and Next Steps

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada published 94 recommendations from their 5 year study released in December, 2015. Their recommendations around education were also consistent with the themes uncovered from other Indigenous authors and researchers working in education. Specifically, these calls to action seek more support from the Federal government to address the achievement gap through increased funding, training educators on the history of Indigenous people and the incorporation of culturally appropriate learning materials.

Since the release of the TRC (2015) recommendations, the Federal Government has pledged its support to work with First Nations communities on a national strategy to implement these calls to action.

For instance, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's official statement in response to the TRC final report release states: "one of our goals is to help lift this burden from your shoulders, from those of your families, and from your communities. It is to accept fully our responsibilities – and our failings – as a government and as a nation" (Trudeau, 2015). However, preliminary research from the literature review into *how* these calls of action are being implemented in the education system show a gap in the research so far. Therefore, my research will not only look back into the history of Indigenous education and the policies informing it but also look forward into what new policies have been developed to support Indigenous people in education. Lastly, information will be gathered through narrative and storytelling by Indigenous people through sharing circles which is consistent with Indigenous research methodology.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Design

The ideological perspective that informs the approach to my research is based on Indigenous research methodology which is holistic, includes ceremony, recognizes protocol, is considered sacred and honors Indigenous knowledge (Absolon, 2011). Indigenous research methodology recognizes that Indigenous knowledge is unique and that the greatest source of information is gathered through narrative and storytelling (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2011; Wilson, 2008). Therefore, Indigenous research methodology requires reaching out to Indigenous people to acquire knowledge about their lived experience (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2011; Wilson, 2008). Subsequently, the epistemological assumptions within Indigenous research methodology is that all knowledge is subjective, collective and relational (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2011; Wilson, 2008a). Therefore, Indigenous research is "subjective without apology" and Indigenous researchers voices are embodied throughout the writing (Baskin, 2011). Furthermore, Indigenous research methodology entails that the knowledge that comes directly from community members and should be guided by community priorities (Baskin, 2011; Schnarch, 2004; Wilson, 2008). Indigenous paradigms also demand that research conducted within communities also has to be reciprocal in nature and built upon respectful relationships with community members. For instance, Absolon (2011) states that reciprocity is very important for respectful relationships between researchers and community members and is common for "other Indigenous searchers" (p.126). Therefore, research is done in collaboration with Indigenous peoples rather than *on* them (Wilson, 2008).

During the research process there was a considerable delay in receiving ethical approval beyond my faculty board members from the Research Ethics Board and the Aboriginal Advisory

Research Committee because my proposal had to be evaluated based on section 9 of the TPSC2 which outlines ethical guidelines of conducting research with Aboriginal peoples (see appendix b). Consequently, this reduced the number of sharing circles I had hoped to conduct from three to one due to time constraints. This section of the TCSP2 was created by Indigenous people to address past unethical research that had been done on Indigenous people. Furthermore, the Aboriginal Advisory Research Committee at York University was created to ensure that research projects being conducted with Indigenous people meet ethical standards according to this section. Although my research was delayed and reduced, I believe that the ethical measures that have been put in place are beneficial to Indigenous research participants. However, they can also act as a barrier to Indigenous researchers hoping to conduct research. Therefore, in honor of the participants involved in my research I will be making available all the approved forms and proposal notes that I was required to submit to assist them in their future research endeavors.

The epistemological assumption of Indigenous research methodology differs from dominant western paradigms such as positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism where knowledge is seen as *individual* in nature (Wilson, 2008b). Unfortunately, the idea of collective and relational knowledge has been criticized by western researchers for not being objective. However, Cindy Baskin (2011) argues that "every researcher brings their own "bias into the research process" and that there is no such thing as objective research. This needed to be explicitly explained and justified as part of the research review process prior to approval.

Indigenous research methodology is also based on the assumption that Indigenous knowledge should be privileged as a way to reclaim knowledge and is a form of decolonization (Absolon, 2011). For instance, Indigenous knowledge was suppressed and even illegal under oppressive legislation such as the "*Indian Act*" (1876) created by the Government of Canada.

However, that knowledge survived and was passed down to community members orally as a form of resistance, by Elders and traditional knowledge keepers. Subsequently, by seeking that knowledge, researchers defy colonization as a continued form of resistance.

Although there are many different Indigenous nations that have different cultures and beliefs, there are common ontological beliefs and values that inform Indigenous research (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2011; Wilson, 2008b). One of the fundamental beliefs incorporated in Indigenous research methodology is that the research should benefit community members. For example, building capacity by training community members as peer researchers seeks to undo the past harm that has been done by western researchers is one way of benefiting the community (Schnarch, 2004). Subsequently, many Indigenous researchers believe that their research is a "way of giving back to the community" (Absolon, 2011, p.119).

Other ontological beliefs within Indigenous paradigms demand that research conducted within communities also has to be reciprocal in nature and built upon respectful relationships with community members. One way that Kathleen Absolon (2011) was able to incorporate reciprocity into her research was by involving participants in every step of her project. She also provided a copy of her thesis from her research to them as a way of sharing and giving ownership back to the community for the knowledge that was generated from her research *with* them. Therefore, participants in my research were provided with access to data generated and were involved in the data interpretation prior to inclusion into the research paper. A transcribed draft of the findings from the sharing circle was sent to individual participants through email for their review. The participants were then invited to provide feedback in terms of accuracy and interpretation. Furthermore, they were asked to submit further recommendations. Participants also gained experience in the research process which builds individual and community capacity.

Participants were also acknowledged as co-contributors if they wished to be which is also congruent with Indigenous research methodology.

Indigenous research methodology is exploratory in nature as it seeks to understand peoples lived reality. For example, storytelling is a big part of Indigenous methodology and is seen by some researchers as a standalone method on its own (Thomas, 2005; Wilson, 2008b). Again, this method of gathering data honors peoples knowledge which disrupts the dominant discourse to "tell counter stories" of survival and resistance (Thomas, 2005 p.241). Although there are fundamental values that are intrinsic to Indigenous research methodology, there is no single definition of this methodology. This is because there are many cultures and different Nations of Indigenous people. For instance, Wilson (2008) contends that Indigenous research methodology does not need dominant western theories and paradigms and is complete within itself. Therefore, he suggests leaving dominant theories and paradigms behind as a form of decolonization. However, Baskin (2011) contends that other forms of research paradigms, theories and methodologies compliment and support Indigenous methodology. For instance, Baskin (2011) believes that Participant Action Research (PAR) and Community Based Research (CBR) can be allies to Indigenous researchers. Both these methodologies seek to create change and rely on critical theory that "…critiques historical and structural conditions of oppression and seeks transformation of those conditions" (Glense, 2001, p.9).

Indigenous research also demands change that will benefit the community which is often structural which also supports Cindy Baskins (2011) idea of drawing upon critical theory, PAR and CBT (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2011; Thomas, 2005). Therefore, it makes sense that PAR and CBT critical theory utilising an anti-colonial framework could "sit alongside" Indigenous research methodology (Baskin, 2011, p.234). Subsequently, Indigenous research often explores

Indigenous people's feelings and beliefs to understand the dominant power dynamics that marginalize Indigenous people.

Furthermore, Indigenous research therefore often interrogates the structures or institutions that historically and presently oppress Indigenous communities, such as the Children's Aid Society, the federal government, and the education system. However, unlike main stream paradigms, Indigenous methodology demands that the researcher goes beyond the literature in order to truly understand people's experience (Thomas, 2005). Therefore, the data collection techniques and tools in Indigenous research include outreaching to community members, utilising sharing circles and one on one interviews (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2008; Hart, 2009; Thomas, 2005; Wilson, 2008b). The information from the narratives derived from the interviews and sharing circles therefore become the data source to understand how colonial institutions impact Indigenous peoples' lived experience.

Some of the strengths of Indigenous research methodology include conducting research in an ethical way that honors participant knowledge and culture and is reciprocal and holistic in nature and benefits the community (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2008; Hart, 2009; Schnarch, 2004; Thomas, 2005; Wilson, 2008b). For example, Schnarch (2004) contends that utilizing Indigenous research methodology based on the principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) falls in line with TCPS2 ethical guidelines in research with Aboriginal people. Some of the limitations in conducting research in this way are that it can be considered non-viable by western standards (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2008; Hart, 2009; Thomas, 2005; Wilson, 2008b). Absolon (2011) even goes as far to suggest that Indigenous research methodologies could be seen as addendums to dominant research practices.

Research Description

Learning about Indigenous research methodology and seeing how this holistic approach honors peoples knowledge, is action oriented and gives back to the community, inspired me to pursue and incorporate it into my own research. The purpose of my research is to understand what factors are enabling Indigenous peoples to stay in school despite the barriers and challenges they face that make it difficult for them to do so. I believe that Indigenous people can offer valuable insight into obstacles encountered in education that are specific to this population due to the historical trauma of colonization, as well as identifying the specific factors that enable them to continue their education. Therefore, it is through collaboration with Indigenous peoples that I hope to understand their experiences in the education system within a colonial context.

My research engaged Indigenous peoples through a sharing circle using Indigenous methodology. There were seven Indigenous participants in the sharing circle from York University. All of the participants were in the process of completing post-secondary education or had recently completed their degrees from various disciplines such as Human Rights and Equity, Dramatic Arts, Business and Society as well as Multiculturalism and Indigenous Studies. For example, one participant was completing her Phd, five participants were in undergraduate programs and one participant was a traditional knowledge keeper with a masters degree in social work who provides mental health support to Indigenous students at CASS and teaches at Ryerson University. Therefore, although participants may not have been in the same field of study or had any classes together all of them knew each other and were connected as members through the Centre of Aboriginal Students Services (CASS). All participants agreed to be identified by their first names after approval of the data and a review of the research

According to TCPS2 guidelines regarding research with Indigenous people, approval from community members and organizations is required. Therefore, as part of the research process, I informed the director of CASS about my research and was only able to post a recruitment flyer for the sharing circle upon his approval. This process is necessary for any researcher conducting research with Indigenous people to meet ethical guidelines (see appendix a and b).

However, the questions to inform this circle were tentative because in respect to Indigenous research methodology, the research needed to be guided by what participants wanted to discuss during the circle. Furthermore, as part of the ethical considerations for this research, I was required to have an Elder or traditional knowledge keeper as part of the sharing circle to ensure that emotional support was provided to participants during and after the circle. During the circle, in consistency with Indigenous world views, participants took turns speaking and sharing their stories while other participants listened without interrupting (Koleszar-Green, 2007).

Although Indigenous research methodology could be utilised as a standalone methodology, I also utilise anti-colonial theory as a lens through which the data will be analysed. This is because I believe it complements the critical aspect of this research which is to draw themes from the data collected from participants in order to understand and interrogate the relationship between the education system and colonial operations.

Furthermore, in addition to the sharing circle my methods included a spring time fast, oral teachings from traditional knowledge keepers, a traditional counselling session with an Elder and a literature review that privileged Indigenous authors. I am truly inspired by Indigenous researchers Kathleen Absolon, Cyndy Baskin, Michael Hart, Raven Sinclair, Suzanne

Stewart, Ruth Koleszar-Green and Shawn Wilson and it is my hope that one day my research

will be able to benefit and support the Indigenous community as their research has.

Chapter 4: Findings

Sharing stories and knowledge

Indigenous research methodology requires that research is directed by community, therefore for the sharing circle it was important that there were no structured questions prepared or problem identified by the researcher (Koleszar-Green, 2007). Subsequently, the sharing circle began with an acknowledgment that although Indigenous experience in education was going to be explored in the circle there was no set questions the participants were required to answer. Furthermore, participants were informed that they could direct the conversation in any direction they felt it was important to do because Indigenous research methodology also relies on storytelling through lived experience to gain a deeper understanding of the issue (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2011; Schnarch, 2004; Wilson, 2008).

Indigenous research methodology is also built upon relationship and demands self-disclosure by the researcher in order for them to situate themselves within the research (Baskin, 2011). Subsequently, as the researcher I opened the circle by sharing my own personal story and my experiences in education as an Indigenous woman and a social worker as well as why I was interested in doing research in the educational experiences of other Indigenous people in education. Furthermore, it was important to acknowledge how colonization displaced Indigenous people in order to acquire land and resources and link the growth of colonialism to the residential school system, the growth of the child welfare system and the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care (Sinclair, 2004). I also explained how social work is implicated in the historical trauma of Indigenous people through the apprehension of Indigenous children for the residential schools and remains complicit in the oppression of Indigenous people through the child welfare system today (Sinclair, 2004).

Freire (1990) as quoted in Sinclair (2004) contends that "the social worker as much as the educator is not a neutral agent, whether in practice or in action (p.50)". Sinclair (2004) goes on to explain that when Indigenous people began to protest against the residential school system and the schools began to close, the child welfare system grew through mass scooping of Indigenous children from their homes by social workers. Consequently, because of this history, and the paradigm of western thought that social workers continue to be trained in at educational institutions, social workers are unable to meet the needs of Indigenous people (Sinclair, 2004). Therefore, it was also important to note to participants that the first recommendation of the TRC (2015) around education and social work is that social workers be trained in the history of Indigenous people.

In an attempt to address "the problematic position of social work within the lives of Aboriginal peoples", the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work introduced new accreditation standards in the 1990s that outlined how Indigenous peoples worldviews could be incorporated into social work education programs (Koleszar-Green, 2007). However, it was not without resistance from students and professors that these standards were introduced and Indigenous social work educators remain skeptical as to whether schools will actually be denied accreditation if they do not meet these requirements (Baskin, 2016).

Self-identification is often criticized as being unacademic according to western standards of research, however I found that opening up the sharing circle in this way was appreciated by Indigenous participants and is consistent with the principals of reciprocity and relationship. Furthermore, I explained the principals of Indigenous research methodology as being guided by community and offered tobacco or *semma* to each participant in respect for traditional protocol. Beginning with *semma* honors the spirit in exchange for knowledge (Absolon, 2011).

Some of the themes uncovered through the sharing circle included, having access to cultural support services, appropriate boundaries, mentorship, learning styles, racism and resistance, as well as the importance of Indigenous knowledges in mental health. The circle began with the tentative question which asked participants who were all University students to share what has enabled them to get this far? What's enabled them to stay in school?

Cultural Support Services

One participant, (Stefan) began by sharing his story about the transition from his reserve to Toronto and the challenges he faced adjusting to a large city and a different high school.

"When I first came here everyone has like their own separate religions, cultures practices groups of like friends and being taken away from the culture you're left with… you don't you don't have access to that"… "so I was on the verge of dropping out of high school but talking with the child service worker I was connected to the Aboriginal Education Centre which changed my life". "They (Aboriginal Education Centre) brought me into the community with like open arms". " I was taught practices that I could do during the day and then I was brought back to my community to my culture and that instead of like resenting high school and not wanting to be there I wanted to be the in the Aboriginal education Council". "I wanted to learn". "It was enjoyable". "So I truly believe that without the Aboriginal education Centre". "I would not have graduated high school and that one of the great things that they did is they had that transition program from high school…". "I came here (York University) when I was like seventeen years old and I was able to like see somewhere I can go and feel comfortable and know that see those resources are that are available to me". "So it wasn't like a perfect transition into University but I'm here now and so I think that without that support and like that direct help and that counselling and direction I wouldn't be here". [Stefan]

When asked about how his experience in University was, he went on to share that being a member of the Centre for Aboriginal Student Services [CASS] at York enabled him to get through his first year and excel beyond what he thought he ever would. He explained that through CASS he was able to stay connected to community and culture, access resources, make friends and have a "home base" in the large campus where most students seemed to be stuck in their own microcosms and alone. The idea of staying connected to culture which enables Indigenous students success in school is consistent with findings from the literature review

which exposed how grades and mental health and well-being improved for Indigenous students as a result.

CASS is a space set up to offer support and services to Aboriginal students at York and utilizes the medicine wheel to inform their programs and services. In the mental quadrant of the medicine wheel for instance, CASS offers support in writing and library resources. In the emotional quadrant of the medicine wheel, CASS offers mental health support through Elders and traditional knowledge keepers. In the spiritual quadrant of the medicine wheel, CASS offers spiritual teachings, sharing circles and traditional medicines. In the physical quadrant, CASS offers the space for Aboriginal students to study, work on a computer, print, store their belongings in a locker, eat and socialize.

Another circle participant, (Sofi) echoed these findings by sharing her experiences in education. She stated that having "access to culturally appropriate community space like CASS. Having things like medicines on hand and traditional knowledge keepers"… on campus there to provide support if you need a one on one" contributes to a feeling of family on campus. She also shared that before she started her journey identifying as Indigenous she didn't go to an Indigenous student centre and spent as little time at school as possible. However, now she finds that she is able to connect and make friends with the same background she is spending more time at school and is happier.

Another participant (Ethan) also shared how he was from a small town and being a member of CASS enables him to feel a "sense of belonging" in such a large setting like Toronto. Furthermore, he shared that at the other campus he attends there is no Indigenous student centre but that he and other students are trying to start one. He also shared that although his family did not start identifying as Indigenous until he was in grade 10 or 11 and there were no support

groups where he was from. Therefore, he attributes most of his education about being Indigenous from family and friends.

Appropriate Boundaries

Another theme from the sharing circle was around the idea of boundaries between teachers, students and support workers, which need to be taken into consideration when supporting Indigenous people in education. For example, a circle participant (Ally) stated that the first day she was in class she found out that she was related to her professor and while they had a student teacher relationship when she was a student, submitting papers and being taught in a classroom setting, she also babysit his children as a natural part of their family relationship. However, she also stated that it was "weird" sometimes because those boundaries were not as clearly defined as what she had been taught is appropriate in mainstream school settings but noted that having close access and connections to the professors "was really helpful". These sentiments are congruent with what Indigenous scholars and students have noted how this close access is common for Indigenous teachers in order to better support students and that building relationship remains central to Indigenous ways of thinking and an act of decolonization and healing (Baskin, 2015; Sinclair, 2004).

Personal boundaries and relationships in Indigenous communities are and have always been very different than non-Indigenous communities. Consequently, from first contact, Indigenous people were criticized as being naïve, trusting, childlike and inferior by colonial settlers (Paul, 2000). This is because unlike colonial societies that are based on hierarchical power relations in order to maintain boundaries, Indigenous communities are more egalitarian in nature. The Mi'kmaq for instance, were branded as pagan savages by the settlers like everyone else who was not Christian and therefore inferior (Paul, 2000). However, Paul (2000) contends

that the Mi'kmaq at the time of contact had a well-established democratic form of government that recognized human rights whereas the European settlers had a more totalitarian form of rule. This form of rule is steeped in a history of violence unheard of by Indigenous people. For instance, the Inquisition allowed innocents to be imprisoned and condemned, tortured and hung without defense (Paul, 2000). Unfortunately, this violence was brought over with the settlers, and resulted in the almost complete annihilation of the Indigenous people.

After contact between colonizers and Indigenous people, it became apparent that there was a serious culture clash that could not be reconciled. One of these clashes was the difference in parenting styles. For instance, Indigenous peoples have always been criticized and constructed as not strict enough and even neglectful by European settlers (Paul, 2000). This construction continues to this day and justifies the continued removal of Indigenous children from their parents and communities. For example, Indigenous children are 4.2% more likely to be investigated by child welfare than non-Indigenous children and in Ontario represent 21% of the children in care even though they are only 3% of the population (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013). Therefore, when social workers and educators are working with Indigenous people, they should consider how these western ideas of proper boundaries and relationships have contributed to the forceful abduction of Indigenous children from their parents and the subsequent physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental abuse that was perpetrated upon them. Furthermore, it should definitely be considered by practitioners as a legacy of intergenerational trauma that continues to this day through the child welfare system.

Boundaries in "client/ worker" relationship as defined by the Canadian Association of Social Work [CASW] (2005) "sets forth values and principles to guide social workers professional conduct in social work" (p.2). These boundaries are also very important to

reconsider to be an effective worker with Indigenous people in educational settings. For instance, it states in the CASW (2005) code of ethics that "Social workers establish appropriate boundaries in relationships with clients and ensure that the relationship serves the needs of clients" (p.5). However, it begs the question: who defines what appropriate boundaries are? Those guidelines also state that social workers should remain impartial and refrain from imposing their personal values, views and preferences on *their* clients (CASW, 2005). Yet, how can a relationship even begin through impartiality? Professor and social worker Cyndy Baskin (2016) contends that the relationship building between therapists and clients has to begin before the intakes, standardized forms and lists of prepared questions are done in order to build trust. In her classroom, she shares her own story about addiction and mental health challenges and teaches about love as a form of connectedness in social work practice and finds that social work students can relate to this very easily.

Having supportive professors was also identified by circle participants as a major contributing factor to student success. For example, one participant, (Lance) shared that all through his education the classes where he was supported by professors were the ones that he did very well in. In the classes that he felt supported, his grades were in the 90s and he also shared how learning from other Indigenous students who are members of CASS in other programs was just as important because it enables him to make the connections to what he is learning in his classes.

"It helps me take that one example and lets me analyze it and critique it and conceptualize it other contexts as well that's how you are actually learning that if twenty years from now I am still just giving examples…[from the readings] then I didn't learn anything I just learned to be reading…not the concept. [Lance]

He also attributes his learning style to his mother's example of not just learning from books but from "every single thing in your life" which is consistent with Indigenous worldviews

of sharing knowledge and learning from observing. For example, education for Indigenous

people prior to contact was based on a holistic approach that ensured that community was the

class room and that "every adult ensured that every child learned how to live the good life"

(Kirkness, 1999/2013, p.8). Furthermore, teaching is seen as a natural process where children are

taught through examples the value of co-operation, sharing, practice and self-reliance which

benefited and ensured the survival of community (Kirkness, 1999/2013). Unfortunately, learning

from observing is often criticized in western schools because it appears to non-Indigenous

educators that the student is not engaging with classmates.

Learning Styles

 Several researchers however contend that culture can impact learning styles and that

Indigenous students tested across different age groups are often "right brained" (Hodgson-Smith

2000/2008). Researchers also attribute learning styles to parenting styles. For instance, Cazden &

John (1971) as cited in Hodgson-Smith (2000/2008) believe it is the "watch and do" approach to

learning that stimulates more right brain activity in Indigenous learners. This contrasts to

learning through verbal direction which stimulates more left brain activity. Subsequently, this

means Indigenous students would learn best from observing and real life manipulation of

materials as well as visual examples (Hodgson-Smith, 2000/2008).   Unfortunately, there is little

curriculum to support right brained learning in schools because most lessons focus on reading

and writing which are left brain activities (Hodgson-Smith, 2000/2008). However, although it is

important to recognize how different learning styles can be attributed to culture and parenting

Hodgson-Smith (2000/2008) warn that it is dangerous to homogenize and "other" Indigenous

students in this way. Instead, when considering learning styles, a focus should be on intimate

teaching styles that support a student holistically.

It is the epistemological and philosophical approach to learning as a holistic process to support all students in educational institutions that is more effective than assigning "universal attributes" based on stereotypes to Indigenous students (Hodgson-Smith, 2000/2008, p.168). For example, as the literature review uncovered, many Indigenous educators believe that if teachers adapted their teaching styles to students' individual learning styles that focused on the strength of the learner educational outcomes would improve (Dion, et al., 2010, Kirkness 1999/2013). Moreover, with a focus on individual strengths and capability, education that addresses the mental, physical emotional and spiritual wellbeing of students will decrease dropout rates and improve overall well-being (Baskin, 2013; Dion, 2010).

Focusing on the concept of student success as well-being instead of academic achievement takes into consideration colonial legacies, reaffirms identity and connections to community (Dion, 2010). Indigenous students involved in the Urban Aboriginal Pilot Project [UAPP] (2008-2010) report that having teachers aware of Indigenous pedagogy which includes an accurate history of colonialism, traditional teachings and language instruction as well as lessons on contemporary culture also contribute to student success and well-being. Some of the ways in which the UAPP staff was able to deliver support was through tutoring, involving parents, organizing community events and creating student groups (Dion, 2010).

From the two year Urban Aboriginal Pilot Project, the Aboriginal Education Centre was created in the Toronto District School Board which provides professional development workshops to teachers, offers one on one support to Indigenous students in the Toronto District School Board, links families to community resources, and provides advocacy for families. Furthermore, in response to the TRC recommendations, the staff at the AEC also developed

curricular resources for educators to use from K-12 in schools, which will continue to grow in

the years to come (Breen, Corneau, Maychak, Nahdee & Senk, 2016).

Racism and Resistance

Another participant (Jen) describes her experience attending a large University for the first time.

I think there may have been 20 people that identified as American Indian and like three or four of them were East Indian, they would check the box you know… and there was no student organization so I started one and there was no pow wow so we had our first pow wow during that time… I wasn't raised with my culture or my heritage, … so coming to University was the first time that I got to really explore what… you know… what my identity is and how I felt and know where I came from …I went to my first pow wow at university …So it was, you know, very eye opening. However, Jen also explained that it took 4 years to get the university to understand what a powwow was, get support to host one, and then find grants and resources to make it happen.

Jen also shared that she has met many Indigenous students that have similar experiences

of learning about their Indigenous identity when they get to University because of the history of

residential schools that many of their grandparents and parents went through. In the residential

schools they were taught to be ashamed for being Indigenous and consequently denied or hid

their culture from their children. In the TRC (2015) report, for instance, one of many former

students of the residential school shared her experiences about learning to be ashamed of who

she was and how it impacted her family.

…I wanted to be white so bad, and the worst thing I ever did was I was ashamed of my mother, that honourable woman, because she couldn't speak English. She never went to school, and they told us that, we used to go home to her on Saturdays, and they told us that we couldn't talk Gwich'in to her and, and she couldn't, like couldn't communicate. And my sister was the one that had the nerve to tell her, "We can't talk Loucheux to you, they told us not to" (p.201)

However, it is important to acknowledge that there has always been Indigenous people

that have resisted these ideas of shame and have kept Indigenous culture and identity alive to

pass on traditional teachings to the next generation despite colonial efforts to eradicate and

assimilate Indigenous people into dominant society. For example, Jen goes on to say that she was

able to begin learning about her identity in University and because she had that "bit of freedom"

and started looking for culture. She goes on to share that she doesn't know if I would have stayed

in University or had as good an experience if she had not started an Indigenous student

organization and found a supportive Indigenous faculty member. [Jen]

Another participant, (Amy) credits her educational success to the support of her parents

and the people that came before her that have been working hard by challenging institutions for

not doing research appropriately or following proper protocols. She goes on to say that it was

these "ground breakers" that have worked hard to develop programs that are specific to

Indigenous people that enabled her to continue on in her education.

> … it was probably the best experience for me because one I didn't have to go to the big campus, all of the programs were community-based. It was geared towards working professionals. I could still work, take the program, take care of my family and all the other things I have to do; there was flexibility. So a lot of people who took the program were already creating policy, implementing it, and analysing it. I was working with the people that are policy makers, so there were a lot of really good discussions in class….really good examples that we can learn from each other. So that was great! [Amy]

She also credits her mentor for supporting her through her research process when she was

doing a thesis on how historical trauma impacts Indigenous people. In Indigenous communities

there is a teaching about thinking about the next seven generations. The principles of this

teaching are about caring for and fostering the young people in order to pass on knowledge as

well as thinking about our actions today and how they may impact the next seven generations

(Baskin, 2016). Therefore it is very important to many Indigenous people in positions of

mentorship to be able to support people beginning their learning journey.

> He [My mentor] is like OK …I'll pick you back up again. My thesis was about how historical trauma has impacted Indigenous people...so he said to me…. OK so your research results will indicate that… Indigenous people succumb to the effects of

historical trauma…and I was like No! That just fired me back up so I was determined to finish my schooling…Ok [I said to myself] I can do this right? I credit my mentor at the Center for World Indigenous Studies for picking me back up all the time. I think I must have wanted to quit almost every month. I can't do this![I said to myself] So that kind of support [from my mentor] was great. He [my mentor] also knew how I think… and the challenges that I saw with Western research models. He was able to help me frame research in a way that I understood. It changed the way that I look at research. That has brought it more close to me… so that was awesome. [Amy]

Many people in the circle share that without the support of mentors and teachers as well as community members they would not have been able to go as far in their education as they have. Furthermore, it is this support that they are passing on to their children and the next generation of learners. For instance, Amy shares that her son was diagnosed with a "learning disability" by his school. As a parent she felt that she has had to pay really close attention to his schooling and has continued to not only advocate for resources for him but has also taught him not to let a label define how he sees himself. She shares that she has told her son whenever he has trouble they can work together on whatever the work is. She also describes her son as an "incredibly optimistic" change maker that "fights the system". For example, she goes on to share that one day her son came home and showed her a video about how much society has changed but the school system has stayed the same for the last 100 years!

Baskin (2016) notes that the impacts of colonization can be linked to the social determinants of health and that one of those determinants is racism (p.195). One Mi'kmaq and Celtic youth for instance, shared his experiences at a conference for educators, social workers and psychologists who work with Indigenous youth in the schools I attended in 2017. He told the audience about the racism he faced from the other students and about the teacher that called him a "tax sucking alcoholic" and that from that point on he hated school. That's when he started fighting back and started getting suspended. He also shared that in the beginning of grade 9 there

were 30 students that identified as Indigenous but by the end of the year there was only 3 left. He stated that the school system failed him because they failed to address the racism he faced in school.

He contributes some of this racism to the media representation of Indigenous people. For instance, he noted that he was able to learn that Indigenous people are less likely to drink than non-Indigenous people. For instance, according to a report on Aboriginal mental health (2008) only "66% of First Nations adults living on reserve consumed alcohol compared to 76% of the general population" (Kahn, 2008). However, there is a higher percentage of heavy binge drinking which is believed to be in relation to the trauma Indigenous people experience (Kahn, 2008).

Jen also noted that until there are Indigenous faculty that can support Indigenous students "we're going to feel kinda lost". However, she also explained that there are not many tenure track positions available

I think academia is hard"… Because there are not a lot of tenure track positions. On the other hand, they are trying to hire more Indigenous faculty people and there are so many Indigenous qualified scholars that…the market would seem flooded. Then you hear from Universities that they can't find anybody to take these positions… or the positions they are offering are not tenure track. A lot of junior faculty that teach only teach one course or a few courses and that doesn't really pay a lot so you have to work if you really want to teach unless you can land a tenure track position…so at this point I don't know. Although, I value supporting students, lack of tenure opportunity means lack of stability. Lack of stability means lack of stable income which affects one's ability to buy a house and plan for retirement. Not being a full faculty member means the wages for teaching courses are low. Paying back student loans and other financial obligations are reasons many Indigenous scholars end up in positions outside academia. I would love to support students and stay in the academic world and research and write papers and support people but ultimately I'm looking at retiring [one day].

Raven Sinclair (2009) notes however that "teaching researching and writing [for Indigenous people] are luxuries that have been superseded by personal, family and community trauma" (p.21). Sinclair (2009) goes on explain that none of the Indigenous scholars "have

escaped the effects of the "*Indian Act*" (1867) and the associated "assimilated projects which contributes to the barriers facing "aspiring academics" (p.21). Furthermore, hiring practices also presented a major barrier for Indigenous educators because they are often measured by western accreditation standards. Consequently, potential Indigenous staff impacted by colonial legacies often do not have the "appropriate qualifications" or sufficient degree requirements and "experience" (Dion, et. al., 2010). Unfortunately, this also means that they are passed over for teaching positions and that non-Indigenous teachers are teaching Indigenous perspectives in the classrooms. Michael Hart (2009) for instance explains his frustration in an encounter with a non-Indigenous educator at a conference who had taught Indigenous content in her classroom. After the conference he explains that he was approached by this teacher who wanted clarification on anti-colonialism because as far as she was concerned "…colonialism is over" (p.25). Hart (2009) goes on to explain that this encounter left him wondering how her views impacted her students, especially the Indigenous students that are still struggling with internalized oppression that manifests itself in addictions, violence and neglect (and I would add high dropout rates) due to alienation in the classroom. Fortunately, it was this encounter that encouraged him to write about and explain what anti-colonialism means.

Anti-Colonialism

Hart (2009) draws upon the several Indigenous authors (Ashcroft, 1995; Dei, 2000; Smith, 2000; Stewart-Hawara , 2005; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) to explain anti-colonialism as a "social, cultural and political stance"…and sees colonialism as a persistent problem still alive and well in countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada that undermines Indigenous collective identity and is "reshaped by corporations" (p.29). This form of neocolonialism also continues to marginalize Indigenous knowledges and is supported by the state, institutions and

society to recreate inequality in all sectors of society for Indigenous people (Hart, 2009). Therefore, when understanding the educational experiences of Indigenous people an anti-colonial lens can be beneficial in understanding the barriers facing Indigenous people and can help legitimise Indigenous knowledges by decentering western colonial knowledge systems (Hart, 2009).

Another aspect of anti-colonialism is Indigenism which literally means to be "born of a place" and challenges imperialism and colonialism and acknowledges the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge as a "fourth world position" (Hart, 2009 p. 33). Therefore, Indigenism advocates for empowerment of Indigenous knowledge through invading institutional spaces. Indigenism also critiques dominant colonial political, social and economic understandings and demands that history be understood from an Indigenist perspective (Hart, 2009). Subsequently, Indigenism relies on holistic understandings that honors traditional knowledge "as a way of life" which would benefit educators and helpers working with Indigenous people in education (p.33).

De-centering Mental Health Practices through Indigenous Knowledge

All of the participants from the sharing circle shared that having access to mental health support by Indigenous social workers, traditional knowledge keepers and Elders that drew upon cultural practices enabled them to to continue their education. For instance, Jen shared that she felt lucky to have Indigenous community support services in Toronto which helped her through school. Having access to community sweats, drumming, shake tents and fasts really helps her to be "supported and grounded". Stefan also shared that he would not have been able to get to University if it had not been for the support from Indigenous counsellors he received in high school. However, colonial knowledge construction also impacts Indigenous people in the helping professions such as social work who find themselves working in impossible contexts dealing

with the continued impact of colonization and funding restrictions (Sinclair, 2009). Indigenous

ways of helping are marginalized in favor of western ways of knowing which are based on white,

patriarchal, middle class values (Hart, 2009). Consequently Indigenous and non-Indigenous

social workers are taught to uphold these values that contradict Indigenous world views and do

not support Indigenous people. Unfortunately the mental physical emotional and spiritual

consequences upholding these ideas have been and continue to be detrimental to the mental

health and well-being of Indigenous people.

One of the serious consequences of this western ideology is an overrepresentation of

Indigenous children in the child welfare system (Baskin, 2016). As mentioned earlier, the TRC

(2015) number 1 recommendation is that "social workers and others that conduct child welfare

investigations are properly educated and trained about the history and impacts of the residential

schools" (p.187). Understanding this history is crucial to working with Indigenous students to be

able to effectively support the personal challenges they may be facing mentally, physically,

emotionally and spiritually that impact their experience in the education system. Social workers

for instance are also the attendance officers in the TDSB. Therefore, social work intervention

occurs when a red flag has been raised due to lack of attendance at school. Unfortunately,

Indigenous students have higher rates of absenteeism than non-Indigenous students which makes

them subject to more scrutiny from social services than non-Indigenous students. For instance,

Indigenous students have a 64% attendance rate compared to a 71% attendance rate for non-

Indigenous students (Dion, 2010, p.14).

It is critical to understand how social work is constructed as a form of control and

intervention when linked to attendance monitoring. As social workers working with Indigenous

people in the education system, it is therefore crucial to understand that traditional social work

comes from an imperial heritage based on white Christian middle class values that impacts the way we work today (Jeffery, 2002). For example, from these values comes the idea of the deviant and less than desirable "other" that must be managed, by social workers (Butler, 2001; Jeffery, 2002). Furthermore, because social work is based on western notions of universal or global truths and knowledge that stems from white, Christian, middle class values and eugenics, the less than desirable other is marked by race, class, gender and pathology (Badwall, 2014; Gibson, 2015; Jeffery, 2002; Rossiter, 2001; Smith, 1999). Indigenous professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) however challenges these "ideas about the other" in academic disciplines like social work by drawing attention to and naming how colonial dominant discourse benefits through this social construction to maintain hierarchical power relations (p.59). By drawing upon Indigenism and anti-colonial theory, social workers, educators and support staff working with Indigenous people in the education system can also de-center taken for granted assumptions about their own knowledge base that maintains racist and discriminatory ideas about Indigenous people.

Funding

When circle participants were asked if funding affected their educational experiences, underfunding and funding structures were identified as a barrier to accessing and completing education which is consistent with the findings from the literature review (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013,. For example, Stefan shared that there is a huge wait list for funding and that he has applied for funding from his band and was denied year after year due to funding restrictions. He also shared that he knows other people that have to apply for funding from their band every semester and may not find out if they are eligible until school starts which makes it hard to continue going to school.

…it's hard to get into university but it's even harder to secure funds through
your band that you were apparently promised and there's such a distance between the university
and band funding and where are the resources come from. As a high school student, like how
easy is it for me to find those resources and understand the processes because it's really
frustrating and the language used is just alien...So the amount of stress is just added on….I think
the process has to be a lot more simpler for students and the wait list is just crazy! [Stefan]

Other participants agreed that funding structure itself was a problem which raises

concerns about new funding promises that appear to support students yet fail in the delivery and

allocation process. In 2016 the Liberal federal government announced a "historical investment"

towards reconciliation with Indigenous people which includes an allocation of 8.4 billion dollars

over 5 years (Government of Canada, 2017). To date, 125 school projects have been initiated, a

First Nations School System has been established in Manitoba and engagement with Indigenous

people has begun to improve education on reserves (Government of Canada, 2017). However

impressive that may sound, participants remain skeptical on actual funding delivery in schools.

For instance Jen explains that:

I think one of the things that really needs to be addressed the larger structure our Indigenous
funding organizations and I would say that there are there are not a lot of Indigenous graduate
students in the grand scheme of things so people who are you know adjudicating these
applications and funding students and in deciding who gets funding a lot of times they don't
understand what it is to be a graduate student what kind of expenses we have … [Jen]

Jen went on to explain that she has been told by Indigenous organizations that she does

not need funding because as a grad student she is "more employable" and should therefore work

while she is in school full time She also noted that these organizations do not seem to understand

that working another job besides being a TA would lead to longer completion times, more living

expenses and more money paid to the university in tuition over the extra time. The added stress

of carrying a full time job would not leave head space to focus on studies. Also it is difficult to

find part time work that pays enough. Time working for low wages ends up costing more time

away from studies and slower completion, leading to more expenses, et.

that as a grad student she is expected to attend conferences and publish work and that these are expenses that she has had to pay on her own and that researching in Indigenous communities requires gifts, tobacco, travel, etc. all of which are extra expenses most non Indigenous scholars don't incur. She also explained that she has been made to feel like she is "begging for a handout" but has taken action by directly addressing people in positions to change the way funding is distributed to students in these organizations. Unfortunately, feeling like you have to beg for a handout can be another way that presents a barrier for Indigenous students who want to continue their education.

Amy also explains that:

> I have a little bit of experience being single mom and recently supporting another single mom. One of the challenges I see stems from a family dynamics. I grew up in a family that was supportive education-wise but there was a lot of relationship breakdown… so learning how to notice that you are in stress or under distress or in a problem area like needing help, is hard to notice… if you come from a trauma background or something like that because it's normal. This kind of feeling [stress] is normalized. So you could be really under a lot of stress and not notice it until you get sick or something happens and then [you] reach out. Asking for help is a huge challenge. For anybody with a trauma background… to ask for help of community or family a lot of times help goes unanswered. Our community or people in our family have not generally asked for it [help] and so when we do ask for help it's like [we are] kicked down or pushed down so when this sort of help is readily available either we don't trust it, or they [individuals] are less likely to ask for help. [Amy]

She goes on to share that another added stress for Indigenous people trying to continue in education is the lack of support services that are really out there like adequate housing and child care and that Indigenous parents are sometimes forced to make difficult choices which can result in scrutiny by social workers from Children's Aid Services. Unfortunately, poverty, poor housing and poor sanitary conditions are still factors that affect Indigenous people today and are considered justification for the continued removal of Aboriginal children (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2007). For example, Indigenous children are three times more likely to be

apprehended than non-Indigenous children by children's aid workers whose risk assessment tools are based on colonial standards (Bala, 2004). Therefore, as long as social workers who work with Indigenous people continue to be committed to ideology based on dominant white mainstream society and worldviews, they will continue to be complicit in the oppression of Indigenous people (Sinclair, 2004).

Raven Sinclair (2004) describes Aboriginal Social Work as having evolved out of the 1970's Aboriginal social work movement. She goes on to note that the tasks for the social worker associated with Aboriginal social work to be an effective ally include: self-healing, decolonization, role modeling, developing critical consciousness and advocacy. Furthermore, Sinclair states that Aboriginal social work demands that we "walk the talk". This can mean that the reciprocity of relationship can demand self-disclosure and participating in ceremony (Baskin, 2016; Wilson, 2008). Therefore, as an Indigenous social worker working with Indigenous people in the education system, I felt that it was important to share my story as part of this research and engage in ceremony in order to reflect on the findings which is also consistent with Indigenous research methodology.

Ceremony

To incorporate a fast as part of ceremony into my research, I felt it was necessary to consult with an Elder in order to explain my research and understand what would be required of me during the ceremony. During my session with elder Joanne Dallaire, she shared with me her own fasting experiences. For instance, she shared that the sound of silence that she experienced during one of her visions was "deafening". As a mother and a student, I immediately understood this because it is so rare that I have been able to stop for ceremony or actually be still enough to hear the 'sound of silence'. I was looking forward to a fast yet I was also filled with trepidation

because of the possibility of being overwhelmed by my emotions. However, Joanne also offered

to be there for me every day by giving me her telephone number to call for emotional support if I

needed, which assuaged some of my fear. This is another example to me of how Indigenous

people challenge "professional boundaries" in the helping professions like social work and

counselling. It is this openness and reciprocal relationship building that is the key to establishing

a respectful relationship with "clients" or students that helps to break down the mistrust caused

by the historical and continued marginalization of Indigenous people through colonization

(Baskin, 2017).

In our session together, Joanne also taught me that it does not matter where we are when

we do our fast or ceremony because we carry our spirituality with us wherever we go. She also

taught me that I could do this on my own like our ancestors did and to trust in myself. Trusting in

ourselves after years of colonial teachings can be a difficult concept to grasp for many

Indigenous people because the loss of positive identity, racism and systemic discrimination

(Baskin, 2016). However, there are amazing "helpers" and educators like Joanne Dallaire, Cyndy

Baskin, Ruth Koleszar-Green, Suzanne Stuart, Sean Wilson, Raven Sinclair and Kathleen

Absolon who work in community, "walk the talk", and have openly and honestly shared their

stories of resistance from which we can draw strength as part of our healing journey.

Utilizing Indigenous research methodology for my research was also a way of healing

myself in my own educational journey. Sean Wilson (2008) describes research as ceremony and

believes that "checking your heart" is critical to good research (p.60). For example, many

researchers that I have met have described feeling lonely and isolated during their work however,

during this research process I was able to connect with community members and learn so much

in order to remain centred and encouraged by their wisdom and experience.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

In conceiving the discussion section of this research, I turn to the medicine wheel for guidance as a way to summarize and illustrate what changes should be made to better support Indigenous students in the education system based on participants' recommendations. As an Indigenous social worker, I find myself drawing upon teachings from Elders in the community when I work with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. For instance, when I work with Indigenous youth in schools in counselling sessions, I often begin our session with a medicine wheel check in which guides our conversation and touches upon the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of being. It is also a way of connecting through culture that many Indigenous people appreciate, however it is important to recognize that Indigenous people are not a culturally homogenous group that uses the medicine wheel or shares the same interpretation of it. Therefore, I always ask if doing this kind of check in would be useful or appreciated. I have also used this kind of check in when working with non-Indigenous people as a way of holistically talking about issues which has been received favorably.

East-Mental

In the eastern quadrant of the medicine wheel, which represents the mental aspect of being, participants explained and the literature showed that Indigenous students thrive when they see themselves reflected in the curriculum and have supportive teachers. Furthermore, when cultural protocols and teachings are honored, a more holistic approach to education is possible which has also been shown to benefit Indigenous students (Kirkness, 1999/2003). Several Indigenous authors recommended decolonizing the classroom through incorporating Indigenous epistemology and worldviews. Furthermore, social workers and educators Raven Sinclair (2009) and Michael Hart (2009) and Cyndi Baskin (2016) also recommended drawing upon Indigenism

and anticolonial theory to unsettle and decentre dominant western theories of knowing in the education system. One way of decolonizing education suggested Susan Dion et al. (2010) recommend focusing on students' well-being rather than academic achievement as a way to support Indigenous students in the classroom.

Understanding that education can be as valid when Indigenous epistemology is incorporated into curriculum has been challenging for educators and has been met with resistance because it requires changing ways of teaching, disrupting boundaries and unknowing what we think we know (Absolon, 2011). For instance, it is hard to admit that the original title of this research project was Exposing and Closing the **Achievement** Gap in Canada for Indigenous people. It was the word *achievement* that my colleague and supervisor Hannah Fowlie pointed out as framing my research to view Indigenous people through a deficit perspective. This view is consistent with what author Frank Deer (2009/2013) notes when he states that Indigenous people are still being subjected to the dominance secured by the colonizer and that through the education system Indigenous students are often viewed as underachieving because of their own failure. Therefore, by reframing my research as a possible systemic **knowledge** gap, I was able understand and interrogate Indigenous experiences from a structural perspective which helps uncover the root causes of oppression in educational institutions (Baskin, 2017).

South-Physical

The southern quadrant of the medicine wheel represents the physical aspect of being. Here participants explained and the literature showed that Indigenous students benefit from having access to culturally appropriate learning spaces with resources that can assist them in their education. For instance, all participants noted how much having a separate physical space with access to computers, printing and traditional medicines away from the main campus in

University enabled them to succeed in their educational endeavors. For many of the participants coming into a large urban centre was shocking and unsettling, therefore physical spaces of belonging through student organizations like the CASS at York University can become like a second home. As noted in the research, many on reserve schools are in dire need of repair due to derelict conditions from chronic underfunding by the federal government, which makes it difficult for Indigenous students and teachers to attend and work in these schools (Kirkness, 1999/2013). For example, Shannen Koostachin, an Indigenous youth activist from Attawapiskat worked tirelessly with other youth until her death at the age of 15 to get the federal government to build a "safe and comfy" school (Provincial Advocate for Youth, 2011). Unfortunately she died in a car accident returning home from a school 100's of miles away from her home before that school ever got built. Today the TRC has called upon the federal government to end the funding disparities that exist in Canada for Indigenous education that contribute to inadequate learning facilities and consequently contribute to low educational achievement. In the 2017 Federal budget, the government has openly recognized that these disparities exist and has stated that it is committed to improving the health and well-being of Indigenous people through infrastructure investments as well as creating "increased opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to pursue post-secondary education and training" (Government of Canada, 2017). Although the 2017 financial commitments of the federal government in the budget claims to respond directly to the TRC calls to action surrounding education, it is too early to tell if these financial investments will be administered effectively to benefit Indigenous people accessing education. Therefore further research would need to be done to evaluate how these new financial commitments have impacted Indigenous people.

West-Emotional

The western quadrant represents the emotional aspect of the medicine wheel. In this quadrant the participants explained and the literature revealed that main stream educational institutions were unable to effectively address the emotional needs of Indigenous students because of the complex historical and continued trauma of colonization in Canada that they may face. However, acknowledging the historical trauma of Indigenous peoples through colonization and the residential school was absolutely intrinsic to emotional healing and well-being in the classroom (Baskin, Deer, 2009/2013; Dion, Rice, 2010; Hardes, 2006/2013; Kirkness, 1999/2013; Koleszar-Green, 2007; Nagy & Sehdev, 2012; Thomas, 2005; TRC, 2015). Unfortunately, Dion, Johnson and Rice (2010) contend that Indigenous students confront a system with little understanding about the history of the residential school system and that teachers report that they feel unprepared to teach Indigenous history or culture in the classroom because of their lack of knowledge and training in Indigenous history. This was echoed by circle participants. Therefore, it is recommended that appropriate resources and professional development opportunities be made available to enable teachers to better support Indigenous students (Dion, et al. 2010).

Furthermore, social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, child protection workers and other support staff would benefit by drawing on Indigenous approaches to mental health which places relationship first and is a holistic approach to healing which includes the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual aspects of a person (Baskin,2016).

North-Spiritual

The northern quadrant of the medicine wheel represents the spiritual aspect of being. Participants all shared that having access to traditional healers, medicines and engaging in ceremony as well as receiving traditional teachings increased their wellbeing in their education. In the residential schools administered by Christian Churches and funded by the federal government, Indigenous people were taught that their spiritual beliefs were false, savage and barbaric and were punished for practicing ceremony or speaking their own language (King, 2012; Paul, 2000; TRC, 2015). As a result of survivor testimonials, the TRC has called upon the federal government to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation. Furthermore, in matters pertaining to spirituality, the TRC recommend that institutions and groups in Canada "formally adopt and comply with the principles, norms and standards of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples"* (p.253). Subsequently, this means respecting Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination in spiritual matters such as the right to teach, and practice ceremony.

Furthermore the TRC calls for interfaith organizations to repudiate "European concepts used to justify sovereignty over Indigenous land and peoples such as "the doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius* (TRC, 2015, p.253). The Federal Government of Canada has agreed to act on each of the recommendations from the TRC (2015) and on May 29th, 2017 Prime Minister Justin Trudeau met with Pope Francis, who is the head of the Catholic Church at this time and encouraged him to apologize for the church's role in the residential schools to which the Prime Minister reported that Pope Francis "seemed open to the idea" (Smith, 2017). While the discussion of an official apology to Indigenous people from the Catholic Church may have been

only a small part of the discussion between the Pope and the Prime Minister, it is a promising

step in the right direction towards reconciliation for Indigenous people in Canada.

A New Story…

Indigenous authors and circle participants agree that the involvement of Indigenous

people in education has resulted in greater retention rates, improved attendance and a resurgence

in Indigenous languages being taught as well as the inclusion of culturally relevant curriculum.

Based on these findings, it does appear authors believe that it is possible to close the

"achievement" or knowledge gap by decolonizing the classroom through incorporating

Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum. Indigenous social workers, educators and mental

health professionals also agree that supporting and focusing on Indigenous student's well-being

also contributes to a higher educational levels and positive experiences (Baskin, 2016; Dion,

2010; Stewart, 2017). Furthermore, Indigenous scholars contend that by drawing on Indigenism

and anticolonial theory, it is possible to decentre dominant western ideology that continues to

marginalize and oppress Indigenous people (Hart, 2009; Sinclair, 2009). They also agree that all

helping professions can benefit from the holistic perspective of Indigenous worldviews (Baskin,

2016).

The data from this research has shown that the Federal Government of Canada has taken

steps to go beyond official apologies by following through and acting on the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) recommendations to address the education gap

through increased funding, developing programs, and training educators on the history of

Indigenous people as well as the incorporation of culturally appropriate learning materials into

schools. However, it is beyond the scope of this research project to evaluate whether or not these

initial actions will be sustained or effective in closing the knowledge gap in education for

Indigenous people at this point. Therefore, it is the author's recommendation that a longitudinal study based on Indigenous research methodology be done in this area to evaluate how effective the federal government's commitment to "fully accept their responsibility" (Trudeau, 2015) to Indigenous people is in contributing to their mental, physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing in education.

In an interview with *The National* in 2015, the Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair stated "it is education that got us into this mess and it is education that will get us out of it". I truly believe these words; however, as this research has shown it is *how* that education is delivered to fix the knowledge gap that exists in education for Indigenous people. It also takes a commitment by educators, government and mental health support workers to create a space of wellbeing for Indigenous students in the classroom in order to overcome a legacy of mistrust of the education system and for healing to begin. Maybe then it will be possible to create a new story for Indigenous people in education.

Because…Every. Child. Matters. (Hon. Justice, Murray Sinclair, 2015)

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Appendix A
Research Project

Kwe everyone!

My name is Tsitra McKay, I am Mik'maq and Celt and member of the Centre for Aboriginal Students Services (CASS). I am currently in doing graduate studies in the School of Social Work at York University. For the practice research paper component of the MSW program I am researching what factors contribute to how Indigenous peoples access and experience education. My goal is to offer the opportunity to share your experiences and to center the voices of the community within academic research. I am utilizing Indigenous research methodology, which is holistic, respects protocol, builds the capacity of community and honors tradition. Therefore, participants would be honored as co-contributors to this research if they wish and would have full control of the direction of the research as well as any data they contribute.

I am seeking Indigenous community members (status, non-status, and self-identifying) who can share their experience in the education system. The project will involve a focus group that will last approximately 60-90 minutes in length. Participant's identity would remain confidential if they chose and all measures would be taken to ensure a safe environment during the focus group. Ethical guidelines regarding research with Indigenous peoples would also be in place to ensure the safety of participants. Compensation and refreshments for participants will be provided during the focus group.

Wel'al in

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Appendix B

Guidelines for Research Involving Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples

Introduction
In response to the experiences of York University researchers working in Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples' contexts and in light of the Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2nd Edition (hereafter "the policy"), the Office of Research Ethics took on the task of articulating research guidelines for implementation of Chapter 9 of the policy. A group of Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples and non-Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples researchers, including graduate students, met over a period of two years to discuss the issues in depth and to draft this set of guidelines related to research I involving the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples of Canada. These guidelines are intended to inform researchers and the Human Participants Review Committee as they prepare for and review research to be conducted in an Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples context and/or with Aboriginal peoples.

We particularly recognize the unique considerations necessary for conducting research in each, distinct Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples context. In addition, we are aware of the concerns of many Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples about the ways research has taken and is taking place in their communities. As renowned decolonizing scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith has clearly stated in her 1999 text Decolonizing Methodologies, "The term "research" is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, "research", is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary." Cognizant of this historical context, the guidelines are at least partly an attempt to redress this situation.

Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples, as host peoples of this nation, remain distinct within Canada and, for this reason, deserve separate attention when it comes to research. In light of their histories and contemporary circumstances, intensive preparation and culturally appropriate protocol are required of each researcher who chooses to do their work in Aboriginal contexts.

General Principles:

1. Community engagement is required.

One of the key principles of research involving Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples is the engagement of the community or communities within which the research will be conducted. Specifically, researchers conducting research where the research is likely to affect the welfare of an Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples community, or communities, to which prospective participants belong, researchers shall seek engagement with the relevant community. The nature and extent of community engagement in a project shall be determined jointly by the researcher and the relevant community, and shall be appropriate to community characteristics and the nature of the research.
Wherever possible and appropriate to the nature of the research, researchers should consider a collaborative and/or participatory action approach to their research. Similarly, where the form of community engagement and the nature of the research make it possible, research should be

relevant to community needs and priorities. The research should benefit the participating community (e.g., training, local hiring, recognition of contributors, return of results), as well as extend the boundaries of knowledge.   The project should seek to strengthen capacity building within the community through the enhancement of the skills of community personnel in research methods, project management, and ethical review and oversight.

2. Researchers must recognize and engage Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples organizations, service organizations and communities of interest as communities.

For the purposes of community engagement and collaboration in research undertakings, researchers and REBs shall recognize Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples organizations, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit representative bodies, and service organizations and communities of interest, as communities. They shall also recognize these groups through representation of their members on ethical review and oversight of projects, where appropriate.

In engaging territorial or organizational communities, researchers should ensure, to the extent possible, that they take into consideration the views of all relevant sectors – including individuals and subgroups who may not have a voice in the formal leadership. Groups or individuals whose circumstances make them vulnerable may need or desire special measures to ensure their safety in the context of a specific research project. Those who have been excluded from participation in the past may need special measures to ensure their inclusion in research.

3. A community engagement plan must be developed and provided to the REB for review.

When proposing research expected to involve First Nations, Métis and Inuit participants, researchers shall advise their REB how they have engaged, or intend to engage, the relevant community. Generally, it is advised that the REB be notified via a community engagement plan whereby the proposed methods of engagement are clearly articulated.

In those communities which have a recognized governing authority and/or have community organizations with recognized authority, researchers may formalize their engagement with the community through a research agreement. Where a community has formally engaged with a researcher or research team through a designated representative, the terms and undertakings of both the researcher and the community should be set out in a research agreement before participants are recruited.

4. First Nations, Metis and Inuit governing authorities must be respected.

Where a proposed research project is to be conducted on lands under the jurisdiction of a First Nations, Inuit or Métis authority, researchers shall seek the engagement of formal leaders of the community. In such instances, both review by the institutional REB and the responsible community body recognized by the First Nations, Métis or Inuit authority is required. Where alternatives to securing the agreement of formal leadership are proposed for research on First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit lands or in organizational communities, researchers should engage community processes and document measures taken, to enable the REB to review the proposal with due consideration of complex community authority structures.

Further, researchers should engage the community in identifying Elders or other recognized knowledge holders to participate in the design and execution of research, and the interpretation of findings in the context of cultural norms and traditional knowledge. Community advice should also be sought to determine appropriate recognition for the unique advisory role fulfilled by these persons.

It is important that researchers understand the community context within which they are conducting their research. Researchers have an obligation to become informed about, and to respect, the relevant customs and codes of research practice that apply in the particular

community or communities affected by their research. Inconsistencies between community custom and this Policy should be identified and addressed in advance of initiating the research, or as they arise.

Note however that institutional REB review and approval will be required regardless of approval by Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples governing authorities' and/or organizations approval. Specifically, Research ethics review by community REBs or other responsible bodies at the research site will not be a substitute for research ethics review by institutional REBs, and will not exempt researchers affiliated with an institution from seeking REB approval at their institution, subject to Article 8.1.

5. Researchers who wish to be exempt from the requirement of community engagement must provide a written rationale to the REB for review.

There are circumstances when community engagement may not be possible or appropriate. Researchers who wish to proceed without a community engagement plan must provide a detailed rationale to the REB for review and consideration.

Note, however, that a rational need not be required for specific circumstances and/or research methods. For example, "…where research relies only on publicly available information or on legally accessible information as defined in Article 2.2 (TCPS), community engagement is not required. Where the information can be identified as originating from a specific community or a segment of the Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples community at large, seeking culturally informed advice may assist in identifying risks and potential benefits for the source community."

6. Research involving critical inquiry within or about Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples communities, may not require community engagement and/or community consent.

Research involving Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples that critically examines the conduct of public institutions, First Nations, Métis and Inuit governments, institutions or organizations or persons exercising authority over First Nations, Métis or Inuit individuals may be conducted ethically, notwithstanding the usual requirement of engaging community leaders. However, irrespective of the fact that community engagement may not be required, researchers must remain respectful of the community as they conduct their research.

7. Research involving secondary data analysis – and in particular the use of biological materials – is subject to research ethics review.

Prospective research and secondary use of data and human biological materials for research purposes is subject to research ethics review. Regardless of the source, if researchers wish to conduct secondary data analysis on data that is "…identifiable as originating from a specific Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples community or segment of the Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples community at large, researchers shall, through community engagement as appropriate, address any potential inadvertent identification of communities, or misuse of traditional knowledge."

Thus, unless specifically authorized through an appropriate consent process, researchers cannot use data for secondary purposes without further community engagement, consent and ethics review and approval.

Specifically, if the data and/or biological materials are "identifiable as originating from an Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples' community or peoples is subject to REB review" and/or there is no formal research agreement for additional use and/or the data is not publicly available researchers must engage the community and provide documentation of such engagement to the REB prior to use of said data. Further, Individual consent for the secondary use of identifiable information is required unless the REB agrees that one of Articles 5.5 or 5.6 or Articles 12.3 or 12.4 may apply.

Given the historical context, the collection of biological samples requires careful consideration by researchers and extensive engagement and consultation with the community from which the data and samples will be collected. Where collection of biological materials forms part of the research project, researchers shall engage the community to "…address and specify in the research agreement the rights and proprietary interests of individuals and communities, to the extent such exist, in human biological materials and associated data to be collected, stored and used in the course of the research."

Special care and consideration shall be given by researchers as it pertains to the privacy and confidentiality of the participants' and their data. "The extent to which limited or full disclosure of personal information related to the research is to be disclosed to community partners shall be addressed in research agreements where these exist. Researchers shall not disclose personal information to community partners without the participant's consent, as set out in Article 3.2(i)."

Finally, REB review is required where the researcher seeks data linkage of two or more anonymous datasets or data associated with human biological materials and there is a reasonable prospect that this could generate information identifiable as originating from a specific Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples community or a segment of the Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples community at large.

8. Researchers must address the issues of intellectual property, data interpretation and dissemination of results prior to commencement of research.

The issue of intellectual property should be addressed during the process of community engagement. Ideally the issue should be addressed formally in either a research agreement or community engagement plan. "In collaborative research, intellectual property rights should be discussed by researchers, communities and institutions. The assignment of rights, or the grant of licenses and interests in material that may flow from the research, should be specified in a research agreement (as appropriate) before the research is conducted."

Further, prior to the publication and dissemination of research, community members should be provided with the opportunity to review the research results. Specifically, "researchers should afford community representatives engaged in collaborative research an opportunity to participate in the interpretation of the data and the review of research findings before the completion of the final report, and before finalizing all relevant publications resulting from the research."

Appendix C

3 Focus groups approximately 60-90 minutes long will include participants over 18 years of age. (see attached Human Participants Research Protocol form for more details)

Focus Group Research Questions

Despite all these barriers: What is keeping Indigenous people in school?
How can the education system continue to improve to support Indigenous people until post - secondary?
What are the implications to Government and Educators now that the TRC recommendations have been released?

CLOSING THE GAP

INFORMED CONSENT

TO BE ADDED TO HARD COPY