LIVING AND WRITING INTO BEING TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION: THE EXPERIENCES OF FIVE INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND TWO ALLIES

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Abstract

The study takes place in the Langley School District and the Fraser Cascade School District in the Fraser Valley in British Columbia. Five Indigenous women and an ally were all part of the process, which used a talking-circle methodology to capture the stories and opinions of the participants as a way to create authentic and relatable strategies for moving Truth and Reconciliation forward in our schools.

Several themes emerged from the research: a quest for identity, loss and trauma, residential-school connections, systemic racism in school and society, labelling of Indigenous students as special needs, the importance of storytelling as an educational methodology, embracing Indigenous Principles of Learning, and decolonizing educational practices. The results of the study point to language revitalization, celebrating culture, the importance of Elders, and the need for both appropriate resources and anti-racism structures in schools.

Pedagogical shifts in practice—such as implementing universal design for learning, Indigenous Principles of Learning, land-based pedagogy, and competency assessment models, were identified as critical strategies for supporting Indigenous students.

Acknowledgements

During my second year of the Ph.D. residency, we attended a forum of students who had finished or were further along in the process. One of the forum's recurring themes was that life could get in the way of completing a dissertation. Since starting my journey, I have lost a father-in-law, a brother, and several colleagues. I became a superintendent of schools and led our district through a pandemic, floods, road closures, fires, and immense snow storms. I also celebrated one of my daughter's marriages in Italy last year. Through the support of many people, I persevered and kept living the research.

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Michelann Parr, for her unwavering support, belief in my research and patience as we walked through this study. YOU WERE THERE TO NUDGE ME AND KEEP ME GOING when I was exhausted from work or life's challenges. Thank you also for your humanity as we discussed the complexities of life and the challenges of our public-education system. You are educational sustainability in action, and I am forever grateful for your insights.

I acknowledge my research participants, Mikayla Bay, Jillian Fraser, Stephanie Fredette, Jessica Poirier, Cecelia Reekie, and Cathy Speth, and their courage and conviction as we navigated their experiences and their hopes and dreams for a better future for our Indigenous students. I am also grateful to Kwantlen, Matsqui, and Semiamooh First Nations, where this study originated, and to the fourteen nations surrounding the community where I now work. We acknowledge that we are living, working, and learning on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Xwchíyò:m, Sts'ailes, Sq'éwlets, Sq'éwqel, Shxw'ōwhámél, Sq'ewá:lxw, nłeʔkepmxúym'xw, and Chawathil people. The Chawathil people are from the Tíyt Tribe of the upper Stó:lo Nation. The Tiyt Tribes extend down both sides of the Fraser River from Yale to Sq'éwqel and the Peters territory. We acknowledge this shared territory so that we are mindful while we move through our work with a good mind and good heart.

I appreciate my parents, Kamala Moorthy and the late Sam Moorthy, for their courage in bringing their family of five to a new country from across the globe in search of the immigrant's dream. This doctoral journey is a tribute to your persistent message to me about the importance of education. I acknowledge my oldest brother Mohan Moorthy and my late brother David Moorthy, who inspired me to enter the education field. You were a pure teacher David, and I will carry your heart with me wherever I go.

I am honoured to have four incredibly talented daughters committed to Truth and Reconciliation in their respective professions who have been championing me throughout this project: Rachael, the author/teacher of "River Meets the Sea;" Tiahna, the genetic counsellor in New York; Katrina, the occupational therapist of Intuitive Health in Chilliwack; and Emily, the nurse at the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in BC Women's Hospital. You are a significant inspiration, and I am so proud to be your father.

My wife, partner, and best friend, Shalegh Moorthy, was my most significant support for completing this dissertation. We started on our educational journey together over thirty-eight years ago, and what a story we have created and lived through together! I am proud to call you my wife and am honoured to have watched our children grow and develop with you. You are an exceptional educator, mother, daughter, sister, auntie, and friend. You are reconciliation in action, and I appreciate you joining me on this journey.

Lastly, thanks to the hundreds of educators I have worked with in my thirty-four-year career. I am enriched by my work with you and marvel at your dedication to our profession. I hope this study helps you in some way to make lives better not only for our Indigenous students but for all of the children with whom we work.

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Chapter 1
Why and Where the Fire Burns

Imagine a fire that burns brightly. We are seven around the fire: five with Indigenous ancestry and two allies. The fire is warm, and the circle is comfortable. This traditional sharing circle fosters equity, sharing, trust, familiarity, and a dissolution of boundaries: we are all in this together. We share a common passion and commitment—we seek truth and reconciliation in our communities, in our educational contexts, and with our children. Circling the fire, our conversation explores whether our school district's commitment to truth and reconciliation has made a difference in the lives of Indigenous students.

During my first PhD summer residency, we were invited to explore the following questions: *Who are we? Where are we? Where have we come from? And, how is this reflected in our research?* One of our educational-theory professors suggested that "all research is fundamentally about ourselves;" many of us responded in modest disbelief, and we resisted the suggestion. As my inquiry has proceeded, I have come to understand that, in many ways, the research really was a search for self, a way of understanding why I do what I do, and how my own past experiences have shaped who I am today—personally, professionally, and relationally. I intentionally begin with an autobiographical sketch originally drafted that summer (July 2017), as it offers insight into why I am both motivated and well-positioned to do this research.

An Autobiographical Sketch

I was born in Brunei, Borneo on January 4, 1967. My father was a medical attendant on a Shell Oil barge, and he flew to and from home by helicopter. He was away for weeks at a time, leaving my mom with a nanny to take care of my two brothers and me. We moved from Brunei because my parents, as Sri Lankan immigrants, were unable to secure my citizenship. Brunei has

a strict immigration policy, and they were concerned that I would be a child with no identifiable country as a place of origin. As a result, we went to England for two years as my parents finished nursing school.

In 1970, we arrived in Canada. My parents had only a few hundred dollars in their pockets, but as nurses, they secured employment right away at Vancouver General Hospital. We moved around alot, from scary rental homes to ones that looked better but were still infested with cockroaches, before finally settling in a rental house on Prince Albert Street in Vancouver.

As new immigrants, my parents experienced many challenges. The first year, unaware of Halloween traditions, my parents rushed to the fridge to give trick-or-treaters fruit or anything they could find. They had a similarly limited understanding of Christmas and Santa Claus. And of course, I recall my father's disgust that Canadians ate dog (this after seeing hot dogs in the meat section of the grocery store). The hippies at the end our street took great delight in the dark South Asian family that had moved into the neighbourhood; of course, it took me years to realize they were way ahead of their time. They seemed to like us and were delighted when my brothers and I would ask for pop bottles that we could trade for candy.

In the early 1970s, Canada was still a sea of White faces to many of us. It was not that there were not any other visible minorities, but Canada certainly was not the multicultural stew that it is now.

In 1972, we moved to Abbotsford, and my father got a job as a nursing supervisor at the regional psychiatric centre, and my mother secured a position as a nurse. It was a big deal for my father to get a supervisory job in the early 1970s and for my mother to work in the same place. Abbotsford was a playground, and my brothers and I were like free-range cattle. We roamed everywhere and came home only for dinner or when it started to get dark. I started school that

September at Godson Elementary School. My brothers' and mine were the only dark faces in the school. It was there that I got my first real taste of discrimination. Ironically, for many people, Sri Lankans, as an ethnic group, are ambiguous because of their dark skin. I was called the N word as frequently and I had South Asian insults hurled at me. My way of dealing with it was to fight. When I was in Grade 4, I got into a fight with a Grade 7 student and held my ground; few kids bothered me at school after that.

Every student in Abbotsford was a member of one of the softball teams that played other schools throughout the community. In my Grade 4 year, I was the only dark player in the league. After a while, my biggest worry was not about playing well; instead, I worried if and when the first racial remark would come from the other team or its fans: "Hey, they've got a brownie [or the N word, Paki] on their team." You name it, I heard it. Sometimes a parent would shut it down, but other times it would happen when no one else was listening or watching.

Racism is like that. It can be covert, but it is worst when it is insidious. Sometimes, a few players refuse to shake my hand in the line-up after the game. I didn't tell anyone about this act of discrimination, but it felt awful just the same.

Then there were the ridiculous mistakes that adults make, like the substitute teacher who read *Little Black Sambo* (Bannerman, 1899/2003)—a book about the stupid little black boy who gets chased by a tiger around a tree until the tiger gets turned into butter—in class. You can imagine the snickering from the back of the class as the teacher read this. I wanted to become invisible and evaporate into thin air.

As the years passed, the need to prove myself became the norm in school. I continued my involvement in athletics, had a few White girlfriends, and was deemed to be cool and different by many of the students in the school. I gained this notoriety, in part, by separating myself from

the fresh-off-the-boat South Asian community in Abbotsford. I was quick to say, “I am not East Indian; we are different.”

I was student council president of my junior high school in 1982. While you might think I had surpassed all of the discriminatory challenges by then, I encountered much more as a high school student, university student, teacher, and even during the early years of my marriage to Shalegh since, like my parents, we were a mixed-race couple. While I acknowledge race as a social construct today, it was a much different time when we married twenty-nine years ago.

Much has changed in Canada and Abbotsford since the 1970s, and, therefore, my daughters grew up in a much different world. Forty per cent of the Abbotsford community is now of South Asian descent and represent a significant portion of the community’s wealth. Half of the players on one of my daughter’s soccer teams identify as bi-racial or a visible minority. Ironically, some of the biggest discrimination issues we continue to face in schools are ones that are predominantly Indo-Canadian. Many White or Caucasian students leave school because of bullying and exclusion. I have come to realize that discrimination is not based solely on colour but also on privilege (Parr, 2019, personal communication), and that “race is purely circumstantial. It establishes a social hierarchy that people can use to exploit others” (Olson, 2002, p. 39).

My experiences, my roots as a critical race theorist (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) and my budding interest in socioculturalism (Adams et al., 2008) have led me to believe that our experiences shape us, and that new understandings of self and other come when we are challenged to deconstruct and reconstruct concepts like race, power, and privilege. I honour the beauty and uniqueness of all human beings, each with their own gifts to offer the world. This is a

mantra for how I live my life, what is discussed amongst my family, what I reinforce with friends, and what I share educationally in large and small groups.

Education is the best weapon against ignorance.

Self-Location

I am first-generation Canadian Sri Lankan. As a colonized visible minority, I have survived my own share of racism, and I often see my experiences of discrimination reflected in society, in our educational systems, and with Indigenous peoples. Throughout my teaching and administrative career, I have consistently advocated for victims of discrimination. I am one of the original members of the Langley Human Dignity Coalition (LHDC) whose mission is "to promote, protect, and advance the principles of human dignity, equality, and inclusion in the community" (LHDC, 2017, para. 2). For the past 20 years, I have also been a member of the Fraser Valley Human Dignity Coalition. I am now considered an ally by Indigenous people. Thus, my research inquiry aims to support both equity for Indigenous learners and the Indigenous Principles of Learning (FNESC, 2017) in the British Columbia public-education system and schools.

For over thirty-three years, I have fulfilled the roles of a public-school teacher, principal, and now, Superintendent of Fraser Cascade School District. Sixteen of these years were spent in the Langley School District, where I developed a strong relationship with Kwantlen First Nation. If I had to identify a turning point, I would say that my investment in Indigenous people's rights and perspectives peaked after a public board meeting on June 6, 2015, during which the Langley School District's Board of School Trustees, in association with the District's Leadership Team, formally committed to the principles of truth and reconciliation as outlined in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Interim Report* (TRC, 2012). District leaders, school-

based administrators, teachers, and support staff were challenged to lead the way in ensuring that the cultural importance and history of Indigenous people and Indigenous Principles of Learning, and the history of cultural genocide in Canada (in part through the residential-school system), were acknowledged in all public schools (Langley School District Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement, 2015–2020).

My initial attempts to support the principles of truth and reconciliation resulted in a question that demonstrated my limited understanding of the impact of sociocultural contexts, particularly for Indigenous people. Today's research curiosity reflects a holistic and humanistic approach representative of Indigenous methodologies—one that supports a strong emphasis on relationships, co-created and emergent research, respect, reciprocity, and intentional listening (Peltier, 2018). Woven into my inquiry are my personal experiences with racism and emerging research, which suggest that our own Canadian history needs to be viewed through a lens of White superiority rather than one of privilege: "In connecting settler colonialism to studies of whiteness and racism in geography, we argue that white supremacy is a critically important yet undertheorized concept, as compared to the more widely recognized notion of white privilege" (Bonds & Inwood, 2016, p. 716).

Theoretical Framework

My theoretical framework is a natural extension of my experiences, my professional work, and my ongoing reflections on colonization and the deficit perspective that has pervaded the treatment of Indigenous Peoples in Canada

My genetic ancestry—eight per cent Torres Strait Islander, 81 per cent South Asian, and 11 per cent East Asian—does not qualify me to unequivocally adopt an Indigenous worldview. As a victim of racism, however, I have developed an empathetic lens of the discrimination

experienced by Indigenous peoples within a colonized educational system. While racism of visible minorities in Canada has sometimes been linked to the discrimination faced by Indigenous peoples, I am cognizant of the added complexities and sensitivities required as a result of land dispossession and precontact history of Indigenous Canadians (Ashkok et al., 2011).

I believe that the Indian Act, the residential-school system, and our Canadian educational system are a result of a racially superior view that is at the heart of colonialism (Hanson et al., 2020).

Scholars such as Razack (1998) suggest that

> Encounters between dominant and subordinate groups cannot be managed simply as pedagogical moments requiring cultural, racial or gender sensitivity. Without an understanding of how responses to subordinate groups are socially organized to sustain existing power arrangements, we cannot hope either to communicate across social hierarchies or work to eliminate them. (p. 8)

Critical Race Theory

"Critical race theorists believe . . . that racism is normal, not aberrational—'normal science,' the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this county" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 6–7), and that "because it is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture" (Ladson-Billings, 1998 p. 11). Similar to Ladson-Billings, Razack (1998, p. 60) suggests that culturalized racism is covert, embedded within the Canadian fabric, and illustrates how we are fixed in a system of denial and self-promotion of equality, pluralism, ethnic diversity, and peacekeeping. As such, "we can conveniently forget our racist past and feel secure in the

knowledge that at least the residential schools are closed" (p. 60). Critical race theory (CRT) can be used to deconstruct our knowledge of education as a Westernized and/or a Eurocentric construct (Mclaughlin & Whatman, 2011, p. 2), thus situating it in a post-positivist movement. The notion that CRT is uniquely linked to the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples is synthesized by Mclaughlin and Whatman (2011).

CRT offers a revolutionary movement and puts race at the centre of critical analysis (Roithmayer, 1999). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) advanced CRT in education from legal studies, through their publication of *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education,* which advanced the pioneering work in law by Derek Bell and Alan Freeman (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Given the history of Australian Indigenous studies and education, CRT is highly applicable, particularly given its commitment to transforming social structures and advancing the political commitment of racial emancipation (Roithmayer, 1999, p. 1).

The Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour Movement

I could not have predicted how the mirroring of Indigenous rights and its association with racism in North America would evolve when I started my doctoral studies in 2017. There was minimal extant research that linked Indigenous people to the plight of Black people and People of Colour in the United States and Canada. While I had drawn parallels between CRT and the lived experiences of Indigenous people, the connections were at the time personal and informal. What a dramatic contrast to today's Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) movement, which "aims to build authentic and lasting solidarity . . . in order to undo Native invisibility [and] anti-Blackness, dismantle white supremacy, and advance racial justice." This movement highlights "the unique relationship to whiteness that Indigenous and Black (African Americans) people have, which shapes the experiences of and relationship to white supremacy for all people

of color within a U.S. context" and unapologetically focuses on and centers relationships among BIPOC populations (BIPOC Project, n.d., para 1).

Basu (2020) credits "young people, aware of the intersectionality of politics and culture, and unwilling to be pushed around agenda-driven impositions, [with having] brought conversations around BIPOC to the fore, to unite people of all colours and expand its ambit" (para. 1).

Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Although I cannot claim an Indigenous worldview, it is one that I consider and borrow from throughout this inquiry. I am informed by Kovach's (2010) epistemological description of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) systems, which consider experience as a legitimate way of knowing; Indigenous methods as a legitimate way of sharing knowledge; receptivity and relationship between researcher and participants as a natural part of the research methodology"; and collectivity as a way of assuming reciprocity to the community (p. 28).

I also draw on Simpson's (2000) seven principles of Indigenous worldviews: knowledge is holistic, cyclic, and dependent upon relationships and connections to living and non-living beings and entities; there are many truths that are dependent on individual experiences. Everything is alive; all things are equal; the land is sacred; the relationship between people and the spiritual world is important; and human beings are the least important in the world. My theoretical framework and resulting methodology also rely on Simpson's principles that help to situate myself in the inquiry and make an argument for the fusion of CRT and IK in this study.

Knowledge is Holistic, Cyclic, and Dependent Upon Relationships

Over the past 15 years, I have developed a very close relationship with Kwantlen First Nations in the Langley School District. I was acknowledged and blanketed by them at my last

Graduation Ceremonies at DW Poppy Secondary School. The Chief, Marilyn Gabriel, and her husband indicated "that they considered me as family." This relationship has grown over the last 15 years because of my advocacy for Kwantlen students and my work in promoting the truth and reconciliation initiative in the Langley School District. Throughout my years working with Kwantlen, I learned about the permissions, protocols, and understandings that are key parts of the Kwantlen community. For example, it has become a tradition for every school in Langley and at every major school board function to state the following: "The Langley School District resides on the unseeded territories of the Kwantlen, Kaitze, Semiamooh, and Matsqui First Nations." I have learned that there are certain elements of Indigenous Knowledge that are only permitted to be shared by Elders and that there are stories that require permission to be told. The uniqueness of these traditions can allow teachers to draw parallels with other cultures that have sacred traditions and encourage students to explore and connect with their own cultural histories (Riddell et al., 2017).

There Are Many Truths That Are Based on Individual Experiences

One of the greatest concerns that educators across British Columbia have noted is their uncertainty regarding how to infuse the history and culture of Indigenous Peoples into their curriculum. While the new Ministry of Education direction calls for us to understand the principles of truth and reconciliation, all students are encouraged to examine their own histories rather than the colonized story that has been infused into the BC curriculum and the false history that our students have learned. Students may become more empathetic about the loss of culture experienced by Indigenous people by authentically studying their own history.

Learning about identity is what connects us to each other. The Alberta Education (2005) resource, *Our words, our ways: Teaching First Nations, Metis and Inuit learners*, states,

"Talking about Aboriginal cultures is equivalent to talking about Asian, African, or European cultures—each of these have a variety of nations, customs, traditions, languages, and outlooks" (p. 10). The document also points out that there are hundreds of Indigenous cultural groups across Canada that have distinct cultural nuances. The extension for classrooms and research is to authentically learn about the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and understand the cultural genocide that took place while exploring the connections of our own history so that we can view ourselves as citizens of the world rather than someone who is just Canadian (Alberta Education, 2005).

St. Denis (2017) discusses the importance of bringing together CRT and Indigenous cultural safety, two seemingly different truths; he observes that we are beginning to embrace culturally sensitive pedagogy in classrooms and universities, recognizing Indigenous people as Knowers and Knowledge Keepers with social relations and as a spiritual group of people who have a harmonious existence with nature. In reality, Indigenous people also need to be viewed as human beings who are victims of oppression through colonization and subsequent marginalization through racial dominance and White supremacist ideologies (St. Denis, 2017). The use of this lens in classrooms and research settings can lead to positive social change.

As I work collaboratively with the Indigenous members of my inquiry, I am keenly aware that my personal experience as a discriminated other uniquely positions me in this research.

Everything is Alive

A basic premise of Indigenous beliefs is that all things are connected and that everything is alive. This interrelationship is indicative of a holistic philosophy that is contrary to a traditional dominative mindset (Restoule, 2011). As Bonds and Inwood (2016) indicate, "Both conceptual tools complicate common-sense temporalities and spatialities: neither white

supremacy nor settler colonialism can be relegated to historical contexts. Rather, both inform past, present, and future formations of race" (p. 715). This sense of holism and mutual respect is essential to this research inquiry: interrelationships and mutual respect between my participants and me are embedded in a humanistic approach with respect for all beliefs and elements.

All Things Are Equal

As indicated by the Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research's *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (2014), "working with Indigenous communities involves sensitivity to Indigenous Knowledge, traditions, and territory." Respect for persons, justice, and welfare needs to be considered and the focus on maintaining the culture must be adhered to. The ethical guidelines make specific recommendations for participatory community engagement, joint agreements for research, and research committee participation in Indigenous communities. This approach offers a counter-approach to our past history with Indigenous people and resulting research approaches. A critical race theory viewpoint suggests that many White Canadians view Indigenous people as their property and thus the notion of being researched to death is a reality (Daigle, 2019).

The Land Is Sacred

Korteweg and Root (2016) note that in-depth study of a local topic affords participants the opportunity to develop an emotional connection to place; this emotional connection lies at the root of ecological understanding. We can develop a stronger and more holistic understanding (connection) about a feature or aspect of Indigenous people's place through direct contact as well as through projects or avenues of exploration that interest us. If, as many suggest, we will not try to save what we do not love, then by affording ourselves time to reconnect with something local in ways that have personal resonance, we will develop emotional connections for ourselves. This

is contrary to the settler colonial narrative that suggests a dominative relationship to land where Indigenous peoples had their land seized and privatized and faced cultural genocide through ongoing racism (Bonds & Inwood, 2016).

Alfred (2015) emphatically states that Indigenous people must recognize themselves as part of Canada in a way that is beyond decolonization through co-optation and must experience a resurgence in a truly transformative way through repossession of the land. Alfred further states that "the root of all Indigenous people is dispossession of the land;" this offers further context to the proposed study, as it is rooted in cultural loss and genocide for all Indigenous people in Canada. Recognizing the deep-seated relationship that Indigenous people have with the land and the current political tensions in Canada over land dispossession is essential to the scope of this research. As McLaughlin and Whatman (2011) point out, "the argument for race as property is justifiable with Australia's history of colonisation under the proclamation of *terra nullius*, dispossession of land, stolen generations, stolen wages, and a history of Indigenous educational provision based on assumptions and models of student and community deficit" (p. 12).

In 2023, environmental consciousness is prominent in our society. Not only did our colonized system of education oppress Indigenous people around the world but it also had little regard for the environment. Through issues such as climate change, over-forestation, and poor natural-resource-harvesting practices, we are witnessing the effects of an ideology that is clearly racist, capitalistic, and anthropocentric. Adopting an understanding of Indigenous values and responsibility to the land would bring an appreciative inquiry into the research process. In addition, the narratives from the Indigenous educators in this study will most certainly tie into the natural relationships that Indigenous people have with land and the passion for the environment that is exhibited by youth, as exemplified by this year's climate protests in British

Columbia. If the ultimate goal is to find relatable strategies that allow for the infusion of Indigenous ways of knowing into classrooms, then viewing the link between Indigenous people, placed-based learning, and ecological awareness is significant to this inquiry.

The Relationship Between People and the Spiritual World

How the relationship between people and the spiritual world is typically interpreted through Church tenets that suggest that man is superior to all creation and should have dominion over all things. “White supremacy is not only a rationalization for race; it is the foundational logic of the modern capitalist system and must be at the center of efforts to understand the significance of whiteness” (Bond & Inwood, 2016, p. 720).

Conversely, Indigenous thought suggests that man is equal to all other aspects of creation. Indigenous thought is non-dominative and dependent on oral language and oral storytelling. The governmental structure is circular, and the concept of stewardship is integral. Songs and ceremonies dictate ways of being. Elder Willie Ermine (2007) advises that bridging the two disparate theories of Indigenous thought and Western thinking involves moving into a “new partnership model of the ethical space, in a cooperative spirit between Indigenous peoples and Western institutions, [that] will create new currents of thought that flow in different directions and overrun the old ways of thinking” (p. 203). Martin (2012) suggests that this bridging is reciprocal and recommends that Indigenous communities consider both Indigenous and Western views to appreciate multiple perspectives and see through both eyes (p. 31).

Setting of the Fire: My Educational Context

On August 1, 2020, I assumed a new role as Superintendent of Schools in the Fraser Cascade School District. Fraser Cascade School District is a small school district in the most eastern part of the Fraser Valley; it serves Hope, Agassiz, Harrison Hot Springs, and Boston Bar.

Forty per cent of the school district is Indigenous, and there are fifteen First Nations communities within the region. First Nations communities that are part of my new district have each negotiated local education agreements and transportation agreements that involve a high degree of consultation. For example, Qalatkuem school (one room), in the Sea to Sky School District just north of Pemberton, educates 10–12 Indigenous students who would otherwise not go to school due to their remote location. Much of my new role involves liaising with Indigenous leaders and educational representatives from these communities.

I learned more about working with Indigenous communities in my first year as Superintendent than in my first thirty-one years as an educator. As a result, my new lived reality allowed me to carry out this research on a deeper level. I find myself reflecting on a daily basis about how my new position is, in fact, research in action for my doctoral studies.

Fuel for the Fire: An Extended Context

Research inquiries do not take place in a vacuum, and it is, therefore, important to scan the national and geopolitical context of the inquiry and the shifting landscape of the world, and to consider how these change not only how data is gathered (i.e., talk about the research questions) but also how it is interpreted and represented. It is, therefore, important to consider both what is happening in our county as a result of events south of our border in the United States and the directives established by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as they are being adopted in British Columbia Schools.

I began my doctoral studies in July 2017. Since this time, much has happened that has illuminated not only systemic racism but also attempts by the government, Church, and state to continue, even in the context of truth and reconciliation, to cover up and ignore past abuses. Two

particular movements inform this inquiry: the Black, Indigenous, People of Colour movement and the Kamloops Residential School tragedy.

The increasing number of findings of unmarked graves of Indigenous children and adults on a number of residential-school sites has brought to light the grim reality of Canada's genocidal history. The Kamloops Residential School operated from 1890 to 1969, when the federal government took over the administration from the Catholic Church (Dickson & Watson, 2021). Up to 500 students taken from Indigenous communities attended the school. Historical records have proven to be inadequately documented. In an interview with CBC News, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, director of the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre at the University of BC, confirmed what many Indigenous people have indicated for years—namely, that the extent of the abuse and the number of children who did not return is impossible to determine:

> There may be reasons why they wouldn't record the deaths properly and that they weren't treated with dignity and respect because that was the whole purpose of the residential school . . . to take total control of Indian children, to remove their culture, identity and connection to their family. (Dickson & Watson, 2021, n.p.)

These emerging realities support the original context of the inquiry even more deeply, gesturing toward widespread and systemic racism and discrimination that has resulted in what we now understand as cultural genocide.

Many years ago, classroom resources had few references to Indigenous people, and even those were often superficial or incorrect. As curriculum processes evolved, resources began to include some information about Indigenous people but did not discuss how Indigenous understandings and perspectives help us learn about the world and how they contribute to a

stronger society (Lippmann, 1975). Sadly, the removal of Indigenous perspectives continues in parts of Canada as the Indigenous Science curriculum has been recently removed from the Ontario Elementary School Curriculum (Alphonso, 2022).

Rectifying this omission and colonization of curriculum, the 2017 revision of the BC K–12 curriculum makes stronger links to First Peoples' Principles of Learning (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2017) through its core competencies: personal, social, thinking, and communication. Building personal and social competency, students are expected to explore positive personal and cultural identity, personal awareness and responsibility, and social responsibility (British Columbia Ministry of Education and Childcare, 2015, para. 1).

Indigenous content and ways of knowing are now woven into the curriculum. For example, science suggests emphasizing a place-based approach; English language arts emphasizes Indigenous world views, such as the use of texts and stories to explore real and imaginary worlds; mathematics emphasizes how numeracy is used in everyday aspects of Indigenous life; and in social studies, students are invited to explore the roles of Indigenous people in the growth and development of Canada.

Purpose for the Fire: Rationale and Significance

I believe that truth and reconciliation is a personal responsibility that every individual in Canada must undertake. First, we must understand the reality of the cultural genocide in our country in terms of colonization, land displacement, the eradication of language and culture and the impact of Residential Schools. Once we learn the truth about our history, we must reconcile with Indigenous peoples by taking positive steps to reteach the history, language and culture within our school system and create appropriate support for Indigenous students. We must also

develop strategies of support for Indigenous peoples within the Canadian fabric regarding healthcare, housing, and other social assistance programs.

Working toward truth and reconciliation, this study explores potential next steps towards decolonizing classrooms in British Columbian schools within the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations:

> Recommendation 5: The Commission recommends that provincial and territorial departments of education work in concert with the Commission to develop age-appropriate educational materials about residential schools for use in public schools.
>
> Recommendation 6: The Commission recommends that each provincial and territorial government work with the Commission to develop public education campaigns to inform the general public about the history and impact of residential schools in their respective jurisdictions. (Truth and Reconciliation Interim Report, 2012 p. 236)

Many educators and students across British Columbia are beginning to understand the *why* behind truth and reconciliation and the need to infuse Indigenous Principles of Learning into practice, but they are unfamiliar with the *how*. Through this research, I hope to gather the ways this work is being achieved by five Indigenous women and two allies. This is not easy work, but it is important if we hope to achieve truth and reconciliation in our nation, in our schools, in the world. Our British Columbia curriculum continues to be deeply Eurocentric. Extending beyond research as knowledge production, it is anticipated capacity building, community healing, and resilience (Drawsong et al., 2017) will come through exploration of our current practices and colonized structures.

At the heart of this inquiry and truth and reconciliation is the importance of care in our curriculum and in our schools. I draw on Noddings (2005) research on pedagogies of care in

schools; she posits that while many educators may demonstrate virtue-based caring by working hard and pursuing goals for their students, the relational aspect of caring is equally, if not more, crucial. Caring involves building meaningful relationships with students, understanding their individual needs, and fostering an environment where students genuinely feel cared for and engagement is a reciprocal process.

CRT, Indigenous Knowledge systems, and pedagogies of care serve as useful structures for this work and situate this study in our contemporary world; it implores us, as leaders and educators, to see "the official curriculum as a culturally specific artefact designed to create a white supremacist master script" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18).

Overview of Chapters

In this chapter, Chapter 1, I introduce myself, locate myself in the inquiry, offer my worldview grounded in critical race theory and Indigenous ways of knowing, and set both a local and extended context for the inquiry. I conclude with a firm commitment to advance equitable educational practice that respects and values diverse views.

In Chapter 2, I survey the literature, weaving together decolonizing practices, critical race theory, and antiracist education. I offer a set of practices and dispositions that may be useful in pre-service education and in-service professional development.

Chapter 3 lays the foundation for an Indigenous research methodology using storytelling as a decolonizing process for gathering data. Information on community-based participatory research is an example of co-created spaces employed for setting the research context. As a researcher and co-participant, I situate myself as co-creator and discuss research-question development and data-gathering methods.

Chapter 4 illustrates the research findings and themes that emerged from the talking circles. Narratives are captured in real time and intense topics appear as each participant shares their lived history as an Indigenous leader or ally in our school system. The stories are raw and authentic, illustrating the deeply embedded racism that the participants experienced while growing up in the BC public-school system and continue to experience in their current roles.

Chapter 5 provides concrete examples of how we can move Indigenous Principles of Learning forward in our school system, the structures we can create to support Indigenous student success, and how educators can inspire appreciation of Indigenous history and culture within our schools. Authentic and relatable actions are offered for educators in a Canadian context.

Chapter 6 provides a summary and conclusion of the research and offers a summary of recommendations for educators in Canada. The power of the story, contributions to literature, limitations of the study, and implications for further research are shared.

Concluding Remarks

Ermine (2007) suggests that bridging the two seemingly disparate theories involves moving into an ethical space, "in a cooperative spirit between Indigenous peoples and Western institutions, [which] will create new currents of thought that flow in different directions and overrun the old ways of thinking" (p. 203). Bartlett et al. (2012) define this as two-eyed seeing, meaning that researchers should "see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together" (p. 335). In this inquiry, I endeavour to use the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and the strengths of critical race theory. Little Bear (2000) reminds me:

> No matter how dominant the world view may appear, there are always other ways of viewing the world. Different ways of interpreting the world are manifested through different cultures which are often in opposition to one another. One of the problems with colonialism is that it tries to maintain a singular social order by means of force and law, suppressing the diversity of human world views. (p. 77)

My feelings of deep connection to Indigenous people are difficult to articulate fully but position me well to guide this inquiry. In my journey as an educator, I have come to realize, personally and professionally, the impact of racism, discrimination, inferiority, and cultural genocide and how it continues to play out in our education practices and policies. The work undertaken in this dissertation is not only a response to these understandings but also a contribution to truth and reconciliation. This work values co-creation and honours building knowledge in collaboration with Indigenous educators and allies who are committed to supporting truth and reconciliation initiatives in British Columbia schools and education spaces. The overall goal is to create authentic and relatable strategies for educators as they work towards realizing truth and reconciliation and deconstructing a curriculum that is grounded in colonialism and White superiority, situating this inquiry firmly within today's BIPOC movement.

Chapter 2
Literature Review: "Building the Fire"

In this chapter, I build and stoke the fire that burns within, ultimately making a case for antiracism and cultural awareness training for educators. I open the conversation with an overview of the complexities of race and racism; this serves as a prelude to a discussion of settler colonialism and settler humanitarianism as they relate to the impacts of residential schools and the land dispossession of Indigenous people. I then proceed to an overview of the history of Indigenous racism and its association with the current Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour movement in Canada. Ultimately, I identify an acute need to infuse our classrooms and curricula, at all levels of education, with critical race theory and discuss the importance of having conversations about White privilege and Whiteness that will prompt teachers and learners to expose their underlying beliefs, attitudes, and values and enable them to understand how, without interrogation, these can work their way into perceptions, choices, and actions.

Setting Context

Archibald (2006) states, "The experience of being colonized involves loss of culture, language, land resources, political autonomy, religious freedom, and often personal autonomy. These losses may have a direct impact to the health, social, and economic status of Indigenous people" (p. v). The proposed study, therefore, explores decolonizing initiatives in education and the subsequent positive impact it has on the success for students who have been part of our traditional, Eurocentric model of learning.

There is a moral purpose for school districts to address Indigenous history and the impact of cultural genocide in Canada. Milner (2008) implores us to introduce an "evolving theory in teacher education against racist policies and practices arguing that racial equality and equity for

people of colour will be pursued and advanced when they converge with interests, needs and ideologies of Whites" (p. 333).

Battiste (2013) argues:

> The constitutional framework and court decisions affirming customary Indigenous knowledges then generate what might be seen as a place where an emerging reconciliation of Indigenous knowledge in learning and pedagogy can have an impact on all public forms of education. It creates the context for systemic educational reform to include Indigenous science, humanities, visual arts, and languages as well as existing educational philosophy, pedagogy, teacher education and practice. (p. 77)

Battiste (2013) makes the role of schools and teachers explicit: urging "collaborative conscientization," (p. 69) she challenges teachers to deconstruct their beliefs about Indigenous students and employ non-colonial practices. She also encourages students of Indigenous ancestry to share their narratives as a means of gaining more self-empowerment. Tanaka (2016) agrees with Battiste and calls for teachers to "embrace Indigenous frameworks in their practice and encourages them to shift their beliefs by being wary of thinking prescriptively, paying attention to community collaborations, and considering the power dynamics between students and teachers" (p. 199)."

Maki and Roberts (2017) emphasize that "the biggest challenge with bringing the shared history of Canada and colonialism to those who have been educated and raised in the dominant or Eurocentric perspective is their lack of knowledge of the true or accurate shared history" (p. 15). When non-Indigenous educators learn of the historical injustices and the ongoing inequities Indigenous people face due to colonialism, discomfort often settles in.

British Columbia (BC) First Nations groups and advisory panels, educators and administrators, and other stakeholders have responded to the need to build capacity and support teachers and students as they navigate their discomfort and lack of knowledge related to our colonial history. Below, I highlight two different BC initiatives: the work of the First Nations Education Steering Committee that has been in place since 1992, and a joint initiative between BC school administrators and the University of British Columbia. Both are relevant to this inquiry in terms of resources and initiatives available to both teachers and research participants.

First Nations Education Steering Committee

Tyrone McNeil, president of the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), remarked in the *Annual Report 2015/16*, "Increasingly, First Nations students are being supported to succeed in classrooms that acknowledge and value their histories, realities, and unique perspectives, and there has been growing recognition of the need for systemic change" (FNESC, 2015–2016, p. 2). The FNESC mandate is to "facilitate discussion about education matters affecting First Nations in BC by disseminating information and soliciting input from First Nations" (p. 7). Summarizing the year's events, McNeil cited three important milestones that establish a context for this literature review: i) the joint announcement with the BC Ministry of Education of "an amendment to the Student Credential Order, which will reduce the disproportionate number of First Nations students who have been directed to access the non-graduation Evergreen Certificate;" ii) the signing, with BC Minister of Education, of "a bilateral protocol agreement to help further collaboration to improve the achievement" of Indigenous students; and iii) continued focus on Indigenous education rights now that Canada is a "full supporter of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples" (p. 6).

The FNESC (2015–2016) "works at the provincial level to provide services in the areas of research, communications, information dissemination, advocacy, program administration and networking" (p. 1). Additionally, the committee "strives to share up-to-date information about available programs, government policies and initiatives, and local, provincial, and national education issues that affect First Nations Learners" (p. 7). The work of the FNESC is useful for teachers in our BC schools and provides valuable information for the participants in this study.

Joint Administrative and Higher Education Initiative

In 2017, the British Columbia Principals' and Vice Principals' Association (BCPVPA), Office of Indigenous Education, Indigenous Education Institute, and the Faculty of Education of the University of British Columbia jointly released *Learning Knowing and Sharing—Celebrating Successes in K–12 Indigenous Education in British Columbia* (Archibald et al., 2017). This report highlighted eighteen of the province's top performing Indigenous education initiatives. The report specifically addressed Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and how it shapes curriculum in K–12 schools; systemic changes needed for Indigenous student success; effective work with Indigenous communities, school, district, and community; and how IK influences individual, school, and district identity. Engagement was cited as a key goal for Indigenous students. "The sense of teamwork that is developing in schools and districts between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators gives us hope and confidence that together we can make our schools places of liberation and sites of transformational change" (Archibald et al., 2017, p. 43). Putting the above guidelines in action increased graduation rates for Indigenous students by 25 per cent within the past ten years (Archibald & Hare, 2017, p. 45).

The BCPVPA (2017) and Archibald and Hare (2017) support Rosborough's (2012) description of the power and broad acceptance of learning and assertion that these contribute to a

sense of credibility and momentum for change: “The development, articulation and application of these learning principles and the improvements that they foster in educational pedagogy and outcomes speak strongly to the connections between indigenous knowledge and successful educational practice” (p. 33).

Dei and Lara-Villanueva (2021) advise that it is essential that educators recognize that racism that is inherent in schools and Canada’s history of colonialism. Schools are seen as systemically racist due to these colonial structures, and this creates a power imbalance for racialized students. This is highlighted in the increased suspension rates of Black and Indigenous students and the streaming of Indigenous students into specialized programs. In order for schools to address these systems of inequality, antiracist educators can address issues of power, privilege, and identity in their classrooms. Dei and Lara-Villanueva (2021) also observe that antiracist educators commit and advocate for changes in the curriculum, look for multiple sources that can support the diversity in their classrooms, and work with school boards to eliminate racism and racist structures.

Several school provinces are now implementing antiracism initiatives such the Toronto District School Board’s Anti-Black Racism curriculum and the new mandatory First Peoples graduation requirement in British Columbia (BC Ministry of Education and Childcare, 2023c).

Larson (2017) examined the perceptions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, parents, and educators in a northern British Columbia school district (Atlin) regarding their opportunities to learn Indigenous culture, language, and relationships with others. Working from a perception that positive changes for Indigenous students in education have been limited, Larson recommends that educational institutions be decolonized and that we recognize and eliminate the dominance of European knowledge and legitimize Indigenous Knowledge (IK) systems.

One of the key findings of Larson's studies is that schools need to be more vigilant about educational enhancement agreements and include more goals to increase opportunities to learn language and culture and improve the sense of belonging for Indigenous children. Graduation rates and literacy assessments are only part of the story for self-determination for Indigenous families.

The ongoing challenge of consistent attendance for Indigenous students is represented in many communities across BC, including the thirteen on reserve communities in our district:

> If students miss thirty-one days per year on average, then after thirteen years of schooling they will have missed approximately four hundred days, which is the equivalent of two school years. This is even more significant if students do not complete Grades 11 and 12. Students who leave school after Grades 9 or 10 may have in effect only been in school for eight to nine years. (Larson, 2017, pp. 155–156)

The seven themes that emerged from Larson's (2017) study provide salient directions for schools in British Columbia as they navigate the ongoing challenges of improving the success and engagement for Indigenous learners.

- Identity is linked to place and place means kinship;
- Grandparents play a role in language socialization for children:
- There is a language-transmission gap between younger parents (aged 25 to 44) who only speak English in their homes. Parents spoke about hoping that their children would learn more Tlingit than they themselves could speak;
- Opportunities that integrate academic and cultural support enhance students' engagement in school;
- An integrated model of education is most beneficial for students;

- Education for Indigenous students should include the revitalization of language and culture in Indigenous communities;
- Choices about learning and leadership opportunities prepare students for self-determination.

The findings of Larson's study are well represented in our school district and are well aligned with the directions of our Indigenous Education Program and the direction from our large Indigenous Education Council and yet many teachers in our district continue to struggle with the practical realities of implementing a critical decolonizing methodology.

Valdez (2015) employed a "transformative decolonial pedagogy as a means of weaving critical pedagogy, critical race theory and decolonial pedagogy to examine the construction and implementation of Common Core based decolonial pedagogies in a public elementary classroom" (p. 8), with a focus on race and the intersection with education. Five themes emerged from the study of her classroom: internal colonialism, Eurocentric standards and scripted curriculum, teacher isolation, high-stakes testing, and teacher isolation. Her findings captured a decolonized classroom in action:

> Throughout the study I was able to meet content standards through a humanizing and loving education that validated students' lives and challenged colonialism. The most critical tool for supporting student transformation proved to be the pairing of student reflection journals and student dialogue. This coupling provided the space for students to grapple with critical content and push their peers' thinking within the class. I was also able to counter my feelings of isolation. (Valdez, 2015, p. 123)

Valdez (2015) recommends that elementary-school teachers review the colonial standards within their classrooms, develop meaningful learning opportunities, implement project-based

learning, challenge colonialism by choosing decolonizing literature, and create spaces of love, healing and continuous improvement. Similarly, school principals are challenged to learn about the negative impacts of colonization and racism on their school communities. School districts in British Columbia are becoming more reflective of Valdez's findings. In the past few years, more than 80 per cent of the conferences and superintendent and ministry meetings I have attended have had truth and reconciliation, Indigenous rights, antiracism education, and inclusive mindsets as the majority of the agenda.

The current efforts undertaken by the British Columbia Ministry of Education are a step in the right direction. The proposed study further documents how decolonizing practices function at the intersection of our historical context and Truth and Reconciliation initiatives, with a goal of building capacity with teachers using tenets of critical race theory and the BIPOC movement.

Historical Context of Settler Colonialism, Settler Humanitarianism, and Treaties

Teaching about residential schools, land dispossession, and treaties, and meeting the needs of Indigenous learners are steps in the right direction, but they fail to address the ongoing and systemic impacts of colonization. For the purposes of this dissertation, I argue that our current education system and curriculum, while continually in motion, continues to have undercurrents of settler colonialism, and by virtue of its very being, may be an example of settler-humanitarianism. Treaty offers an opportunity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous solidarity. I believe that a full understanding of Canada's historical context is necessary in order to proceed with the work that needs to be done, not just in British Columbia schools but also across Canada.

White-Settler Colonialism

By White-settler colonialism, I mean the "ongoing ideology and practice" that continues to structure all lives, not just Indigenous ones, through processes of normalization, extraction, appropriation, racism, violence, and national mythologizing of peoples (Battell-Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 35). There is an inextricable link between White-settler colonialism and the political and economic structures, land displacement, and subsequent treaties that are grounded in a Eurocentric concept of land as property (Atleo & Boron, 2022).

Indigenous communities believe that no one owns the land but that land is an extension of their world and a benefit to all, as all people are created equal and have an equal right to land ownership. Batell-Lowman and Barker (2015) suggest that

> Land is at the root of any issue or conflict you could care to name involving Indigenous and Settler peoples in Canada. The land is what sustains Indigenous communities and identities. The land is what Settler people need in order to have a home and economic stability. (p. 48)

Atleo and Boron (2022) concur and note the impacts to individuals, cultures, and societies:

> Respectful and reciprocal relationships with land are at the heart of many Indigenous cultures and societies. Land is also at the core of settler colonialism. Indigenous peoples have not only been dispossessed of land for settler occupation and resource extraction, but the transformation of land into property has created myriad challenges to ongoing struggles of land repatriation and renewal. (p. 1)

Atleo and Boron further reinforce that Indigenous identity is connected to the land so deeply that it is not distinct from their flesh and blood; it follows, then, in my humble opinion, that to deny land is to deny culture, identity, and community, and this is fundamentally an act of racism.

Canada's colonial history has not only stripped Indigenous people of their land but has also impacted their identity, belonging in this nation, and population. Through disease epidemics, settler colonialism in British Columbia, the site of this inquiry, eliminated over 90 per cent of Indigenous community. As noted by Little Bear (2000), "Colonization attempted to destroy Indigenous worldviews through a variety of eliminatory and assimilative methods. . . . Indigenous peoples work in the cultural context that they have maintained within systems that do not belong to them" (p. 78).

White-Settler Humanitarianism

White-settler humanitarianism is one such system that does not belong to Indigenous peoples. Maxwell (2017) uses, "'settler humanitarianism' to emphasize how liberal interventions inspired by sympathy for Indigenous suffering are aligned with settler-colonialism's enduring goal of eliminating Indigenous peoples in order to control and exploit their territory" (p. 976).

Reflecting on the Canadian context, Murdocca (2020) discusses how racial colonial violence (i.e., residential schools) was "rationalized as a humanitarian project fuelled by the racial anxieties of the settler state aimed at 'educating the native' which worked to redefine the so-called 'uncivilized'" (p. 1280). Sadly, "the humanitarian impulse always works in tandem with forms of violence, control, and a grammar of racialized worthiness in order to demarcate the boundaries of humanity" (p. 1281).

Pallister-Wilkins (2021) offers further critique on how humanitarian sentiments designed to save lives, relieve suffering, and uphold human dignity and the associated narrative became part of, and continue to be part of, everyday colonial government. While such efforts may have soothed "the troubled souls of white folk" concerned with the well-being of Indigenous

populations, its universalizing claims actually worked to invisibilize "racial hierarchies and the white supremacy embedded" in its very foundations (p. 102).

Maxwell (2017) raises concerns about obscuring "how Indigenous suffering flows from more wide-ranging, collective experiences of colonization, characterized by the severing of attachments to territory, nation, community, and kin" (p. 980) by drawing publication attention to a narrow, universalizing formulation of the residential schools' impact (i.e., sexual abuse, trauma, and interpersonal violence faced by Indigenous children).

Treaty

The Government of Canada (2023) website says, "Treaties provide a framework for living together and sharing the land Indigenous peoples traditionally occupied. These agreements provide foundations for ongoing co-operation and partnership as we move forward together to advance reconciliation" (para 1). And yet, *treaty* is a term that our White-settler nation has attempted to appropriate in terms of politics, greed, and White supremacy—a space that the state has attempted to appropriate and empty of meaning (Lawrence & Dua, 2005).

"Treaty is important to non-[Indigenous] people of colour and antiracist politics because is the ground upon which residential schools are condemned, the apology is criticized, and redress is sought" (Lawrence & Dua, 2005, p. 272). Treaty also forms the basis for Indigenous people and people of colour to come together and find an understanding of their relationship as colonized visible minorities and the original inhabitants of the land:

> I am in favour of organizing on the basis of a shared interest in treaty and treaty relationships over a mutual commitment to sovereignty because treaty is the basis of relationships and for non-[Indigenous] belonging on this land, not because sovereignty is

> irretrievable from colonial versions while treaty is somehow unaffected. (Lawrence & Dua, 2005, p. 272)

The turn to treaty is important also in terms of solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of colour, as it presents a possibility to develop discursive spaces where we can begin to explore our relationship with one another within a settler and racist state (Lawrence & Dua, 2005). "Part of the profound strength that has helped Indigenous peoples to maintain their identity despite five centuries of colonization derives from the fact that they have retained knowledge of who they are due to their longstanding relationships to the land" (p. 127).

Fulfilling our treaty obligations as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can "make space . . . for thinking beyond this present colonial conflict, to a future defined by reciprocity, responsibility, and restitution" (Maxwell, 2017, p. 23). "Honouring the treaty relationship and negotiating new treaties based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership, is key to achieving lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples" (Government of Canada, 2023, para. 5).

Relationship to Research Inquiry

Through this research, I open conversations that are grounded in truth and reconciliation with the goal of contributing to decolonizing our approach to education from cradle to grave, and thus returning to some of our original treaty obligations. I explore the extent to which our efforts either support or refute Maxwell's (2017) paradox whereby interventions meant to address Indigenous welfare may actually reinforce systemic racism. I wonder, as does Murdocca (2020), whether our efforts continue to be fuelled by White anxiety. And I offer this research in support of Pallister-Wilkins' (2021) perspective that "race and racism need to be taken seriously as features within the structures of humanitarian thought and patience" (p. 102). Finally, it is my

belief that this research is a solid example of a discursive space that is aimed at building solidarity among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

This work is not without interrogation as country and of self. We must understand not only our historical context but also antiracism, the politics of race and racism, and critical race theory, particularly as it applies to Indigenous Peoples.

Antiracism Through the Lens of Settler-Colonial Frameworks

The following section discusses vital topics relevant to the research, including the growth of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) Movement in Canada. Notably, the research for this context has grown significantly since the George Floyd tragedy and the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. Discussions of antiracism in society and education are further explored concerning our genocidal history and its inextricable links to critical race theory as well as how it intersects with the Indigenous plight in society and education. Directions for school improvement for BIPOC students are suggested, as are the implications for teacher education, antiracist education in schools, and the need to work together as faculty and students to negotiate White privilege. Examples of teachers and educational leaders using decolonizing educational practices internationally, nationally, and within the province of British Columbia are discussed. It is important to understand the preparation of teachers since most of the teaching faculty continues to be White. Strategies and examples for decolonizing and examining White privilege in teacher education programs are shared as critical next steps for the transformation of public schools in BC.

The Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour Movement in Canada

The recent surge of the BIPOC movement in Canada is noteworthy and builds on the understanding that our country is built on a racist ideology. BIPOC groups are challenging this

ideology and directly impacting our national and provincial imperative and influencing the direction of the Ministry of Education and Childcare.

Linking colonization and racism, Dwyer and Jones (2000) suggest that "a settler colonial framework enhances understandings of whiteness by revealing how white supremacy is produced through ongoing structures of genocide and Indigenous displacement that are concomitantly connected to the continued subordination of black and other non-white racialized bodies" (p. 720).

Lawrence and Dua (2005), in discussing their discomfort with how Indigenous people and perspectives are excluded within antiracism, point out that "there is something deeply wrong with the manner in which, in our own lands, antiracism does not begin with, and reflect, the totality of Native people's lived experience—that is, with the genocide that established and maintains all of the settler states" (p. 121). Where Indigenous people are victims of cultural genocide as a result of the historical realities of land dispossession and the residential-school system, they suggest that people of colour are similarly impacted by harsh immigration policies and discrimination in terms of voting, housing, and employment. Lawrence and Dua emphasize the need for Canada to move away from multiculturalism in society and schools, and focus more on antiracism and decolonizing education, both of which are guiding principles of this study. I am personally and professionally motivated by their observation of the

> growing desire for solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of colour. There are logical reasons for this, as both communities can share in meaningful conversations about how racism influences our lives and shapes our communities. From such conversations comes the potential to develop new strategies of resistance and renewal rooted firmly in our lived experience with racial injustice. (p. 265)

Lawrence and Dua (2005) further note that "antiracism demands an analysis of the ways that racial oppression is systemically embedded, thereby denaturalizing it and moving us closer to its destabilization" (p. 268). They conclude that "antiracism is premised on an ongoing colonial project" and "rather than challenging the ongoing colonization of [Indigenous] peoples, Canadian antiracism is furthering contemporary colonial agendas" (p. 123).

Ashkok et al. (2011) link racism of visible minorities in Canada to the discrimination faced by Indigenous peoples, arguing that "the question of reconciliation in a Canadian landscape is mediated by multiple histories that cross and overlap borders of race, identity, and culture" (p. 8). In their research, they found that "'Whites,' 'Negroes,' 'Indians,' and 'Chinese' were constituted not only as discrete races but as populations that were socially, morally, and physically incompatible and thus in need of separation and racial management" (p. 168). They draw further similarities between the history of Indigenous Peoples and African Americans that are neither new nor unique to the United States of America: "Police surveillance is a reality that all racialized people face, and yet native communities are at risk of direct military intervention in ways that no other racialized community in Canada faces" (Ashkok et al., 2011, p. 235).

Racism is evident in contemporary situations that see Indigenous people in Canada facing a barrage of media racism, as can be seen in coverage of the current Wet'suwet'en and Mohawks of Tyendinaga protests about their right to block the Coastal GasLink pipeline on their land (Andrew-Gee, 2020). Such conflicts inform the purpose of the study, as it aims to deconstruct Canada's racist past in relation to its treatment of Indigenous people—a curricular reform that has been taking place in Canadian schools over the last decade (FNESC, 2016–2017).

Systemic racism continues and is embedded in our educational, healthcare, housing, overall social standards, and in particular policing, as reported by Martin and Walia (2019):

> Between 2008 and 2017, Indigenous people accounted for over 15% of street checks despite being 2% of the population, and Black people accounted for 4% of street checks despite making up 1% of the population. In 2016, Indigenous women, who comprise 2% of Vancouver's women population, accounted for 21% of women who were street checked. DI Joe, an Indigenous woman put it clearly: "The police don't protect us; they harass us." (p. 68)

In 2019, *Building a Foundation for Change: Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2019–2022* was released. The strategy acknowledges the need for the Government of Canada to address "racism and discrimination that is anti-Indigenous, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-Black, or homophobic . . . [and] to combat racism and discrimination in its various forms" (Government of Canada, 2019–2021, para 1). Initiatives introduced through this program include

- $30 million for community-based projects (in the form of a newly launched Anti-Racism Action Program for Indigenous Peoples), racialized communities, and religious-minority communities.
- $3.3 million for a national public education and awareness campaign that aims to increase public awareness and understanding across Canada of the historical roots of racism and its impacts on Indigenous Peoples, racialized communities, and religious-minority communities.

Building a Foundation for Change also indicates, "Racialized communities and Indigenous Peoples continue to face systemic barriers, notably in employment, justice, and social participation. Leadership requires taking proactive steps to remove these barriers that impose a limit on one's full potential" (Government of Canada, 2019–2021, para. 10).

Despite the anti-racism strategy, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted racialized differences for BIPOC students in Canda (James, 2020). In marginalized communities, food security, crowded housing, and poor technological services exacerbated the racial divide:

> Before the pandemic forced a crisis in the education system, many school boards had committed to addressing systemic racism and inequity by re-evaluating programs, such as French immersion (which attracts a higher proportion of affluent, white students) and streaming (which routinely put Black children on a path to applied courses, which limit their options after graduation), that have disadvantaged students from low-income and racialized communities. (p. 1)

As we come out of the COVID-19 epidemic, attention is being directed to the trauma, inequity, and systemic racism that had been placed on racialized and other marginalized communities throughout the pandemic. Achievement gaps are known to widen for racialized groups when they are away from school (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). In School District 78, it is noteworthy that many students missed nearly two years of in-person learning, or had two years of learning that was disrupted over that period of time.

James' (2020) study identified that many racialized students come from families who are unable to supplement the educational loss through extra-curricular or academic enrichment opportunities. In order to address the widening disadvantage for Indigenous students and students of colour, James encourages school districts to imagine education differently and addresses these students needs in terms of the following:

- Educational polices that perpetuate systemic racism, such as streaming and disciplinary policies;
- Culturally responsive partnerships with post-secondary and neighbourhood agencies;

- Flexible and culturally sensitive curriculum including relevant online options;
- Strong partnerships with parents: involve them in setting goal and creating culturally meaningful opportunities for their children;
- Culturally sensitive curriculum design;
- Deeper levels of engagement with communities that are marginalized;
- Increased mental-health training and supports for teachers and support staff to address the increasing needs for BIPOC and all students. (p. 7)

Greenwood (2021) argues that dealing with anti-Indigenous systemic racism in Canada will require systems and structures focused on ant-racist strategies. In our education system, this means creating structural change in terms of curriculum, teacher-training programs, assessment models, and discipline policies. Greenwood also discusses the need to address the *Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women's Report* (Government of Canada, 2019) and the ongoing violation of Indigenous women's rights in terms of the disproportionate amount of violence that they face as well as the trauma experienced by girls and the LGBTQQIA communities.

Claxton et al. (2021) recently conducted a review of British Columbia's racist history, identifying many commonalities between the plights suffered by Indigenous people and Black settlers as well as other immigrants as a result of dispossession of lands and systemic discrimination by the government. Claxton et al. suggests that British Columbia's deeply rooted racialized history is aligned with a White supremacist agenda that dates back to the British terms of agreement with Canada in 1871 that was the basis of colonialism. The widely held Christian beliefs of British, French, Dutch, and Portuguese communities resulted in years of subjugation of Asian, African, and Indigenous people. A White superiority narrative formed the basis of immigration policies that not only robbed Indigenous Peoples of their land and rights, but

specifically discriminated against Black, Chinese, South Asian, and Japanese immigrants by modelling legislation "on the racist Natal Act in southern Africa [that] had its origins in "Jim Crow" legislation in Mississippi that prevented people of African descent from voting by imposing literacy tests or other prohibitive requirements" (Claxton et al., 2021, p. 48). Aligned with James (2020), Claxton et al. note, "The shared reality of the current COVID-19 pandemic, Breonna Taylor and Chantel Moore with the Wet'suwet'en crisis in British Columbia illustrate the comparative systemic racism that continues to be a source of ongoing racism in our province" (p. 4).

Claxton et al. (2021) also explore how the Canadian government is moving forward to address the injustices experienced by Black and Indigenous Peoples, by instituting Truth and Reconciliation initiatives, appointing a parliamentary secretary for racism, creating antiracism networks, and implementing stronger policies at the school district level in British Columbia. Many larger school districts now have senior leadership positions devoted to antiracism education. While these are bold steps towards achieving the principles of truth and reconciliation and the Black Lives Matter movement, antiracism education continues to be an ongoing challenge for Canadian schools. It is within this context that I pursue this research.

Spearchief-Morris (2021) believes that Black and Indigenous communities have a shared call for justice, an allyship that is a result of the European settlers who, beginning in the 1700s, brought slaves to Indigenous lands in Canada. Both the history of African people and the genocide of Indigenous Peoples were not discussed in Canadian schools until relatively recently, and the retelling of these stories creates further momentum for the BIPOC movement in Canada. Spearchief-Morris summarizes the relationship between Black and Indigenous people in Canada, "Nevertheless, Indigenous and Black communities in Canada forged bonds over a shared

struggle to be seen among white majorities as deserving of the same rights and opportunities in the face of over-representation in the criminal justice and child welfare systems" (para 31). Additionally, Spearchief-Morris calls on Black activists to be aware that they must fight alongside Indigenous allies but recognize that they are settlers on the land. All immigrants and people of colour can be viewed as settler allies who faced discrimination and racism but they should do this through the lens of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

Black and Indigenous children have had traumatic experiences in Canadian schools. For example, there were segregated schools in Canada until the 1970s and the last residential schools were not closed until 1996. The Canadian education system perpetuated a system of White supremacy and a sense of internalized racism amongst and between visible minorities (Spearchief-Morris, 2021). It is, therefore, incumbent upon schools to examine the White-settler colonial narrative and how this has impacted the history of BIPOC people in Canada.

Cotter (2022) summarized the experiences of Black and Indigenous people in Canada by analyzing data from Statistics Canada and reported the following:

- 44% of Indigenous people in Canada and 41% of people who identified as Black had faced discrimination in the past year;
- A significant increase in discrimination has been experienced by Indigenous people in the past five years;
- A prevalence of discrimination nearly three times higher for BIPOC groups than for those who identified as White;
- Black and Indigenous people more likely to report discrimination and unfair treatment in Canada than other population groups, a proportion that has increased since 2014, when the General Social Survey on Victimization was last conducted;

- Higher levels of discrimination in public places like stores, banks, and restaurants as experienced by Black and Indigenous people.

Williams et al. (2022) reviewed the impacts of racial trauma in Canada. Not unlike prior research cited above, and as a result of the increasing BIPOC population, they, identified a need to address increased mental-health challenges in marginalized communities, particularly coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic. They concluded that racialized individuals are at risk for racial trauma due to prejudice and discrimination, indicating that "The politicization of multiculturalism has permitted Canada to deny claims of racism, yet the historical basis of established institutions results in irrefutable systemic and systematic barriers for Canadian people of colour" (p. 29). The shift away from multiculturalism and towards unifying BIPOC peoples formulates the changing landscape for race relations in our country and education at all levels.

Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman (2014) stress the importance of educators recognizing the impact of intergenerational trauma on Indigenous individuals due to the historical consequences of Residential Schools. The trauma responses continue to undermine the well-being of group members, hinder their ability to cope with present stressors, and can be passed down from one generation to the next. This intergenerational trauma has led to lower attendance rates, an increased risk of suicide, and a higher prevalence of depressive symptoms. Furthermore, Indigenous youth with a parent or grandparent who attended Residential Schools face a greater likelihood of experiencing learning disabilities, struggling to achieve educational goals, grappling with mental health issues, and being more susceptible to drug abuse or addiction. Cultural identity, typically viewed as a protective factor for well-being and pride, was

historically suppressed and not celebrated among many Indigenous children. This was evident in the current study.

However, acknowledging the trauma and understanding its impact can be a source of healing for Indigenous students and provide guidance for educators who have been raised in a Eurocentric educational system. The findings suggest that revitalizing the language, working with elders, and engaging in cultural celebrations are contributing to a resurgence of Indigenous student health and well-being. Educators and school leaders must create opportunities for the integration of culture and Indigenous knowledge while dismantling colonial structures to meet the needs of Indigenous students.

A Foundation of Critical Race Theory for This Inquiry

Critical race theory exposes how mainstream schools promote racism through White-supremacist teaching practices, White-based curricula, and school designs that privilege White culture by ignoring or denying how racism shapes the lives of students of colour. Thus, "merit" is framed by critical race theory as a measure of Whiteness or successful navigation of White values rather than a colour blind and culture-blind measuring stick of academic or intellectual. (Lipsitz,1998, p. 142)

Critical race theory, which was originally developed as a theory to support civil rights, poses the following questions: "How exactly does the law fabricate race? How has the law protected race? How does the law reproduce racial inequality? How can the law be used to dismantle race, racism(s) and racial inequality?" (Bridges, 2019, p. 10). While these questions focus on the law, the implications are far broader. For the purposes of this research, we could easily substitute our education system (meaning that of BC) for the word *law* and arrive at a set of theoretical and philosophical questions to underpin this discussion:

- How exactly does our education system fabricate race?
- How has our education system protected race?
- How does our education system reproduce racial inequality?
- How can our education system be used to dismantle race, racism(s), and racial inequality?

Synthesizing seminal theorists such as Crenshaw and Delgado, and bringing discussions of critical theory into the twenty-first century, Bridges (2019) recognizes that (a) race is socially constructed, not a biological entity; (b) racism is normative, and public policy, education, and our legal system have perpetuated racial inequality; (c) CRT rejects "traditional liberal understandings of the problem of racism and how racism will be defeated" (p. 13)—meaning that consciousness of race is simply not enough. In fact, claims of "colour blindness" and meritocracy are systemically racist belief systems that people often associate with being antiracist; and finally, and perhaps most importantly for teachers and the participants in this inquiry (d) CRT "believes that scholarship is not, cannot, and should not be disconnected from people's lives on the ground. Thinkers using a CRT framework produce their scholarship with the hope of dismantling systems that subordinate people of colour" (p. 13).

CRT does not define racism as individual acts, but instead sees it as embedded in choices that reflect our White-settler states through such things as mainstream curriculum and traditional values and practices. As a student growing up in the Fraser Valley, reciting the Lord's Prayer, reading from the bible, and singing "God Save the Queen" were everyday occurrences. Reading racialized literature (i.e., *Tom Sawyer*) and contending with ranking and scoring systems were similarly common. My experience of education reflects Ladson-Billings's (1998) view of how racial inequality is perpetuated by our colonized education systems:

> Curricula that largely exclude the history and lived experiences of Americans of colour are the norm. Deficit-oriented instruction often characterizes students of colour as failures if a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work for them. Standardized-test scores from assessments detached from what students learn in the classroom are widely used to confirm narratives about the ineducability of children of color. (p. 18)

Recognizing that these changes are much bigger than just curriculum, Ladson-Billings further advises that "it is not just the distortions, omissions, and stereotypes of school curriculum content that must be considered, it also is the rigor of the curriculum" (p.18) as well as, I would argue, the overall structures and teacher training—both pre- and in-service.

CRT calls us to review laws, policies, and educational practices to see what occurs in our society. Mclaughlin and Whatman (2011) suggest that an emerging trend exists between the association of Indigenous Principles of Learning and CRT, and that "decolonising curricula alongside a broader international agenda of CRT in education represents a strategic way to achieve aspirations and commitment to reform educational and social structures for social transformation and racial emancipation" (p. 20). For Ladson-Billings (2012), this would be akin to abandonment of curriculum that fails to support students of colour, the examination of discipline policies that privilege some over others, and the reformulation of policies that suppress students of colour in terms of achievement.

To this discussion, Zembylas (2015) contributes that an understanding of the complexities of race and racism encompasses more than just the recognition and resistance often offered by critical race theory. He feels that our attempts to teach about race have failed, largely because they do not attend to lived experiences and their associated affect. Instead, our understanding of race needs to be more fluid and take into account pedagogical spaces and

practices and political influences that shape how we create safe spaces for children in schools. Zembylas suggests that we focus less on binary understandings of race and racism and investigate how systems and structures within society and classrooms perpetuate racism. Understanding racism through lived experience and not simply critical theory is essential if we are truly to interrogate racism in our educational institutions.

Grosz (2005) agrees that confronting race and racism must move beyond politics and identity to reach for a far more action-oriented practice. CRT can help us to understand not only how racism has endured but also how it can be transformed through systems, laws, policies, and education. Teaching and scholarship that ignores race does not demonstrate neutrality but instead adheres to the existing racial hierarchy.

As a person of colour, I am both appreciative and questioning of Zembyla's (2015) stance that talk is cheap. As educators, we need to reflect on why we make the choices that we do, and how society has evolved to where it is now. Understanding that racialized theories of White superiority have led to slavery and the cultural genocide of Indigenous people in Canada is essential for all students. "Critical Race Theory isn't a curriculum. It's a practice . . . an approach or lens through which an educator can help students examine the role of race and racism" (George, 2021, n.p).

Brayboy (2005) extends critical race theory to an Indigenous perspective. TribalCrit emerges from CRT but takes into account multiple complexities including, time, place, history, and the uniqueness of each nation. TribalCrit and critical race theory are inextricably linked through the following:

- Colonization is endemic to society;

- US policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain;
- Indigenous Peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities;
- Indigenous Peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification;
- The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens;
- Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous Peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation;
- Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous Peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups;
- Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being;
- Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change. (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429)

Stelkia (2022) highlights how the Freedom Convoy increased racial tensions in Canada and caused greater pressures for BIPOC families and students. Discussing how Indigenous Peoples witnessed how the protesters were treated in comparison to other demonstrations over land rights, fishing, and overall sovereignty, she identified a double standard: "the response to the Freedom Convoy illuminates a fundamental design of structural racism, in which there exists

two invisible systems of justice within our society, one for white settler Canadians and one that Indigenous and Black peoples experience" (p. 2).

Stelkia (2022) further challenges us to examine the way systemic racism is perpetuated in a society that is grounded in White privilege. It is embedded in everything from our government, and our police force to our education system. The resultant impact has been an increased momentum of BIPOC and antiracism movements in our school system. BC has recently announced the BC Ministry of Education antiracism strategy (2023a).

The direction of the BC Ministry of Education and Childcare (2023a) suggests a deep understanding of the tenets of critical race theory and what is needed to move forward in antiracist pedagogy in our school system. This necessarily begins by embedding critical race theory in pre-service/in-service teacher-education programs and the minimal competencies required by teachers to combat racism in today's educational systems.

Teacher Education for Antiracist Education

Teachers arrive in our schools with many different ideas of what it means to teach, much of which is influenced by their own beliefs, assumptions, values, and/or lived experience. Unless this is examined consciously and informed by a wider awareness of the complexities of systemic and endemic racism, assumptions of white supremacy and privilege, within oneself, individually and collectively, there is a danger that these will surface in the classroom. In my opinion, without integrating the deeper and more personal awareness afforded by critical race theory alongside of what we believe and how we embody these beliefs in our practice, these efforts may not be much better than settler-humanitarianism and may inadvertently perpetuate racism.

There is no shortage of research demonstrating the need for to embed CRT and critical White studies (CSW) in our teacher-education programs. Benwell (2020) identifies the relevance

of CRT to today's classrooms but concludes that it is not well-represented in professional development and classrooms; in fact, she found that Whiteness in teacher-education programs continues to perpetuate an ongoing system of oppression that fails to address the academic, social-emotional, and cultural needs of students. In place of a curriculum grounded in uninterrogated colonization and White-washing, Aronson and Meyers (2020) recommend that CRT training, Black feminism, settler colonialism, Indigenous education courses, and race and ethnic studies should be foundations for teacher-training programs. Wilson (2021) recommends that we re-examine teacher-training programs in order to address the need for antiracism pedagogies and to better serve Indigenous students in Canadian schools. Howell and Ng-A-Fook (2022) insist that teacher training and curriculum must include the promotion of Indigenous languages and cultures; both contribute to a more equitable and respectable educational environment, and are meaningful steps toward reconciliation and the deconstruction of systemic Indigenous racism inherent in many school structures.

Pre-Service Teacher Education

Working with Ontario teacher candidates, Benwell (2020) examined the extent to which they felt they were being challenged to engage in critical discussions of race and privilege within their Bachelor of Education courses, ultimately concluding that teachers are often ill-prepared to deal with the complexities of race in their classrooms:

> while the field of teacher education has made strides in efforts to be more social justice focused and responsive to persistent challenges facing teacher, schools and families, there is still much work to do to eliminate the presence and use of White supremacist logics in teacher education programs, policy development and implementation, research and practice. (p. 134)

In British Columbia, teacher education programs are starting to demonstrate some of this needed reform, as there are mandatory courses in Indigenous education. There is still, however, a significant amount of progress that needs to occur.

Discussions of Race and Privilege

Examining the failure of teacher education programs in the United States to prepare White teachers for engagement with racialized students, Ohito (2016) concluded that there is "inadequate attention paid to the unholy trinity of race, racism and White Supremacy" (p. 454). Using a pedagogy of discomfort, Ohito found that navigating topics of racial oppression and White superiority are essential in order to address the White-supremacist ideologies that are inherent in teacher-training programs. Ohito suggests that the experience and feelings of White teachers represent how deeply ingrained racism is within the teaching community.

To address this inequality, Ohito (2016) suggests that teachers step outside of their comfort zones and deconstruct how they might have been taught to sustain a White-supremacist educational system. She asserts that experiencing tension and discomfort is necessary for growth: "Embracing discomfort as pedagogy cultivated White preservice teachers' emotional openness to supporting each other in a learning community premised on political relationships as vessels for deepening critical consciousness about race, racism, and White supremacy" (p. 459).

Benwell's (2020) Canadian study reflected themes similar to those identified by Ohito (2016): education in North America continues to be dominated by a White settler mentality and White teachers need to understand the historical, social, political, and cultural systems of oppression experienced by their racialized students. Whiteness needs to be interrogated and critical race theory more purposely infused into the academy, as the themes of colour blindness and claims of meritocracy still permeate the belief systems of teacher candidates. White teachers

who evade interrogating their own belief systems perpetuate a system of systemic racism. To build a decolonizing mindset, an emphasis on interrogating Whiteness by first understanding an individual's own White identity is necessary.

Flawed Thinking, Preconceptions, and Attitudes

Benwell (2020) observed pre-service teacher education in North America continues to be dominated by a White-settler mentality; not surprisingly, Aronson and Meyer (2020) note that "many do not believe that what they are doing is wrong because of how strongly racism is entrenched into American society" (p. 17). Wilson (2021) concurs, finding that White college students perpetuate the notion of colour blindness and lack an ability to interrogate their privilege.

White Fragility and Resistance

DiAngelo (2018) identifies the White fragility movement as the predictable resistance White people use in discussions about race and privilege. White fragility arises from the racial segregation that many White people experience growing up, reinforcing White peoples' expectation that White experiences and perspective be centred. When the racial comfort to which White people are accustomed is challenged by hearing the experiences of people of colour in a White supremacist society, White fragility is triggered and the conversation around race shuts down. (p. 57)

Experiences of Racism and Discrimination

White educators will need to get out there and advocate for BIPOC students if they really want to make a difference in classrooms (Oluo, 2019). Studying a twelve-week Whiteness workshop series intended to examine the past experiences, cultural contexts, and relationships of White people and people of colour, Wilson (2021) found that both Whites and people of colour

were strongly motivated to do racial-justice work because of their own marginalized experiences dating back to childhood; their tendency to be self-reflective of their own identity was limited. Post-workshop, some participants were motivated to become more focused on activism while others were limited to a deeper sense of self-reflection. This study highlights the heightened, racialized climate in the United States since the election of President Donald Trump in 2016 and the escalating White-supremacist violence that culminated in the tragedy of George Floyd in 2020, which incited rage in the Black American community and throughout the world. Similarly, the international response amplified an antiracism movement for BIPOC in Canada. Experiences such as these could be invaluable for future teachers who "struggle with unlearning deficit assumptions about communities of colour, a focus on their own experiences as the unquestioned norm and white saviour and community complexes" (Wilson, 2021, p. 12.) Brookfield and Hess (2021) further illuminate the power of interrogating White privilege by examining critical race theory, adult learning and lived experiences to create anti-racist strategies. They develop a guide for White allies to explore their identity while dismantling their systemic White supremacist ideologies.

Critical Emotional Literacy

Winans (2010, 2012) encouraged pre-service teachers to reflect on the varied, complex, and unpredictable ways that emotions function and inform their views, which "is especially important when working with white students in segregated settings because the emotioned rules and dominant discourses within such settings encourage white students to understand themselves as racially innocent and as neutral observers of race and racism" (2010, p. 487). She concluded that "critical emotional literacy" may help teachers develop a nuanced vocabulary for a critical

analysis of affects and emotions as a foundation for their deeper understanding of how affective investments function in their narratives about their experiences of race.

Self-Reflexive Communication

Benwell (2020) stresses the importance of supporting teacher education students beyond surface-level understandings of multiculturalism. There needs to be greater emphasis on critical race theory and how White privilege influences their teaching; in particular, teacher candidates need to develop a deeper understanding of inequality and their own bias: "emphasis should be placed on developing the skills necessary to challenge policies and procedures reflects a critical race framework, which highlights the need to not only interrogate theories, but actively work toward improving the experiences of racialized students (p. 11)." Benwell's emphasis on reflexivity is not unlike that of Wilson (2021), a fundamental requirement for anti-racist pedagogies.

Actions That Combat Racism

The practice of including antiracism strategies in teacher education is, of course, not limited to Canada. Arneback and Jämte (2022) explored actions that were used by Swiss teachers, how antiracist actions intersected with racism, and what and who were the targets of change. Their analysis revealed six types of actions used to address racism: emancipatory, norm-critical, intercultural, democratic, relational, and knowledge-focused.

Emancipatory actions explore racism through the lived experiences of students and staff members that allow them to explore societal power structures based on race, ethnicity or religion. The ultimate goal is to make these imbalanced power structures more visible.

Norm-critical actions challenge the dominant social norms in schools. Battiste (2013) reminds us that "our responsibility is to both unlearn and learn—to unlearn racism and

superiority in all its manifestations, while examining our social constructions in our judgements and learn new ways of knowing" (p. 156).

Intercultural actions make space for cultural diversity and intercultural structures in education. The BC Teachers' Council (2019) sets as a standard that "Educators respect and value the history of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis in Canada and the impact of the past on the present and future. Educators contribute towards truth, reconciliation, and healing. Educators foster a deeper understanding of ways of knowing and being, histories, and cultures of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis" (para. 9).

Democratic action happens when educators challenge practices that have been traditionally discriminatory. Allowing classrooms to evolve as democratic spaces allows students to interrogate topics such as racism, nationalism, and immigration. In the BC curricula, we now see specific initiatives that are building these safe spaces, such as the mandatory Indigenous education graduation requirement that applies to all students.

Relational action refers to developing caring, trusting, and respectful relationships to ensure that others feel valued, cared for, and able to embrace their identity more readily. Benton (2017) explored relational action by linking the importance of outdoor learning and environmental education with placed-pedagogy and its significance to Indigenous ways of knowing.

Knowledge-focused action can be used to build antiracism structures in classrooms; in the Canadian context, and in relation to this study, this would also involve the teaching of the ongoing and systemic consequences of residential schools, the Indian Act, and the Sixties Scoop (BC Ministry of Education and Childcare, 2015).

Competencies for Pre-Service Teacher Education and Professional Learning

In my opinion, what is needed most is a pluralistic approach that weaves together key learnings from all the research outlined above. At minimum, existing research supports the infusion of a range of opportunities to support teacher candidates and teachers in developing efficacy, confidence, and competence in having complex conversations about race, racism, colonization, and its wide-ranging consequences for Indigenous students and other groups who find themselves racialized. At the risk of being reductionistic, I summarize the above research into a minimal set of competencies that should be developed by all pre- in-service teachers in the spirit of truth and reconciliation and decolonizing our education spaces and curricula. Pre-service teacher candidates and in-service teachers should, through their initial teacher education and ongoing professional development, have opportunities to to do the following: (a) develop critical emotional literacy; (b) expose flawed thinking, preconceptions, and attitudes; (c) understand personal experiences of racism and discrimination; (d) engage in self-reflexive communication; (e) interrogate White fragility and resistance; (f) understand actions that combat racism; and (g) engage in critical discussions of race and privilege.

Teachers who have been exposed to critical race theory and engaged in critical Whiteness studies are better positioned to bring these interrogations and structures into the classroom, thus enabling them to open a space of deep truth and reconciliation, support their students in dismantling race and racism as decolonizing structures, and thereby, to work closer to fulfilling our treaties. Brookfield and Hess (2021) offer salient ways for addressing antiracist work in institutions and suggest working with BIPOC representatives to gain trust and move into brave spaces. This work includes being actively involved in antiracism initiatives and addressing White-supremacist culture in organizational settings that includes policies, practices, and

outcomes. In District 78, we have infused several strategies into all of our schools. Installations of formal welcoming posts with ceremonies, formal and informal acknowledgements and territorial recognitions over the PA in the morning, language lessons in schools, and a formal welcoming of the territory and cultural honouring at graduation ceremony are part of our new ways of being. The district is also part of the Provincial Equity in Action Plan initiative to improve the success of all Indigenous learners in our schools.

Battiste's (2013) lived experience and ability to navigate the Eurocentric world of academia have afforded her a unique perspective on how decolonizing education benefits our entire educational system. Her argument for the transformation of education is deeply rooted in our genocidal history, including forced assimilation, our need to understand it as educators, and our responsibility to teach our true nation's history to our students. The need to rebuild trust and include Elders is also discussed as a way to move forward. Additionally, a discussion of land rights and broken treaties is a critical aspect that should be included in our curriculum.

Battiste (2013) advocates strongly for the infusion of Indigenous Ways of Knowing and asserts its benefits to the learning process. The fundamental belief is that "Indigenous knowledge is inherently tied to the people's mutual relationship with their place and with each other over time" (p. 95). The core of this belief is relationality and connection to all facets of our environment, including humans, animals, water, land, and plants. Battiste further challenges educators to learn more deeply about Indigenous pedagogy and to infuse it into their practice. She gives practical suggestions regarding science and humanities instruction and discusses how there can be different understandings of the traditional Eurocentric ways of knowing. Using Indigenous Knowledge systems can create a deeper and more appreciative account of the

curriculum for students. Teachers are further challenged to rethink education through a decolonized lens.

Battiste (2013) advocates for examining Canada's racist past and placing schools at the centre of antiracist discussions, training, and practice. Discussing race as a social construct is necessary—as is the need to understand how the artificial notion of race has been used to separate and instil prejudice against Indigenous Peoples—for the decolonizing teacher. Implementing and enriching Indigenous language programs and knowledge systems helps reaffirm the wellbeing and history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Howell and Ng-A-Fook (2022) emphasize the significance of education in addressing and dismantling systemic racism. They argue that the educational system plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes and perceptions, making it essential to incorporate accurate and comprehensive Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum. A transformative approach to education that challenges our colonial system and fosters a more inclusive approach, by understanding Indigenous histories, cultures, and knowledge systems, should be the foundation of this reform.

Battiste (2013) further states that it is essential that Indigenous Ways of Knowing be woven across the curriculum, that educators understand the mindset of students, and that systems leaders recognize that Indigenous Knowledge systems are more about holistic understanding than about the curriculum. Battiste believes education can be transformed in Canada if we understand that decolonizing education "is an act of love that generates passion, activism and truths" (pp. 190–191). Learning about Indigenous ways of knowing can help move our curriculum away from rigid structures and towards a more flexible, adaptive, and dynamic learning experience that is at the heart of a decolonized curriculum.

Concluding Remarks

The research pertaining to this study has moved us into the fire of our deeply rooted history of colonialism. Educators must explore our history more deeply and create decolonized classrooms by digging into the embers of White privilege and authentically "unlearning" much of how we were raised in the education system. As we look for more Indigenous educators in our system, the research reminds us (as is usually the case for meaningful change in education) that it will take an authentic commitment from everyone to learn and unlearn if we are going to improve the success of Indigenous learners in our schools. We must experience the heat of discomfort if we desire to make change. We must also ask whether we are willing to form meaningful relationships with Indigenous families and Elders and whether we wish to learn from them. I am proud that our province has an antiracism strategy attached to curricular change and a plan to increase teacher in-service training with respect to Indigenous ways of being. We are seeing change in post-secondary teaching programs as well. Still, I challenge programme developers and instructors to authentically integrate studies on cultural sensitivity and White fragility if we are to make a meaningful difference for our Indigenous children.

Chapter 3
Circling the Fire

Chilisa (2012) reminds us that "Indigenous research is identified as having four dimensions: it targets local phenomena; it is context-sensitive and derives knowledge from the local community; it can be integrative and adopt Western and Indigenous ways of knowing; and, in reality, what counts comes through an Indigenous paradigm" (p. 13). In other words, the research is seen through an Indigenous worldview. It is for this reason that I have adopted a co-created design (Peltier, 2018) for this research study that blends together community-based participatory research (Drawson et al., 2017), the conversational method (Kovach, 2010), and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The Case for Indigenous Community-Based Research and Storytelling

"There is growing evidence that social science research needs emancipation from hearing only the voices of Western Europe, emancipation from generations of silence, and emancipation from seeing the world in one colour" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 212). Chilisa (2012) warns that what we often assume is sensitive towards Indigenous Knowledge systems is carried out through the lens of a colonized mindset; when conducting research, we should assume that we are working with colonized others. As well, Castellano (2002) suggests that "Aboriginal citizens, communities, and nations are ill-informed about their rights and the options available to protect and preserve their intellectual heritage from misappropriation and misrepresentation, whether research is mounted by insiders or outsiders to their communities" (p. 107).

Dei (2013) clearly illustrates that we should not attempt to fit Indigenous research into a "colonial box," indicating that "Indigenous research has a specific political and academic goal to subvert the dominant ideology that seeks to dismiss, downplay and decentre the importance and

relevance of local peoples knowing in everyday practice" (p. 29). Dei further notes that "Indigenous researchers challenge the dominant approach of researching Indigenous people for 'data,' an oppressive practice that transforms Indigenous peoples into research 'objects' to be 'mined' by the researcher" (p. 30).

Indigenous research is not concerned with the positivistic paradigm of collecting data to verify a question; rather, it is a holistic process. Deloria (1999), as cited in Stewart-Harawira (2013), "describes Indigenous conceptions of knowledge as intrinsically connected to the lives and experiences of human beings, both individuals and communities and emphasizes that all data and all experience is seen as relevant to all things" (p. 43).

It is for these reasons that researchers working with Indigenous participants or initiatives require a solid understanding of Indigenous Knowledge systems, the historical research mistakes impacting Indigenous Peoples, and current, more ethical and holistic methodologies. Indigenous research emerges from Indigenous worldviews, languages, and interconnected relationships with the land and all beings. It integrates the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of knowledge gathering and sharing. Indigenous research methodologies underscore the importance of relational accountability, and the need to ground research in community context while adhering to the principles of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Kovach, 2009; McGregor et al., 2018; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

Castellano (2002) and the Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement of Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS-2; Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research, 2014) support a holistic approach and note that to work "with aboriginal communities involves a sensitivity to Indigenous knowledge, traditions, and territory" (Castellano, 2002, p. 110). Respect for persons, justice, and welfare should be considered and a focus on preserving the culture

should be maintained. TCPS-2 illustrates a multi-layered and alternative understanding of our pervasive Eurocentric model of knowledge and research that responds to Castellano's (2002) call to use compatible research methodologies with Indigenous communities:

> The integrity of knowledge transfer has received too little attention in the past. Therefore, Aboriginal communities, political organizations and scholars are insisting that the integrity and validity of research cannot be assured by western methodologies alone. They must be tempered by methodologies that are compatible with Aboriginal methods of investigation and validation as well. (p. 106)

Community-Based Participatory Research

TCPS-2 makes specific recommendations for participatory community engagement (Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research, 2014, p. 110). This is supported by Drawson et al. (2017), in their comprehensive meta-analysis of research on, with, and about Indigenous peoples in Canada, which highlights community-based participatory research (CBPR) as a strongly compatible Indigenous research method as well as a philosophy that underlies relationship building and co-research design.

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is far more sophisticated, meaningful, and respectful in Indigenous communities than the traditional quantitative paradigm of research that has dominated the scientific and academic research communities for decades. Castleden and Garvin (2008) believe that "the historical imbalance of power, deep-seated mistrust, racism, and lack of control between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada has also permeated the research process, fostering the need to identify effective and culturally appropriate research tools" (p. 1394). They further suggest that "CBPR is an attempt to develop culturally relevant research models that address issues of injustice, inequality, and exploitation" (p. 1393). CBPR

lends itself well to Kovach's (2010) conversational method, which is "of significance to Indigenous methodologies because it is a method of gathering knowledge based on oral story telling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm" (p. 40).

In other words, we need to ensure equitable research practices such as that offered by CBPR. The methodology for this study was chosen in response to Indigenous people's criticism of academia regarding power, trust, and ownership in Indigenous research. Developing an Indigenous research framework should include the Anishinaabe Seven Grandfather Teachings: wisdom, love, honesty, respect, bravery, humility, and truth (Jacklin & Kinoshameg, 2008).

Indigenous Storytelling

The power of Indigenous storytelling is a key component of the new British Columbia Ministry of Education curriculum redesign. Pihama et al. (2019) state,

> For countless centuries, First Nations knowledge, traditions, and cultures have been passed down from one generation to another in stories, and narratives, as well as through songs, dances and ceremonial artefacts. Before Europeans arrived in BC, First Nations had oral cultures: their languages had no written form. The oral tradition was integrated into every facet of life and was the basis of the education system. (p. 210)

Archibald (2008) explains that storytelling and research "should enable people to sit together and talk meaningfully about how their Indigenous knowledge could be effectively used for education and for living a good life and to think about possibilities for overcoming problems experienced in their communities" (p. 81). Kovach (2009) further reinforces that

> Stories are who we are. They are both method and meaning. Stories spring forth from a holistic epistemology and are the relational glue in a socially interdependent knowledge

system. In listening to the research stories of others, it is evident that research stories reveal the deep purpose of our inquiries. (p. 108)

Storytelling is also highlighted as an important tool for Indigenous research in Drawson et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis. Discussing the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing in relation to narrative inquiry, Clandinin et al. (2018) observe that relational ethics is cyclical and involves a form of departure that is truly non-definitive; it requires looking backward and forward, exploring how relational ontology shapes ethics and love, being wide awake, keeping multiple perspectives, moving slowly in ways that allow for listening and living, and embracing tension through narrative inquiry. They emphasize that we should engage with imagination, improvisation, playfulness, and world travelling while dwelling in the depths of the unknown and embracing uncertainty and not knowing. In their view, relational ethics involve stillness, land-based understanding, listening, and being in place; to live relational ethics means that if we truly engage with our participants, our relationships and subsequent research is ongoing. "Relational ethics call us to live… [and] to take action with ourselves and our participants" (Clandinin et al., 2018, p. 4).

A Co-Created Relational Space: "Creating the Circle and Stoking the Fire"

Peltier (2018) believes that the essence of conducting research must be with, rather than on, Indigenous people, so that "the lived experience and knowledge of Indigenous peoples is honoured, [and] there is an aim of creating social transformation, and power over the research process is shared" (p. 3), ideally through a co-created process. Clandinin and Connolly (2000) emphasize co-creation as a means of dissolving power relationships. Dei (2013) illustrates the reduction of power systems in Indigenous research methods that have "a specific political and

academic goal to subvert the dominant ideology that seeks to dismiss, downplay, and decenter the importance and relevance of local people's knowing in everyday practice" (p. 29).

Dei (2013) emphasizes that relationality, co-creation of research, nurturing conversations, trust, and situation of the self in the centre of the research journey are the *what* and *why* of social research. In agreement, Clandinin et al. (2018) suggest that researchers create comfortable research spaces in an effort to make research less institutional and allow for co-creation in a safe and negotiated environment where participants are free to take risks (e.g., Indigenous talking circles, around a fire, or on the land. Protecting the vulnerability of participants requires researchers to be deeply present in conversations, move slowly, and remain wide awake to what is unfolding, as articulated by Clandinin et al. (2018):

> As we waken to who we are in relation and slowly awaken to the complexity of our and participants' experiences we see that we cannot engage in relationally ethical narrative inquiry without ongoing awakenings and ongoing awakeness. Without this, we could allow ourselves to interfere in ways that reinforce or continue the dominant narratives. (p. 68)

Participants and Co-Creators

Five women with Indigenous ancestry and two allies took part in a co-created research design that was respectful of an Indigenous research methodology. Each in their own way, participants are supporting truth and reconciliation efforts throughout public school systems in British Columbia. Indigenous participants include a teacher in a public high school pursuing a Master's degree in environmental learning through Indigenous place-based learning; a school trustee in District 78; a provincial advocate for Truth and Reconciliation who is a former Langley School District Trustee; an Indigenous support worker; and a member of the Cheam

First Nations Council. Non-Indigenous allies include a teacher of Q'aLaTKu7eM Community School; myself, a former principal in the Langley School District for 17 years and now the superintendent of schools in the Fraser Cascade School District 78. Biographical sketches of participants are intentionally placed at the beginning of Chapter 4 to enhance relationality, offer solid context for the conversations that follow, and amplify the voices and experiences of co-creators and storytellers.

Situating Myself as Researcher

Absolon and Willett (2004) discuss the importance of situating oneself when conducting Indigenous research: "Location of self in writing and research is integral to issues of accountability and the location from which we study, write and participate in knowledge creation" (p. 5). As a colonialized visible minority, I place myself as a historical victim of racism and discrimination, but also as an advocate for equality and an ally for Indigenous people. For the past twenty years, I have been a member of the Human Dignity Coalition in Abbotsford. We initiated a new Langley chapter three years ago. I am the vice president of the organization. The Fraser Valley Human Dignity Coalition's (FVHDC) mandate is to promote the rights and dignities of all community members. As a coalition of community partners, we believe every person has the right to be treated with dignity, respect, fairness, and compassion. The coalition's underlying premise is that all members of the human family live without fear of discrimination, intimidation, and violence, which may occur due to race, ethnicity, class, gender, family status, sexual orientation, religion, mental and physical ability, age, or political beliefs. We envision a more compassionate and welcoming community that embraces each of its members as respected and valued human beings. "Any illumination of past, present and future First Nations conditions

demands a complete deconstruction of the history and application of ideology and, most importantly, of the impact (personal and political) of racism" (Absolon & Willett, 2004, p. 9).

Procedures

I begin by reminding myself that any research with Indigenous communities must be done with respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001, pp. 12–18). Honouring a holistic and ethical space, I recognize the Indigenous belief of a person as an entity with four parts working together: intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual. I favour the Ojibwe Medicine Wheel as an analogy for how I conducted this research. "I began with guidelines for ethical research, and moved through the wheel of ethics: ethics review committee, the research review, and evaluation. The ultimate decisions rested with the communities or organizations" that made the final decision that the research could proceed (Noojmowin Teg Health Centre, 2003 p. 14) by authorizing my community engagement plan.

Consistent with Indigenous Methodologies, the methods were fluidly structured so that the process, discussions, and directions could be negotiated with input from the participants (Kovach, 2010, p. 42). Peltier (2018) shares that Indigenous research must be a co-created space:

> Relational inquiry is defined as a way of embracing research in a way that privileges Indigenous voices and Indigenous ways of knowing and being will change the way research is conducted: When Indigenous people become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed. (p. 3)

As a group, we co-created the direction and format of the research each time a topic was introduced using the yarning method (Dei, 2013). Yarning in semi-structured interviews meant that we explored areas of interest that are relevant to the study and accountable to the Indigenous people involved in the study—in this case, advancing truth and reconciliation efforts. Our

research yarning ensured that topics were discussed in a relaxed manner but with a clear purpose to the conversation and included a beginning, an end, and a focused discussion (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010).

As the conversations progressed, we moved forward with a relational inquiry using field texts, such as transcripts of conversations, journals, and writings of experiences in a three-dimensional format of space and time, context, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Sessions were divided between individual discussions that used the conversation method and whole group discussions structured as an Indigenous talking circle. During our initial conversation, I invited each participant to share an autobiographical sketch.

Talking Circles

Once the autobiographical sketches were gathered, I arranged an introductory meeting for the first talking circle, which took place on Zoom. It is important to note that the talking circle process was meant to be in person, but the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to conduct in-person meetings at that time. Three of the Indigenous participants were on reserve; the other participants, who were not on reserve, spent a great deal of time liaising with members of Indigenous communities. The fear and barriers resulting from COVID caused the study to be adapted to Zoom meetings. While it created a barrier in one way, it opened a door in another. The comforts of home and the trust built through hours of discussions supported the concepts of respect and reciprocity that I had hoped to achieve. As one member stated in our fourth meeting, "I really feel like we have become fast friends, and I can't wait to meet everyone in person" (Cecelia Reekie, personal communication, 2021).

After detailed introductions, shared biographies, and detailed discussions regarding the purpose of our circle, the participants agreed to four talking circles, which took place on the

evenings of April 5, April 21, May 30, and June 30, of 2021. Questions were co-created in a manner that allowed for a research design that was a partnership rather than a structured interview process.

A Moment to Pause: Kamloops Residential School Tragedy

When the Kamloops Residential School incident occurred (see https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-91-the-early-edition/clip/15845816-the-bodies-200-children-found-former-kamloops-residential), our discussion evolved to include how the discovery was impacting each of the participants and how our schools were responding. We needed to pause, honour, and discuss in "real time" the history of residential schools and the cultural genocide in our country. We needed time to process and explore the emotionality of the findings. We needed to make connections for the next steps in our research direction. Finally, we needed to embrace this relational inquiry using current field texts and writings of experiences in a three-dimensional format of space and time, context, and place while valuing Indigenous voices throughout the process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This, according to Kovach (2010) is the power of a relational inquiry and Indigenous research:

> The conversational method is found within Western qualitative research. However, when used in an Indigenous framework, a conversational method invokes several distinctive characteristics: a) it is linked to a particular tribal epistemology (or knowledge) and situated within an Indigenous paradigm; b) it is relational; c) it is purposeful (most often involving a decolonizing aim); d) it involves particular protocol as determined by the epistemology and/or place; e) it involves an informality and flexibility; f) it is collaborative and dialogic; and g) it is reflexive. (p. 43)

Allowing deep reflection to guide us through this incident, rather than adhering to the agenda of pre-determined questions was truly respectful, relational, relevant, reciprocal, and responsible (Peterson, 2022).

Gathering and Sharing Data

Otter software was used to record each talking circle. Both video recordings and transcripts were gathered. While the Otter software was effective at capturing the dialogue during each session, conversational dialogue resulted in many errors and thoughts were lost in translation due to the use of Indigenous languages. At the end of each Zoom session, the transcripts were reviewed, and the Indigenous languages were corrected to reflect the true spelling of many of the Indigenous territories. Once the corrections were made, the transcript was emailed to each participant to review before the next session. The beginning of each session always built on the questions and themes of the previous sessions. We clarified discussions and directions as the talking circles evolved. There were many times when the members led the discussion based on current trends in our country and our schools.

Indigenous research is never done. Nadeau et al. (2022) describe the process:

> This trust is built over time and requires long-term relationships that go beyond a single project, as well as a constant review and reflection as a project unfolds. Indeed, grant agencies have started to emphasise the value of this process in their action plan and through initiatives such as the CIHR Network Environments for Indigenous Health Research (Canadian Institute of Health and Research [CIHR], n.d.) . . . as an important part of the ethical stance needed to do research with Indigenous communities. (p. 3)

I am appreciative of the relationships I have developed with all of the participants, and I continue to have conversations with them, as their thoughts intersect with a lot of the work I am

doing to support the success for all learners and Indigenous students in my role as superintendent. We are hoping to end our session with a dinner and visit to Jillian's school, Q'alatku7em Elementary School, this year.

Holistic and Ethical Data Analysis

After gathering the data, I researched several sources to determine what structure I would use to analyze the hundreds of pages of transcripts that were gathered. I researched NVIVO and its efficacy in my particular research design. There were other qualitative analytical designs that could also be used. In the end, none of them seemed to fit the authenticity of the Indigenous talking circles and the stories that were gathered.

I found myself returning to Stacy's (2014) discussion of the importance of yarning in Indigenous research,

> Through conversations we can learn about people's experiences, feelings, thoughts and hopes. There are different types of conversation that people can have. Conversations can be social, artistic, political, professional, religious, therapeutic, or research focused. Kvale (1996) discussing the use of conversation in doing research uses the metaphor of the traveller when talking about how an interviewer conducts an interview. He sees the interviewer or in this case the researcher as a traveller who embarks on a journey and who upon returning home has a number of tales or stories to tell about what he/she saw and experienced. (p. 2)

Stacy (2014) identifies specific types of a yarning methodology that supports this study. Collaborative Yarning describes a method in which people relate stories that are relevant to a research topic. In this case, the conversation was directly related to the research question, *How can we practically integrate Indigenous Principles of Learning into the classroom?* Through

these discussions, the participants reflected on and responded to each other's ideas and narratives to enrich their own thinking, which extended into further discussions in subsequent talking circles. As trust developed and participants felt emotionally safe with each other, some of the discussions evolved to therapeutic yarning, where participants started to relay stories that were deeply personal and emotional. When the conversations moved to this form of yarning, we listened deeply within our circle, supported the participant, and celebrated their courage. These breakthrough discussions were essential to the trust and honest dialogue that inspired the themes of our co-created research.

The research design was grounded in respect, trust, and concern for the welfare of all participants. Participants reviewed and discussed all data and the interpretation of the data with representatives of the First Nations communities that they represented. Communication with representatives and advice were shared throughout the project, during the analyses, and before dissemination of the results. We asked participants to consult with Elders and/or Knowledge Keepers to ensure culturally informed consultation both during the research and as the data evolved. Some members of the study were classified as Elders or Knowledge Keepers; others needed to ensure that they shared the data and the findings as the research developed. Respect and reciprocity ensured that the gathered data and knowledge were treated with the utmost care.

Concluding Remarks

Stories bring order and meaning to the chaos and randomness of life. A story most often has a beginning, a middle, and an ending. We don't know how our own stories will end, and our lives are essentially a search for our own personal stories. Caine et al. (2013) indicate that three-dimensional inquiry depends on the ability to move backwards and forwards in time, making

sense of social interactions within the continuum, and understanding the importance of spaces within these contexts (p. 20).

For the purposes of this inquiry, I reflected on the importance of permission and guidance, the power of the talking circle, the qualities of a good storyteller, the role of mentors and teachers, and the power of oral research. I am more aware of how careful one needs to be when we collect stories from Indigenous people. Many of them experience a healing effect of being around a fire and warmth and comfort is derived from a circle. We all sometimes share our hurt, as well as happiness, when we feel safe in such environments.

Chapter 4
Results: Living and Writing Into Being

In this chapter, we are introduced to the research participants and co-creators and learn about their roles in truth and reconciliation. Each co-creator granted me permission to use their full names as they have a passion for and direct connection with our public-education system in Fraser Valley Schools in British Columbia. This section begins with first-person self-generated biographies. Transcriptions of the thoughts they shared in in the talking circles are then themed and reproduced using their words in order to honour their deeply lived and experienced stories; this is at the co-creators' request and with their authorization.

Autobiographical Sketches of Co-Creators

To create autobiographical sketches, I asked co-creators to reflect on their place of birth, their kinships, and their land of origin. Their biographical sketches, all written in first person, contextualize and add depth to our talking cirles. Co-creators were encouraged to discuss their personal experiences of growing up and attending school and to include examples of the direct or indirect racism that they faced. They were also asked to share how they were involved in moving truth and reconciliation forward. These are the stories of resilience of six women with strong voices, who are all making a difference. I am honoured to have learned the stories of such bold and courageous women. As Cecelia stated in response to our talking circles, "It feels like we have become fast friends." We have become more than co-participants, more than co-creators; I've formed a lifelong connection with these women.

Mikayla Bay

Hello (tansi). I am of Saulteaux Cree descent. My grandmother (kookum) comes from a band that is located on the waters of Moberly Lake, BC. I grew up in a family where Aboriginal

principles and values were held in high regard. One of these principles is to have respect for all ages and stages of life. My childhood was rich with intergenerational interaction, and I was given ample opportunity both to teach and guide younger members in my family and to soak in the wisdom of my elders. Although these principles were present while I was growing up, they were never attributed to "Indigenous ways of knowing and learning." It is only now, in my adulthood, that I can engage in reflexive thinking to realize how intrinsically Indigenous I really am and how much I yearn to educate others in the value of Indigenous ways of knowing.

I have always loved learning and have made it a priority in my life. I worked hard for the education I received, whether it was by holding multiple jobs at a time or applying for scholarships/bursaries. Knowing that I have the freedom to pursue further education, whereas my ancestors did not, keeps me motivated to continue setting and attaining goals. After high school, I went on to complete my Honors English Degree. Engaging with Indigenous history—my history—did not occur until I was placed in the Indigenous Perspectives Module at Simon Fraser University while pursuing my Bachelor of Education. During that year, I began to learn about Canada's history at a deeper level and became inquisitive of my Grandma's personal history. She has not spoken about her past much or even shared with us that she still speaks our Cree language. That year was extremely enlightening and I believe it was then that I began to take ownership of connecting with my Indigenous heritage.

With my new understanding of Canada's history and a desire to contribute to a positive way forward, the truth and reconciliation initiative resonated deep within me. Reconciliation is a powerful word, embodying hope for the future for this current generation. My great-grandfather was a residential-school survivor. My Grandmother was spared from residential school and living on a reserve by being placed in a nunnery. Though spared in some regard, her identity was

still skewed, as she was told she had to pretend she was French and was prohibited from speaking her native tongue. These rules were put in place to protect her, yet a deep shame accompanied this request.

The words of Aboriginal author Wab Kinew (2015) resonate with me. He poignantly states: “Reconciliation is realized when two people come together and understand that what they share unites them and that what is different about them needs to be respected” (p. 211)). To me, reconciliation means honestly acknowledging the past and learning how it affects the present, while applying this knowledge to a better future in order to foster a culture of mutual respect (manâtcihiwewin) and value for every human being.

My desire to learn more brought me to where I am now in my educational journey: at the University of British Columbia, working on my Masters of Education in curriculum development in outdoor education through Indigenous perspectives. The more I learn about Indigenous ways of knowing and the principles that guide the learning process, the more I realize how innately Indigenous I am. The more I learn, the more I see how these ways of knowing and being in the world can benefit all learners, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. My current research seeks to understand Indigenous ways of knowing and learning and to identify ways in which educators can incorporate these methods into the everyday classroom. This transformational journey has just begun, and I am filled with anticipation for what will unfold in this transformational journey (ispiciwin).

Thank you (hay-hay).

Cecelia Reekie

I am a member of the Haisla Nation. I was born to a 15-year-old girl with French Canadian background and a Henasksiala father. My original birth certificate listed my name as

Cecelia Demers; when I was adopted, it was changed to Cecelia Cashore, and now my married name is Reekie.

Things were very different in 1963 in regards to the stigma of being unwed and pregnant and the way that adoption was handled. Although I was adopted in the 1960s, mainly for unwarranted reasons; my birthmother's family chose my adoption. I can certainly relate to the issues that those who are part of the '60s scoop face, as identity, connection to land, community, family, and language were lost for me as well.

Mine was a closed adoption, and I am the oldest of four children. My adoptive dad was a United Church minister, and my adoptive mom was an elementary-school teacher. Throughout my childhood, I felt I belonged and was loved by all in my family. There were times throughout my life when the thoughts of my birth family were more intense than at other times. As you grow older, you begin to question who you are, where you come from, who your family is, where they are, and what their story is.

When I was 24 years old, I gave birth to my first son. When I held him for the first time, I was overwhelmed to realize that, for the first time in my life, I was touching someone who was biologically connected to me. Shortly after, I knew that I wanted to seek out my birth mother. With my adoptive parents' support, I began the search and shortly after reunited with my birth mom.

Through my birth mom, I was also able to reunite with my birth dad very quickly. My dad had married and had four children; it is hard to explain the importance of siblings, even half-siblings. I loved the opportunity to get to know them and to be there for milestones in their lives: the birth of their children, their weddings, and sadly, even some of their deaths. Even through the hard times, I am grateful that I have so many people in my life, both adoptive and birth families.

When I met my birth dad, it is difficult to explain the emotions that I had. I was meeting someone so loving, caring, and accepting. This was someone I belong to and someone who has guided me to discover who I am in my soul.

As I got to know my birth dad and his life story, he shared his experience in residential schools; my dad went to a residential school from age 10 to 14. I had not even heard about the schools before then. Over the years, my dad would share snippets of his experiences with me, but it wasn't until 2008, at the Truth and Reconciliation event in Vancouver, that I heard his whole devastating story.

At that time, I was a school trustee for the Langley Board of Education, and I was honoured to be the first Indigenous person to be elected in civil politics in Langley. After hearing my dad's testimony, I realized I knew so little about Canada's "true" history with Indigenous people. I knew I had to learn and then speak out about this history, so people can begin to understand and thus begin the journey of reconciliation. With my dad's permission, I can talk about his story. His life is complicated, to say the least, as is the case for many Indigenous Elders who have experienced colonialism over generations. Our generation is also understanding and sharing our stories. I hope one day we will find our place where our people will be respected and listened to regarding all our teachings.

I still have so much to learn. In September 2018, I had the opportunity to go to the Kitlope, my traditional territory—such beautiful land—where my dad was born. In this place, for 100s and 100s of years, my granny and grandpa and all my ancestors lived well without outside influence. We were culturally connected to the land. I remember sitting at the lake, and I could visualize my ancestors paddling in the lake, hunting, and teaching the young, as they are our future generations.

My dad, my family, and the Haisla Community have given me a sense of who I am; my journey has been happy, sad, challenging, overwhelming . . . but I would absolutely do it all again! I am the product of love from so many people, both blood-related and not.

Reconciliation is listening to the survivors and understanding with your heart the pain that has been left in each one of them. We must listen and understand the intergenerational survivors and honour their experiences. We also must figure out a way to move beyond the pain. This is so important for our children, for future generations; we must continue to find a way to both go back to our roots—our language, songs, traditions—and to live in the world we are in now. This is the balance we must find. I believe when we do this, we will offer our children a new way of living, a way for them to find their place in this country where they will be honoured for their ability to respect the land and our people.

We must have difficult conversations about stereotypes and racism. We must understand that we all carry racist thoughts and must figure out how to break them and to have patience for each other's differences as we begin to heal our country. We must recognize that systemic racism is everywhere in our systems of government: RCMP, justice system, education system, Ministry of Children and Family Development. The list goes on and on; if we do not admit that these systems are not working well for our people, we will not be able to help fix them.

We must understand the traditional territories all across Canada and why they are sacred. We must know that Indigenous people have been stewards of this land since time immemorial and listen to their wishes regarding projects, pipelines, fish farms, lumber, and so on.

How do we, as Non-indigenous Canadians and Indigenous Canadians, begin to heal? How do we help heal our people and communities to ensure our futures are bright? These are the conversations that we need to have. We, as Indigenous people, must talk about what we need and

attain support to meet those needs. We require concrete ideas and the guidance and wisdom of the Elders to help us move forward.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous people need to determine what our future looks like together; we must understand that, as a nation, we are stronger standing together than walking separately. We have a long journey ahead of us that will take generations, and the only way I believe we can do this is by walking respectfully together. We, as individual Canadians, must want this. Do not lead, do not follow, but walk beside one another.

Cathy Speth

I currently serve as the assistant chair of School District 78 School Board, and I am the first Indigenous trustee in our district to be elected to this position. Before becoming a trustee, I was the Indigenous Education Council chair for ten years. I've been with the Indigenous Education Council for probably 30 years. I also worked for Boston Bar First Nation as an accountant. I am from Spuzzum First Nation, and I'm proud that my daughter Jessica has joined us as well.

I was born in Hope, British Columbia. My mom is from Chawathill First Nation and is Stolo, and her parents are also Chinese and Italian. My dad is almost entirely Nakutma and was born and raised here in Spuzzum, so we've lived here all our lives, as have my children. I started school at Yale Elementary. I don't think my classmates and I knew that we were First Nations; we were raised as people and we're all the same. We all knew each other; it was just a tiny community.

When I was in Grade 7, we moved to Hope, and I went to a school called CE Barry, which no longer exists. I had a hard time there because I didn't know anybody from Hope and I was First Nation. I wasn't accepted by the non-First Nation people and the First Nations people

just because they didn't know who I was. I grew up with non-First Nation people as well. Our First Nation cousins didn't want to associate with me. We were outsiders, so it was hard on me.

Both my parents were residential-school survivors. I never knew this; I don't think it was ever mentioned in my house. I found out about it when my parents were thirty. I think it had to do with the reconciliation money, and all their conversations were terrifying for me because I was so naive about it. I never knew anything.

We grew up with really no culture. My daughter has so much knowledge about our culture. I always tell people I'm not a very good Indian because I don't know a lot about my own culture, and my parents were so adamant about me being academic and going to school. I think that's how I was raised. I was a band manager for specific First Nations' groups for 17 years. As an advocate for First Nations, people felt I was very cultural. I wasn't. What I was, was a very strong advocate for my children.

I enjoy being involved with the schools. So, I was always interested in education and advocating for every student from my band. We made a solid education, and I'm proud that I was involved. I was also on PAC at Yale.

My mom was the Chief for nearly 20 years, and she was a counsellor for many years, the same as my dad. So, we knew all the politics of the band. But I still didn't know much about my culture; it bothers me to this day, but that's how I was raised. So, I probably have more to say.

We grew up talking about racism. It was very, very evident. You could see it in the Hope area, but I think it is better now. It's still there, but I believe our education council is working on trying to resolve some of those issues.

Stephanie Fredette

I am a member of Xwchíyò:m, of the Pelólhxw (Pilalt Tribe), the territory of the Stó:lō People. I am a member of Sik-E-Dakh, of the Gitxsan people, from the house Xhliyem-Laxha and a part of the wolf clan. I am currently on the Xwchíyò:m Council, and I am the vice-chair of the Fraser Cascade School District Indigenous Education Council.

My dad was a part of the ’60s scoop and was raised in Bonnyville, Alberta. He connected with his family in 1993. My mother was raised by one of her aunts in Glen Vowel, BC. Her mother was a residential-school survivor. My grandmother later lived with us, and I remember her heavy heart when she had to go to trials.

Growing up, our family lived in Glen Vowel, BC. In a remote area where the nearest town was small and the largest was a six-hour drive away. The Indigenous population is large in Hazleton. I attended a school where many of the kids were all friends with each other. I was there from Grades 2 to 5. At the age of 11, I moved to Rosedale, BC, where there is also a large population of Indigenous peoples, but it felt different. I found it hard to make friends at school, and I did not understand why for a long time. The children in these schools were farm town kids and were often not friends with the kids from the reserve. My dad was adopted, and when we returned to Cheam, it was not easy to be close to family. I did not feel connected to my culture, as my dad was not raised with culture. To not be welcome into the Rosedale community was challenging.

I attended Rosedale middle school and was put into a small classroom with six students with learning disabilities. I don’t remember what this program was called or who decided to put us in there, but we spent our entire year separated from the other students. It was awkward to be

left out of the rest of my class experiences, and it was hard to understand why the six of us had to be in a separate class. I did have a hard time learning, but I was capable of learning.

Transitioning into high school, I was asked to participate in the Evergreen program. The guidance counsellor asked if someone had explained what this program was. At the time, I had no idea what an Evergreen was. It was a "life skills" building program. I told the guidance counsellor I did not want to be in that program. I wanted to graduate and go to university. The guidance counsellor was surprised but allowed me to take all the regular courses. I went into Grade 11, taking Communications 11 and Math Essentials 11. I learned in Grade 12 that I could not attend university with these courses. After speaking to the guidance counsellor again, I was enrolled in English 11 in the fall; in the winter, I took Communications 12 and English 12 in the same semester. This was so that I would have a "backup" plan. I then dropped English 12, as it was too stressful for me. Looking back now, I was not set up for success; I was set up to fail. My entire education experience has always been about fighting for my success.

I went to university fresh out of high school. I felt very lost. After a short period, I dropped out. In 2017, I decided I wanted to go back. I obtained a career development certificate, and in the same year, I completed operational First Aid Level 3. Throughout those years, I learned that I want to further my education at university, and I am currently attending University of the Fraser Valley to major in psychology. I continue to push through and create my path to success.

Jillian Fraser

I am a White settler from Markham, Ontario. All of my grandparents were born in Canada along with some of my great grandparents. I completed my elementary and high school education in Markham. My experience with education was very much about interacting with my

friends and feeling obligated to do as I was asked in school, as I was a conscientious person. I often felt invisible to educators throughout my experience and was very much disengaged in school.

My parents were both teachers, and we spent most of our summers at our family cottage on Georgian Bay, neighbouring Shawanaga First Nation, which belongs to the larger Anishnabek Nation. I paid close attention throughout the years to this community and the people who lived there.

I have a diploma in travel and tourism hospitality from Seneca College, a bachelor of arts in business management in hospitality and tourism from the University of New Brunswick, Saint John, and a bachelor of education from Lakehead University. I have additional qualifications in English as a second language, special education, Native studies and mathematics. I am currently working on my master in education for change, specializing in Indigenous education.

When I attended Lakehead University, there was a mandatory Aboriginal education course. The main assignment for the course was to write a paper on a specific First Nation of interest. I asked for permission to do something different. I reached out to the Chief of Shawanaga First Nation to learn more about the perspective of his people, and he welcomed me to his home. I also reached out to the small community school and asked if I could come in to teach a lesson on photography and do a project with the students. I recognized that relationships were the way forward in building an allyship through understanding and listening.

I worked as a teacher in northern Ontario, where many of the Indigenous children from neighbouring communities attended school. I developed relationships with community members and families.

In 2017, I moved to BC and began teaching at Xetólacw Community School, part of the Lil'wat Nation in Mt. Currie in Stl'atl'imx territory. I was recruited in the summer of 2018 to open a small school in the remote community of Q'aLaTKu7eM in Stl'atl'imx territory, as the students who lived there were having a difficult time attending school due to the road conditions and long commute. I opened the school in the fall of 2018 with 13 students ages 6 to 17, in Grades 1 to 11. I followed the new BC curriculum, combined with learning on the land. I hired a strong community knowledge keeper and Elder Samu7 to teach culture and tradition. This past year we were fortunate enough to hire Dan Peters as our Ucwalmicwts language teacher. The school continues to grow and be a focal point in community.

Jessica Poirier

Hello, my traditional name is Nxʷəstinek. I am from Spuzzum. My mother's name is Cathy Speth; my father's name is Rene Poirier; my grandmother's name is Jennifer Bobb; and my grandfather's name was Ralph Bobb.

I was born in Surrey, BC but was raised in Spuzzum, the traditional territory of the Nlakapamux people. My dad was raised in Hope by his sisters, since his parents passed away when he was seven. He is of European descent; we don't know where his dad's family originates from, but his mom was born and raised in England and immigrated here when she married my grandfather. My mom was raised in Spuzzum. Her father was also born and raised there, whereas my grandma is from Chawathil. We're a mixed bag on my mom's side, mostly Indigenous (Nlakapamux and Sto:lo) with some Chinese, Italian, and Scottish.

Growing up, I didn't identify with anything. I was ashamed of being Indigenous because of all the stereotyping and racism around me. I always say I grew up White; my family wasn't traditional. We never learned the language; although my grandpa knew some of it, I know a few

words from him. My grandparents attended residential school, as did my great-grandparents. Two generations removed from that, I am just now re-learning.

I had a tough time in high school. I would always hear things like "you're not like the other ones" or "what are you anyway?" I think the worst experience I ever had in school was when I had my French teacher told my mom and me that I wasn't capable of learning French; she kicked me out of her class. I just received an A- in Nlakapamux through Nicola Valley Institute of Technology.

The other incident happened just after I was removed from French; instead of putting me into a different class, I was placed in a learning-assistance class. My Indigenous support worker was in that block. Whenever I asked her for help, she would do my assignment for me. Never in my life have I felt so stupid. It wasn't until I graduated that I felt like she included me in anything; it was actually the only time I showed up in her scrapbooks. I was a good statistic for her.

Even after I graduated, I continued to get weird comments from former staff from the school. When I worked at Kent Elementary, one of the old school counsellors asked what I was doing there; I told her I worked there as an Indigenous support worker. Her response to that was, "huh, who knew . . ." like it was something that they couldn't even fathom that I could do.

It took me years to accept who I was as an Indigenous person, and, honestly, I lost a lot of people that I called friends because of it. My husband pushed me to dig deeper and learn about my culture. In 2012, I took a job with my reserve as a First Nations monitor, helping with archaeology in the area; it is something else to say that you have held the tools of your ancestors. It was a raft trip that I did with 11 other indigenous people from around BC that started to open my eyes to the truth of our people. It's become a journey for me to learn more and more about

my culture; I have written a 120-page living document of everything I have learned about my territory to share with whoever wants it. I wanted to create something for our people so they didn't have to go through everything I did to learn about our traditions. I now have an Indigenous name, Nxʷəstinek, which means "come back off the mountain"; it was gifted to me by my family with the help of an Elder from Lytton. I have also received two traditional tattoos from a local Nlakapamux tattoo artist, Dion Kaszas. I have a skin-stitch earth line on my arm, as does my husband, and also rays of sunshine by my eyes. These tattoos are a tremendous sense of pride for me and a big teaching moment for those who ask about them.

These moments have brought me to where I am now, an Indigenous support worker for School District 78. I wanted to be the support worker that I never had. I am open and honest about how I did in school. I am open and honest about my downfalls and what they taught me. I also do my best to advocate for my students. My students need to see that even if they don't do well in school, it doesn't mean they won't do well in life. It also means I push many buttons sometimes, but they are worth the trouble.

We need our next generation of kids to be proud of who they are. We need them to push and fight for "truth and reconciliation" because that's what it is, a fight. We have to fight for what is suitable for our people. I feel it is my job to show our next generation that sometimes we must push those boundaries and use our voices to advocate for our people and ourselves.

Talking Circle 1

Throughout our initial talking circle, many commonalities emerged; it was clear, however, that the experiences of the Indigenous women in the study were unique. There were many perspectives I could share in terms of racism, being othered, the systemic racism I experienced in school, trauma, exposure to levels of domestic violence, and violent incidents of

racism. I could even relate to certain elements of cultural genocide through the lived experiences of my parents and their family. These conversations furthered my understanding of why I will never have an Indigenous worldview.

All of the Indigenous women in the study shared that they were on a quest to reclaim identity; they told stories about their lived experiences of racism within our Eurocentric education system, including lowered expectations and mislabelling. Eventually, the conversations turned toward supporting students in our school system; we discussed topics such as Land-based pedagogy, storytelling, and Indigenous Principles of Learning. Listening to these stories is essential if our goal is to improve the educational experience of Indigenous students. The following narratives capture the themes that emerged from the research, in the authentic voices of the participants.

A Quest for Identity

You know, looking back, I certainly think I wasn't proud to be Indigenous because I think everything was so instilled in such negativity, especially in the school district's curriculum. How can you be proud when you're not taught those things? I was only exposed to the typical stereotypes that you hear and feel, and I felt it. It was deep. ~ Cecelia Reekie

I always tell people I'm not a very good Indian, just because I don't know a lot about my own culture, and my parents were so adamant on me being academic and going to school, and not failing. ~ Cathy Speth

I really didn't associate with other Indigenous students, and I really can't say why it ended up like that. Even my core group of friends all through high school were non-Indigenous students. I really struggled with my academics in school, and with the Indigenous support worker that I did have. ~ Jessica Poirier

Well, I was not very happy about that, because my Indigenous heritage was not something that I was proud of then. And, yeah, it just wasn't seen as something to be proud of in our family yet. ~ Mikayla Bay

The kids are calling me Indian mom, but I don't understand; I'm not Indian, and my mom says to me, "Well you are sweetie, you are." At that time, and being in the city, it didn't make sense to me what they were saying to me. ~ Stephanie Fredette

Of the six participants, five indicated that they were on a strong resurgence journey to claiming their Indigeneity and discussed their generational connection with residential schools and intergenerational trauma.

I was adopted in 1963, almost immediately after I was born. I was raised in a Caucasian family and didn't have a sense of identity growing up, and it wasn't until I was 24 when I met my dad. While I was given the opportunity to learn who I was, where I came from, I didn't really know. I knew I was Indigenous, but beyond that, I did not know to which nation I belong, to which family I belong, from which community I come.

I've met both my birth parents with the support of my adoptive family. My birth mother is, French Canadian. Her family (my ancestors) were one of the first few families that came to Canada. I was adopted by a United Church minister, and my adoptive mom was an elementary school teacher; she has passed away, but my adoptive dad is still with us. To assess that part of the history—knowing that my dad went to Alberni Residential School, which at the time was being run by the United Church of Canada, the very church I was baptized in, the very church that I was confirmed in as a teen—it was an important part of my life. All of a sudden, I just became curious about my past. My dad was everything about me. I just couldn't understand why I didn't know anything. I couldn't understand how this was done.

My dad was visiting me here and in Langley where I live, and the TRC was happening in Vancouver. I volunteered to work at the TRC and my dad just kind of showed up and wanted to stay with me for a couple of weeks, and I'm like "yeah, but I'm going to the TRC." He said he would come with me on the first day, and then he just watched. He watched everybody, and he eventually agreed to testify. He wanted to testify, and I have his testimony on a DVD. ~ Cecelia Reekie

I wasn't accepted by the non-First Nation and the First Nation people just because they didn't know who I was. I honestly grew up with non-First Nation people, as our First Nation cousins just didn't want to associate with me. We were just like outsiders, so it was really hard on me. I think it was hard on my kids at first, just because we lived out here.

Both my parents were residential school survivors. I never knew this. It was never mentioned in my house. I think it was when they were thirty that all their conversations decided to come out. I think it had to do with the reconciliation money. It was pretty terrifying for me, just because I was so naive about it. I never knew anything. We grew up with really no culture. So, I mean, my daughter right now, she has so much knowledge about Indigenous art and I totally appreciate it. But I always tell people I'm not a very good Indian, just because I don't know a lot about my own culture.

Being an advocate for First Nations, people really thought that I was very cultural. I wasn't. What I was, was a very strong, strong advocate for my children. I was a band manager for specific nations for 17 years. So, I was always involved in education and advocated for every student that came from my band. We made a very strong education, and I'm proud that I was involved. ~ Cathy Speth

I grew up with a lot of Indigenous principles, founded within our family, which was really beautiful. Looking back now with the lens of Indigenous on it, I can see it. And that's really cool for me now, but growing up, our Indigenous heritage wasn't something we talked about with my grandma. My grandmother was raised in a nunnery. I still to this day don't know if it was the residential school, or if it was just a place where she was sent and her language was changed so that she was less traumatized. I still don't know that, but I do know that she was told that she had to pretend she was French. Her language stripped away. All of those typical things that we know from residential schools. And so, there's those blurred lines that I'm still unsure about, and would like to dig more into that just to learn truth and understand her more. My great grandfather, (her father) was shot over land disputes, and many, many acres of land in Moberly Lake area, which should be our grandmother's and our families, are now under colonial or White ownership. So, there's a definite sense of loss of place and land; the language was definitely one of them, and my grandmother never spoke her Cree language until just a couple of years before she passed. ~ Mikayla Bay

Lived Experiences of Racism

All of the Indigenous participants shared lived experiences involving racism growing up and within schools. Two typical experiences are described below:

I think one of the hardest things for me to hear on a regular basis is a lot like what I grew up with. My friends would say little off things to me, but I never connected it to them being racist. But I see it now with the students. They'll say things like "that's so rez," or they'll make fun of the drunks in the park, or they'll make comments about how dirty reserves are. It gets to me, and I've tried to explain to them that it may not seem like it's hurting their Indigenous friends now,

but later on, it'll have a bigger impact when they realize . . . I don't know how to say it. It has an impact on that person, whether they realize it or not in the moment. ~ Jessica Poirier

I had a similar experience with the drumming ceremony. It's really sad and shocking to even relay it. I was at the luncheon with my mom and some other people on council with Trinity. One of the ladies spoke up because they had a Drumming Ceremony right beforehand to open things up. She said, pretty much verbatim, "I just don't know why we have to waste so much time with drumming and I don't even know what the purpose is." And then she imitated it in a very degrading way, "dum dum dum dum dum dum dum bum bum." She said this right in front of my mom and me. My mom just looked at her and asked, "Do you know that I'm Indigenous?" and she said, "Well I'm not talking about you." The ignorance and the disrespect are really unfortunate and pretty appalling. It makes me more than offended; it makes me sad for them, because I don't feel that they open up their minds and their hearts to this kind of stuff. And so they won't experience the richness of what Indigenous culture and all peoples can offer, if we are connected and if we integrate one another's beliefs and standpoints ~ Mikayla Bay

The Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants observed that systemic racism regarding Indigenous students has been and is still very evident in schools. Stephanie shared a tragic example of her school experience in a Fraser Valley School District. Upon entering her graduation years, she was informed that she should take a modified English class, as she would not graduate with a regular Dogwood Diploma. "The BC Certificate of Graduation or 'Dogwood Diploma' is awarded to students who successfully complete the provincial graduation requirements," (Government of British Columbia, 2022a, para. 1) and is a prerequisite for students enrolling in a post-secondary institution.

Stephanie advocated for herself as a young student and took both a remedial and regular English 12. She received her college diploma and is now pursuing a psychology degree. All participants shared such stories of systemic discrimination and subsequent labelling of Indigenous students:

Moving into high school, I was told that I was going to be put into the Evergreen, and I didn't know what that was. They said to me, "Well, you're not going to graduate. You're going to do cooking, welding, automotive; you're going to do all these life-skill-building courses." I said, "What do you mean I'm not going to be graduating?" They weren't aware that I wanted to graduate. So, I was then moved out of the Evergreen program, and they put me in all the required courses. So I was taking Communications 11 and Essentials Math 10. Then I learned that those won't actually get you into university, so I talked to the counsellor. I think they made me do Communications 11 in addition to English 11, just in case I failed English 11. Then I moved into Communications 12 and English 12, so if I failed English 12, I had a backup to graduate. That was a lot to put on me to do all this English work instead of just working with me to pass English. That was their way of getting me to graduate. I did graduate in 2011. I jumped right into university without knowing anything about it, not even what I wanted to do. Then I worked in customer service for the last ten years, but I always wanted to help students so that they didn't have to go what I went through. ~ Stephanie Fredette

Jessica relayed a typical story that still surfaces for many of our Indigenous students today:

In French 8, I was told by the French teacher that if I promised never to take French again, she would pass me. But if I was going to continue, she would fail me so Grade 8 determined that I would never go to post-secondary, and it was a French teacher who made that

determination. Wow! That's sad because what does that tell me about me? What does that say about me that I internalized at 13? I thought that I shared something in common with someone else and realized that I didn't. Sitting here talking just now, I realize that that was really instrumental in limiting my education because I didn't have a second language. Was it not something else? I don't think it's about the district. I think it's about the mentality of what we have. ~ Jessica Poirier

Labelling Indigenous Students as Special Needs

Participants consistently identified the labelling of Indigenous students as *special needs* as a source of concern:

It was just this continuous battle that happened—coming to terms, even understanding what this meant for us as a family, but then going through the education system with IEPs [Individualized Education Program]. Excuse my language, but the bullshit of having to navigate a system with Indigenous special needs, blah blah blah. Well first of all I got into PAC; I had to become a PAC member and eventually became PAC President for a number of years, and I realized that so many parents didn't have voices or didn't have support. I come from my mom who worked in special education and would be at the IEP meetings. She knew the testing and knew the terminology. She knew the questions to ask. And I was married. I have my in-laws who were very supportive and I realized that there were a lot of people who are just trying to do this on their own. And so, I ran to become a school trustee, and I became a school trustee for Langley for a term and a bit, because I was first elected in a by-election and worked with BC School Trustees Association on their Indigenous board. I was the chair on their Indigenous Board after my stint of being a school trustee. ~ Cecelia Reekie

The farm kids in the Rosedale elementary weren't that accepting, so it's really strange to not know where you fit in. I don't have too much to say about when I was in Grade 6 in Rosedale School, but then I went to Grade 7. Usually when you go to the middle school, you go to different classes, like you switch class to go to science, you switch to go to socials. But they actually put I think six of us into this tiny little classroom. It was like almost a closet—and I kind of forgot about this until I was talking with Balan—but they put us into this. It was for Indigenous students, all from my reserve. And there were two non-Indigenous. It was like an assistant class where we stay in there, we would do a mass, we do socials—everything except for PE, I think. We would jump into the PE class, so we didn't really get to socialize with any of the students. And it was really weird because at that age, you don't really understand what's going on, I was only 13. ~ Stephanie Fredette

Land-Based Pedagogy

TRC findings and residential schools were heavily discussed in the circles. We also had strong discussions about the importance that land dispossession plays in the lives of our Indigenous students and their ancestors. Jillian Fraser came to *Q'aLaTKu7eM Community School* on a chance visit from Northern Ontario about five years ago. Jillian is a non-Indigenous ally who was tasked with opening a small one-room school for a few Indigenous students who were not attending school because their only opportunity required a two-hour round trip to attend school options. Her story offers British Columbia teachers a solid example of how to incorporate land-based pedagogy into their practice. Jillian had no idea what to expect on the first day of her school opening. She expected five primary-school-aged students, but thirteen students from Grades 1–11 walked through the door of the one-room portable. Four years later, one student has

graduated and more are working towards graduation this year. The little school sits as a focal point of the reserve.

So, place-based and Land-based education really tied in with my experience of starting the school from nothing; we were strangers as a group, and it was truly the land-based and place-based education opportunities that I talked about through sports and through experiences. Typically, it was outdoors where we were able to really begin to build a sense of identity in the students, and courage and again that resiliency for trying new things. But it was truly through these experiences that our relationship as a small new school community developed. And that's what bridged the way for us to begin academics, because it wasn't going to happen at the start with this group. And there was a lot of trauma and maybe not a lot of trust within the school setting, so it was really through just getting out on the land and then a lot of my networking through my community outside in the Pemberton Whistler area. It was getting to do some new experiences for these kids that really began to develop the program in a beautiful way. I'm a White female settler, who's a woman in a colonial-education setting. Yes, right, treat everyone with respect, that's part of my upbringing and the development of my paradigm: We're all humans, with unique sets of circumstances, as well as commonalities. ~ Jillian Fraser

Storytelling

Storytelling was, not surprisingly, identified as an important part of Indigenous ways of knowing as well as an integral component for moving Indigenous Principles of Learning forward in schools:

We had Phyllis Webstad come to our school district. She was the student who was punished for wearing an orange shirt when she attended residential school, and she is the inspiration behind orange shirt day. Phyllis is actually a friend of mine. I met her on a ten-day

raft trip, twelve years ago, and we've kept in contact ever since. She came to our high school and to Kent Elementary. The elementary-school kids had a better understanding and a better grasp of what it meant. They had better questions than the high-school students, who have never been exposed to learning about the residential schools before. So, they get it. They understand what it is, when it's being explained in a proper manner. ~ Jessica Poirier

It's the job of educators to teach the truth, especially when we know it. Maybe 20 years we didn't know it, but now we know. So, there's no excuse in my mind, and, I would say it would probably open more doors to dialogue within family and community, which is so important. Perhaps—just throwing it out there these are just ideas—we could have a community gathering, even just to acknowledge it, like in my community we have an orange shirt day. Our survivors do a walk in the village with our reserve school, then they go and have lunch with the children. So, our survivors are having lunch with the little ones, so they're seeing residential school survivors they know from our community, but they're also sitting and having lunch with them and hearing them tell their stories.

And, I don't give in to the idea that it is too difficult, because that's the easy way out. I don't want to use the kids as the excuse. We know if you talk to any counsellor or to any psychologist or whatever, they recommend speaking the truth at an age-appropriate level, whether it's residential schools, death, marriage, whatever it is. ~ Cecelia Reekie

Indigenous Principles of Learning

Participants agreed that integrating Indigenous Principles of Learning into the curriculum was essential for supporting Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners.

I've been coming across a lot of what we've just talked about, so I feel like I have a lot of ideas surrounding motivating educators and how to do it. So, some of it has to do with students

and educators, and this is something I've been working on since winter break. The question is an interesting one, because how do we get students to buy-in, to learn about and engage with Indigenous principles? So, this would be all kids, Indigenous and non. So these are two different schools I'm talking about, but not my Q'aLaTKu7eM Community School, which actually all of the students I work with are Indigenous. Even with me trying to really reiterate to them the importance of learning about that, they don't necessarily want to have our language classes or do drumming or really talk about why it's important. ~ Jillian Fraser

We get our own. We want all of our students to learn about Indigenous ways of knowing, but how do we get Indigenous students to buy-in to coming to school? Then how about learning about Indigenous principles themselves? How do we encourage Indigenous students be part of the engagement in an interesting way? And you know, part of the difficulty is because of that prejudice. ~ Cathy Speth

Talking Circles 2 and 3: Key Questions and Next Steps

At the end of Talking Circle 1 and subsequently throughout Talking Circle 2, participants co-created research questions that would continue to guide our conversations in Talking Circle 3:

1. Are we considering whether, and why, Indigenous students are graduating inappropriately with an Evergreen Certificate?
2. How can we encourage our staff to bring Indigenous Principles of Learning into the classrooms?
3. How can we practically integrate the Principles of Learning into the classroom?
4. How do we have conversations with staff members who will not buy-in with regards to truth and reconciliation? How do we deal with those who have prejudicial beliefs?
5. What barriers are preventing Indigenous children from being successful?

6. How do we determine what defines success for our Indigenous students?
7. How do we encourage Indigenous students to engage with Indigenous Principles of Learning and buy-in to coming to school?
8. How do we encourage non-Indigenous students to engage with Indigenous Principles of Learning?
9. Are our testing methods for our Indigenous students valid?
10. How do we involve our Indigenous stakeholders as partners in this process?

Samples of responses to the co-created questions and a summary of the findings for the questions are discussed in the next section.

Are We Considering Whether, and Why, Indigenous Students Are Graduating Inappropriately with an Evergreen Certificate?

Several of the participants expressed strong concerns about Indigenous students being incorrectly placed in an Evergreen graduation program. The School Completion ("Evergreen Certificate") is intended to celebrate success in learning that is not recognized in a Certificate of Graduation Dogwood Diploma (see Langley School District No. 35 Administrative Procedures Manual). The Evergreen Certificate is reserved for those students with learning disabilities that traditionally range from mild to severe cognitive delays. Many inclusive educational leaders now believe that gaps in Indigenous students' learning, rather than true academic and cognitive ability, have been erroneously used to label Indigenous students because doing so increases the school's ability to garner funding or support.

Let's just put them in an Evergreen without really assessing their ability: I think that's the expectation that they have for Indigenous students. And, I mean, I'm sure there's a lot of other things. I was thinking about when I was young and the reason my mom was on Chief and

Council, and then was a Chief for many, many years. She got into education and politics because my sister and I were listed as special needs. But we were honour students in school and she could not believe that that happened. So, when she went in, she found that all students that were First Nations were put in special needs. The reason was because they got more money for it, and it was charged to our nominal role, which is how funding moves from the government to our bands and then the school district. And no one questioned that, not even our First Nation bands. So, I think, Wow. That's hard to believe. I feel so naive with this. ~ Cathy Speth

Experiences such Stephanie's and Cathy's led to a serious question posed by Cecelia that made us all reflect:

Are we in residential schools with Indigenous students today? We're just calling it something different. But to me, there's no accountability and there's no looking at this in deep conversation. Nobody really wants to go there. The board meetings will give the stats for Indigenous students, but nobody really does anything. My heart has been heavy the last week because I've been thinking about this. Have we just continued the cycle with our children and our grandchildren? Are we failing them, and has the education system allowed the residential school system to continue in some way in public education?

I think we are 100% failing these kids in the education system, because I feel like a lot of our Indigenous parents, when they are told about Evergreen, don't fully understand what it means. They don't understand that their kid is graduating with something that they can't use, because I'm sure that it's not presented in a way that all your Indigenous people understand. It must be presented or streamlined in a much more diplomatic way than is it now.

My son—Indigenous, special needs—got an Evergreen, and that was heart-breaking for us. I felt so angry. I just felt he's done his 12 or 13 years in jail, and I'm a mom, and I'm a

former school trustee. He got nothing, and the staff said, oh well, he can walk across the stage and then, you know, he can carry his thing, and I'm like, this is a Gong Show. We arrived at the grad ceremony with our drums as a family. "Don't bang the drums" was what we were told. That's crazy; it was DW Poppy High School. It was heart-breaking; the whole thing was awful.

As a parent whose son has an Evergreen, I think about education—what it is, how people learn, and how kids learn. My son should have been able to graduate. Maybe not meeting all the standards, but why do we have standards?

Why do we have to pass/fail? I don't understand, as he would never go to university. He's not going to become a doctor, but what he remembers in education is that he didn't graduate. He knew he didn't graduate, and you ask any kid who has an Evergreen, they'll say they didn't graduate. It's just a stupid piece of paper. ~ Cecelia Reekie

Cecelia's comments would help shape the rest of our conversations about how we need to deal with our systemically discriminatory practices in public education if we are going to make things better for our Indigenous students.

How Can We Encourage Our Staff to Bring Indigenous Principles of Learning into the Classroom?

Honestly, I feel strongly that Indigenous ways of being, doing, knowing are far more interesting to incorporate and appeal to all the different learning styles and that there's just so much more than the colonial cookie cutter approach. You know, I've done a lot of interesting courses and read a lot of interesting articles even on just non-Indigenous students who would do so much better with an outdoor program or more hands-on holistic approach. And so, I think it benefits all. ~ Jillian Fraser

I get really tired of having to do the work. And I would hope that one day, non-Indigenous people like Jillian do the work. Rather than Indigenous people having to give the ideas, having to support them, encourage them, whatever, in whatever position you're talking about. But if you're talking about education I need some ideas; I need this. And, you know, like, I don't think it's up to a couple of key individuals in each school to kind of bring the rest of the staff along, you know reconciliation. Quite frankly I'm happy to leave people behind who aren't ready because it's too much energy to move them forward. ~ Cecelia Reekie

Cecelia's comments illustrate the importance of working with teaching staff to accept and internalize the ninth teaching standard, as outlined by the BC Teacher's Council (2019):

> Educators respect and value the history of First Nations, Inuit and Metis in Canada and the impact of the past on the present and future. Educators contribute towards truth, reconciliation and healing. Educators foster a deeper understanding of ways of knowing and being, histories, and cultures of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis. (p. 3.)

It will be critical for the educators in School District 78 to examine their own biases, attitudes, beliefs, values, and practices to facilitate this change. Many of our communities have a White settler history, and this needs to be authentically deconstructed as discussed by Jillian:

Maybe each school should have teachers that volunteer to be part of our shared learnings and have an Indigenous education team that leads meetings for the shared learnings and brings PD. So, every month that group should meet and really dive into this type of work but also compile resources to bring back. So exactly, Cathy, what you were speaking to. That's something that we're doing in our district and SD 48, that, I see from the level of working with these teachers, but I haven't been able to see the scope. ~ Jillian Fraser

How Can We Practically Integrate the Principles of Learning into the Classroom?

Jessica suggested that the key to practical integration of Indigenous Principles of Learning is largely dependent on modelling from the principals and vice principals in the schools:

Well, I've been saying for years, actually I have been complaining for years, about the Indigenous Pro-D Day. Because you find teachers signing up for the same thing, year after year, and it's always a craft. Right. And instead they should be going to the workshops that are actually meaningful, that they could learn from, and actually get a better understanding of things.

I've said this to teachers, "Why not take a workshop with whoever's presenting that day?" or "Why not take a different class, other than making art?" because that's not all we are. And my honest opinion is that it has to start from the top of the school. If your administrators don't encourage staff to learn, they're not going to. You're going to get the same thing, year after year, from those staff members. It's a tough one. We're in a safe place. I was talking about this with my co-workers just the other day. When I would do home visits at Kent Elementary, it wasn't my co-worker that would come with me. It was the principal. He would come with me every time to a home visit and would talk with the parents and would talk with the kids and build those relationships with the families. My principal now was supposed to come with us today, and bailed. So, if your principal's not making the connections to the communities, there is no connection to the communities. You're not going to get Elders that are going to freely walk in because it's not a safe space for them, where it's that wasn't an issue, it can't, you know, we made that a space that was as safe as possible for every student, every parent. We built those relationships. ~ Jessica Poirier

How Do We Have Conversations with Staff Members Who Will Not Buy-In to Truth and Reconciliation? How Do We Deal with Those Who Have Prejudicial Beliefs?

Cecelia shared her strong feelings, which underscore the importance of buying-in to the recommendations of the TRC. In her words, she feels that the residential school system is still very much alive in our schools and that we have a long way to go towards creating environments that are non-colonial:

It has been really hard because all of a sudden it just came to me after our conversation with all of us and I've carried it for the last week. I'm thinking: we've continued; we've allowed it to continue; the education system has allowed it to continue; governments have allowed it to continue. It's continuing today, and that's heart-breaking. ~ Cecelia Reekie

Jessica also talked about pervasive structures that dominated her school;

The high school I work at, we asked to have a welcome song at our graduation ceremony, and we were told there isn't time. And then I started creating senior grad caps for our Indigenous students, and I was told no, because all the kids have to look the same. Okay, well that's wrong, so I did it anyways. ~ Jessica Poirier

As part of this discussion, I shared the contents of a powerful presentation that I attended. The subsequent discussion, reconstructed below, led to a very intensive conversation about how we need to move educators forward in our schools.

Jo Chrona is an Indigenous scholar; when we had our provincial meeting, she discussed anti-racism, which is the direction I think we need to take in our country. First, we must recognize that systemic racism exists in every part of the country. And what you stated, Cecelia, that's the part of the education system we're discussing. These racist structures are deeply ingrained because the education system is Eurocentric. It's based on European colonization,

dominance, and all of those things, and we haven't fixed it. Now, there are some promising movements; let's not be 100% grim here because of the new professional standard for BC: standard number nine.

That means that they have been bold enough to say that, if you're an educator in British Columbia and you're not doing these things, then you're not meeting the standard of an educator.

We know those standards of effective relationships, appropriate lesson design, and questioning strategies; we need to view our new teaching standard nine similarly. Suppose we see people violating these things, making racialized comments in the classroom, what we're probably going to see very soon is people being called to the task at a very high level. Then what does systemic racism look like exactly? It's the stuff you talked about as the persistent unintended racism of lower expectations for Indigenous students.

There are inherent perceptions about Indigenous learners, and these come with deficits. Some educators ignore colonial attitudes and actions, devaluing Indigenous Knowledge systems and expecting change. We must be courageous, have challenging conversations and professional learning about racism, disrupt continued narratives, and so on. You know, I like this. So many people say, "I'm not racist. I'm not racist." And I said to my friend who is liberal and a deep friend, and you would assume because his daughter has married interracially and he loves his family, he would get a pass. His daughter married a Black guy—one of my friends from Mobile, Alabama. How could he be that way? He loves his grandchildren. And I said to him we can't say that you're anti-racist because we all have personal bias. Right? We all have a little bit of bias.

Interestingly, you could use this analogy: Say you're differentiating between being a man and a woman. You can say, "Well, I'm a feminist," but can a man say he's 100% feminist when

he comes with a level of male bias? He is not on the same level because the world treats women differently. There's no way a man can say, "I'm 100% feminist." Still, he can say that he's working to this level where he can understand that there are positions of disempowerment that women have faced all of their lives in our society.

But what you can't say is that you're not racist; you can state that you're moving towards becoming an anti-racist. Right? If you look at it deeply enough, we all know people that are right here, right there. They deny that there's a problem; they avoid discomfort. We had a prime minister for a while who was denying and refusing to make the apology.

Today, Jo said Black Lives Matter in Canada, now referred to as BIPOC, starts with Indigenous Lives Matter, and in Canada, we really have to start from that mindset—even people who are Black. Now you'd have to be sensitive to have this discussion, but even Black people have to recognize that they come from a position where they are a settler ally in this country. But, as victims of racism, they are also allies, and this is true whether you're Black, Indo-Canadian Japanese, Chinese, or any of the others who have been here in Canada. But Indigenous people are the founding example of how racism flourished in this country. Everything originates from there. So, I thought that was also a good analogy.

We need to encourage people to come to this zone and actively seek out people who think differently. We need to continue to educate ourselves, advocate for policies and procedures that are anti-racist, speak out when we hear or see racism in action, and be willing to sit with our discomfort. ~ Discussion notes from Balan Moorthy

What Barriers are Preventing Indigenous Students from Being Successful?

Cecelia continued to address the theme of low expectations for students and parents. The narrative of systemic discrimination was repeated throughout our talking circles:

I mean to read, write, and speak English, and that's it. And if you listen to so many survivors, they'll say that's it. Read, write, speak English. Did we continue the cycle? Are Indigenous students still in residential schools today? I have to wonder; my dad couldn't read. He got a Grade 5 education; if we took Grade 12 Indigenous students, where would they rank? Are we still in that same system, so to speak? ~ Cecelia Reekie

How Do We Determine What Defines Success for Our Indigenous Students?

In our discussion of what success meant for Indigenous students, we returned to acknowledging the harm of residential schools and discussed whether such acknowledgement could support Indigenous students to feel safe and to be validated for their experiences. Recognizing the harm appeared to create an environment where students could feel honoured and successful.

Right. And this person's further comment was that they experienced enough of the effects at home, so we shouldn't be bringing that into the school. ~ Balan Moorthy

Yeah, I still question whether or not it's part of the curriculum and part of a mandated education? Now, I still believe that, even within my school setting, it's necessary and it should be done in a very respectful manner, which I think that I do. I always gauge the children's reactions, and I feel that I know them well enough now to know what's a little too mature for the younger but not for the older, and what's appropriate for whole group. ~ Jillian Fraser

It takes me back to a video that I believe is online. It was at the Truth and Reconciliation event in Vancouver and a lot of Langley students went to that education day, as I'm sure did many schools and districts.

One of the videos I show in my presentation is of students being interviewed after the event about what they got out of it. There were students from all over the province. This one

young girl spoke about how her dad never talked about residential school. She said, "I understand why he drinks," like all of a sudden, after hearing the stories, life in her own home began to make sense. We have a responsibility to teach the truth, as uncomfortable as it is. It's the job of educators to teach the truth, especially when we know it.

My parents and family members were residential attendees, but no one talked about it. I think when they came out with the Truth and Reconciliation and some funding, that was probably the only time I ever talked about residential school, other than at my IEC [Indigenous Education Council], because one of our representatives brought it up and kept bringing it up. I knew nothing like that. Even our First Nation people didn't know much about it. But I thought it didn't affect me until they started talking about it. And I went to a class and had an aha moment when I realized why I was raised the way I was.

Those conversations were hushed within families; our parents or grandparents didn't talk about it. So, when I'm talking to students, I'll say to them, you know, we as Indigenous people are learning this history; we went through Truth and Reconciliation because we had to learn the truth, and some of us didn't know the truth. So we're all doing it together. And, they're pretty surprised, but I think it's so essential that we continue that conversation. ~ Cecelia Reekie

We were not allowed to speak. We were not allowed to talk about things that were really strange growing up. I refused to do that with my kids because I thought my kid should have opinions. After I found out about the residential school, it was like, "Oh my God! That's why my mom and dad don't hug me or go near me." And so when I grew up, I refused to raise my kids like that. ~ Cathy Speth

Training right, it's like learning a different way. Some of our parents are still parenting the way that they were parented at residential school. Because they didn't have their parents, it

was the priests, the abusers, the pedophiles, and the nuns who were their parents, and then they passed that on to their children through their parenting abilities. And that becomes this big conversation about how we break the cycles. Cathy did it. She's breaking this cycle with her daughter. Not everybody's in the same place; that's the struggle and the trauma within our communities.

How do we determine success for Indigenous students? We all have the trauma of residential schools, whether you got a little bit of Indigenous in you, or you're 100% Indigenous, we still carry that trauma of residential schools, I believe. Even if we didn't go because of our families, somebody in our family did. And then you're asking us to buy into the public education system. I can't tell you how hard it has been for me to realize that we allowed residential schools to continue in public education. ~ Cecelia Reekie

There were strong feelings about re-engaging Indigenous students and about what schools could do to re-engage them:

What is success for Indigenous students in our school system today? We've said forever that if they pass and get 60 or 70%, then that's success. Is it all about graduating from school? Is it about the attendance and being on time? That's what we have always said. ~ Balan Moorthy

For me, when I think about success for those students, yeah, it's those things, but on a deeper level it's also being connected with seniors and belonging. It is being able to feel like they can be proud and confident in their Indigenous heritage. ~ Mikayla Bay

As a parent of a special needs child, I can remember we were asking this question about what is success and I said, "You know what success for me with my son is? That he will get on the school bus every day and go to school. That's my success rate. You guys have succeeded; he should graduate. He shouldn't be given a piece of paper that is so stupid and meaningless,

because he made it through." And that was success for me, that simple. It's not an A in History 12, or English 12. It's not being able to write an essay. Success is getting on the bus.

So, I think it's different for everyone and yet we have put things in place that determine what is success, so those who aren't reaching it are not successful. In the standards of the education system today, my son is not successful. But he was successful; for 12 years, he went to school every day. ~ Cecelia Reekie

I interviewed about four portfolio or four graduates. And one of them is still in my mind because he was so messy. He wasn't Indigenous, either. His whole portfolio was messy, but his confidence was there in the way that he talked, He was looking through his portfolio trying to show me stuff, but it was just a mess. But his speech, the way that he talked with confidence about what he wanted to do, it just made a big impression. I was so impressed by him. I went and talked to the counsellor, and she said that he is just one of those people that you look at, and you can tell. I said this boy is going somewhere, and I think that's what we need to do with our Indigenous people. We need to nurture, so when they leave that school, they're proud of themselves. That's what counts.

I've always had this saying that not everybody is a rocket scientist. When we did tutoring programs in Spuzzum, I had one girl that was struggled with math. But I'd always asked her, "Did you try?" And she said, "I studied, I tried but just couldn't get it." And if she got an E, we were happy, because that's as far as she could go with math. So, we celebrated because we knew it was important to her and that was her goal. I think we have to look at things for Indigenous students. We have First Nations support workers going into the schools; they are directed right now to be just focused on academics and we're social emotional people. That's why we didn't succeed there, because some of our students really need that social emotional help. We have to

really bring that back into the schools and get support workers who are counsellors to deal with all that social stuff. I think once we get through that social emotional barrier, our students can go somewhere. But we need to work through that. Along to our other goals, we need to work with students that are going through those traumas. ~ Cathy Speth

How Do We Encourage Students to Engage with Indigenous Principles of Learning and Buy-In to Coming to School?

As we discussed how to re-engage Indigenous students, our talking circle continued to focus on our personal experiences and on the transformation that is necessary to re-engage students and families. Trauma and hopelessness were critical elements in these stories. Decolonizing our education system and blending learning with cultural practice was a strong theme throughout our session:

I had my year-end review meeting today with my director and we talked a little bit about this. I'm finishing my masters in Indigenous education; that is something that I'm doing for my own growth and learning. But truly, in my small setting with my staff, I still need to find really intentional, purposeful ways of inspiring them to not plant the seeds of incapability. And I'm really inspiring them to continue to have our students view themselves as capable and valuable and to know that they have a voice that matters. We're there to support their dreams every day, to let them know that they're capable of whatever they want out of life. I do not want to hear anymore that we have to be realistic about our expectations. Next year, I will also have a position at the Pemberton elementary and high school, one day a week, to help facilitate these changes.

What I really want to reflect on over the summer is how to really stop putting that first brick in the wall of capabilities. For me it is about reaching the educators that we're talking

about, whether it starts off with some projects or with bringing a little bit more of what I'm doing out in the community into the Pemberton schools. It could look like helping the Grade 7s transition to the high school, and even through an Indigenous education lens. ~ Jillian Fraser

I was talking to my sisters about what we're doing in our talking circle. And they all had something to say about their experiences in school, because we've never talked about it as a family. So, I just sat there and listened, because all of us have had really terrible experiences in school, but we've never actually sat down and talked about it.

It really it got me thinking about it, because there's just so many little things that happened, like teachers following them around. I'll be honest; my sisters would smoke marijuana, and teachers kind of knew, so they'd follow them around to catch them. The teachers would wait for Indigenous students to get paid, as there is a monthly stipend students received on reserve for attending school. So, they wait till that payment is made and then they follow them. And then they would catch them and expel them, and my sisters would be transferred into a different school. That happened, I think, to one or two of my sisters. I understand that they shouldn't have been doing that stuff at school, but to follow them around? They said that other students would be with them but they weren't Indigenous, so they got to stay in the school. So, the Indigenous students were targeted.

For change to happen, I think we just need understanding. My four sisters and I all deal with trauma in very different ways. I was even just talking to my counsellor. She asked me, why why are you so together? Maybe how I deal with my trauma is to just keep pushing and going. But that's just what you're seeing. My other sisters deal with it in very different ways, so I think it's hard for them to be compared to me. When teachers see siblings together, they might assume, "Well, one is doing okay why can't the rest?" And that blocks the understanding of what's really

going on inside, and I think that's where I really want to see it change; we just need to take the time to see what is there, what lives there. Because people deal with trauma in very different ways. You may never understand it or ever see it, but we need to realize that it's there.
~ Stephanie Fredette

Steph, I appreciate how you mentioned that educators need to see the trauma, but I think educators also need to look at whether students are not feeling supported, are not feeling seen. But instead of looking at it as doing something negative, as something we're not doing, flip it around: "I see you. How can I support you?" You know, because otherwise it just makes the student feel like "another adult thinks I'm worthless." ~ Jillian Fraser

Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah, to be supportive would be great as well—to not just focus on what they're doing wrong. ~ Stephanie Fredette

Yeah, that's connecting back to how students are feeling, instead of just focusing on what they're doing wrong. It's seeing a student as a person. ~ Jillian Fraser

Yeah, it's interesting. We've talked about the curriculum and understanding the history of residential schools and learning about Indigenous Principles of Learning as a teacher, but so much of what I keep hearing from everyone is about the social-emotional void. There is a disconnect for kids in school and people believing in them. And so having this need to label our Indigenous children. I think the curriculum will come if we let go of this Eurocentric education system—who's at the top of the class who's at the bottom of the class—that I still have a hard time breaking out of.

And, you know, we need to let go of some stuff that we have in our curriculum that's really, really boring. I just spent a couple of days in Social Studies 9 and 10 classrooms, and interestingly enough, it was my friend who took over those classrooms from a teacher who went

on maternity leave. That teacher had an enormously high failure rate, particularly for Indigenous kids, because the way the curriculum was taught—high written output, high project based, volumes and volumes of reading—created barriers. Yet, when I went in and talked about racism and discrimination and how embracing those things was a social construct, some of those kids were talking up a storm with me. There was one kid who was in there for the third time. I thought "Just ask him; he's a bright kid. Get him to talk to you and use his voice. Sit down and develop that relationship." What benefit is for there for a 16 or 17 year old to be just sitting in Grade 9 Social Studies? You can't tell me that that's beneficial. We have to teach them a lesson or teach them they can't get something for nothing or teach them what is going on. ~ Balan Moorthy

So, Steph your comments were amazing, and what I go back to is, every child has a story. And we have to know the story. I also think about an example in the community where I come from: We go to the middle of nowhere every March to catch eulachon fish, and we prepare our grease, which can take four to six weeks, because eulachons come once a year, and we need enough grease to last us all year long. Our people still pull our children out of school to go to the camps to fish. It would drive the teachers crazy because, all of a sudden, there'd be no children in school, because they all had to go to the camp. The eulachon don't run in our local rivers anymore because of pollution, so we've got to go down to one of the other rivers, far away. A few years ago, when my nephew was in school, the teachers from the community school went with the families to process eulachon grease, and they realized the children were doing math and life skills and all the things that the curriculum covered, but they were doing it on the land and making what they needed to be able to survive for the year. Do we stop to think about what's happening in our own Indigenous communities and the challenges those kids face every

single day? I wonder if we should start thinking about how to go beyond our classrooms and about what our children are learning. How can we incorporate this into our classrooms on reserve? For example, if there's a community smoke house, what would happen if, when the men came back from fishing, the children in the elementary school were to prepare the fish, smoke it, and then distribute it to the Elders? The kids would learn which wood goes with which fish, how long to smoke it, and how to hang it. It's not a traditional curriculum, but for them, it means something. It will allow them to be a part of the community, so it's more valuable than doing times tables, right? We have to figure out what's important to them. And their culture is critical. So I think we have to rethink what we're doing to engage our children. We can't just say it's not possible because our communities are too big. We have to at least try to do it, to see what works and what doesn't. And I think Jillian is a perfect example of what can work when we're willing to look beyond our four walls, where we keep children sitting in a desk. We can go out and learn. I think knowledge is so important, but I also hear teachers, and I hear it a lot: "We have to do another Pro-D on Indigenous Education?" Why does it always have to be so sad?

"Why can't we just sing and dance?" I don't know if you guys hear that, but I hear it. But if we don't have the knowledge, then we can't give our students a sense of belonging. If we have teachers who are giving up and who don't feel it's important—well, to be blunt, they shouldn't be in education, or they should not be working in a district that has high Indigenous numbers. If they have that mindset, then it's the responsibility of superintendents and principals to weed them out. We have to have the courage to say, "You're not fitting in here. Perhaps you may work well in another district that has really low Indigenous numbers, but not here in my district." It just takes one to make a mess. It takes forever to put things back together again and build that trust, but it only takes a second to take it away. It's going to take courage from our leaders and

education to do this, but there are other teachers who are willing to come and learn and embrace the culture, the students, and the families. Because it's not just about the students. It's about embracing the family and the community in every way.

I'm thinking already about the fire in Lytton. I know people who are there; it's tragic. We're going to have to start pulling together as a province to ensure that this community has everything they need. But we should be doing that every day. We shouldn't wait for a crisis to think about what our communities need. We need to do whatever it takes. It's the same way with Canada right now. Do we have the courage to make the change, or are we just going to be like Justin Trudeau today who said, "We're thinking of the communities"? I was screaming at my TV, "Screw that!" I don't need you thinking about it, I need you doing something. What are you doing as the Prime Minister of Canada? I don't know. ~ Cecelia Reekie

Talk is cheap, right? ~ Balan Moorthy

Yeah, it is. We also need to be aware that people like staff are going to get tired. Those who are passionate, we give so much energy, but we're going to get tired. We need everybody to carry this; it shouldn't just be a few people in every district who engage in this conversation; it should be every single staff member from a bus driver, to a custodian, to a teacher, to the principal. ~ Cecelia Reekie

How Do We Encourage Non-Indigenous Students to Engage with Indigenous Principles of Learning?

Participants shared that the work of truth and reconciliation is to be shared by non-Indigenous people; this can begin by understanding Canada's history and by engaging with Indigenous Principles of Learning throughout their education.

So, I think, of course, we need to have that in the school setting and to educate students about all of these topics and breaking it down in that manner because there are so many adults that just haven't had the, you know, whether they have just been sheltered, but by choice, and not taking it upon themselves to educate themselves and of course now there's it's becoming increasingly difficult to lead a sheltered life with what's happening within our country. So, what's working on a positive note is that there is just too much now to keep it contained.

So, more and more people are starting to understand; Canadian settlers are beginning to understand why it is so important. I had a conversation here in our district. Certain students said, why are people so sensitive? They are always sensitive about it. I am using this term or that term, and I had a conversation explaining that you might not be sensitive because there's no reason for you to be sensitive. But, consider yourself in the other person's shoes instead of saying, oh, you know people are just too sensitive.

What I said was just a White colonial male perspective of using terms such as even 'you guys' I am trying to stop saying, guys. What's the history there? And if you're truly aware of it, do you still choose to use it? Is it really about someone else's sensitivity? ~ Balan Moorthy

So, I think students need to learn about these topics; where do gender-specific themes come from, white privilege, all of these things and beyond racism it's, where does it come from, what does it come from, and what do we want to do better? ~ Jillian Fraser

The other thing I was thinking about is that in our Indigenous education concept, we've always had principal representation there, and one of the principals, we work with is non-Indigenous. He is part of our community now because he's been on our IEC for that long. He gets so emotional about our Indigenous people and our ways of living, and all the different aspects of our people.

If we could use those people because they already appreciate us, they know you know they see our side of the story, they understand it. They are the people we need to go to because they're there; they have that understanding and passion. ~ Cathy Speth

Truth needs to go into the schools. There are six states in the United States that are trying to prevent any teaching of slavery, because they don't want their kids to feel guilty. We can't let that happen in Canada. Students need to know the truth, and the curriculum needs to be revamped. The new social-studies curriculum allows for that, but we still have educators who are relying on old resources. Why do we not have a mandatory Indigenous studies class, so the curriculum can just be naturally delivered? It's more about the way we work in our system: how we assess kids, how we how we talk to children, how we set them up for being valued and feeling well-treated and connected, how we set the kids up for success. Those are the critical elements and themes that I'm seeing coming out of this discussion. We want to have people who believe in our Indigenous students, who don't predispose of them and say they should be on an Evergreen Certificate. So those are the major themes I've heard from you.

We also have to deal with systemic racism, such as comments that might come from teachers. I have heard a teacher say, "They should just get over it." I'm investigating that; it is something that I take very seriously. I think we've amped it up to learn on a whole different level, and I'm just hoping that we can move forward. I know we can in our district, because the voices in our Indigenous communities are strong. I feel very proud because we have welcoming posts at Hope Secondary, Coquihalla, Silver Creek, Harrison Hot Springs, and Boston Bar. At all the schools, as students walked in, they saw that Ey Swayel sign that they made at Agassiz, and an Elder spoke. She said that she went to the school 60 years ago and never thought she would see the day. Those are beautiful things.

The next step now is going to be now moving into those classrooms, right now. Okay, we've got some recognition outside; let's probe deeper, and let's go into the classroom. Let's re-investigate our practice and how we identify that. I see them in schools doing the word of the Halq'emeyelem and word of the day, or doing land acknowledgments the same way we used to listen to the Lord's Prayer. Those are positive things that are slowly starting to evolve. But we definitely need to push to the next level. I think we can get there. I'm just hoping that the rest of Canada will follow suit and will follow hard right; that's what we said we're going to do.

~ Balan Moorthy

Are Our Testing Methods for Indigenous Students Valid?

As the discussions evolved, it was clear that most members of the panel spoke to lived experiences that led them to feel that Indigenous students were not being evaluated in valid or culturally sensitive ways. Cecelia's example of the eulachon fishing and Stephanie's lived experiences clearly indicate a system of deficit mindsets regarding Indigenous students:

I think it's knowing the students. Jessica gave us some examples of students who couldn't even talk to her and it took two years to build a relationship where the kids would talk. That's success. My God, they haven't written the test, they haven't got an A or B or whatever, but that's success. I think we get very stuck in these colonial ways; as a parent of a special-needs child, I was so sick and tired of hearing from this public-education system about what my kid could or couldn't do. I think they're just set up. Unfortunately, that's the way the system is. And there's very few, actually, who will graduate meeting all the requirements.

Maybe we need to look at our education system and think differently about what the requirements are. I get that that's going to be a provincial thing, but when you can look at a group of students, probably in all our districts, who have learned a song that they can drum and

sing in their language, that's an A. Put it in whatever course you want to; put it in whatever little box you got to check off. But that's an A. That is amazing. Where the kids aren't given that chance, we're not working towards what is important to the kids and their sense of being; we're just doing the education system as it has always been done. This week we asked people to think outside the box, and we're lowering the flags, which normally doesn't happen. Why do we have to continue on the same road of whoever decided that education had to be this way? Maybe we have to let go of those. Our world has changed and our society has changed. So it's going to be different, and it's going to be different for each kid. ~ Cecelia Reekie

Are students really going to try? Because they get scared, and they don't talk. I see it all the time when we have parent meetings. We'll have the principal and us and the parents and so on, and the kids shut up. They stop everything and don't even look at anyone. And then you want to go and test them with strangers that they have no bond with, no relationship with, and expect them to talk or write. Then they get put on the Evergreen. They don't understand the repercussions of that either at such a young age. Then they are also told that they don't have to do anything to be pushed forward. ~ Jessica Poirier

So, then they don't. It's very perceptive question. What is the validity of testing methods for Indigenous students? Will they shut down using this process work where there is low trust? ~ Balan Moorthy

Using a high-stakes testing process all comes down to residential school again. These students are the second or third generation whose parents were in residential school. If parents don't speak the language that is used in the classroom and in testing, what impact does that have on the students? ~ Jessica Poirier

How Do We Involve Our Indigenous Stakeholders as Partners in the Process?

Cathy indicated that there was a necessity to invite Elders and Knowledge Keepers as partners in the classroom:

I think we need to ask how we involve our First Nations partners or stakeholders in this whole process, as we always are trying to solve the problem. What I've noticed, even as we're trying to develop curriculum, is that we want to get things done in schools. Sometimes, we forget that we should involve the knowledge keepers, to sit and listen and lead us in the right direction, because we forget. I've always been a big voice in the school, and I keep going back and saying that the school needs to get First Nations support workers and needs to get our dollars to the key person. How are they going to do that? If they don't know how to direct the funds, their lead teachers won't know either. So, we all have to be working all together. We need a willingness from everybody to work together. ~ Cathy Speth

Jillian describes an authentic example of how to create relationships with Indigenous stakeholders in the classroom:

I looked straight away to Elders and community members to be very much a part of the program at school. Through that, I hired an Elder and a Knowledge Keeper, who I very much respected, who was in the project with me. We were allies and we were working together. I'm finding in my master's program that although it's an Indigenous specialization there's still a lot of constraints and a lot of that traditional formatting. And together, Wayne, this beloved friend and ally and my teacher at school, he would help me in pushing the boundaries and trying to really take down some of those colonial restraints that still exist, and so I've been very much passionate about that and trying to be a leader. My friend and ally Wayne passed away suddenly in January and that's been a really tough, tough loss. He had a significant amount to offer, and

he was a wonderful person and such a part of the program. I'm sure I'll speak more about the involvement that he had and some of the work we were doing together. ~ Jillian Fraser

A Moment to Pause: Kamloops Residential School Tragedy

In the time that elapsed between Talking Circles 2 and 3, information came to light in our country and province that would shake the foundations of our schools and communities. On May 27, 2021, the remains of 215 children were found buried at the Kamloops Residential School site. The impact of this news about the true history of the residential school system in Canada reverberated through our group. What follows are excerpts of the dialogue in our Talking Circle immediately following the news:

It's been a tough week with the realities of what happened and how it must have impacted you. I can't imagine how it impacted your relationships and personal connections. What I would like to do is go around and just do a check-in with everyone. And then, we will talk about this little memorial candle that many of us have. I will say that I sat at my computer when I found out, and my heart was heavy. I began to well up because I just saw those little children's faces. I thought about their fear, and felt such empathy. I thought about my children, who are now young adults. And so, it was very difficult and heavy on my heart, and it followed me throughout the last couple days.

We knew that these losses and knew that these bodies were out there, but this makes it real, and the scary part—I think, Cecelia, one of your tweets stated that this is probably the tip of the iceberg. This is where we come to an accurate recognition of this genocide. So, I'll ask, how did it make you feel? What have you been processing for the last little while? How are you walking through it? ~ Balan Moorthy

So also, with a heavy heart, I have the beautiful photos, Balan, that you've shared of my Indigenous students in their orange shirts. I did a post in the community they supported and they just recognized, asking to wear orange, sharing some photos, and looking at my beautiful students' faces. And yes, your heart breaks because you see these beautiful children and make that connection to the fear for those innocent lives and their families. It's just horrendous. This will hopefully bring some more learning and education. It has impacted Canadians more, from what I see on the news and social media, and there's information getting out there. I hope that this makes it real and helps with further education, and I wonder what we are going to do as a country to bring some support. ~ Jillian Fraser

Um, I think I was at a loss for words when it came out. But as Indigenous people, we already knew that there were losses like this out there. We were already educated on both the losses that were there and the network of untold stories. I think we were educated. What surprised me is that it was like an aha moment for those Indigenous people, because I think that people turned such a blind eye to it. You see the genocide, and now it's like a big shock to them, but if they ever listened to history, they would have known. It hurts that it's a surprise to the world, when, if they had listened and respected our Indigenous people's story and history, this probably wouldn't have happened. It's just so sad. I still don't have a lot of words to say because it makes me angry. And I'm not quite sure what my mom feels, but I'm sure she's been hurt by this. ~ Cathy Speth

I have been angry. I have been so incredibly sad. The grief is unbelievable. I'm thankful my dad's not alive, which is sad. I don't know how he would have handled this news. I've been thinking about my dad and what his life was like, and about all 10 of my aunts and uncles. Thank God, they made it home, but they also didn't. That's the hard part. They came home alive, but

they didn't come back the same. This news would have been so devastating for those survivors who are still with us. How much more they can bear?

As Cathy said, we all knew. I don't think we understand the gravity or know how many more we will find. Still, we certainly heard stories from our survivors about children who went missing. How many were disposed of? That we will never find out, that's another scary thing for me.

We've all seen the posts on social media, and some take my breath away because I remember when Humboldt happened, and the bus crash. I remember my husband having to travel. And he was sending me pictures because there were hockey sticks outside of hotel rooms in Ontario where he was travelling, and the country stopped. I don't think the country has stopped yet for the 215 babies. I don't know why my mayor in Langley Township has not made a public statement about lowering the town's flags. You know, Williams Lake came out last night. Prince Rupert came out last night. They're all doing it in different ways. Some are doing four days for the sacred fires that are happening in Kelowna or Kamloops. Some are doing 215 days—one day for every child they found. But I sit here and look at the Bible belt area of our country. It's so frustrating because the only reason they'll lower the flags—if they do it—is because they get pressured. But, why do we even need to ask? They're waiting on Indigenous people to ask. I shouldn't have to tell you that this is important; you should know this is the right thing to do.

I'm pretty sure flags were dropped for MPs and whoever else; that's the colonial system. We can break it today by dropping those flags. This is so critically important. I know Langley has come forward with Gord Stewart. The flags in Langley school district will all be lowered tomorrow. I don't know about other districts, but I don't even know why this has to be a

conversation. For a number of years, I've worked with churches in Langley as they organized a walk for reconciliation. The plan was to walk from Fort Langley, a colonial capital, to St Mary's, and we would walk that walk over three days. I was on the organizing committee for one or two years, and it just so happened that the walk was this weekend. But I couldn't walk; I didn't want to walk. I didn't want to go there. Then last night, I'm like, I want to go on the walk. And I knew it was the right thing to do. So today, I walked 31 kilometres from Fort Langley, all through Abbotsford, and made it to St Mary's Residential School. We stopped at the ruins of the boys' dorm, and I said a prayer and somebody had placed flowers and a pair of shoes there. Then we walked over to St Mary's. I couldn't go. I stood back, way back, and just watched these other people walk closer. This is painful stuff.

A couple of things are going to happen if Canadians don't get it. We're going to see a lot more anger from the Indigenous people, and rightly so, because enough already. If people don't get this now, I don't think they ever will. And that's concerning, because reconciliation has been my passion. Still, I'm not going to spend my lifetime trying to get people to understand. If they don't get it after this, then I give up, because it's way too tragic. I think it's going to be interesting to see what happens and see what they think is important. Just lowering the flags seems so insignificant, but it is a powerful statement to all Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It's not something that takes a great deal of time and forethought, but it is a statement.

If Canada doesn't wake up with this, I don't think we'll ever reconcile. The churches have to commit, and they have to be public. They've been quiet. As I was doing the walk this morning, I wondered what church services would be like today across this country. I wonder what it's like for those who are going to church?

You should all be coming together and figuring out how you're going to get those radar machines; every school that those religions were responsible for needs to have those machines on site. We need to know what we're dealing with. This shouldn't take 20 years; it better not take 20 years. You know I'm thankful the coroner's office has been called into Kamloops. I'm grateful the RCMP is involved, because people have to be held accountable. It's our only way of healing. It's not going to be easy, because there's going to be way more babies. That's terrifying to me, but I'd rather know and bring those babies home and honour them. Who knew there were mass graves in Canada? We hear about mass graves in countries worldwide and are horrified when we hear about them. But we have them here in Canada. Let's have that conversation. What does this mean to us? I'm heartbroken. ~ Cecelia Reekie

Like Cathy, I feel like we knew this already. I sat down next to the Chief, and he said, "Did you see the news from the Catholics yesterday?" I said, "I haven't looked to see what it was." Then I looked, and I'm like, what is this? I already know this myself; I understand what's going on. And at first, it didn't feel like much of a shift for me. Then I went on social media. I follow a lot of other Indigenous creators, and most of the time, I see pretty terrible comments from people who don't understand all of what has happened. But when I saw people sharing this news, there was such a shift.

People were writing, "Wow! I didn't realize; I can't believe this has happened in Canada." People were saying, "I'm now ashamed of Canada." I thought, "Wow, this is crazy." Before, I felt like people didn't believe. They'd think, "Get over it," and it's like, "What do you mean get over it?" So, to see the shift, to see people understanding what has happened to Indigenous people, that's what's crazy for me. ~ Stephanie Fredette

Thank you all for your vulnerability and openness. Yeah, it's hitting home. When I saw the article, I got physically sick, and my jaw was hanging open. And I think that is what I learned more about because learning about my people was a new beginning, only beginning in 2013. It just hit home, because my grandma and close family did not talk about it at all, because it was so shameful. When my mom was growing up, it wasn't seen as a positive thing to be Indigenous, so our heritage was never discussed. There was never pride in it until very recently. And so, the news was like a punch to the stomach again, reminding me how Indigenous people are perceived or have been perceived in the past. It was hitting me personally, and it kept coming up in conversation amongst family and friends throughout this past week. Again, it was just sobering to be reminded of our country's ignorance. I think that the ignorance of what went on continues. I don't think that many Canadians would consider what happened genocide, because they're not informed. But as we know, it was genocide. So it was a very sobering week. ~ Mikayla Bay

Concluding Remarks

The unmarked graves and the findings of the Kamloops Residential School tragedy shifted our discussions and gave us time to pause, reflect, honour, and grieve. Notably, these discussions shared common threads with the results from our talking circles, including a loss of identity, racism, loss and trauma, and land dispossession. All participants expressed strong opinions about their experience in schools and offered examples of what we could do to support Indigenous students and move truth and reconciliation forward by shifting our educational practice and adopting Indigenous Principles of Learning and methods such as storytelling. The biographies, narratives, and revelations that unfolded in this chapter pave the way for the subsequent discussions and recommendations in Chapter 5. Co-creators underscore the need for empathy, compassion, but most of all care as we work toward student success and engagement.

Chapter 5
Discussion of Themes and Actions

The current inquiry is a result of the personal and professional relationships that I have developed with Indigenous people; it also demonstrates my passion for moving truth and reconciliation forward in the British Columbia school system.

This chapter focuses on the thematic needs and actions that emerged through the talking circles. Each thematic need is discussed, alongside the participants' lived experiences and the insights they shared in our talking circles.

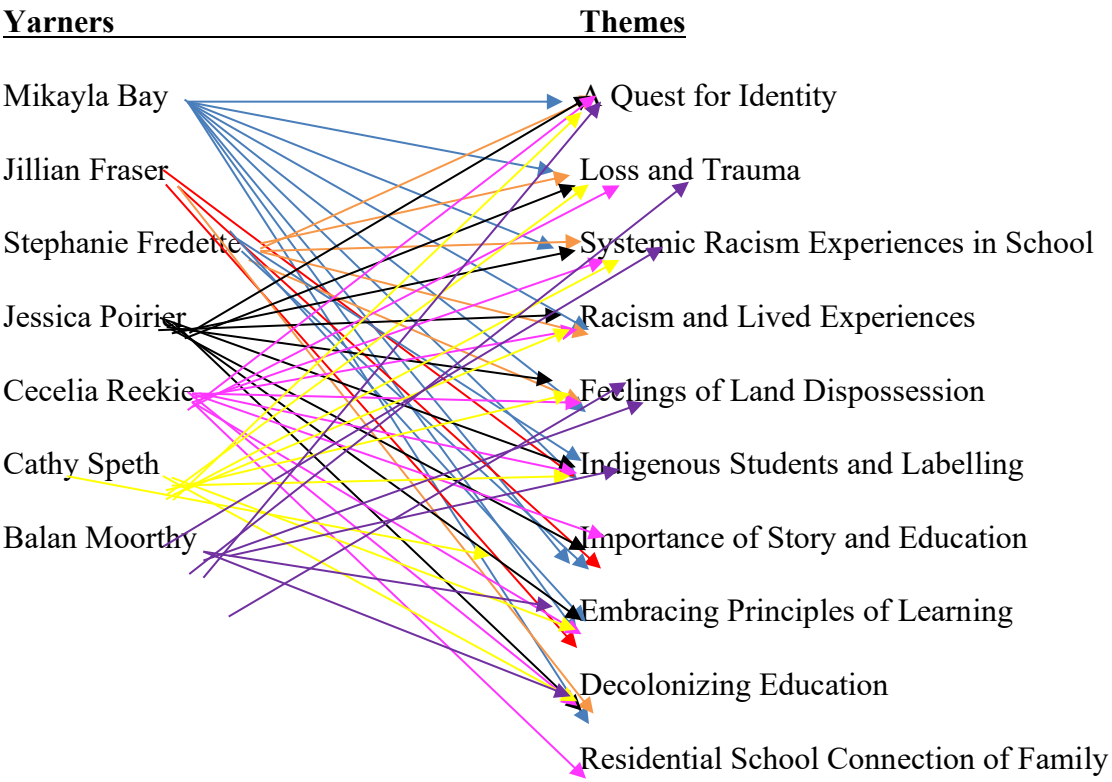
The social-yarning technique was used to connect and summarize the talking circle findings (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Social yarning takes place between the researcher and participant before the research yarn; it is where trust is developed and a relationship is built. Social yarning topics can be diverse and include whatever social information the participant and researcher choose to share in the moment (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010).

As indicated by Cecelia, yarners believe that decolonizing education is a shared responsibility and should not continually be the responsibility of Indigenous people who are increasingly tired of being asked to do the work. In order to demonstrate the shared and collective work, thematic needs are supported by relevant literature, evidence-based practice, and BC policy as these emerged within the context of this inquiry.

As did our conversations, the themes (See Figure 5.1) identified by yarners weave in and out of each other, capturing the essence of what it means to decolonize education and support Indigenous student success.

Figure 5.1

Themes Identified in Social/Family Yarning



Thematic Needs and Specific Actions

Themes identified through the yarning method gave way to a set of shared thematic needs that include the following: (a) contexts that support Indigenous students in their quest for identity; (b) antiracist structures and mindsets in our schools; (c) decolonizing classroom pedagogies and practices; (d) a strategy to address barriers**,** lower expectations, and disproportionate labelling of Indigenous students; (e) acknowledgement of the impact of land dispossession; (f) school leadership models and practices that reflect the principles of truth and reconciliation. These broad themes gave way to specific actions that educators, as well as school

and district leaders can reflect on in order to provide salient strategies for supporting Indigenous learners.

Contexts that Support Indigenous Students in Their Quest for Identity

Indigenous students need resurgence more than they need reconciliation (Alfred, 2015) in order to reclaim some of the identity that has been lost or stolen from them. It is important, therefore, that we start by understanding why Indigenous students do or do not feel connected to school and examine ways to support learning and engagement. We can do this by recognizing that residential school trauma is intergenerational, surveying Indigenous students to see how they feel about school and adopting strategies of engagement, making language visible in our schools, developing language programs, embedding culture in schools, inviting Elders to share their wisdom, and encouraging the use of Indigenous resources in our classrooms.

Recognize that Residential-School Trauma is Intergenerational

Throughout the talking circles, the historical realities and impact of residential schools were a recurring theme. The participants shared their parents' experiences and their own experiences as students. Many related feelings of being unwelcome and uncared for in a colonized education system. Cecelia's persistent belief that the structure of the residential schools is alive in our current BC education system was shared in terms of colonialized standards of success for Indigenous students. Graduation and transition rates are the go-to standard in most educational circles. This, however, was not a practice participants deemed successful for Indigenous students. Cecelia added that success was not about letter grades or graduation rates but about getting on the bus and coming to school every day. The challenge for schools is to create a sense of belonging within the schools for our Indigenous students.

School systems need to pay attention to teachers who continually have high failure rates in particular curricular areas (i.e., social studies and science), and how this perpetuates a cycle of poor attendance and fear from communities. Cecelia challenged system leaders to address colonialized structures. Stephanie's statement that "I really want to see it change; we just need to take the time to see what is there, what lives there. Because people deal with trauma in very different ways" is powerful and circles back to the need to decolonize our practices if we want our students to attend school. Further, it explains why many Indigenous students choose to move to Alternate Schools.

Survey How Indigenous Students Feel About School and Adopt Strategies of Engagement

All participants discussed the need to understand how students feel about school and what they would like to achieve; this information needs to be shared with administrators and teaching staff in order to enhance student engagement. British Columbia disseminates data for review but it is uncertain whether schools are disaggregating the data and having authentic discussions with on- and off-reserve students about how they feel. Staff are encouraged to have discussions with local educational councils, communities, and families to brainstorm strategies to improve attendance or can attend community gatherings in the evenings to show commitment to families and students. Schools can explore ways to give credit to students who participate in ceremonies or cultural events perhaps through open directed studies or integrated studies within select subjects. Educational leaders can also open difficult discussions about high failure rates for Indigenous students and work with staff to assess students using culturally sensitive practices.

Ensure That Indigenous Language and Culture Is Visible, Celebrated, and Woven into Classrooms

Cecelia reminded us about the importance of language when she suggested the following in our discussion, "*Maybe we need to look at our education system and think differently about what the requirements are. I get that that's going to be a provincial thing, but when you can look at a group of students, probably in all our districts, who have learned a song that they can drum and sing in their language, that's an A."*

Indigenous languages need to be prominent in the hallways, on signage, and at the entrance to the buildings. As well, teachers are encouraged to start incorporating language into the classroom, whether they are Indigenous or not. Schools (elementary and secondary) and districts are encouraged to hire language teachers, and work with teacher-regulation branches to secure permission letters if language teachers do not have the traditional BC teacher's certification.

When Cecelia talked about the skills learned while eulachon fishing, she shared an important example of students learning about their culture and receiving credit for it. She discussed the importance of the cross-curricular growth that could happen for teachers when they experience these events. Districts can also explore the development of locally approved course credit that allow students to experience Indigenous culture, community, and ceremony.

Invite Elders Into Our Schools to Share Stories and Culture

The importance of bringing Elders to schools was supported through our talking circles. Jillian discussed the critical role of the Elder at Q'alatku7em School and how important he was to the development of the school: "This beloved friend and ally and my teacher at school would

help me in pushing the boundaries and trying to take down some of those colonial restraints that still exist, and so I've been very passionate about that and trying to be a leader."

Cathy also reminded us of the importance of Elders in enhancing student identity: "Sometimes, we forget that we should involve the Knowledge Keepers to sit and listen and lead us in the right direction because we forget." Larson (2017) also reminds us about how inextricably linked Elders are to the identity of Indigenous students, "Students in Atlin spoke about feeling connected to the land, to the place, to their cousins, aunties, and grandparents, and to their ancestors and have the desire to know more" (p. 287).

Encourage the Use of Indigenous Resources in Our Classrooms

In addition to enhanced language use, schools and teachers need to ensure that Indigenous pedagogy is embedded in all subject areas, and represented in classrooms through books, games, dance, and stories. Jillian's suggestion that teachers participate in shared professional development and that we incorporate Indigenous Department Heads in schools is an example of way to model how Indigenous principles of learning can be infused in schools. This past year, our Indigenous Education Council funded Department Head stipends to support such leaders in our schools. There has been an immediate impact in our district, and we now have a district team of dedicated leaders who are helping to lead this initiative.

Antiracist Structures and Mindsets in Our Schools

Racism and discrimination resurfaced on many occasions throughout our talking circles, reinforcing the impact of the lived experience of racism that Indigenous people have historically faced and continue to experience in our schools today. Direct examples of discrimination experienced in the school system were offered.

Cecelia noted that systemic racism is deeply engrained in an education system that continues to be Eurocentric and grounded in colonization, dominance, and all else we haven't yet fixed. The first step in becoming antiracist is to acknowledge this systemic racism—often a result of fixed mindsets in need of transformation—faced by Indigenous students.

Canada's treatment of Indigenous people is an example of how racism flourished in this country. Decolonized classrooms and schools can be created by digging into the embers of White privilege as we authentically unlearn much of how we were raised in the education system. As we look for more Indigenous educators in our system, this research reminds us that it will take an authentic commitment from everyone (teachers and non-Indigenous students) to learn and unlearn if we are going to improve the success of Indigenous learners in our schools. Building antiracist structures and mindsets requires first, and foremost, that we support educators in becoming antiracist educators.

Support Educators in Becoming Antiracist Educators.

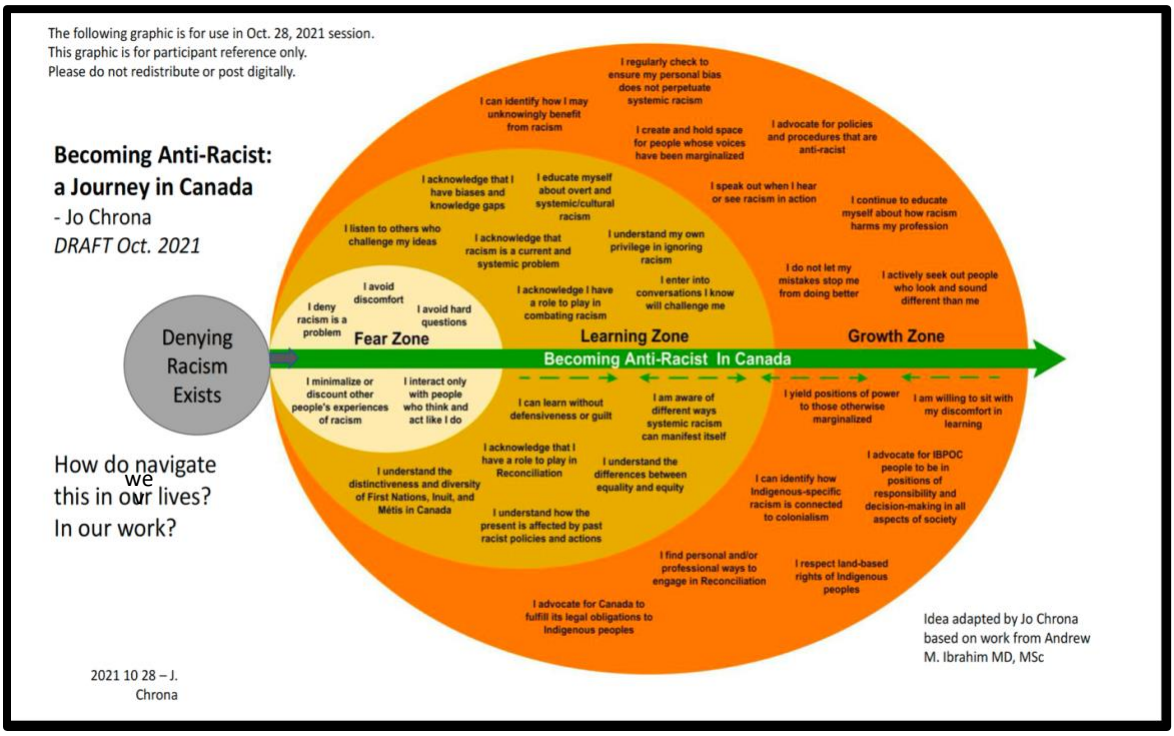
Becoming an antiracist requires a commitment to interrogating and problematizing existing policies and structures (Battiste, 2013; Brookfield and Hess, 2021). All participants engaged in conversations about both explicit and implicit racism encountered in various roles within the school environment, including as students, parents, and educators. The overarching theme emphasized the imperative for educators within our system to actively examine and deconstruct their personal biases, coupled with a collective commitment to fostering an antiracist educational environment. Jo Chrona is a key leader and an Indigenous scholar in Indigenous education in British Columbia who is working to develop antiracist structures with teachers and schools. Figure 5.1 contains a detailed set of thoughts, perspectives, and actions to facilitate

teachers' and schools' journeys in becoming antiracist; this progression necessarily moves from a fear zone, through a learning zone, and into a growth zone.

Recently released, the BC Ministry of Education and Childcare's (2023a) most recent action plan will be indispensable in supporting schools and teachers to developing anti-racist mindsets. Reminiscent of Pauchulo's (2013) "Anti-Racism in Canada Best Practices," BC's plan involves including community voice, removing barriers, raising awareness, working collaboratively for change, building capacity, and offering school support, with all elements positioned equally in the cycle. The fundamental difference between these two models is the depth of the lens through which racism experienced by Indigenous people is explored in the BC action plan.

Figure 5.2

Becoming Antiracist in Canada



Note. Reprinted with permission from Jo Chrona (2021); word inserted by D. B. Moorthy.

Decolonizing Classroom Pedagogies and Practices

Student success is dependent on what happens in the classroom day-to-day. Administrators and teachers are encouraged to consider how they embed Indigenous Principles of Learning (see Figure 5.3), universal design for learning, and inclusive and holistic design in their programs and lessons and the impact this might have on Indigenous student success. Decolonizing classroom pedagogies and practices requires that we infuse Indigenous principles of learning into practice, encourage teachers to interrogate their classroom design, infuse universal design for learning into practice, and adopt a holistic mindset for Indigenous student assessment.

Infuse Indigenous Principles of Learning Into Practice

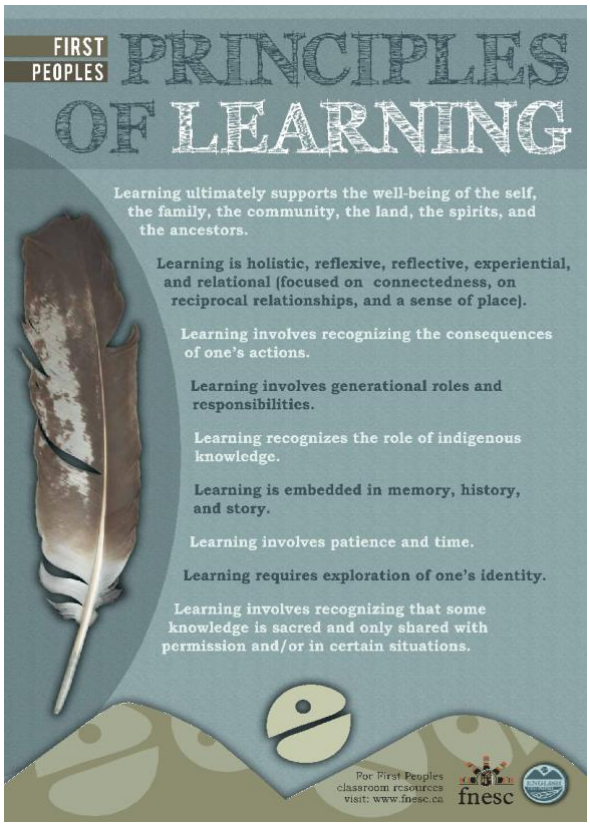
The First Peoples Principles of Learning are linked to the curriculum and establish a firm commitment to Indigenous student success as well as to building identity and healing from trauma and loss (see Figure 5.5). These principles are consistent with the 2017 revision of the BC K-12 curriculum that identifies personal, social, thinking and communication as core competencies and prompts students to explore positive personal and cultural identity, personal awareness and responsibility, and social responsibility. The necessity to develop further awareness and practical application of these principles was front and centre throughout our talking circles.

The First Peoples Principles of Learning are explicitly linked to the curriculum, establishing a firm commitment to Indigenous student success as well as to building identity and healing from trauma and loss (see Figure 5.5). Infusing First Peoples' Principles of Learning (FNESC, 2017) into education in BC is consistent with Jillian's observation of the power of embedding these principles for the betterment of all students, and other inclusive frameworks in Canada, most notably the framework offered by The Alberta Regional Professional Development

Consortia (2018), which challenges teachers to weave Indigenous ways of knowing into their practice by encouraging cultures of belonging, adapting instructional design, infusing pedagogy, and incorporating story into their practice.

Figure 5.3

First Peoples Principles of Learning



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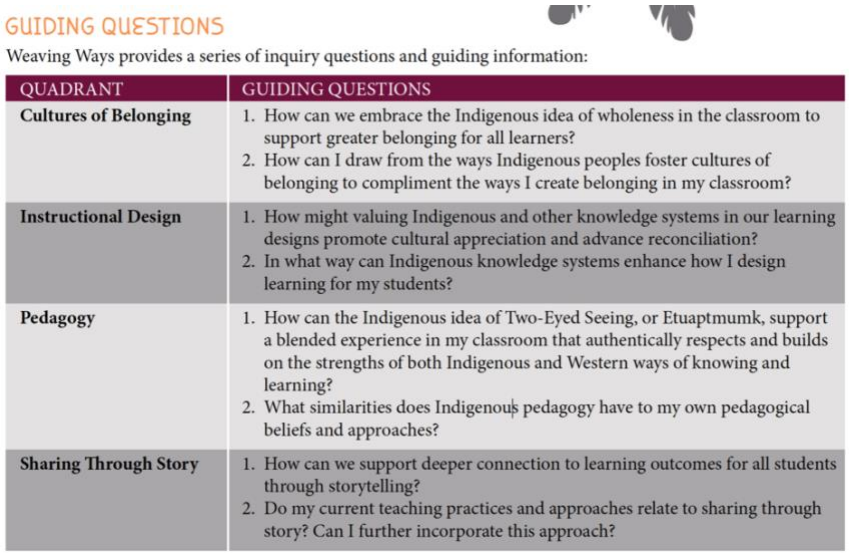
Encourage Teachers to Interrogate their Classroom Design

Holistic learning benefits all students by connecting to the community, the natural world, and spiritual values; creating collaborative relationships with the community and in the classroom; and exploring relationships amongst their families, themselves, and their histories. Mikayla identified outdoor learning as a way to connect her students to a more holistic learning

experience. The questions listed in Figure 5.4 are useful for teachers interested in building capacity for weaving Indigenous ways of knowing into their classroom design.

Figure 5.4

Weaving Ways of Knowing



GUIDING QUESTIONS

Weaving Ways provides a series of inquiry questions and guiding information:

QUADRANT	GUIDING QUESTIONS
Cultures of Belonging	1. How can we embrace the Indigenous idea of wholeness in the classroom to support greater belonging for all learners? 2. How can I draw from the ways Indigenous peoples foster cultures of belonging to compliment the ways I create belonging in my classroom?
Instructional Design	1. How might valuing Indigenous and other knowledge systems in our learning designs promote cultural appreciation and advance reconciliation? 2. In what way can Indigenous knowledge systems enhance how I design learning for my students?
Pedagogy	1. How can the Indigenous idea of Two-Eyed Seeing, or Etuaptmumk, support a blended experience in my classroom that authentically respects and builds on the strengths of both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing and learning? 2. What similarities does Indigenous pedagogy have to my own pedagogical beliefs and approaches?
Sharing Through Story	1. How can we support deeper connection to learning outcomes for all students through storytelling? 2. Do my current teaching practices and approaches relate to sharing through story? Can I further incorporate this approach?

Note: Reprinted with permission from Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia. (2023).

Infuse Universal Design for Learning Into Practice

One of the ways we can move towards more inclusive practice and more readily meeting the needs of our Indigenous students, is through universal design for learning (UDL), "a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how all students learn" (Center for Applied Special Technology, n.d., para. 1). Teachers need to explore intersectional understandings by considering the following types of questions: (a) What structures and systems are you using in your classroom to create an intersectional understanding of inclusive education? (b) How are you learning about how universal design for learning can be used to meet the needs of your students? (c) What systems and structures in your school are creating these understandings? (d) What systems and structures in your district are creating these understandings? Cecelia's example of teachers becoming more

culturally aware of how Indigenous students learn through eulichan fishing combines outdoor learning, mathematics, history and social competency into one experience.

Adopt a Holistic Mindset for Indigenous Student Assessment

All participants indicated concerns about the assessment of Indigenous students and how assessments contribute to students feeling a lack of success in school. Cecelia's voice was strong when discussing her experience as a parent: "I think we get very stuck in these colonial ways; as a parent of a special needs child, I was so sick and tired of hearing from this public-education system about what my kid could or couldn't do." Teachers should, therefore, adopt a holistic framework for ensuring that assessment best meets the needs of all students in a culturally sensitive and strength-based manner (BC Ministry of Education, 2023).

Address Barriers, Lowered Expectations, and Disproportionate Labelling of Indigenous Students

While British Columbia has made significant gains in addressing the low expectations held for Indigenous students, during the study it became more evident that Indigenous students continue to be overrepresented in special education. How the curriculum is experienced by Indigenous students and the issue of lowered expectations as a result of Indigenous identity warrants exploration. Jessica, in particular, offered multiple examples of discriminatory statements she heard while growing up and still hears in schools today.

Cecelia discussed "coming to terms, even understanding what this meant for us as a family but then going through the education system with IEPs. Excuse my language, but the bullshit of having to navigate a system with Indigenous special needs, blah blah blah. It was just this continuous battle that happened." Research by Grindal et al. (2019) demonstrates that while race and income play a role in identification disparities, income itself does not fully explain the

identification patterns and that students of colour are being identified for special education at higher rates. The findings demonstrate that these patterns are occurring within our school district and within British Columbia (Ministry of Education and Childcare, 2023b).

Addressing this theme will require educators and systems to shift practice, theory, and policy toward inclusive education and to address systemic reacism as it relates to streaming and misidentifying Indigenous students' needs.

Shift Practice, Theory, and Policy Toward Inclusive Education

As we move from special education to inclusive education in districts across British Columbia, an intersectional understanding is emerging. The previous focus on labelling children and removing them from the classroom has made way for a new focus on ensuring that students are adapted for within the classroom. Inclusive mindsets are being adopted for all BC Schools where inclusion means equitable access, time spent in general education classrooms, participation in field trips alongside same age peers, etc. (Surrey Schools, 2019).

Furthermore, shifting from special education to inclusive education may offer a more equitable and caring space for Indigenous students, whether they are formally identified or not. Stephanie's experience in school might have been different had our focus been more on inclusion and setting goals with students instead of making assumptions about their educational trajectories.

Address Systemic Racism as it Relates to Streaming and Misidentifying Indigenous Students' Needs

Stephanie's experience of being pushed towards obtaining a School Leaving Certificate, now called an Evergreen Certificate, is an example of the historical and ongoing streaming many Indigenous students faced in the past and continue to face today. During this study, Prince

George School District (57) was subject to an inquest by the Ministry of Education as a result of allegations of racism. The *Special Advisors Report* (McGregor & Wilson, 2021) focuses on several key topics: governance, board and senior leadership, student learning, systemic racism, and relations with First Peoples. The inquest highlighted many examples of behaviour and practices that are discriminatory and systemically racist. Systems and structures must, therefore, be put in place to ensure there is no room for racism and discrimination, in any form, in the district. The report was clear:

> All students must remain on the path to a Dogwood diploma, and if not possible, there must be a transparent, clear plan to track the student's progress and return to the Dogwood path. It is unacceptable that Indigenous students are disproportionately held back and placed in alternative programs or classes and that many are not on the Dogwood path. There must be immediate intentional action taken to address this. There needs to be base metrics and an accountability framework that ensures Indigenous students are no longer "lost in the system." (p. 4)

Acknowledgement of the Impact of Land Dispossession

The history of colonialism is one of taking and misuse of land and resources. The roots are selfish and capitalist. When we move our students towards this understanding, a deep appreciation for the power of place-based learning occurs and students begin to develop an emotional connection to place, which lies at the root of ecological understanding (Korteweg & Root, 2016, p. 181). Adopting an understanding of Indigenous values and responsibility to the Land might develop, in all students, a stronger sense of connection to the world in which we live.

Acknowledging the impact of Land dispossession begins by formally recognizing land territory and infusing land-based pedgagogy into practice.

Formally Recognize Land Territory

Teachers and administrators must ensure that the school formally recognizes territory in the announcements, during assemblies, and before all formal events. The effects of land displacement on Indigenous Peoples must be understood in our classrooms. “The land, aiki, is both content and process” (Simpson, 2014, p. 7). The value of land and place-based learning is emphasized throughout Simpson’s (2014) Land as Pedagogy. Deloria (2001) similarly states, “Indigenous education is not our education unless it comes through the land unless it occurs in an Indigenous context using Indigenous processes” (p. 58–59).

Infuse Land-Based Pedagogy into Practice

Jillian referred to the importance of Land-based learning: Through [the Elder’s] guidance and our developing relationship, we could make some beautiful connections with the land where the school is. It’s on reserve, so we did many plant walks. Medicinal plants are in the garden, and we are learning about traditional stories. . . . It was indeed land-based and place-based education opportunities. It was typically outdoors that we were able to build a sense of identity with the students, and courage, and again that resiliency trying new things.

Jillian also noted that it was essential to start the school in Q'aLaTKu7eM in Stl'atl'imx territory, as the students who lived there were having a difficult time attending school due to the road conditions and long commute.

Jillian often spoke of the importance of land-based learning and how critical it was for students to heal from the trauma that they had experienced: “There was a lot of trauma and maybe not a lot of trust within the school setting, so trust was really built through just getting out on the land and then a lot of my networking through my community.”

Teachers can improve place-based learning that came out of this study working with Indigenous communities from their territory and visiting them in community; inviting Indigenous Knowledge Keeper from the territory to visit to present in the classroom; including Indigenous literature that is located within their province and territory; researching, supporting, or attending local Indigenous community events; working collaboratively with Indigenous leads to make connections in the community and learn about the land. (Butler et al., 2019).

School Leadership Models and Practices that Reflect the Principles of Truth and Reconciliation

The research from this inquiry clearly emphasizes the critical role that principals play in supporting their schools—including staff, students, and parents—to move reconciliation forward. From discrimination to professional development, to inclusive education, to working with Elders, knowledge keepers, and community members, it is the principal's leadership that must draw on the strength of the school staff and community. This can guide their school toward being a welcoming and caring place for Indigenous students.

How do we have conversations with staff members who will not buy-in to Truth and Reconciliation? In other words, how do we deal with those that have prejudicial beliefs? These questions were raised during the study's talking circles, during our discussion of the need to have principals demonstrate leadership by addressing issues of systemic racism and White privilege. Cecelia's comments about continuing the legacy of residential schools are both raw and real: "I've carried it for the last week. I'm thinking: we've continued; we've allowed it to continue; the education system has allowed it to continue; governments have allowed it to continue. It's continuing today, and that's heart-breaking." The role school leaders have to advance the principles of Truth and Reconciliation include the creatiom of structures and school-wide

systems that incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and ensuring that principals have the proper tools to advance Truth and Reconciliation.

Create Structures and School-Wide Systems that Incorporate Indigenous Ways of Being

Brendtro and Brokenleg's (2009) Circle of Courage philosophy offers a framework for schools to develop a system that reclaims Indigenous learners and all at-risk students. Cathy often emphasized the importance of a hollistic philosphy to reach Indigenous children in not just academic ways but social emotionally as well.

Other recommended strategies include the Virtues Project and Seven Sacred Teachings (Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia, 2023). The Fraser Cascade School District makes use of the Circle of Courage philosophy as the guiding framework for its strategic plan (see Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.5

Fraser Cascade Strategic Plan, 2022

Note: Reprinted with permission from School District 78.

Ensure that Principals Have the Tools to Lead Reconciliation Efforts

School decolonization is a reflection of the leadership of the school principals and the ways they embed Indigenous ways of knowing in school-wide systems. Supported by Hill (2022) and embedded in the narratives of this study, school leaders require professional training and support from district leaders in order to advance their truth and reconciliation efforts. This includes the following: assigning a high level of importance for decolonization and Indigenization in their schools; addressing systemic racism in assessment policies, discipline, instruction and participation in staff development; offering support in the face of resistance, fear, and prejudice when leading decolonization and Indigenization; encouraging the infusion Indigenous learning and inquiry-based learning into their schools; advancing Indigenous inclusion alongside and in relationship with school inclusion more broadly; supporting learning on and from the land; including Indigenous perspectives in school events, community events, practices, and resources; building relationships with and learn from Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers; committing to hiring more Indigenous leaders, teachers, and support staff; collaborating with each other, the community, district leaders, ministry leaders; create structures to co-lead the work with students and communities; and facilitating learning for parents to help them understand the need for this work (Hill, 2022, revised from pp. 11–20). As Cecelia said, "It's going to take courage from our leaders."

Concluding Remarks

The findings identified in this study underline the central role that educators—teachers and principals—play in decolonizing our educational system and the need to unlearn and relearn many of the strategies we developed as students, teachers, and administrators. The literature calls us to work with our Indigenous communities—to listen to the voice of Elders and work

alongside Indigenous rightsholders—to make experiences better for our Indigenous students and for all of the students who have been marginalized in a historically stratified system. As I moved through this study, I recognized the collective responsibility we bear in Truth and Reconciliation: indeed, it is both being and becoming Truth and Reconciliation that will move this country forward. To this end, we must grasp the truth surrounding the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples and dedicate ourselves to individual acts of Truth and Reconciliation. For educators, the insights gained from this study offer a tangible path on this transformative journey.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

It is hard to process where this journey has taken me. Early in 2017, my course professors, Dr. Michelann Parr and Dr. Susan Elliott-Johns, reminded our cohort that the PhD experience involved research about yourself as much as about a particular subject. I begin my conclusion to this dissertation by discussing how this process has transformed me and my educational insights.

As indicated in the findings and the discussion, strong themes emerged in the research regarding the participants' quest for identity, their lived experiences of racism, and the subsequent internalized racism they struggled with throughout their lives. My work with the participants made me more reflective about my experiences. As a colonized, dark, visible minority of Sri Lankan descent, the study took me back to my childhood experiences and my roles as a student, husband, father, and educator. There is a deeply ingrained shame that comes with oppression and an ultimate desire to fit in with the dominant group. As I reflect on my own feelings and experiences along with those shared by the research participants and all students, I realize we have much work to do within our educational system to create safe spaces for our Indigenous students. Decolonizing our educational system will require a concerted effort on the part of all educators in order to explore their own privilege.

The Power of Story in Action

The story-making methodology used in the research is an example of the richness of what we can learn from the students, families, Knowledge Keepers, and Elders of Indigenous ancestry. I turn back to the research participants and reflect on how key themes that emerged from their

individual stories can assist us in moving learning forward for Indigenous students by incorporating Indigenous Principles of Learning in our schools in thoughtful and relatable ways.

Mikayla Bay spoke about the importance of reclaiming her Indigenous ancestry by listening to her grandmother's voice. Her love of environmental learning and experience infusing this into her practice function as potent examples of key themes that developed as the study progressed.

Jillian Fraser is a powerful example of a White settler who is making a significant effort in our province to support Indigenous students. Her work in the Q'aLaTKu7eM in Stl'atl'imx territory and her dedication and willingness to learn from members and Elders within the community have gained provincial attention. To achieve the trust of Indigenous communities, we must connect with people within the community and approach teaching with an open mind and an open heart.

I am grateful for Stephanie Fredette's powerful narratives about how low expectations that have historically been placed on Indigenous students pushed her onto an educational path that she resisted. Her candid stories of discrimination and the treatment of her sisters in school serve as a reminder that discrimination is alive in the public school system. Her courage and willingness to persevere and obtain both a regular graduation diploma and a post-secondary education are potent reminders that we must use a strength-based approach with all our learners.

Jessica Poirier shared her experiences of identity loss, avoidance of her Indigeneity, and low expectations. Her experiences as an Indigenous support worker in the same community where she attended school offer insight into the discrimination she experienced as a student and how she sees the cycle continue today. Her leadership and advocacy for Indigenous students is a

beautiful reminder that we must continue to hire staff members of Indigenous ancestry who are strong advocates for their students.

Cecelia Reekie's passion for truth and reconciliation is evident in the strength of her stories. Her journey as a child in care adopted by a Christian family, a mother of children in the education system, a school trustee, and eventually, a knowledge sharer is a powerful story. Her narrative of reclaiming her relationship with her biological father and rediscovering her Haisla ancestry is profoundly moving. Her strength in speaking against the residential-school system, the treatment of Indigenous students with unique needs, and education-assessment practices beg the question, What methods are still being used in schools that perpetuate colonial ideologies? Her strong voice challenges notions of the meaning of success for Indigenous students; ultimately, Cecelia feels success is about them feeling connected as they walk through the doors of their schools every day.

As the assistant board chair of the Fraser Cascade Board of Education, Cathy Speth's journey is a reminder of the cycle that many Indigenous people experience. Cathy stated that when she started her journey she was not a "very good Indian," as she did not know much about her culture. That her journey has subsequently seen Cathy become a parent, Parent Advisory Council president, Band Council representative, and chair of the Indigenous Education Council, reminds us that we need to support our Indigenous students and parents to find their voices. Our school system reminds many parents of the trauma experienced deeply within their communities and families. Educators must be aware of these barriers and actively encourage parents of Indigenous ancestry to occupy leadership positions within our educational system.

I am indebted to these powerful and courageous women for sitting at the fire with me, being vulnerable, and sharing their hopes and dreams as we attempt to move Truth and Reconciliation forward in our country.

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations for Pre-Service Education and Professional Learning Opportunities

The BC educational system is moving truth and reconciliation forward in our schools in an attempt to create relatable strategies for educators. Through this inquiry and, in particular, the mapping of common elements, I have been surprised by the intersectional viewpoint that inextricably links the BC Curriculum, Indigenous Principles of Learning, and our quest for identity into an ongoing spiral of awareness.

Positive personal and cultural identity competency involves the awareness, understanding, and appreciation of all the facets contributing to a healthy sense of oneself. It includes understanding one's family background, heritage(s), language(s), beliefs, and perspectives in a pluralistic society. The Positive Personal and Cultural Identity Competency Profiles (The BC Ministry of Education, 2015) have been developed by BC teachers based on students' work.

This study suggests that our non-Indigenous students and educators need to deeply interrogate their own personal and cultural identity and reflect on the following question: What would happen if your own culture and identity were completely eradicated, and you were told that you could not speak your language or celebrate your culture? What if you were taken away from your parents, and what if you were forced to live on a reserve and had your land taken away? What would be left of your society? By exploring these questions, we are developing

empathy, beginning to understand the intergenerational effects of colonization, and building respect for Indigenous cultural practices.

As presented in Chapter 5, all members within our educational communities should support the development of culture and identity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by re-establishing Indigenous language programs, participating in meaningful territorial recognitions, celebrating Indigenous cultural programs, and working with Elders in schools. Incorporating Indigenous resources may be seen as an obvious recommendation; however, we challenge educators to use up-to-date resources such as those provided by the First Nations Education Steering Committee and to work with Indigenous educators and Knowledge Keepers to vet other sources.

The topic of antiracism and its roots in our colonized educational system resurfaced on multiple occasions throughout the research. School districts will need to continue to reflect on the numerous ways our systems still have remnants of the residential-school system by misidentifying Indigenous students, incorrectly labelling them with special needs, re-evaluating archaic assessment practices and deeply interrogating the curriculum. By examining inclusive education models such as Indigenous Principles of Learning and universal design for learning, schools are poised to support all learners and decolonize classroom pedagogies and practices.

This study directs us to interrogate more deeply the history of land displacement and how it has negatively impacted Indigenous identity. Much has been reported about residential-school trauma, but we are also beginning to understand the importance of discussing land displacement as part of our genocidal history. By examining this displacement and infusing land-based pedagogy into our practice, we honour our country's true history and recognize the environmental consciousness of the students we teach.

The research took a substantial turn when the Kamloops Residential School tragedy was revealed on May 27, 2021. The emotions expressed by the participants and our recognition of Indigenous people's trauma reignited a fury of Indigenous awareness about Indigenous residential schools, antiracism, and truth and reconciliation initiatives. In a sense, we were living the focus of the study with the rest of the country, as the genocidal history of Canada confronted us in real time. For the study participants, it reignited their sense of intergenerational history and led to further discussions about their experiences of being marginalized in our school system. These are essential realities for educators to reflect on. How often do we reflect on the lived experiences of the students we teach? As we move forward in our quest to support truth and reconciliation in our schools, it makes sense to scan how Indigenous students feel about attending school and to adopt engagement strategies. Surveys used to measure Indigenous students' feelings about attending school suggest that the following strategies to increase student engagement and success in school: supporting cross-cultural credit, employing culturally sensitive teaching practices, having staff visit communities, increasing cultural celebrations in schools, and encouraging intergenerational teaching by working with Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

During the time that this research was being conducted, the BC education system was involved in a large-scale assessment-reformation process. Notably, the heart of this reformation, which moves away from summative letter grades, supports Indigenous students in terms of transition rates, graduation rates, and success in school. Student self-assessment and inclusive practices using universal design for learning and Indigenous ways of knowing are critical strategies for the new assessment framework. Additionally, all students with diverse abilities will be assessed according to their strengths and areas of growth. Letter grades are to be used in

Grades 10–12 to indicate student learning according to the Learning Standards. Emerging scholarship suggests that much of students' disengagement from education stems from our traditional assessment strategies including labelling students using letter grades and, often, the retention strategies that have them repeating grades. Many of these students end up leaving school. An ultimate question we need to reflect on is whether failing Grade 8 or 9 is any prediction of a student's future success. Similarly, we should consider how many of these students we have lost from our educational system once they have failed these grades. The new assessment model focuses more on students' proficiency and takes a strength-based approach, which has been lacking in our educational system for a while.

Educational leaders and school principals must lead the way in supporting the systemic changes that need to occur in our schools. Leadership must be supportive, passionate, and direct in order to facilitate change for students. At a certain level, all of us will have to step into discomfort to examine the concept of White privilege that permeates our educational system. Principals must take the lead and have difficult discussions about assessment policies, discipline strategies, instructional processes, and staff development regarding Indigenous Principles of Learning. Our principals must formulate relationships with Indigenous communities, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers. Leaders must do the work of interrogating personal biases and privilege and developing their cultural understanding. They must go deeper into their professional development and learn about Indigenous Principles of Learning in order to be more informed and to stand up to resistance from teachers and parents who adhere to colonial educational practices.

Contribution to the Literature

When the research question was formulated in 2017, I found limited research on how educators can support Indigenous learners in Canada's public education system. As the study

progressed, there was a notable increase in scholarly research; however, it is still limited in scope, particularly in the depths of the narratives presented in this dissertation. This is highlighted in Chapters 2 and 3, which focus on the work of the First Nations Education Steering Committee, the historical context of settler colonialism, treaty, the BIPOC movement, critical race theory, and teacher training for antiracism education. Highlighting the need for pre-and in-service teacher education regarding White privilege, White fragility, resistance through critical emotional resiliency, self-reflexivity, and actions that combat racism in the classroom are a priority in 2023. The contribution and power of the storytelling methodology outlined in Chapter 3 and the use of a co-created research space contribute to the emerging body of literature on decolonizing research and working with Indigenous communities.

This study's contribution to the literature is both timely and highly relevant as it builds on existing research that advocates for a decolonized approach to education in Canada and North America. It emphasizes the importance of considering how we educate Indigenous students, as well as all students, pointing to the need for a more holistic approach. The findings of this study are intended to inspire educators to embark on their personal journey towards Truth and Reconciliation. It encourages them to reflect on Indigenous educators' experience with schooling as they explore their own growth and understanding of Indigenous Principles of Learning and storytelling within the framework of critical race theory. Furthermore, it calls for an examination of the relationships being developed with Indigenous communities, students, and Elders, and a critical evaluation of pedagogical practices steeped in colonialism. School and district leaders should also assess and modify existing structures to better meet the needs of Indigenous students.

Limitations and Complexities of the Research

One of the significant limitations of the research is that it was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The original intention was to conduct the talking circles in person, but social-distancing limitations caused all discussions to occur during group Zoom sessions. We considered moving to sessions with masks, but all participants expressed that the online sessions made them feel more comfortable. Notably, in a few sessions, participants were unable to attend or had to leave early due to family commitments.

The study was also limited to participants who were connected to the Langley and Fraser Cascade School Districts. The perspectives of Indigenous representatives from the Fraser Valley could be very different from those of others within Canada or even BC's northern regions. Similarly, the perspectives are restricted to participants with strong voices within the BC public-school system. These narratives could differ significantly from those of Indigenous women and allies not formally connected to our schools.

I am aware that the success of this research is based on a partnership process. While comfort, honesty, and trust emerged throughout the research process, I cannot ignore that I am the superintendent of schools, which may be perceived as a position of power. I am male and non-Indigenous to this country. I will never have an Indigenous worldview, and I will never know what it feels like to be an Indigenous woman in our country. I must, therefore, acknowledge the deeply rooted power imbalance that I bring to the fire, no matter how much I want to be viewed as an ally.

With storytelling and participant-based research, it never quite feels as though the research is complete. Perceptions and responses require time over a longitudinal study. When studies are exploratory and qualitative, it can be argued that the study only gathers the

perceptions of a select number of participants over a fixed period. Truthfully, I learn more every time I connect with one of the participants. As Indigenous education and antiracism initiatives evolve exponentially in our country, I can continue the discussion cycle with these passionate women.

Bias and subjectivity may also have been present in the study. Five Indigenous women and an ally were selected because of their passion to support Indigenous learners in schools. Ours was a group of like-minded people passionate about change; we must, therefore, take into consideration those who were not at the table, as we had no dissenting voices challenging the discussed reformative strategies.

The fact that only one researcher conducted the study is another limitation. As stated throughout the study, I am passionate about antiracism initiatives, social justice, and truth and reconciliation. The lens I bring to the findings may be seen as one that comes from an anti-oppressive perspective instead of that of a neutral investigator.

Future investigations and extension of this study to other contexts and with a broader participant range should be considered.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

The intent of this study was, ultimately, to create relatable strategies that educators can use in their classrooms to move truth and reconciliation forward, to incorporate Indigenous Principles of Learning, and to create support for Indigenous student success. More work can be done to gather a larger sample of teacher perceptions about what is needed to support them in their classrooms. A quantitative review of teacher needs could help determine whether the strategies that emerged from the research are practical and manageable.

A more in-depth study of parents' perceptions is necessary. Larson's (2017) study looked at parents' perceptions in Atlin, British Columbia. However, the area is relatively remote and is home to a deeply entrenched Indigenous community. What of those perceptions of parents who are closely linked to more cosmopolitan communities? Many Indigenous communities in the lower mainland live in two worlds: the reserve and the more Eurocentric community.

A comprehensive examination of Indigenous students' perspectives is strongly recommended to validate the alignment of this study's findings with the experiences of students in schools across Canada. Understanding factors that enhance student attendance and engagement, as well as fostering emotional connections to school, is paramount. In my role as a superintendent, I have engaged in focus groups with students, and the findings from those sessions corroborate many strategies identified in this doctoral research. Nevertheless, there is a need for more in-depth qualitative and quantitative research to gain a clearer understanding of effective ways to support Indigenous students. This includes exploring whether Indigenous students perceive a sense of value and care and the potential influence of the Ethic of Care, as identified by Noddings (2005), on student engagement and attendance.

Final Comments

The Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair (2010), Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has stated, "Education got us into this mess, and education will get us out of it."

I hope that the contributions of this research honour the words of Justice Sinclair and the many Indigenous leaders and allies working hard to transform our education system for all of our students. Educators must work to teach students the truth and create a plan to build hope for all our country's learners.

We are collectively engaged in a transformative journey. Symbolically, this journey prompted a subtle yet significant adjustment to the dissertation's title in its concluding stages. The original title, "Living and Writing into Being – Truth and Reconciliation. The Experiences Of Five Indigenous Women And Two Allies," underwent a signficant modification at a question posed by Dr. Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, a member of my dissertation committee. He invited me to reflect on the meaning of the dash. The removal of the dash more authentically captures my experience of being and becoming Truth and Reconciliation and offers a way forward for students, educators, and this nation.

I conclude with the final line from my daughter, Rachael Moorthy's (2023), release, *River Meets the Sea*, "Even when things seem rigid or isolated, they're not. Everything, everyone continues to flow infinitely, like the clouds into the river, into the sea."

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