Structures and Strategies for Supporting Aboriginal Student Success: How do Instructors in Aboriginal Controlled Post-secondary Education Institutions Integrate Indigenous Knowledge and Culture into their Practice?

by

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Abstract

This multi-case analysis of instructors in self-governed Aboriginal post-secondary institution illustrates ways that Aboriginal culture and Indigenous knowledge can be integrated into formal education. Documents such as government inquiries complement instructors’ contributions. The work is intended to support all educators in increasing the quantity and quality of Indigenous knowledge and culture in their own practice for the benefit of all students and as a strategy for improving outcomes for Aboriginal learners. Recommendations for effective integration of Indigenous knowledge and culture at the individual educator level are provided. Within this inquiry into individual pedagogical practice larger structural factors emerged and as such recommendations include suggestions for improving teacher education and increasing Aboriginal participation in educational governance recommendations.
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In loving memory of Elizabeth “E-li” Jeff who showed me that knowledge of ourselves and our stories is a key aspect of personal, political, and legal decolonization.
# Table of Contents

Abstract.................................................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements................................................................................................................................. iii
List of Figures........................................................................................................................................ viii

**Chapter 1 - Context** .......................................................................................................................... 1
  Introduction........................................................................................................................................... 1
  A Note on Structure .............................................................................................................................. 9
  Terminology Colonization/Decolonization ......................................................................................... 10
  Decolonization of Education............................................................................................................... 10
  Terminology Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, First Nation ..................................................... 12

**Chapter 2 – Literature Review** .......................................................................................................... 16
  Education in the Context of Decolonization ....................................................................................... 16
  Teacher attitudes towards Aboriginal students ................................................................................... 16
  Impact of teacher attitudes on treatment of Aboriginal students ..................................................... 17
  Decolonizing Professional Education.................................................................................................. 18
  Misguided explanations of Aboriginal student outcomes ................................................................. 18
  A lack of knowledge about Aboriginal students within the teaching profession .............................. 19
  Recent improvements in teacher preparation and in-service support ............................................. 19
  Cultural Integration in Education ......................................................................................................... 20
  A positive relationship between the integration of Aboriginal culture in education and Aboriginal student outcomes................................................................................................................................................. 20
  Culturally Responsive Teaching......................................................................................................... 21
  Culturally Responsive Teaching and Literature Supporting Aboriginal Student Success................. 23
  Tailoring Culturally Responsive Teaching to Decolonizing Practice in a Colonial Context.............. 24
  Misrepresentation and Invisibility......................................................................................................... 25
  Addressing Misconceptions.................................................................................................................. 25
  Revitalization and Resurgence............................................................................................................ 26
  Common Features of Indigenous Knowledge Systems........................................................................ 26
  Diverse .................................................................................................................................................. 27
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Epistemological Pluralism</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded in Community</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cautions against Extraction, Appropriation, and Distortion</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizing/Accessing the Local</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decolonization at the Individual Level</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Imperialism</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-affirmation</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decolonization at the Institutional Level</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging Western Hegemony through Indigenous Knowledge</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decolonization at the Societal Level</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reframing Land Use and Ownership through Indigenous Knowledge</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Consciousness</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 - Methodology</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Scope</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 – Data Analysis</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Biographical Introductions</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through the Lens of Culturally Responsive Teaching</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerations</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Structures</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biographical Introductions</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emergent Themes.................................................................69
  Residential schools and healing .....................................69
  True History...................................................................71
  Ongoing vulnerability of Indigenous people and knowledge in society ...............75
  Purposes of education and what success means..........................................78
  Misconceptions regarding what it means to be Indigenous.............................83
  Varying levels of knowledge of own culture ..............................................85
  Local protocols ..................................................................86

Institutional Structures................................................................88

Chapter 5 – Conclusion ................................................................92

Initial inquiry........................................................................93

Findings within the Context of Key Themes in the Literature.........................94
  The distinct nature and transmission of Indigenous knowledge .......................94
  Facilitating the transmission of situated knowledge .......................................95
  Interacting with community..............................................................................95
  Colonizing/decolonizing.................................................................................96
  Invisibility .........................................................................................97
  Experiences with and perspectives of mainstream education.............................98
  Healing, critical consciousness, Indigenous knowledge as pillars of freedom........98

Limitations..................................................................................100

Implications.............................................................................100

Classroom Practice......................................................................101

Confronting Colonialism with the Teaching Profession.................................102

Future Directions: Areas for Further Inquiry...........................................104
Illustrative Examples of Decolonizing Professional Education ............................................. 104
Decolonizing Pedagogy of Non-Aboriginal Student Bodies ............................................. 105
Addressing Institutional Barriers ................................................................................. 105
References ....................................................................................................................... 109
List of Figures

Figure 1. Student Satisfaction Survey Data: Bullied, Teased, or Picked on...................... 5
Figure 2. Student Satisfaction Survey Data: Safety................................................................ 5
Figure 3. Layers of Terminology ....................................................................................... 12
Figure 4. Participant Demographics .................................................................................... 41
Figure 5. Alignment with Culturally Responsive Teaching.................................................. 55
Figure 6. Structural Elements which Enhance Integrating Indigenous Knowledge and Culture.................................................................................................................. 86
Chapter 1 - Context

Introduction

Welcome, I would like to acknowledge that this paper is being presented on the traditional territory of the Okanagan people.

I acknowledge your presence as a reader and welcome you into this cognitive space I’ve created. Traditionally when someone enters your home you make sure they have something to drink, offer them food, and offer them a blanket in case they are cold. Receiving guests is an honor and I receive you. If you are thirsty, hungry, or cold I invite you to make yourself comfortable before continuing.

Traditionally when you are received as a guest you accept what is offered to you even if you’re not thirsty or hungry or it’s not your favorite food. When people receive you they might not offer you luxury items, but even if they have very little to give they’ve chosen to give it to you and you should receive it on the assumption that it is the best they have to offer. I know from my interactions with Indigenous communities, decolonizing academics, and the educational community at large that many people are very hungry for what I have to offer. I also know, though, that it may be bitter to people of certain orientations. If what I offer you isn’t particularly appealing to you I assure you that it is the best that I have to offer – my freshest coffee, my most nourishing food, my warmest blanket – and I ask that you receive it as such.

As a people we, the Tsilhqot’in, share what we have, but also protect what we have. We have resisted colonial attempts to infringe upon our rights and title again and
again. When the HBC tried to set up a fort we did not support it. We actively resisted it, causing the Hudson’s Bay Company to refer to us as “troublesome and disorderly” (Glavin, 1992). When the colonial officials wanted to build a road through our territory to the gold fields and ignored our opposition we initiated the Chilcotin War of 1864 which successfully delayed road building efforts for about a century (Glavin, 1992). Our warriors were branded criminals and hung for murder, and it wasn’t until over 100 years after the event that the government admitted that it was in fact a war and the hanging of our warriors was an injustice (Cariboo Chilcotin Justice Inquiry, 1993). When forestry disputes arose on our territory we took them to court and won a landmark case, Roger William vs. British Columbia and Canada, which both affirmed our rights on our territory and forwarded the agenda of rights and title and the legitimacy of oral testimony (Campo, 2008). My grandmother, who was very knowledgeable about our oral history and language, testified in that court case. When the government appealed the case we won again. Now we face the new challenge of a proposed gold mine on one of our sacred sites. I carry on a tradition of resistance and operate within the context of ongoing attacks on Indigenous rights. My work is a part of a larger ongoing intergenerational movement.

In order to introduce myself properly I will tell you about my background. My grandparents are the late Elizabeth and Garnet Jeff of the Tsilhqot’in Nation. I am of mixed ancestry. My grandmother Ruby Brogaard is the Canadian descendent of Scottish immigrants and my grandfather Morton Grass is descended from British, Dutch, and other immigrants. My first home was on Tsilhqot’in territory but since then I have lived on Secwepemc territory, learned on Okanagan territory, and worked on Nlaka’pamux and St’át’imc territory. I currently work and reside on Coast Salish territory. I include
information about territories that I have been on in addition to my home territory because addressing my relationship to other territories is part of my decolonizing autobiography (Haig-Brown, 2009). As part of the process of both reflexivity and relationality as described by Kovach (2009), I will tell you my purposes and motivations for undertaking this inquiry.

Both Indigenous theorists and critical theorists ask “what’s at stake” and “who benefits” when performing and reading research. I position myself in relation to these questions from the perspective of myself personally as an individual, myself as an educator, myself as a member of the Canadian Aboriginal community, and finally, myself as part of the larger educational community.

First, as an individual it is important to me to continue my ancestors’ legacy of protecting our land and culture for the sake of our descendants and the other beings who live on our land. As demonstrated by the court case my grandmother testified in, our stories and knowledge are a means of ensuring that our rights as Indigenous peoples are protected. Increasing the degree to which Indigenous knowledge and culture is integrated into education will increase Aboriginal students’ own knowledge base and thus their capacity to participate in land struggles such as rights and title cases. I am taking on this project as part of a larger life purpose which involves increasing the capacity of Aboriginal people to uphold our rights within a nation and economy founded on natural resource extraction at the expense of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal rights (Manyard, 2011).
Second, as an educator I felt confined by what I perceived as arbitrary traditions in the public K-12 education system. Despite working in schools in which the majority of the students were Aboriginal I felt confined in terms of integrating culture and indigenous knowledge into my own pedagogy. This research is intended to validate and legitimize alternatives to the status quo. As an educator I seek not only justification for my desire to do things differently, but also to open my imagination and practice to decolonizing pedagogies which I may not have conceptualized before.

Third, as a member of the Canadian Aboriginal community I have been engaged in numerous conversations regarding transforming the system so that education and educators change in order to meet the needs of Aboriginal students (Arnold, Brillon, Grass, Hill, Johnston, Lever, McMahon, & Prince, 2010; Grass, 2010a; Grass, 2010b; Grass, 2010c; Grass, 2009; Grass, 2013, Grass, 2013b). Currently there is a widespread perception that there is a disconnect between what teachers are teaching and what communities need in order to further the agenda of Indigenous self-determination and survival itself. Further, there is a desire within our communities, as within all communities, for education to meet the needs of our communities. The revitalization of cultural and Indigenous knowledge is a need in our communities that is being underserved by the education system. This work is a response to a call-to-action that I have heard again and again from various stakeholders in Aboriginal communities.

Fourth, within the larger educational community I have been asked during workshops to share more concrete examples of decolonization and culturally responsive pedagogy in an Indigenous context, and the integration of indigenous knowledge into
formal institutions. Up until now I have only been able to draw from my own experience, however, a life being what it is, my experience is finite. This research seeks examples so that educators who are trying to change their practice in order to better meet the needs of Aboriginal students can learn from the work of their colleagues in Aboriginal self-governed post-secondary institutions.

The final thing that you need to know about me is that I am a storyteller. I have read short fiction to public audiences and performed stories at private gatherings, but usually I tell stories in order to connect with others in a way that is otherwise impossible. Stories insert a human element to abstract concepts. Stories provide us with metaphoric and personal interpretations to knowledge which otherwise might be literal and depersonalized. Stories ground me in my history and community and shift my accountability. Stories help me preserve my humanity while operating in a Eurocentric educational system. Commonly seen educational qualitative methods make up the bulk of this inquiry; however, this research makes sense to me, and I can better convey it to you when grounded in stories. For that reason there is a narrative element integrated into this research.

I hope that you are well hydrated, your stomach is full, and you are warm enough. After you take care of your guests’ physical needs it is important to sit with them and talk. If you are comfortable, that means it’s time for us to visit now!
This inquiry sought to describe the work of instructors at self-governed Aboriginal post-secondary institutions through qualitative methods in hopes of shedding light on instructional strategies used to improve the success of Aboriginal students. In BC the Aboriginal graduation rate at the secondary level is a dismal 60%, compared to 86% for non-Aboriginal students (BC Ministry of Education, 2013). While the Aboriginal graduation rate increases each year, the rate of change is very slow. According to my calculations using the past five years of Ministry data, if we continued with the current rate of change non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal graduation rates we might reach parity in graduation rates in BC until 2032. A child born this year would graduate in the first cohort in history where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal graduation rates are at parity. A Ministry of Education survey (2013) administered to grade 4, 7, 10, and 12 students in BC public schools also shows that Aboriginal students feel less safe at school than their non-Aboriginal peers and are more likely to be bullied, teased, and picked on (see Figure 1, Figure 2).
Question: At school, are you bullied, teased, or picked on?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage of Aboriginal students who responded yes</th>
<th>Percentage of Non-Aboriginal students who responded yes</th>
<th>Difference</th>
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<tr>
<td>3 / 4</td>
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Figure 1. Student Satisfaction Survey Data: Bullied, Teased, or Picked On

Question: Do you feel safe at school?

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage of Aboriginal students who responded yes</th>
<th>Percentage of Non-Aboriginal students who responded yes</th>
<th>Difference</th>
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Figure 2. Student Satisfaction Survey Data: Safety

While there are many contributing factors, we in the public education system need to examine our own practice and engage in dialogue on how we can be doing better. This work is part of that dialogue.

As a secondary teacher in a public school district, teacher educator, and curriculum developer I chose this inquiry in order to increase my own capacity to meet the needs of Aboriginal students as well as to increase the body of knowledge in education regarding effective practices. In workshops other teachers have asked me for
examples of decolonizing practices and while I have anecdotal examples from collaborative projects I wished that I had a wider range of examples that I could draw from in order to have conversations with my colleagues about decolonizing pedagogies. I have spent much of my career trying to orient my teaching away from empiricist research which homogenizes practices and towards decolonizing practice that is responsive to the needs of local communities and individual students and this research is a continuation of that ongoing work.

Instructors in Aboriginal self-governed post-secondary institutions were chosen as a source of pedagogical knowledge for two reasons. First, Aboriginal self-governed post-secondary institutions have higher success rates when it comes to Aboriginal students than mainstream institutions (Stonechild, 2006). Thus, in theory, Aboriginal self-governed post-secondary institutions could be sources of instructional leadership for teachers in mainstream K-12 schools who teach Aboriginal students. Second, Aboriginal self-governed post-secondary institutions were born out of the Indian Control of Indian Education movement in education where Aboriginal people demanded self-determination in education (Stonechild, 2006). These institutions represent variations of what self-determination in education could look like.

The overarching inquiry question examined in this thesis is “how do instructors in self-governed Aboriginal post-secondary institutions integrate Indigenous knowledge and culture into their work?” In reviewing the literature there are several areas of inquiry which are important in discussing indigenous education and which have shaped this
discussion. Inquiry can roughly be grouped around three themes: decolonization of education, culturally responsive teaching, and indigenous knowledge.

A Note on Structure

This work has two structures running in parallel. The first structure is the conventional structure of a multi-case analysis. The second structure, narrative, is in italics. The narrative structure allowed me a freedom which the conventional structure did not. There are several distinct features of narrative research that I found beneficial to this work. It allowed me to treat my work as a socially situated interactive performance, “produced in this particular setting, for this particular audience, for these particular purposes” (Chase, 2005, p.657). In this case it helped me connect my work to the larger social project of decolonization while simultaneously speaking to a general audience of educators. I wish to “disrupt the politics of traditional research relationships, traditional forms of representation, and traditional social science orientations to audiences” (p.660). Reflecting on my work through narrative increased my capacity to do so. As an educator I have found anecdotally that conventional forms of research carry more authority in the field, and I wanted the benefits that come from having performed a relatively conventional form of empirical research. Paradoxically, though, I was focusing on a form of knowledge that is situated, embedded, and affirms multiple epistemologies. Integrating narrative helped ease this tension to some degree. Narrative also allowed me to use Mill’s trilogy (in Chase) – biography, history, society – as an important backdrop to the specific inquiry (p.671).
**Terminology Colonization/Decolonization**

Before discussing decolonization of education it is important to pause and consider the terms colonialism and decolonization. Colonialism is “the process by which European powers achieved economic, political, and cultural hegemony” (Horne, 2004, p. xvii). Neocolonialism refers to the shift from military and political control to economic and cultural control (ibid.).

Decolonization is about surviving and resisting colonialism and neocolonialism, but it goes beyond merely surviving. Vizenor’s concept of survivance aims for “a state of being beyond ‘survival, endurance, or a mere response to colonization and of moving forward toward an active presence... and active repudiation of dominance, tragedy and victimry,” (Grande, 2008, p.244). A key strategy and consequence of colonialism has been the suppression of Indigenous knowledge and culture. According to Henderson and Wakeham, "If cultural loss is one of the critical injuries of colonialism, cultural affirmation must, according to many Indigenous theorists, be a central aspect of any process of redress or reconciliation”(2009, p.219). Henderson and Wakeham also emphasize that cultural affirmation does not replace political reform (p.219). Manyard defines colonization/decolonization as an important issue in feminism because women are disproportionately impacted by impoverishment and displacement caused by land injustice (Manyard, 2011). What, then, does decolonization mean in education?

**Decolonization of Education**

Education can be a means to decolonization through capacity building for self-governance. However, the decolonization of education is also an end in and of itself as Aboriginal students deserve to be educated in a way that does not make them collateral
damage in the colonial agenda. Theoretical work exists regarding decolonization of the institution, however, not enough work exists to support educators at the classroom level who wish to decolonize their own teacher/student relationships and practice. A variety of concrete examples derived from this study will address this gap.

Within the academic literature surrounding Indigenous pedagogy several key themes surface including the nature and transmission of Indigenous knowledge and decolonization at the individual, institutional, and societal level. What was absent in the literature was an explicit comprehensive instructional framework which described unique aspects of Indigenous pedagogy including the relationship between teachers and learners within formal institutions, evidence regarding effectiveness, specific strategies, and models of instruction. The absence of such a framework could be due to the relatively recent participation of Indigenous people in academia, the diversity of Indigenous cultures resulting in diverse practices of knowledge transmission, and the nature of Indigenous knowledges themselves. In the absence of such a framework, culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000) was used in this thesis as an organizational framework for data analysis and point of entry for bringing Indigenous knowledge into the field of education. Studying the two in unison increases the ability of those from various educational fields to understand the integration of Indigenous knowledge and culture into formal educational institutions and expands scholarly work on culturally responsive teaching by noting ways in which it can be enhanced in order to integrate Indigenous knowledge and culture into the classroom. These findings may support those who already use culturally responsive teaching to effectively integrate Indigenous knowledge and culture into their practice.
Terminology Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, First Nation

Several terms are used within this document which may require clarification for those new to discussions within Canada and British Columbia or new to Indigenous discussions. In this section I will summarize very contentious and political concepts and ask the reader to recognize that these concepts are more complex than what can be presented here.

The word Indigenous refers to global Indigenous peoples. Recognizing that there is a global discussion occurring regarding the protection of Indigenous knowledge, the term Indigenous knowledge is used within this study. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, Indigenous knowledge is not single a unified body of knowledge. When discussing research on non-Canadian Indigenous groups, such as the Maori or Native Americans, the word Indigenous is used to highlight shared educational issues and priorities. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is a document which outlines the rights of Indigenous peoples. However, in recognition of the diversity of Indigenous peoples, the United Nations does not have a definition of Indigenous, but instead uses the following characteristics to describe Indigeneity:

- Self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member.
- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources
- Distinct social, economic or political systems
- Distinct language, culture and beliefs
- Form non-dominant groups of society
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.

(United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples, n.d.)
Aboriginal is a term used in the Canadian Constitution which acknowledges and reaffirms the existing rights of Indian, Metis, and Inuit peoples of Canada (Constitution Act, 1982, s 35). Aboriginal is used frequently because it is often used as a category in government data collection and dissemination and in some academic literature. Although a few major news organizations do not capitalize the term I always do because it is a legal term embedded in Canada’s Constitution and as such I believe it deserves to be treated as a proper noun.

First Nations is a widely used term but has no legal definition (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2004). The term Indian comes with legal rights related to the relationship between the Crown and Indigenous peoples in Canada. It is entrenched in documents such as the Royal Proclamation of 1763, so the word is still in use within our legal framework; however, it does not accurately capture the full range of our identities as individuals and as peoples. First Nations recognizes that we had our own way of life before contact and colonization and demands a nation to nation relationship with the Crown. First Nations people is used as a general term instead of Indians, and First Nation can be used to describe what was formerly referred to as an Indian band (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2004).

Individual First Nations communities are nations. For example, I come from the Tsilhqot’in Nation. I often drive through the Sto:lo Nation. However, communities within the nation are also nations. For example, the Tletinqox-t’in First Nation is a community within the larger body of the Tsilhqot’in Nation.

Due to the divisive modern treaty process and land claim processes, some nations are fractured and/or contested and this simplified definition is not meant in any way to weigh
in on ongoing land/identity/sovereignty disputes. Several First Nations groups, such as the First Nations Summit and the Assembly of First Nations (formerly the National Indian Brotherhood), have embraced these terms. Others, such as the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, focus more on the legal terms “Aboriginal” and “Indian” within their name and constitution (Union of BC Indian Chiefs, 2010). Increasingly First Nations are changing their legal community names to reflect the names that they call themselves in their own language, often with reference to the land.

Figure 3. Layers of Terminology

In this paper Indigenous refers to groups outside of Canada or groups inside of Canada alongside groups outside of Canada. When referring to Aboriginal I will be referring to Indian, Metis, and Inuit. When referring to First Nations I will be referring in plural to the specific groups that name themselves. When referring to First Nations students I will be
speaking about students who are of First Nations ancestry and belong to a First Nations group. When referring to others’ research I will be uncritically using their definition of Aboriginal, which itself can be mired in controversy depending on whether or not a person is legally registered with any group, whether the group that they belong to has the legal authority to recognize them, the degree to which their ancestors recorded their genealogy, and so on. Indigenous, Aboriginal, Indian, and First Nations are complex and contested concepts, there is no consensus around their definitions. Blurred terminology and the need for external categorization of identities is a tool of colonialism which creates confusion and the potential for strife even in the simplest of conversations. Tying ourselves to words such as Indian in order to retain our rightful relationship to the land is itself a feature of colonialism.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Education in the Context of Decolonization

The Canadian education system has explicitly been used as a tool of assimilation in the project of colonialism through residential schools. Although the residential school system has been dismantled, echoes of assimilationist tendencies remain in the education system.

**Teacher attitudes towards Aboriginal students.** In a study of attitudes of teachers working with native youth, Lee (2011) found that many teachers still hold assimilationist attitudes leading to the marginalization of culture in the classroom. Cherubini, Hodson, Kitchen, and Trudeau’s (2008) study, which focused on the experience of Aboriginal teachers, found that assimilationist discourses exist in teacher training programs. In his study of attitudes of Social Studies teachers in British Columbia, Orlowski (2008) found that liberal discourses among the teaching population tended to blame Aboriginal students for the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in educational attainment. In a study on the experiences of Aboriginal students at UBC, Lindsay (2010) found that many of the participants felt that they had been discriminated against by faculty and emphasized the connection between classroom climate and drop out rates. In a study on the implementation of BC First Nations Studies, Mason (2008) found that even when teachers sought to integrate Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies into their classrooms the institutional structure of the public education system was a barrier.
Impact of teacher attitudes on treatment of Aboriginal students. In a recent experiment by Riley and Ungerleider (2012) twenty one in-service teachers from a Western urban center were shown grade seven student achievement cards and asked to sort students into remedial, standard, or advanced classes for grade eight. Some cards were marked ESL or Aboriginal. The study looked at how the teachers sorted cards identified as ESL or Aboriginal differently than identical cards with no identifying features and analyzed the justifications used when making these decisions. Despite having equal credentials to their non-Aboriginal peers Aboriginal students were more likely to placed into remedial classes and less likely to be placed in advanced classes. Teachers were surprised by Aboriginal students with high grades, and one teacher explained that he was surprised by Aboriginal academic achievement because Aboriginal students have priorities other than succeeding in the “white man’s world,” (313). Teachers stated that they were less likely to put Aboriginal students in advanced placement classes if they felt that students had negative life circumstances (313) and some believed that Aboriginal parents were less interested in education (316). Students who were not identified as ESL or Aboriginal were referred to as “normal” or “regular” (317). Researchers noted that many teachers claimed to oppose negative stereotypes about Aboriginal students, yet their decisions were based on negative stereotypes about Aboriginal students. Researchers remarked that within an increasingly diverse student body, white middle class students may be at an advantage because they are perceived to be the norm within an education system where the vast majority of teachers are white and middle class.
These studies critique existing practices and call attention to the underlying narratives informing them. Do teachers in Aboriginal self-governed post-secondary institutions have counter-narratives and/or alternatives to discourses about the gap between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students and assimilationist aims of education? If so, what are they?

**Decolonizing Professional Education**

**Misguided explanations of Aboriginal student outcomes.** Despite ongoing work by a number of researchers in Canada, misguided notions about the roots of dismal Aboriginal graduation rates persist. For example, in 2006 the *Canadian Journal of Education* published an article in which the central claim was that Aboriginal learners weren’t motivated to learn because Aboriginal people are dependent on unearned income (Minnis, 2006). In 2011 a survey of urban Aboriginal people reported that some of the most common stereotypes about Aboriginal people include that they are lazy, lack motivation, are unemployed, and rely on welfare (Environics Institute, 2010). These stereotypes exist even in the minds of well-educated Canadians, as evidenced by the appearance of the peer-reviewed publication in the *Canadian Journal of Education*. Decolonizing professional education involves confronting misconceptions and stereotypes about Aboriginal people. According to a Canadian faculty instructor at the University of Regina, misconceptions and stereotypes exist in the pre-service teaching population as well (Schick, 2009). She has found that many of her pre-service student teachers consider Aboriginal culture the root cause of social issues such as high rates of Aboriginal poverty, and thus the cause of poor Aboriginal outcomes in education.
A lack of knowledge about Aboriginal students within the teaching profession. Equally troubling in misinformation and stereotypes about Aboriginal people is the absence of knowledge regarding the needs of Aboriginal students. Teacher education is critical as part of a strategic holistic approach to eradicating assimilationist and neo-colonial tendencies in the classroom. A study on the decolonization of Toronto area schools found that most teachers felt underprepared when it came to teaching about Aboriginal people, history, and culture (Dion, Johnston, & Rice, 2010). A study on the experiences of Aboriginal teachers suggested Tribal Critical Race Theory as a means to educate teachers in a way that helps them understand Aboriginal communities and reject deficit theorizing (Cherubini et al., 2010). Orlowski recommends deconstructing liberal discourses in teacher training as a means of decolonizing the teaching population (2008). However, there is not enough research which describes in practical terms what such training might consist of. Likewise, much of the literature on decolonization of education is written in theoretical rather than practical terms. In my own experience as a teacher educator I have found that teachers are seeking practical advice and powerful models of what decolonization of education looks like in the classroom.

Recent improvements in teacher preparation and in-service support. There has been some practical movement in the training and support of teachers of Aboriginal students, including the recent requirement for all new teachers in BC to take a course on Aboriginal education. There is also a developing trend of teacher education at the institutional level through publications such as Thompson Rivers University’s “Handbook for Educators of Aboriginal Students,” and Lakehead Public Schools’ “Aboriginal Presence in Our Schools: A Handbook for Staff.” These resources are a good
start, however, they are only the beginning. They provide generalized advice for working with Aboriginal students and knowledge about Aboriginal people, however, they lack an explicit theoretical framework with concrete methods which teachers can turn to when making instructional decisions and as such are limited in scope as instructional resources.

**Cultural Integration in Education**

A positive relationship between the integration of Aboriginal culture in education and Aboriginal student outcomes. Several studies have found that the integration of Indigenous culture into classrooms benefits Indigenous students academically. Drywater-Whitekiller reports that Native students who were engaged in cultural activities were more likely to succeed in college (2010). In a study of BC Aboriginal student achievement Muhajarine, Puchala, and Janus cite a positive correlation between the integration of Aboriginal knowledge in the BC curriculum and Aboriginal student achievement (2011). A powerful study by Chandler and LaLonde found that Aboriginal youth in BC who were engaged in cultural activities were less likely to commit suicide (1998).

Yet in a large-scale survey of urban Aboriginal people in Canada many Aboriginal students reported that schools are not integrating Aboriginal knowledge into the curriculum, particularly at the K-12 level (Environics Institute, 2010). Aboriginal controlled institutions do integrate Aboriginal knowledge into formal educational institutions. How do instructors in Aboriginal self-governed post-secondary institutions integrate culture into their instruction?
Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is a model which encourages teachers to bring culture into the classroom through students and through learning resources (Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive teaching is a promising tool for integrating culture into the curriculum. Culturally responsive teaching aims to be validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, transformative, and emancipatory.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching.** Culturally Responsive Teaching is transformative because it explicitly respects students’ culture and experiences, uses them as worthwhile resources for teaching and learning, recognizes students’ existing strengths and accomplishments, and enhances them further in the instructional process (Gay, 33). Culturally Responsive Teaching does not pit academic success and cultural affiliation against each other (Gay, 34). Culturally Responsive Teaching can be validating because it recognizes the legitimacy of cultural heritage, builds bridges between home and school, builds bridges between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities, uses a wide variety of instructional styles for different learning styles, teaches students to know and praise their own and others’ cultural heritages, and incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all subjects and skills. Culturally Responsive Teaching is comprehensive because it teaches students intellectual, social, emotional, and political expectations and skills woven together as an integrated whole (30). Culturally responsive teaching is multidimensional because it encompasses curriculum, context, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, and performance assessments while tapping into a range of cultural knowledge, experiences, contributions, and perspectives to inform practice. Culturally Responsive
Teaching is emancipatory because it frees students from the constraining manacles of mainstream cannons of knowledge and ways of knowing (Gay, 25).

Caveat. While I wholeheartedly agree with these aspects of Culturally Responsive Teaching I choose not to validate one piece of the theoretical framework which states that culturally responsive teaching enables students to “become better human beings” because culturally and pragmatically I am uncomfortable with it. I grappled with this decision a great deal because I understand the positive intent behind this aspect of the framework. However, after a great deal of consideration I decided that the framework works without this piece and chose to put this item aside for the time being. From a cultural standpoint I reject the idea that children are less than and then become better through education. They become who they are and growth is an expansion of who they already are. “Better” carries moral connotations. Better than what they would have become had they been assigned a different teacher? Better than their parents raised them to be? Can one person can make another person become “better”? While the Dene Kede curriculum’s mission statement does not exactly express what I believe, it comes close:

According to the Dene, it is said the child is born with a Drum in its hand…
The child is born with integrity,
The child has worth.
It is the birthright of the Dene child to be acknowledged and respected for this.
The child who is not respected cannot become what it is meant to be.
(Dene Kede, 1993, p.xvi).

A child is born with inherent worth. A child’s status as a worthwhile human being is not something that needs to be tinkered with and improved upon. The child’s humanity simply needs to be honoured and nurtured so that they can become who they are. I was
raised to recognize my own limited authority over other human beings. I do not have the authority to say that one person is a better human than another person. I can identify harm, but it is beyond the scope of my humanness to regularly determine that the people in my life must become better humans and if so determine how their humanness can be improved upon. It is beyond the scope of my humanness to determine ways that I can improve upon them. That responsibility lies within the individual.

Pragmatically endorsing the idea that teachers can and should, through education, make students better human beings has the potential to be harmful to the well-being of Aboriginal students. Given Canada’s history of non-Aboriginal institutions attempting to make Aboriginal people “better” through forced assimilation I am reluctant to encourage largely non-Aboriginal teachers working with Aboriginal students to determine that the human beings that they have authority over must become “better human beings.” In Canada we live and work within a society founded on imperialism validated through evangelism and that legacy has not been entirely eradicated from our collective psyche or our public institutions. Given the Eurocentric context in which we live and work, perpetuating the idea that teachers can make Aboriginal children better human beings has the danger of perpetuating assimilationist attitudes.

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Literature Supporting Aboriginal Student Success. Overall, Culturally Responsive Teaching has the potential to be a useful tool for teachers who wish to integrate Indigenous culture and knowledge into their practice. The intentions of Culturally Responsive Teaching align with information in the literature described in the above section on cultural integration in education which asserts a positive relationship between the integration of culture and Aboriginal student
Tailoring Culturally Responsive Teaching to Decolonizing Practice in a Colonial Context. As an educator when I integrated Aboriginal culture into my classroom I regularly experienced resistance from students and parents, and even occasionally my colleagues. I noted a reluctance of some students to self-identify as Aboriginal. Students who eagerly shared their culture with me before the bell rang were reluctant to share the same information in class discussions. Having grown up in Canada as an Aboriginal person and having experienced varying degrees of racism within education as a student as an educator I knew that these issues were rooted in the very specific type of racism directed towards Aboriginal people by settler society. I sought solutions to these issues within Culturally Responsive Teaching and I think Culturally Responsive Teaching has a lot to offer but will not be as effective if teachers are unable to confront historical and present conflicts and power dynamic inherent in Indigenous/settler relationships. There are specific considerations that must be kept in mind when utilizing Culturally Responsive Teaching with Aboriginal culture and so with this research I seek to append these considerations to discussions of Culturally Responsive Teaching in order to increase its effectiveness.

Unique Barriers to the Integration of Indigenous Knowledge and Culture into Formal Education Systems

There are unique barriers to the integration of Aboriginal culture into education. These barriers are not impossible to overcome, however, they warrant attention and inquiry.
**Misrepresentation and Invisibility.** Due to colonization Aboriginal people have been misrepresented and/or made invisible in the curriculum (Egbo, 2009). According to Battiste (2000), “no force has been more effective at oppressing First Nations cultures than the educational system,” as public schooling as “been used as a means to perpetuate damaging myths about Aboriginal cultures, languages, beliefs, and ways of life” (p.193-194). Viewed from a societal perspective, this educational practice was part of a larger societal movement of assimilation which valued universal norms and attempted to destroy Indigenous difference and replace it with Eurocentric sameness (Henderson, 2000a). A similar tactic of erasing Indigenous identity through education for the purpose of replacing it with Eurocentric norms has been used in Australia using the concept of cultural deficit theory (Cross-Townsend, 2011). How can we overcome this legacy of misrepresenting Indigenous people and making them invisible within education?

**Addressing Misconceptions.** Work must be done on the part of the teacher to educate themselves about Indigenous people and to be prepared to encounter and confront students’ misconceptions of Aboriginal people when they arise in the classroom. This is an especially sensitive activity when students exhibit internalized oppression. Instructional resources, such as textbooks, often contain inaccurate information about Indigenous people disseminated from non-Indigenous ‘experts’ in fields such as anthropology (Cannon, 2011). How can teachers educate themselves about Aboriginal people and communities? How can teachers detect and address misconceptions about Aboriginal people and communities in the classroom? How can teachers address instances of internalized oppression?
Revitalization and Resurgence. Aboriginal people are currently going through a period of cultural revitalization and indigenous knowledge is going through a period of resurgence (Simpson, 2011). This resurgence and revitalization is in progress. Thus, relying on students to bring cultural knowledge into the classroom may prove fruitless as students either lack knowledge about their own culture or are in the process of discovering it. Educators cannot assume that Indigenous students have knowledge about Indigenous peoples or knowledge about how to acquire it (Cannon, 2011). How can teachers support Aboriginal students in their journey of cultural rediscovery?

Indigeneity itself is a highly political topic because of current issues such as the right of Indigenous peoples to free prior and informed consent in natural resource extraction and the unsettled land question in British Columbia. How can teachers facilitate discussions on Indigeneity in the classroom when the discussion becomes politicized?

Common Features of Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Indigenous knowledge can be understood by looking at some common features of indigenous knowledge systems, things that make indigenous knowledge unique, and ways that knowledge is transmitted. Anderson (2011), in his discussion of Vine Deloria Jr.’s work, highlights that indigenous knowledge is land-centered and situated in place. Indigenous knowledge can be understood through ecological time, that is, the rhythms and events of the natural world, rather than modern conceptions of time. Indigenous knowledge systems occur in microcosmic spiritual realms and accept epistemological pluralism.
Diverse. Indigenous knowledge is unique from Western Eurocentric knowledge in a number of ways. First, it is not a unitary, homogenous entity (Davis, 2011). I’ve often had people approach me after a workshop and explain their difficulties in locating and integrating indigenous knowledge, and then express the desire for provincially created instructional materials that have indigenous knowledge content. Once one realizes the scope of diversity in BC, however, and the variety of worldviews, it becomes obvious that even if presenting indigenous knowledge in this way were appropriate, the task of creating such a volume would be monumental.

Epistemological Pluralism. Indigenous knowledge is situated rather than universal (Anderson, 2011). Whereas Western epistemology places great value on the process of generalizing knowledge so that it can be understood universally as a truth, indigenous knowledge systems understand knowledge as tied to place and context. This situated and contextual view of knowledge enables a large degree of epistemological pluralism in indigenous knowledge systems. A holistic perspective on knowledge which locates it in time and place means that knowledge cannot be fragmented and presented in discrete, ahistorical pieces. In order to maintain the integrity of indigenous knowledge in educational institutions it is important that it be taught “in frameworks that make explicit reference to Indigenous worldviews” (Heckler & Sillitoe, 2011, p.177).

Embedded in Community. Indigenous knowledge is dynamic and embedded in community rather than static and free standing (Anderson, 2011). In order to maintain the integrity of indigenous knowledge in formal education it is important to respect these elements. The opportunity to do this in education is a recent development, though, as
historically education in Canada has served an explicitly assimilationist agenda. Both in my own personal practice and in discussions with colleagues I have found that the ways in which we both meet the demands of a formal educational institution while honoring the nature of indigenous knowledge are emerging forms of resistance. This interchange between contemporary credentialism and traditional knowledge transmission is being created on the ground by the instructors who make it happen for their students and communities in the classroom. What influences their instructional choices? How do they overcome the inherent tensions between the two types of teaching and learning and two types of knowledge?

**Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge**

The transmission of indigenous knowledge is important when discussing indigenous knowledge systems in formal educational institutions. Several authors have explored the need to ensure that Indigenous knowledge is transmitted in ways that ensure the integrity of Indigenous knowledge is not lost in the process of integrating it into a western formal education institution.

**Cautions against Extraction, Appropriation, and Distortion.** According to Heckler and Sillitoe it is important to “transmit knowledge with an epistemological framework that is appropriate for the knowledge being transmitted” (2011, p.177). Further, Heckler and Sillitoe, critical of approaches which extract knowledge from communities and then present it as a data in a formal setting, caution that some ways of transmitting knowledge distorts it to such a degree that the mode of transmission can “fundamentally change and appropriate” Indigenous worldviews (2011, p. 175). Cannon, too, urges careful
examination in the way that indigenous knowledge is transmitted in knowledge institutions, and echoes the sentiments of others in that “indigenous knowledge cannot be understood as ‘another information set from which data can be extracted to plug into scientific frameworks.” (Cannon, 2011, p. 128).

**Relational.** In Indigenous communities, knowledge is relational, and as Anderson explains “attachment to family, place, and community engages relations for the exchange of knowledge,” (2011, p. 105). Sette emphasizes that indigenous knowledge exists in communities, and that indigenous knowledge “is embedded in community practices, rituals, and relationships, making it hard to codify” (2011, p. 441). Simpson notes that in her own experience transmission of knowledge varies even within the same nation, and that there are different local protocols and variations of accessibility of knowledge depending on your relationships and where you are (2011).

**Emphasizing/Accessing the Local.** Cannon (2011), discussing indigenous knowledge in post-secondary institutions, says that there is a responsibility on the part of educators to become familiar with the local territory and stories of that territory, and that there is a responsibility on the part of the institution to set up institutional supports which engage the community, including elders and youth, in the institution. Heckler and Sillitoe encourage teaching students how to access indigenous knowledge through interviewing elders and engaging in local ceremonies at the post-secondary level so that learning indigenous knowledge can become an ongoing part of their lives (2011).

Indigenous knowledge is a separate category from culturally responsive teaching because of its explicit role in decolonization. The social role of indigenous knowledge in
Decolonization can be explored at three levels; the individual level, the institutional level, and the societal level.

Decolonization at the Individual Level

At the individual level the degree to which the under-representation or misrepresentation of indigenous knowledge and worldviews in the curriculum has impacted individual conceptions of self cannot be understated. I find Youngblood Henderson’s lake metaphor particularly powerful for understanding the way that the lack of indigenous knowledge in institutions impacts individuals:

In Canadian universities and colleges, academic curricula support Eurocentric contexts. When most professors describe "the world," they describe artificial Eurocentric contexts and ignore Aboriginal worldviews, knowledge, and thought. For most Aboriginal students, the realization of their invisibility is similar to looking into a still lake and not seeing their images. They become alien in their own eyes, unable to recognize themselves in the reflections and shadows of the world. As their grandparents and parents were stripped of their wealth and dignity, this realization strips Aboriginal students of their heritage and identity. It gives them an awareness of their annihilation. At best, Canadian universities define Aboriginal heritage, identity, and thought as inferior to Eurocentric heritage, identity, and thought. Typically, however, Eurocentric thought explicitly and implicitly confirms Aboriginal inadequacy and asserts a negative image of Aboriginal heritage and identity. Tragically, before long, Aboriginal students will succumb and inwardly endorse Eurocentric thought and help to lay the foundations of the relationship of domination that will entrench their thoughts. (p.59, 2000b).

In this quote Youngblood-Henderson is speaking about mainstream post-secondary institutions which have lower success rates with Aboriginal students than self-governed Aboriginal post-secondary institutions (Stonechild, 2006). On wonders, then, whether the phenomenon of invisibility is less predominant in self-governed Aboriginal post-secondary institutions, and if so, how do instructors do this while meeting the demands of curricular and program expectations and norms?
Cognitive Imperialism. Battiste uses the term “cognitive imperialism” to describe (2000, p.193). In education this is done by presenting a settler version of Indigenous peoples and their knowledge or by excluding their presence and perspectives all together. Initially this was done through residential schools, however, as discussed above echoes of assimilationism still persist in education today. Aboriginal self-governed post-secondary institutions present a unique opportunity to provide education from an Indigenous worldview in Indigenous communities to students who presumably hold Indigenous worldviews. What opportunities and methods are used to do this in the classroom that deviate from standard norms in mainstream education regarding the integration of Indigenous worldviews in pedagogy? In short, how do instructors in these institutions combat an established history of cognitive imperialism through education?

Self-affirmation. If one applies the work of Couthland (who explicates Fannon’s ideas) to formal education, the marginalization of indigenous knowledge in education is not accidental. Couthland explains that part of the strategy of colonization is to impose upon the colonized the colonizers view of them, so that the colonized come to view themselves as inferior and no longer need to be coerced by force to participate in their own oppression and subjugation (2007). Thus, the road to self-determination requires that the colonized to engage in an individual and collective process of self-affirmation, after which they can “begin to conceive of and construct radical alternatives to the colonial project itself,” (2007, p.453). In a similar vein, Anderson points to the strengths of indigenous knowledge in healing initiatives such as liberation psychology (2011), and Settee recommends the use of indigenous knowledge in education as a means of developing critical consciousness (2011).
Decolonization at the Institutional Level

Challenging Western Hegemony through Indigenous Knowledge. Settee’s (2011) description of decolonization at the institutional level is most concise, as she describes the inclusion of indigenous knowledge at the institutional level as a challenge to the hegemony of Western knowledge. The hegemony of Western knowledge can be seen as an extension of the processes of individual colonization described above. Likewise, the decolonization of individuals though challenging the hegemony of Western knowledge and the legitimization of indigenous knowledge described above is more possible in the context of a decolonized institution. In an instructional sense part of decolonization of the institution involves removing barriers that limit the genuine integration of indigenous knowledge. For example, in a study on BC First Nations studies, the structure of the public school system was cited as a barrier to the integration of indigenous knowledge (Mason, 2008). One wonders, then, what opportunities exist in self-governed Aboriginal post-secondary institutions for the integration of indigenous knowledge into formal education. In this study I am looking at institutions that take up the project of decolonization through their integration of culture and knowledge into classrooms.

Decolonization at the Societal Level

Reframing Land Use and Ownership through Indigenous Knowledge. At the societal level the integration of indigenous knowledge into formal education can be a means of decolonization by reframes debates around land use and ownership. Marker (2011) sees the processes of reclaiming lost knowledge and lost land as concurrent and complementary. Marker also sees the turn towards Indigenous understandings as an act of resistance in and of itself as Indigenous understandings do not fall within dominant
ideologies. Davis sees the resurgence of indigenous knowledge as “part of a strategy by Indigenous peoples to develop a challenge to prevailing authoritative discourses relating to land, heritage, environment, and education,” (2011, p123).

**Critical Consciousness.** Youngblood Henderson, drawing upon the theoretical framework of Freire’s concepts of cultural emancipation and critical consciousness, says that “it is fundamental to any Aboriginal emancipation that existing Aboriginal worldviews, languages, knowledge, customary orders, and laws must be validated by Canadian institutions and thought,” (2000a, p.252). By looking at the integration of indigenous knowledge and culture in formal education this study takes decolonization to the societal level by providing professionals with knowledge on how to integrate indigenous knowledge and culture into the curriculum and opening dialogue regarding what counts as knowledge at the post-secondary level and how knowledge is disseminated at the post-secondary level, disrupting hegemonic and singular definitions of knowledge and culture in the process.

*As a Tsilhqot’in woman I am deeply invested in the revitalization of Indigenous knowledge for the purpose of having a secure land base for future generations. Having a secure land base is the means to which we protect and transmit our culture and knowledge. When we were growing up our land base was an important part of our identity even though we did not live on it. While I am not raising my son on our land base I bring him there and that’s where he learns about traditional activities such as fishing and setting up fish camp. I hope that my son’s identity is tied to our land base. When our land base is threatened our very existence as Tsilhqot’in is threatened.*

*As a young adult I witnessed my grandparents, uncle, and mother participate in the Tsilhqot’in rights and title case. Suddenly traditional knowledge was not just something that we had for our family, it was something we had which benefitted the nation by providing ongoing occupation and land use which then secured rights and title. In the summer of 2013 I participated in the second Canadian and Environmental Agency’s Assessment process for determining whether or not to build a gold mine in our territory. My presentation to the panel was on the United Nations Declaration on the*
Rights of Indigenous Peoples. My son and I sat with my mother while she did her presentation. I also sat in on two days of panel presentations and read my uncle’s transcripts from a previous panel hearing. I noticed that within the panel hearings Indigenous knowledge was the means by which people established that the area was currently important to our nation and that the gold mine would have negative repercussions on our people. In both the panel hearing process and rights and title cases Indigenous knowledge functions to uphold existing rights and to challenge attempts to disconnect us from our land base. Indigenous knowledge as a decolonizing force is not abstract or theoretical – the maintenance and revitalization of Indigenous knowledge within our nations has material and political benefits for current and future generations. The maintenance and revitalization of Indigenous knowledge is about the survival of our people within a state and global economy which desires to disrupt our relationship to the land.

Questions

This discussion on the relationship between education and decolonization leads to several questions. How might teachers integrate Indigenous knowledge into formal institutions? Does working in a self-governed Aboriginal post-secondary institution present unique opportunities in terms of the integration of indigenous knowledge? What advice would they give others who wish to integrate Indigenous knowledge into their classrooms?

I am particularly interested in this last question for my own practice as a classroom teacher as the integration of Indigenous worldviews into formal education has been an ongoing inquiry question throughout my career.

This line of inquiry began in my undergraduate exit research through my Guided Reflective Inquiry Project (GRIP) and while doing the materials created by the Native Adult Education Resource Center were invaluable in imagining different possibilities for education. As I moved into teaching the inquiry continued by reading academic and professional publications and trying out the ideas presented in terms of integrating
knowledge and culture into the classroom. I have documented my ongoing inquiry through my blog which has generated a great deal of interest among other educators. I have also taken this dialogue to the larger educational community through workshops at conferences such as the First Nations Education Steering Committee. In this journey I have met many educators who want to do a better job of meeting the needs of Aboriginal students in the classroom; however, in a public school setting your imagination and practice are somewhat constricted by the expectations of others, institutional barriers, and the colonial traditions embedded in institutions which you are expected to maintain.

When I was working for the Lillooet Tribal Council as a literacy coach, a role which involved supporting students who were taking courses through the St’at’imc Education Institute and NVIT, I realized how qualitatively different self-governed education is from mainstream education and it gave me incredible hope during a period when I was experiencing numerous challenges in the decolonization of my own work as a public school teacher. It made me aware that I had reached the boundaries of my own individual inquiry and needed to enlist the support of other instructors in order to extend my understanding of what decolonization in education can look like. This study is an extension of an ongoing inquiry and an opportunity to widen the scope of an ongoing conversation in Aboriginal education.
Chapter 3 - Methodology

There has been a crisis in Indigenous educational and child welfare policy (among other sites) in this country. Why? Because the research that influences policy and shapes practices that impact Indigenous communities emerges from Western, not Indigenous, knowledge or forms of inquiry. The proposition is that methodology itself necessarily influences outcomes. Indigenous research frameworks have the potential to improve relevance in policy and practice within Indigenous contexts.

(Kovach, 2009, p.13)

Kovach’s quote illustrates an ongoing struggle that many Indigenous researchers in professional fields such as education struggle with. In order to communicate with the larger field in a way that we can be heard strategically, we need to use the language of that field through means such as conventional research design. However, the need to communicate using the tools available cannot overshadow the knowledge and messages in our work to the degree that our voice as Indigenous individuals, as well as the stories which our participants have allowed us to share, are not distorted or destroyed in the process of fitting them into conventional designs. This paradox is an echo one of my primary inquiry questions – how do you integrate indigenous knowledge into formal institutions without distorting it or destroying it in the process?

Smith states “this shift in position, from seeing ourselves as passive victims of all research to seeing ourselves as passive victims of all research to seeing ourselves as activists engaging in a counterhegemonic struggle over research, is significant” (2005). I consider myself and my work to be part of this shift. Smith also states “research, like schooling, once the tool of colonization and oppression, is very gradually coming to be seen as a potential means to reclaim language, histories, and knowledge, to find solutions
to the negative impacts of colonialism and to give voice to an alternative way of knowing and being.” The participants that I worked with most utilized schooling as a means to reclaim language, histories, and knowledge, and to find solutions to the negative impacts of colonialism and give voice to alternate ways of knowing and being within formal institutions. My work seeks to draw attention to their work by sharing it, celebrating it, and contextualizing it within academic and professional discourse.

This inquiry can best be described as multiple case study. In this design, I use “multiple case studies with no separate discussions of each case but an overall cross-case analysis with an un-sequenced structure” (197, Creswell, 2006). It is a descriptive case study, which is defined by Merriam as a tool that can:

- Include vivid material – quotations, interviews, newspaper articles, and so on
- Obtain information from a wide variety of sources
- Spell out differences of opinion on the issue and suggest how these differences have influenced the result
- Present information in a wide variety of ways… and from the viewpoints of different groups (1998, p30-31)

The purpose of this study is to illustrate different possibilities for reconciling indigenous knowledge in formal institutions and for including Indigenous knowledge and culture in the classroom, and as such, the descriptive case study, with an emphasis on a variety of sources, and a diversity of opinions, information, and viewpoints, is the ideal tool for achieving the end result.

Merriam highlights the concrete and contextual nature of case study knowledge which are both elements of case study which make it appropriate methodology for the purpose of this study. Merriam sorts educational case studies into categories by
discipline, noting that there are psychological, ethnographic, historical, and sociological.

Of the four choices presenting, this most closely resembles a sociological case study as it is interested in social roles between educators/students/communities, institutional and community factors that influence pedagogical decision-making, the interplay between education and societal change, and how educators bring culture and indigenous knowledge into formal settings.

Yin sorts the scope of theoretical frameworks into case studies into individual, group, organizational, and societal (2003). It is tempting to get into the organizational frameworks of self-governing Aboriginal post-secondary institutions, or their role in society, however, this study is restricted to the pedagogy of individual instructors in these institutions, their interactions with students, and their interactions with the community through their pedagogy. As such, the primary theoretical scope will be individual and to some degree group.

As recommended by Yin, construct validity was achieved by interviewing multiple sources, using multiple sources of evidence such as lesson plans, grey literature, and by having participants review draft case study reports. External validity was be achieved by using replication logic by having multiple cases. Reliability was achieved by creating a case study protocol.

Data analysis was done through the constant comparative method, which Merriam describes as the process where

The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then
compared to each other and to other instances. Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated.

(1998, p159)

I drew from Stake’s series of tools for organizing theme based assertions from qualitative data in order to methodically complete this process.

Stake cautions against making research design too open ended and recommends a series of carefully designed goals and questions in order to narrow the scope of the inquiry into manageable units for analysis (2006). Yin sorts interview formats into three categories based on the degree of openness in terms of where the answers might go (2003). Open ended surveys are the most open, focused interviews allow participants to interpret and respond to the question in a variety of ways while still focusing on the themes identified by the researcher, and survey interviews are very narrow in terms of topics discussed and participants’ options in terms of identifying themes and topics. I used focused interviews utilized questions to get to the heart of my goals and questions while allowing for more openness in terms of participant answers than a survey style interview.

At first glance the case study seems like a strange tool to choose as a platform for discussion of issues such as indigenous knowledge because it comes with empiricist connotations with are at odds with the idea of situated and embodied knowledge, however, upon deeper examination the case study is actually a very reasonable tool.

I chose the case study method after reading Taiaiake Alfred’s *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (2005), and Margaret Kovach’s *Indigenous
Methodologies: Characteristics, Contexts, and Conversations (2009). In both of these the authors work in a very specific field, base their professional work around emerging decolonizing methodologies, and sought dialogue with others in order to clarify their own ideas and provide concrete examples of very abstract ideas. Within the interviews and discussion are not only examples of transformative action, but also the thinking behind the decision regarding the actions. What is presented is not a prescriptive template for change, but rather possibilities built around principles.

Indigenous intellectuals such as Shawn Wilson have drawn attention to the fact that colonial methodologies such as case studies are informed by colonial epistemologies and ontologies and as such are not an appropriate method of representing Indigenous perspectives (Chilisa, 2012). However, others, such as Church and Kaitgbak have justified the use of conventional methodologies in the exploratory phase of research (Chilisa, 2012). During this encounter stage, researchers acknowledge the limitations of the study and do what they can to infuse indigenity into it with the hopes of later delving deeper into the issue with more appropriate methodologies. The topic of the pedagogical practices of instructors at Aboriginal self-governed post-secondary institutions is underrepresented in the body of knowledge that pre-service and practicing educators draw from in order to inform their practice. This underrepresentation is due to a number of factors, the most predominant of which are that first, the institutions tend to focus on delivering external courses up to the undergraduate level and as such teaching rather than research is the primary and sometimes sole purpose of the institution (Stonechild, 2006), and the institutions are often funded by grants and on a program-by-program basis, creating a piecemeal budget with high levels of uncertainty for faculty (FNESC, 2008). These two
systemic factors together provide little support for instructors at self-governed Aboriginal post-secondary institutions to represent themselves in the research community. I see this study as a first step towards the possibility of collaborative research partnerships in the future.

**Geographic Scope**

This is a multi-case analysis of a larger case. The larger case is self-governed Aboriginal post-secondary institutions in British Columbia, and the individual cases are the pedagogy of instructors within their classes. I am particularly interested in experiences from British Columbia because of the demographics in British Columbia. British Columbia is the most diverse province in terms of First Nations groups. Because of overlap in territories institutions may be located on multiple territories. In order to serve a significant enough population to warrant an institution, these institutions are likely have diversity in terms of the First Nations populations represented in their student body as well as diversity in terms of the composition of their governing structure. Being cognizant of this diversity and ensuring that there is significant representation of British Columbia institutions increased the relevance of this work to both urban Aboriginal education and school districts which often are also situated on and serve multiple First Nations.

**Participants**

Participants were eligible if they were instructors at self-governed Aboriginal post-secondary institutions in British Columbia or had been within the last five years. Aboriginal identity was not a requirement of participation, however, only Aboriginal
instructors responded to the call for participants. As illustrated in the table below, participants brought with them a range of experiences in a variety of educational contexts and came from a range of positions within institutions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grant</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Chad</th>
<th>Wendy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Nations</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous to territory in which they taught</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience working in or with provincial post-secondary institutions</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts in a resource capacity to the entire institution</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary and or/sole instructor for specific courses</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary and/or sole coordinator/instructor for specific program/site</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Participant Demographics

**Data Collection**

**Interviews.** Interviews were structured through the attached interview guide, however, there was ample room for participants to focus on areas which they considered most relevant or areas indirectly related to the inquiry questions.

Three interviews took place in person and one interview took place over the phone. Interview participants were invited to submit artifacts that such as assignment
descriptions and course outlines in order to get a fuller picture of their practice. Interviews were semi-structured using an interview guide and ranged from one hour to nearly two hours. Much discussion took place before and after the interviews, however, only the discussion that took place while the recorder was turned on was analyzed as data.

**Documents.** Over the last fifty years in Canada Aboriginal education has been an area of inquiry for governments and related organizations. Where it complements specific points of discussion “grey literature” (policy documents, government commissions on Aboriginal education) will be intertwined with participants’ comments for the purpose of triangulation. Some readers who are not on the receiving end of institutionalized racism in Canada may find some of the participants’ comments regarding Aboriginal people and education difficult to believe. “Grey literature” is brought in to reinforce participants’ observations and to draw attention to the fact that in policy and government the things that participants are saying have been raised before and are ongoing issues within education. Within the academic literature the principles and recommendations put forth in grey literature has not been translated to the classroom level. The illustrative examples provided by participants bridges this divide.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis began by representing each participant in a teaching/learning biography. Then illustrative examples of ways in which participants’ practice is similar to that of Culturally Responsive Teaching were identified. Finally, themes which emerged from interviews were sought.
Data analysis is inspired by naʕʷqnwixʷ. Naʕʷqnwixʷ is an Okanagan concept of knowledge transmission (Hall, 2007). Traditionally elders would ask people to partake in it as a form of conflict resolution (Cohen, 2010), however, in a contemporary context it can be used as a methodology or dialogue tool (Hall, 2007). The word can be deconstructed to mean “like water dripping onto someone’s head”. The water symbolizes knowledge, and the knowledge becomes infused into the whole person and integrated into their holistic being. It is a shared process among a group of people and speaks to the process of sharing and receiving knowledge. The process “requests each person to contribute information about the subject at hand. What took place was not a debate but a process of clarification, one that incorporated bits of information from as many as possible, no matter how irrelevant, trivial, or controversial the bits might seem” (Cohen, 2010). As such, the process honours and validates the existence of multiple truths (Wilson, 2008) and moves away from the western concept of universal knowledge and towards situated knowledge (Anderson, 2011).

The intention of this work is not to uncover universal truths regarding the tendencies of Aboriginal learners or effective instructors. Such a goal is likely to lead to false generalizations and stereotypes about Aboriginal learners. The intention of this work is to provide powerful examples of decolonizing practices in order to imagine possibilities for decolonizing work in K-12 public education. The intention of this work is also to bring abstract theory to life for educators of Aboriginal students through stories told by people who embody self-determination in education through their work in self-governed Aboriginal post-secondary education and bring the concept of decolonization to
life through their work with students. Naⱥʷqnwixʷ, is concept which has the capacity to honour these intentions.
Chapter Overview

In this opening section to the chapter I provide an overview to the contents of the chapter. It explains the rationale for using biographical introductions to each of the participants. Then it summarizes the nature of the section which provides illustrative examples of Culturally Responsive Teaching as well as the section which explores themes which emerged from the interviews related to integrating Indigenous knowledge and culture into formal education. Finally, it summarizes the section of the chapter which focuses on how the structure of self-governed Aboriginal post-secondary institutions influences practice.

About the Biographical Introductions. In the biographical introduction section I will introduce the four participants. Personal and educational biography factored strongly into participants’ decision to teach and their instructional decisions. Biographical introductions are a form of representation that honours each individual as a whole person situated in unique social, cultural, and political contexts. By beginning with biographical introductions readers are provided an opportunity to consider the context in which each participant works as well as factors they highlight as important to shaping their practice.

Each small biography contains a brief overview of the participant’s teaching experience and a summary of their perspectives on the nature teaching and learning constructed from information provided during their interviews. While the composites below are summarized, I have tried to retain as much of the participants’ voice as possible by using specific phrases and terms that they used to describe their perspectives on teaching and learning.
Through the Lens of Culturally Responsive Teaching. The examples section provides illustrative examples that help extend thinking about culturally responsive teaching with a focus on indigenous knowledge and culture. Gay describes culturally responsive teaching through six key characteristics (validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, transformative, emancipatory) and I have sorted specific examples into these categories.

Initially this was to be the bulk of my data analysis section. By providing illustrative examples I hoped to contribute to the field of education Indigenous examples of what culturally responsive teaching looks like. However, after the interviews I realized that the ways my participants integrated Indigenous culture and knowledge was tied to context and biography. For example, Chad drew on the Okanagan Four Foods story and How Names Were Given story in order to inform and guide the way that he integrated Indigenous culture and knowledge into the classroom. Laura drew on concepts within St’at’imc knowledge, Grant drew on the metaphor of reading the weather, and Wendy drew on her embeddedness within community. The act of extracting examples from individuals and context distorted them into a superficial and possibly inaccurate representation. Each participant drew from Indigenous frameworks of the purpose of education and beliefs about teaching and learning. Merely providing concrete examples divorced from an explanation of their relevance to the participants’ perspectives robbed the data of its richness. I also felt uncomfortable superimposing the theoretical framework onto participants’ examples because the participants came from frameworks where they began with an Indigenous framework in order to enable students to access academic skills rather than explicitly working from the framework of culturally
responsive teaching. So while Culturally Responsive Teaching is an element of my data analysis it does not play the central role that I originally imagined it would.

It remains a critical piece of the discussion, though. Culturally responsive teaching is an entry point into the conversation. While participants may not base their practice on culturally responsive teaching, by finding examples where their practice intersects with culturally responsive teaching we can establish that their practice is similar enough to culturally responsive teaching that considerations are relevant to both people teaching from an Indigenous framework and from a culturally responsive teaching framework.

Considerations. Work to date on culturally responsive teaching lacks attention to the ways that integrating Indigenous knowledge and culture into the classroom requires special care and attention because of the inherent tensions between euro-centric knowledge and Indigenous knowledge, the history of colonialism, and in particular, the ways that the education system has marginalized Indigenous knowledge and learners, misrepresents Indigenous people, and has been used as an assimilationist tool to destroy Aboriginal culture. During interviews participants provided numerous explanations of the ongoing impact of colonialism on Indigenous learners, communities, culture, and knowledge as well as ways that they overcome these challenges in their practice.

Supportive Structures. When I began this inquiry I believed that what my colleagues were doing in self-governed post-secondary institutions was qualitatively different in substance and style than what my colleagues in provincial schools were doing. I also knew that self-governed post-secondary institutions had higher success rates than provincial institutions. Participants connected these two items for me by telling me
why the integration of Indigenous culture and knowledge made a difference in their
effectiveness, and these explanations are integrated throughout. In the structure section I
have compiled participants’ comments regarding how their institutions support their
practice and how Aboriginal control of education supports the ways that they integrate
Indigenous knowledge and culture into their practice.

**Biographical Introductions**

Laura. At the time of this interview Laura had experience teaching in a self-
governed post-secondary institute, a provincial institute delivering community based
programs, and the provincial school system. At the post-secondary level she has taught
university preparation courses, conventional academic courses, and traditionally
developed language and culture courses. She is indigenous to the territory in which she
teaches. Laura’s multiple experiences provide a unique perspective on what makes
teaching in a self-governed context a valuable experience for teachers and learners. As a
student in the provincial system she experienced the marginalization of her St’at’imc
identity as a result of teachers and instructors who did not acknowledge and value her
identity. She strives to ensure that her students do not experience the same
marginalization. She became a teacher because one teacher in particular acknowledged
her as a person while providing guidance, direction, belief, and hope.

As a teacher Laura values inclusivity through knowledge about students’
background knowledge, experiences, and values. By knowing where her students come
from and who they are she is able to consciously ensure that they are valued in the
classroom. She infuses Aboriginal paradigms of teaching and learning into her practice
through interaction with community and activities which value the revitalization of
St’at’imc culture and language. Concepts such as the seven St’at’imc laws, 
nxekmenlhkalha muta7 nt’akmenlhkalha (laws and way of life), the centrality of micw 
(land), and transformer stories provide guidance to her when she is making decisions 
about how to integrate Aboriginal paradigms of teaching and learning into her practice. 
Temporally her teaching strives to connect history to the present and the future all at 
once. Temporally her teaching is impacted by the previous seven generations, and 
enacted with the next seven generations in mind. She is motivated in part by her belief 
that her ancestors would want her to succeed in formal education so that she can study 
St’at’imc language, transcribe St’at’imc language, document St’at’imc history, pass 
St’at’imc knowledge on, sustain St’at’imc knowledge, preserve St’at’imc knowledge, and 
protect St’at’imc knowledge. She teaches so that First Nations can take education and 
apply it to First Nations values and strengths. Her practice includes regularly connecting 
students to elders and mentors from the community. She hopes that her teaching 
empowers students so that they can give back to their community. She feels good about 
working with the people for the people. 

She believes that it is important to be aware of who she is and her own values and 
beliefs so that she can be sensitive to whether or not her beliefs are infringing upon 
students’ beliefs and so that she honours students’ values and beliefs as opposed to 
imposing her own on them. She believes that bringing St’at’imc knowledge into the 
classroom not only acknowledge their existing Indigenous knowledge and encourages 
them to pursue their Indigenous knowledge, but also triggers their cellular memory. 
Laura supports students so that they can take mainstream education and apply it to their 
own values instead of conforming to the values prescribed by the education system.
Education is a tool of empowerment through which students can learn self-awareness and self-determination. Education is a tool of empowerment which students can use to contribute to their family, their communities, their nation(s), and the environment. Laura sees value in connecting learners to community because it allows them to make connections to themselves, recognize who they are, and recognize the values of elders and mentors. In order to be prepared to learn learners need to be aware of their own values, beliefs, intentions, and expectations. Laura acknowledge that her students are parts of families and communities with their own values, needs, histories, and experiences.

**Chad.** At the time of this interview Chad taught at the E-Community Centre and at a self-governed post-secondary institution. Chad is indigenous to the territory in which he teaches. Prior to teaching he was involved in First Nations economic development. He had a near death experience after a bull riding accident which caused him to reflect on the meaning of his life. He realized that what was meaningful in his life was the land, the people, and the language, which led him to leave economic development and begin teaching. Chad’s practice is guided by Syilx concepts such as the centrality of the land and Syilx stories such as the captikwl The Four Foods Story which explains how food was given. His ongoing work as an apprentice to traditional knowledge keeper guides his practice and enables him to reflect on Syilx concepts of teaching and learning from the perspective of a learner. He locates his practice in the Syilx understanding that who we are, and where we are in place, time, and location are intertwined, and values maintaining culture and tradition for the purpose of sustainability. Sustainability means the regeneration of the natural world so that it can continue in perpetuity. Chad runs the E-
Community Center and provides instructional support in university level courses, university transition courses, upgrading courses, and programming for children in care.

Chad’s teaching is more than a job - cultural integration and application is a big part of who he is. As a teacher Chad focuses on group dynamics and collaborative successes of the group. Project based learning in a community setting enables students to develop collective perspectives and contribute to something greater than themselves. He also believes in initiating a concept, then using an approach informed by naʕqnwxʷ, to shift and go where the group leads with freedom to explore varied aspects of students’ inquiries. The programming priorities come from the community and often the students go to the community. Chad describes his work in the context of the vision and leadership provided by the board, who provides community minded, big picture thinking. One of the guiding principles that shapes his practice is how to incorporate a traditional way of thinking into a contemporary setting.

Many of the students that Chad teaches are Aboriginal but not indigenous to the territory. Part of his practice involves sharing his Syilx worldview while explicitly honouring the diverse worldviews of his students. Chad’s Syilx identity gives him the freedom that comes from believing in who he is. When he shares the Syilx perspective he is sharing as opposed to condemning others’ perspectives. He encourages his students to move away from he said/she said approaches to difference and towards answering questions from within and recognizing that what they are contributing is their thinking and their perspective. This approach, where the students and the teacher contribute perspectives is an approach to knowledge taken from the four foods story. Many of the students are away from home and part of Chad’s practice includes understanding where
they are coming from, understanding their life experiences, providing leeway for life events, and welcoming family members in classes. Chad believes that when students are challenged to bring out what they really think they develop leadership skills and abilities which they then bring back to their home communities. All students, including Syilx students, are encouraged to think locally and globally.

**Wendy.** At the time of this interview Wendy had experience working with primary students, working in an alternate school with secondary students, and being the only full time instructor in a college level family and community counselling program at a self-governed post-secondary institution. As a Haida and Six Nation Mohawk woman she is not Indigenous to the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh territory on which she teaches. She connects to the local Aboriginal community through activism and cultural events. She wakes up a sundancer, goes to sleep a sundancer, and it shapes her day. Her practice is guided by frameworks such as the seven grandfather teachings. She was taught that we all have gifts from the Creator which we are in a position to utilize fully in adulthood, and that it is our responsibility to share those gifts generously. She believes in creating continuity between personal history, present self, and future self is crucial to learning and understands the world through the teachings of her ancestors. A pivotal moment in her own education was a course in decolonization which emphasized the reclamation of identity, culture, and teaching.

Wendy describes her teaching as flexible and holistic with care and consideration given to how students are doing in terms of their feelings, their physical well-being, and their current stresses because she recognizes that there are diverse barriers to learning. She wants students to be free to be themselves wherever they’re at.
She focuses on individual and group relationship building and pays attention to different dynamics between students. She believes that it is important to understand where students are, where they’re coming from, and their goals. She understands that her students live in two worlds so she helps them understand and navigate both worlds in order to help the people.

She encourages students to utilize critical thought in order to understand themselves, their families, and their communities. Wendy believes that presenting content as the only truth and presenting only one way of thinking about something limits students’ ability to offer differing perspectives, and as such contributes her knowledge as her own perspective as opposed to the exclusive universal truth. Her students come from across Turtle Island so she makes space in her classroom for diverse perspectives on topics within the program such as human development and as a result learning is bi-directional between teaching and learning. Likewise, the relationship between her classes and the community is bi-directional as elders share their knowledge with students and students share back with the community through service in areas such as depression screening.

**Grant.** At the time of this interview Grant had experience teaching senior secondary courses to adults and post-secondary courses and was in the process of transitioning into teaching and leading in a First Nations school in his nation. During this interview Grant spoke mostly to teaching within the context of a self-governed post-secondary institution. As a Tsilhqot’in man teaching in an urban area Grant was not indigenous to the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh territories in which he taught. Our nation has a historical connection to the land on which he taught because one
of the warriors from the Tsilhqot’in war was unjustly hung for murder. Of the participants Grant placed the most emphasis on recognizing the ways that colonization has negatively impacted Aboriginal’s people’s knowledge of self and knowledge of culture. He places a high value on freeing students from ways that colonization has restricted their ability to know their own identity and on encouraging students to become more independent as Aboriginal people so that they can be free from their own institutionalized mind. As a former residential school and federal day school student Grant is familiar with the ways that education can be used as a colonizing force and the ways that residential schools have created institutionalized minds. It is important for him to help students understand intergenerational connections so that they can better understand their families and communities and accept themselves.

Grant places a high value on the freedom to teach First Nations content in a First Nations way so that his students are free to be themselves as First Nations people. He actively communicates to his student that he feels positive about being Aboriginal. He emphasizes the importance of a climate where students feel like family and at home. It is important to him that students feel safe, comfortable, calm, and relaxed as opposed to feeling on edge in the classroom. Grant facilitates these feelings by speaking his language in the classroom and incorporating songs so that the classroom feels familiar. Grant connects students to the community by taking students to places that are significant to the local First Nations, to local cultural activities, and by inviting resource people into his classroom. Like Grant, many of his students were not indigenous to the area, so Grant encouraged students to share stories and important days from their culture with the class and to learn more about their own cultures. While celebrating diversity Grant also
recognizes that many Indigenous cultures have a lot in common and increases students’
capacity to utilize Indigenous ways of thinking such as learning from the land, learning
from animals, and being aware of local contexts.

**Through the Lens of Culturally Responsive Teaching**

**Summary**

The following table provides a synopsis of participants’ practice which is similar
in nature to the key elements of Culturally Responsive Teaching described in Chapter 2.
As you can see, all participants provided illustrative examples which fall into each of the
categories of Culturally Responsive Teaching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culturally Responsive Teaching is…</th>
<th>Grant</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Chad</th>
<th>Wendy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Validating</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Comprehensive</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emancipatory</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Alignment with Culturally Responsive Teaching

**Culturally responsive teaching is validating.** When speaking about their own
practices participants expressed ways that they validated the legitimacy of cultural
heritage and built bridges between education and the whole student. Participants
unequivocally linked this aspect of their teaching to students’ academic success.
Grant, who taught students from a variety of backgrounds, explains his approach to the diversity of cultures in his classroom:

Culture has a lot to do with again becoming a family and again that’s what I strive for, that we are all brothers and sisters and that we share a similar practice. We may be from a different territory, different areas, yet we pretty much are the same in many ways so it’s always good to share with each other so that everyone’s on the same level.

The participants closely linked validation in their classroom to validation throughout the institution. Wendy says of her institution:

The visible presence of Indigenous people to me, is a comforting part of the institution itself… our institution is one big longhouse, and we have a firepit in the lobby area, we have a ceremonial door that we enter, and we announce ourselves to the spirit of the longhouse. We have elders’ portraits and carvings, and students’ artwork integrated throughout the building.

Participants encouraged students to explore and share their own cultural backgrounds. Participants modelled this so that students had a strong example to draw from. Grant and Wendy emphasized safety for cultural expression, implying that there are contexts in the past where students may not have felt safe expressing their Indigenous culture in the classroom.

Multicultural resources incorporated into teaching include human resources such as elders and community members at community events such a canoe carving. Places are a teaching resources incorporated through visits such to places of significance to the local First Nations including pithouses and areas where traditional land use activities were still possible. Instructional activities tied to land based activities were incorporated into classroom activities. Local resources such as books and videos were used. Time itself was viewed through the lens of multicultural inclusion and students were invited to share
with the class significant times of the year. In some cases educational events were timed based on knowledge about the seasons and the moon. Effort was made to accommodate students who participated in seasonal activities which were part of their culture.

Culturally responsive teaching is comprehensive. Culturally Responsive Teaching is comprehensive because it teaches whole child and intellectual, social, emotional, and political, expectations and skills woven together as integrated whole (30). Chad explains:

Even at the younger ages, there’s still some critical things that we need to talk to them about, around their contributions to what’s happening, so I like doing lots of group work, I like doing lots of creating opportunities for families to learn together. So that it can be maintained or taught to someone else.”

Effort was made to create a community within the classroom and students were encouraged to pursue collective well-being as opposed to individual gain at the expense of others. Participants were mindful of students’ feelings. Safety stood out as an important theme, as did explicitly valuing individual learners. Within self-governing institutions it is not surprising that participants shared that many of their students had an end goal of using their education to support the self-sufficiency of their communities. All participants emphasized the need for institutions to be supportive and to not penalize students for attending to social obligations that they had outside of the classroom, whether family or cultural. To participants this was a crucial element of ensuring that students felt supported in their education. Wendy explains:

I feel like I can provide holistic care to my students, which is part of the job as a teacher. I think there’s an understanding of basic Indigenous principles. Family first for many of our students, understanding that their families will always come first. We don’t make they choose between education and family. The use of threats for attendance and things like that
doesn’t convey any empathy. So we’re really personalized in that way, we will work with students through anything that pops up during the year. If they don’t childcare, they need to be with their children. Or if a parent falls ill, or a sibling passes away, we’re there for all that. And I think that encourages the students to come back.

This is a necessary continuity. It would be incongruent for instructors to claim to value culture while also penalizing students for taking care of their cultural responsibilities. A similar continuity was expressed regarding community connections.

Wendy explains:

The doors aren’t just open for academic purposes, but for community building and support as well.

There was widespread recognition that colonialism had harmed students emotionally, socially, and intellectually. As Grant explains, the students’ reclamation of their cultural identity is closely linked to their growth:

I think it has a lot to do with becoming independent as Aboriginal people and that’s what I find we are lacking. We are so used to being dependent that in my classroom that’s what I try to accomplish, is the thought that the Aboriginal person has policies and rules in regards to their land and laws and different things that we have, that’s what I try to bring out in them, to become more and more independent and not so much colonized.

Participants talked about the social aspect of teaching, and in particular reading the classroom as a unit.

**Culturally responsive teaching is multidimensional.** A theme within this category was ways in which classroom policies were established with First Nations principles in mind. Wendy explains how she opens discussion regarding classroom expectations using a First Nations concept, the Seven Grandfather Teachings:
We just begin this discussion about these principles of thinking and speaking and behaving. And what comes from that is a common understanding of how we are going to aspire to conduct ourselves during our time together… Rather than being rules and guidelines, very structured “do not” negatively phrased rules, we go about it very differently where it’s a discussion of principle and integrity. How to walk with integrity. And right from the get go we do that introduction of how are we able to use those principles within ourselves, in addition to other people, interpersonally: with clients, or classmates, or teachers?

Likewise, Laura used the St’at’imc teachings to encourage students to reflect on various elements of their studies as well as their goals within education. Grant focused on attendance policies which accommodate traditional activities:

> For example each nation’s fishing season might be a little bit different, and might have a different date than other nations”… if teachers can understand these sorts of things it would make it much better for their work

Such an attendance policy and understanding of the importance of traditional land based activities signals to the students that Indigenous culture and Indigenous knowledge is valued in practice as opposed to merely being valued in the abstract without valuing practices required to maintain it. In Laura’s experience as a learner, the acknowledgement and valuing of Indigenous identity and knowledge by the instructor makes a significant difference in student success:

> A lot of it is because of the acknowledgement and integration, inclusiveness and richness of St’at’imc knowledge, the relevance of it, the importance of it… I really struggled in mainstream because it didn’t acknowledge Indigenous pedagogy, learning practices.

**Culturally responsive teaching is transformative.** Explicitly respecting culture was the most common theme within this category. All participants felt that this is an important part of their practice. Grant described how he makes room in the classroom for
cultural expression and how that contributes to students’ comfort and attitude towards education:

I find myself comfortable in being traditional. By that I mean always feel free to practice your First Nations teachings. And I always allow the drum to be in the classroom and have access to the drum. Students are allowed to sing songs and practice their traditions at any time. I find that make them much more comfortable and to be comfortable in the classroom is what I strive for. We want the attitude of the student to be liking the school and to keep coming back.

Grant also explained how he recognizes and elicits students’ existing cultural knowledge and experiences:

I bring something up that they already know and has not been really brought out from them so it makes it that much clearer and once you do that once they understand that then they realize that ‘hey, I’m a smart person and I know a lot already, I never knew. [regarding students’ sharing Indigenous knowledge in the classroom, and in particular, learnings from animals and the land] If you can have them understand that in the classroom or bring that out in them then you’re doing a good job because many of us through colonized minds of today our students do not actually think that.

Rather than viewing the inclusion of culture as something that competes with academic content, and rather than forcing students to choose between cultural identity and academic success, Chad explained how culture is embedded into the core of his practice. Instructors and the institution itself model a synthesis of formal learning built on the foundation of traditional culture:

It’s not about ‘what do we do for them?’ it’s about ‘what do we feed them so that they can learn to feed themselves?’ So thinking about it in that kind of a traditional way of thinking in a contemporary setting, I think it’s perfect. It’s for all of us, as part of a community, how do we feed the people? As leaders in the community how do we feed the people? As teachers how do we feed the students? If you’re giving them garbage, you’re going to get garbage out.
Culturally responsive teaching is emancipatory. Participants generally viewed the exclusive use of western knowledge and Eurocentric frameworks as harmful to students’ academic success. All participants made space in their classroom for students’ own Indigenous knowledge. Participants spoke to ways that the nature of Indigenous knowledge required moving away from Eurocentric models of knowledge transmission and instead required Indigenous models of knowledge transmission. Three participants drew from formally codified Indigenous knowledge transmission models.

The nature of Indigenous knowledge and knowledge transmission. Participants drew from their own cultural contexts to teach outside of the constraining manacles of mainstream cannons of knowing. For example, Grant commented on the nature of knowledge transmission:

> Indigenous knowledge is also not just taught by one person, it is taught by all others within the community, family, or a nation, and it is also taught by the animal family.

This understanding of how Indigenous knowledge is transmitted shapes how knowledge is transmitted in his practice:

> They would talk about the history and also some through art also through writing as well. They would also share and invite others into what they know and pass it onto each other - share.

Likewise, in her practice Wendy turns towards the concept that everyone has knowledge, and away from the conventional dominance of western knowledge held by the teacher alone:

> Presenting an idea as truth, and there’s only one way to think about something, can very much limit someone’s self-determination if they feel differently.
Wendy’s understanding of knowledge shapes how knowledge is transmitted in a way that honours the fact that everyone in her class has knowledge:

So I think the learning is bi-directional between all the different parties in the room. So, it’s definitely going not just instructor-to-student, but student-to-instructor, student-to-student. And I think that’s a balanced element-- it’s not a lecture, passive experience for the student. They’re very much a part of the daily plan. They lead, and I follow often.

All participants touched on the integration of elders and elders’ knowledge in education. Laura provided an example of how the transmission of knowledge through elders requires a shift away from mainstream ways of transmitting knowledge, in which one person in the room transmits knowledge to others from a position of authority.

Instead, knowledge is transmitted through interactions:

If elders come into the classroom we don’t have to put the elder in front of the class the elder can actually just sit and maybe we’ll form a circle or just have a discussion. It’s not going to be where there’s strict rows or seating, it’s trying to make them as comfortable and as inclusive as we can for our guests in the classroom because most elders and presenters don’t feel comfortable standing at the head of the class and talking down to the people they would rather interact and engage with them.

*Codified Indigenous knowledge and transmission models.* In the literature review I discussed ways that Indigenous knowledge and the transmission of Indigenous knowledge is unique. In British Columbia at the K-12 level the distinct nature of Indigenous knowledge and its transmission has been codified in the First Peoples Principles of Learning which is the product of collaboration of First Nations knowledge keepers from across BC. As you can see, the First People Principles of Learning focuses on ways that knowledge is transmitted:

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, then land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
• Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
• Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions.
• Learning involves generational roles on responsibilities.
• Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge.
• Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
• Learning involves patience and time.
• Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission in certain situations.

(First Nations Education Steering Committee, no date)

Chad referenced En’owkin as a guiding principle in his teaching.

I think the approach that we take, is when we introduce a topic, we talk about a concept, and then utilizing some of the different methodologies. Like the naʕʷqnwixʷ, system, the nested system approach. Really looking at it more as a three dimensional kind of model, versus a linear model. So it’s continuously shifting and going where the group leads it; so there’s that freedom to explore the students’ inquiries around different aspects of the subject. So there’s a lot of freedom in that, and really when we look at our own identity, it is necessary for us to be able to express that in a way that’s not going to be criticized, that’s not going to be rejected from a mainstream ideology. So, it actually really enhances the self-esteem, and the awareness of oneself within themselves.

Here is a summary of naʕʷqnwixʷ, from Dr. Jeannette Armstrong:

The word En’owkin in the Okanagan language elicits the metaphorical image of liquid being absorbed drop by single drop through the head (mind). It refers to coming to understanding through a gentle process of integration.

The Okanagan people used this word when there was a choice confronting the community. An elder would ask the people to engage in En’owkin, which requested each person contribute information about the subject at hand. What took place was not so much a debate as a process of clarification, incorporating bits of information from as many people as possible, no matter how irrelevant, trivial, or controversial these bits might seem, for in En’owkin, nothing is discarded or prejudged.

This initial phase is followed by a phase of suggesting direction and asking questions. Finally, the culmination of the process is action. Here Chad illustrates how
naʔʷqnwixʷ, modelled in the Four Foods Story, can become a method of instruction within a formal educational institution:

How they contribute to it really makes a difference. Because it’s Indigenous teachers, it’s not mainstream kind of bookworm people, that ‘Here’s what I’ve got to teach you based on the provincial PLO’s’ or whatever…it’s, ‘Here’s what we’ve got to talk about. Here’s what I think about it. What do you guys think about it?’ It’s almost like a roundtable-type thing. And that’s comes from that Four Foods story, too; it’s not always roundtable stuff, but in that Four Foods Story, everybody gets an opportunity to contribute, or that concept. And that just creates greater perspective of that concept. And what you take from that, it becomes your perspective, or one part of your perspective. So just looking at that continuum of gaining knowledge and perspective, which just grows and grows and grows.

Wendy used the Seven Grandfather Teachings to set expectations in the classroom. This version of the Seven Grandfather Teachings is taken from a publication of the Native Women’s Association which was created in collaboration with several community based First Nations organizations. It is important to note that while there are numerous written versions of the Seven Sacred Grandfather Teachings the central tenants remain the same:

1. Wisdom: to cherish knowledge is to know wisdom: To have wisdom is to know the difference between positive and negative and know the result of your actions. Sound judgment, ability to see inner qualities and relationships. Listen and use the wisdom of elders, spiritual leaders and healers. Wisdom is sound judgment and the ability to use good sense, to have a good attitude and reason of action, that runs through and binds the seven teachings together. Wisdom is given by the Creator to be used for the good of the people.

2. Love: to know love is to know peace: Feel and give absolute kindness for all things around you. To love yourself is to live at peace with the creator and in harmony with all creation. Love is to feel and give complete kindness for all things around you. Love is based upon affection, respect, kindness, unselfish loyalty, devotion and concern. Love your brother and sister and share with them. Love cannot be demanded...it must be earned and given freely from the goodness of your heart.

3. Respect: to honor all of creation is to have respect. Showing respect is showing honor for the value of persons or things by polite regard,
consideration and appreciation. Honor our teachings. Honor our families, others, and ourselves. Don't hurt anything or anyone on the outside or the inside. Respect, also is not to be demanded. You must give respect freely from the goodness of your heart if you wish to be respected.

4. Bravery: to face life with courage is to know bravery. The personal strength to face difficulties, obstacles and challenges. Have courage, make positive choices. Stand up for your convictions--show courage in communicating and decision-making. Do things even in the most difficult times. Be ready to defend what you believe and what is right. Never give in. Never give up.

5. Honesty: is to be honest in action and character, be faithful to fact and reality--to walk through life with integrity is to know honesty. Being truthful and trustworthy. Tell the truth. Be honest with yourself, recognize who and what you are. Accept and act on truths with straightforward and appropriate communication. Be honest in every action and provide good feelings in the heart. Do not be deceitful or use self-deception. Honesty keeps life simple.

6. Humility: to accept yourself as a sacred part of creation is to know humility. Reflecting, expressing or offering in a spirit of deference or submission. Balance of equality with all of life. Recognize the human need for balance in life. Know that you are equal to everyone else. Take pride in what you do, but the pride that you take is in the sharing of the accomplishment with others.

7. Truth: to know of these things is to know the truth. Faithfully apply the teachings of our seven grandfathers and trust in the creator. To show honor is to be truthful and trustworthy, to tell the truth. Sincerity in action, character, and utterance. Be faithful to fact and reality. Be true in everything that you do. Be true to yourself and true to your fellow man. Understand it - Speak it - Live by it.

(Native Women’s Association, 2008, p.6)

Laura draws upon the Seven St’at’imc Laws to guide her practice. Laura expanded upon each law in order to illustrate how they provide a dynamic foundation for formal education in both content and form:

1. Health: health is mental, physical, spiritual, emotional health so in order to obtain law number one you have to have good health in all those areas.
2. Happiness: in order to gain true happiness you have to have law number one, you cannot have happiness if you do not have law number one so it’s, law number one is really important in class.
4. Generosity: generosity is about being generous with your knowledge, being generous with your skills, being generous with yourself, knowledge gained from elders… so education doesn’t come from one roof, education
comes from many forms. So knowledge gained, education gained is not for one person to hold to themselves, education and knowledge gained are supposed to be fits of service to the people. So it’s an act of service being generous with your knowledge.

5. Power: power is what we do with that knowledge. What do we do with what we have gained? How do we utilize it? How do we transform it into something meaningful, powerful, and beneficial to one’s family, to one’s community, to the nation, even to a global context? How are we using the knowledge that we gain for power? How are we using it to empower communities and how are we using it to empower ourselves?

6. Pity: pity is compassion, the truest form of compassion. I think this is one of the things that is really important because if you’re a teacher you have to have compassion and understanding about yourself and your students, you have to have a good understanding of yourself, your values, your beliefs, or even you weaknesses and strengths, what are your biases?... You would just provide guidance and directions to your students and your children so that they would transform to become who they are and who they want to be instead of instilling values and beliefs onto them.

7. Quietness: quietness is being able to understand and know when to not say anything… in an educational context or even governance, quietness is really important to ceremony. Being able to pray, being able to acknowledge when it is the time to sit and reflect and learn, and rediscover where I’m at, what am I doing? Is this beneficial? Because it’s like a ceremonial way of praying, so applying it to classrooms, ok, well let’s take a moment and think about this, and let’s reflect back and let’s figure it out from here. Where are we going? What are we doing? Is this beneficial? Is it not? Is this meaningful? Or is it not? So quietness is a time to reflect.

Laura also provided an example of how she uses concepts embedded within the St’at’imc language in order to guide her practice:

There’s three words in our culture, in our language. Timcw: the land. Ucwalmicw: the people of the land. Ucwalmicwts: the language the people of the land speak. So in each of these words it has a root word which is micw, which is ‘comes from the land.’ So in our culture each of these things is interconnected. One cannot sustain without the others. So if you have no land, how can the people identify themselves to a territory or to a value or to a language if they have no land? Everything on the land has an identity through the language. Or if you have no language how can the people identify and connect with the land if there’s no language? Or if you have just the people and no land or no language how can the people have an identity of existence? So the land, the language, and the people are all interconnected. So if you culture, cultural practices, in our cultural beliefs this is the main point of connectivity. So with the students I had the
students do an activity on this, they had to list all of the resources from the land that they use, from plants to animals, from harvesting.

The quote below from Chad illustrates the deeply intertwined relationship between identity and professional practice:

So I believe in who I am, and I think the whole de-colonization, it’s not just about believing in who you are, but actually practicing that. Taking that knowledge and transferring it into a practical application, where there’s balance between traditional ways of living and innovative ways of living.

What is key to remember about all of these examples is that they cannot be easily extrapolated from their original context. Each of the instructors did not simply pick up cultural tools in isolation of the larger body of Indigenous knowledge in order to effectively teach. They embody culture, and the use of culture in their classrooms was not merely a strategic and utilitarian exercise – it was an expression of who they are as culture beings.

**Emergent Themes**

Several themes emerged which illuminate key considerations that educators may want to address when using culturally responsive teaching with Aboriginal students. These key considerations include misconceptions regarding what it means to be Indigenous, varying levels of cultural knowledge, and local protocols.

**Residential schools and healing.** All participants recognized the impact of colonialism on their work and identified various ways that they confronted and challenged the legacy of colonialism on individuals and institutions. Their discussions on this topic were most often embedded within a discussion of healing from colonialism and/or residential schools. Revitalization of culture, language, and connection to the land
was the most common form of supporting healing through education. Acknowledging the history of colonialism in the classroom, as will be explored in the next section, was also a method cited as supporting healing.

Wendy discussed how she as a person and as an instructor is on a lifelong journey of healing and the theme of healing was a recurring topic within her interview:

I think I am part of that, but with that type of responsibility of part of that decolonizing process is to never be satisfied with myself as being ‘decolonized.’ There’s different battles every day that will challenge me, and this colonial framework is strong and tight. And navigating out of that myself, is going to be a lifelong journey. I’m proud to say that I do believe I’m part of that process in the classroom, because I think an understanding of the trauma, and the pre-contact existence. We know that we had natural laws, we know that we had balance and harmony within ourselves. We had an interdependence. I would have gone back to the way we used to live. To have even just one day, to see how differently things were. Yeah, I think the psychological struggle for myself, and from what I’ve seen with my own people, I believe. The destruction of something so beautiful and integral to our health and wellness, such as our culture or our healing ceremonies, or whatever they may be. Yeah we need to have an understanding to mourn and grieve that, and then we’re able to rebuild that as well.

To me that’s what learning is-- creating meaning in your life, and yourself, and your history. Repairing that disjunction, with myself personally, was my biggest education. Mending and healing that connection through history, to open up futures.

I believe that education can be used as a healing tool, and an empowerment tool for our students and ourselves.

One of the ongoing impacts of colonialism and residential schools is the disconnection between Aboriginal people and the land. Chad considers experience with the land as a healing experience.

Times are changing and there’s a lot of healing going on in communities, and there’s a lot of healing that… what I do, in bringing people out to the land, I don’t even have to do anything. Just bringing them out there, and making sure that they’re safe. There’s things that they see, their own experiential learning that happens within themselves. Just being able to be a part of such a diverse ecosystem. There’s so much going on, and it just
comes to you when you’re out there, and just having the opportunity to be outside.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation provides support to frontline workers working with residential school survivors. One of its publications provides tips for practitioners to avoid unintentionally re-victimizing survivors. One characteristic of service delivery that might re-victimize survivors is “an ‘institutionalized’ cultural environment where rules are inflexible, appear arbitrary and seem to sacrifice emotional and spiritual health in the name of time, efficiency and the bottom line,” (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005, p.61). It is interesting to contrast this re-traumatizing “culture” of some Canadian institutions with the way that Chad integrates culture into his practice for the purpose of healing:

I try to have fun with the things that I’m involved in. Even though I’m perceived as a real stickler, really strict. I like to joke around and tease, and have fun. That humour part of our ways, it’s a part of who we are as well, because that incorporates that healing aspect, and that all-inclusivity around the things that we’re doing. When you can laugh together, it allows people to let their walls down. And it helps build trust, and it helps build a sense of belonging. It’s a universal language, laughter-- it’s just like crying, it’s a universal language. Everybody can understand when somebody’s sad or grieving, or when their happy. I think that’s an important part of who we are, too. Having the opportunity to bring that in, into an educational setting, it really does make a difference.

**True History.** One of the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is that “Canadians have been denied a full and proper education as to the nature of Aboriginal societies, and the history of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.” (Sinclair, Littlechild & Wilson, 2012, p.25). Participants explained that the freedom to teach the true history of Aboriginal people in a formal educational institution was empowering for both themselves and for students.
Some students come to classrooms already aware that the true history has been hidden from them. As Laura explains, though, for some students exploring the true history of Canada’s relationship with Aboriginal people is a painful yet necessary process if it is the first time that they are exposed to it:

Teachings of our history is an act of decolonization because it's bringing history to the front, to the surface and saying ‘you know what? This is the true history that we have endured this is what we have gone through, we are resilient people and this is what we have overcome, these are the things that we are doing, and this is how we're going to continue on.’ Decolonizing can sometimes be very decolonizing can be very sensitive to I find that with students, even for myself at times you know. It's, especially when teaching history First Nations history, students may go through feelings of anger, hate, resentment, denial, frustration, to acceptance, to forgiving, to developing a work plan to overcome it. Do they learn about the history and they learn about the experiences that ancestors went through or that their parents went through, and when they learn about it all these feelings and emotions are stirred up and they become angry and they become - I’ve had a student close book, slam the book, sit down, cross their arms. They become angry because they learned about the history of, the history that was kept from them, because in public school system they didn't learn about it, they didn't learn about the true meaningful history of their people, their ancestors, they only learned slivers of maybe how structures and social organizations or First Nations groups and they were spoken about in a context that they didn't exist anymore, whereas decolonizing is teaching the real facts about the history and the impacts about the colonialism about what our ancestors went through, and decolonizing has been able to learn from it, reflect from and understand it, and take it, and utilize it for the betterment of oneself, to become transformative, transformative change.

Understandably students are may feel hurt and angry when learning about the true history. Laura draws from St’at’imc knowledge through story in order to explain how while initially learning about true history may be painful, in the long run it is important for the empowerment of Indigenous students, communities, families, and nations:

And our oral stories, our creation stories, we have so many stories of Transformers, and so our transformers had the ability to change what was
evil into something good, to change something that could be useful and beneficial, well that's kind of like colonialism, like or post-colonialism, is to be transformative. We have to be transformative. We have to be able to change something that is not working for us into something that is going to be beneficial for us, something that is going to be useful, something that is going to empower us, so that it's like we have to be transformative, we have to learn about the history, learn about the historical impacts, understand the current situations we’re still facing today, transform it into something that could be better utilized for the betterment of ourselves, our communities, and families, our nation.

Wendy underscores the need for teachers to recognize this traumatic legacy in order to mindfully create safety:

Indigenous people and our history of Indigenous people and educational institutions in Canada is traumatic. And I don’t even think trauma is a fair enough word to use, because I think it’s so much deeper than that. So when I talk about safety as an Indigenous teacher, with Indigenous students, it’s a recognition of that traumatic past, and it’s a welcoming space for cultural expression, for identity, for self.

Grant shared an anecdotal experience regarding a colleague who was reprimanded in the public school system for teaching about residential schools after the 2008 Government of Canada’s Residential School Apology. From his perspective mainstream institutions continue to be hostile towards the true history between Canada and Aboriginal people:

I teach a lot about truth in regards to our past and the colonial history. A lot of what I teach in these institutions you’re not allowed to teach in other institutions like school districts. It would be pretty much taboo for me to teach things that I usually teach in an Aboriginal institution so that is a reason why I prefer Aboriginal over public or other institutions where I have to be careful as to what I teach. The true history of Aboriginal people is very much limited when you are in the school district. For some reason the public does not want to know the true Aboriginal history therefore you are only allowed to teach parts of it.

As a residential school survivor who teaches intergenerational survivors Grant offers valuable insights into why it is important to teach the true history:
I teach the true history and what I mean by that is I usually like to teach the history of our peoples like a timeline from the days that the colonizers set in and also the Indian Act and things like that. And to this day it rules us, and the residential schools and things like that. It is important for them to know their history so that their identity is clearer because many of us have no idea who we are, where we… that sort of thing, so that’s why it’s important to tell them about their history from the beginning, the reason why I like to do it from the beginning is that it also makes them aware that this guy is for real, this guy is an Aboriginal person and this guy is actually positive about being an Aboriginal. I kind of lay that out in front of them so that they are as an Aboriginal free to practice their Aboriginal [unintelligible], to be proud of who they are as an Aboriginal person. I have also been to residential school, I’ve been to federal school, I’ve witnessed a lot of things. I have also witnessed a lot of incarcerated people. The residential school, the incarcerated mind, are pretty much the same, they are both institutional mimic to each other, there is no difference. Many of us residential school students to this day still referred to them as time being served, so its important to teach the history of the Aboriginals. What I tell them is even though you’ve never attended a residential school you still have remnants, you still have things in relation to that upbringing. And some students are quite surprised saying ‘I’ve never been to residential school.’ So when I start to ask them, ‘any member of your family been in there?’ and they start, well ‘my uncle, my grandparents, my so-and-so has been’ and there you go, you have ties to that so even though you’ve never been in those institutions you are still part of that institutionalized mind. They start to look at me like, ‘oh, I never knew that.’ And then they’re quick to research residential schools to understand who they are. They are much happier when they find out why their uncle or their grandmother were doing things that were sort of confusing or abnormal. Once they learn that and understand the history they become more knowledgable and willing to understand their grandparents – why they drank so much, why they’re so quiet, why they’re strange, and things like that. So all of that I tried to introduce within our schools so that they kind of grasp an identity that has been missing within each individual. They start to see clearer and they start to accept themselves, and again for that it opens up their learning.

The phrase “true history” is one that arose naturally from participants and was not part of my interview protocol. This choice of words from highly educated individuals working in education should trouble us all. If mainstream institutions are not teaching “true history”, what are they teaching and what are the implications for Aboriginal people’s relationship with Canada today?
The section above contained a discussion on residential schools and raised the concept of true history. A common yet separate thread that emerged was the ongoing vulnerability of Indigenous people and knowledge in contemporary Canadian society and educational institutions, and the ways that ongoing vulnerability impacts or could be addressed within education. Safety stood out as an important theme for both of the urban participants.

Wendy spoke to the importance of recognizing the legacy of trauma and lateral violence in the classroom, particularly when addressing related topics within her program.

It’s a holistic safety, it’s a spiritual safety, an emotional safety, and I think part of understanding that, like I said, lateral violence is a part of understanding where it came from. It came from colonization. Patriarchy; creating safety for our lifegivers. That’s huge. We talk about abuse, surviving sexual assault. We talk about those things in our classroom, and it’s not… a lot of our people have survived. And we need to be able to navigate that, in a way that isn’t re-traumatizing, or re-hurtful.

As a teacher working with vulnerable populations Wendy explained that she does not conform to the typical boundaries of professionalism which limit the degree to which an educator is involved in the lives of their students. This contributes to the feeling of safety within the institution and within her classroom:

And as a teacher, my role isn’t between 9 and 12 I’m on, and then after 12 I’m off. My door’s an open door policy, and I’ve dealt with quite a few crises, and offered crisis counseling services, or helped students get business wear. I wear many hats, and it’s something I enjoy, and environment I thrive in. I feel like I can provide holistic care to my students, which is part of the job as a teacher.

In Wendy’s experience this does not occur to the same degree in provincial post-secondary institutions:

I think the Indigenous institution creates a degree of safety and support for students that mainstream institutions aren’t as successful. And I think, part
of it is... the academy and academia, I even see this in this urban environment. I guess it’s wrong to do a personal example, for example ______. A lot of their Indigenous professors are fantastic people, I know them. But their involvement at the community level is really limited. It’s like there is a separation there.

As a student Wendy did not feel supported in the provincial post-secondary institution that she attended:

I went to a mainstream institution, and found it very challenging and in many ways, disempowering.

Laura shared some of her educational history in non-Aboriginal institutions, and in particular ways that rather than being acknowledged she was labeled. Instead of being supported as a vulnerable child she was stigmatized throughout her childhood and teen education:

I didn't graduate from high school. I was kicked out in high school at grade 8, so I really struggled through the education system because I was viewed as being a minority, not valued, not appreciated, and my history and my family and my culture were not acknowledged in the system as well. And they did not reflect on those kind of things that shaped me, because I struggled I had a broken home, abandonment issues, social, moving from one foster home to the next foster home, so all of that content and information about my own personal history was not acknowledged in the public school system so I was viewed as being a troubled child, an angry child, disturbed, aggressive, careless, carefree and so that kind of shadowed me and followed me all throughout school.

In speaking about the strength that comes from the support that students receive to embrace their Indigenous identity in his institution, Chad also sheds light on the vulnerability of Indigenous identity and belonging in mainstream institutions:

So there’s a lot of freedom in that, and really when we look at our own identity, it is necessary for us to be able to express that in a way that’s not going to be criticized, that’s not going to be rejected from a mainstream ideology. So, it actually really enhances the self-esteem, and the awareness of oneself within themselves. So I think that is a huge benefit for developing leadership qualities, and it provides the opportunity for
individuals that might not necessarily fit into mainstream education, to thrive and to feel successful versus really being isolated as a minority.

Likewise, a 1988 Royal Commission on Education undertaken by the Province of British Columbia found that Aboriginal students were discriminated against in the public education system because they were Aboriginal (Sullivan, 1988) commenting that:

many Native youngsters face a crisis in terms of their identity and must suffer the low esteem in which they are held by the majority of their classmates. Native parents frequently spoke of such circumstances to the Commission and claimed that their children are compelled to adapt to the culture of the school, with little evidence that the reverse occurs.

As an educator Laura has experienced vulnerability in terms of her standing in the eyes of her colleagues as a result of her choice to teach courses which uplift First Nations language, history, and culture in provincial post-secondary:

When I worked at ______, it was kind of struggling because the faculty was just like “oh well she is just the language and cultural teacher,” or “she's just doing contract course to instruct the language First Nations culture or First Nations history,” so they don't view First Nations histories courses as being valuable or as academically rigorous as English or Socials or a history so that perception is… the equality is not there, it is not recognized.

Laura’s quote speaks to the vulnerability of Indigenous instructors as well as the vulnerability of courses and disciplines which are centered on Indigenous knowledge.

On a more global level the lack of support for Laura’s teaching areas highlights the vulnerability of Indigenous knowledge and programming within non-Aboriginal institutions.

Wendy considered the visible presence of Aboriginal people in her institution as a factor which made her feel more comforted and contrasted it to the tokenization of culture which occurs in some educational institutions:
And the visible presence of Indigenous people to me, is a comforting part of the institution itself. And it’s not tokenized, which I’ve seen and experienced myself, the tokenization of culture with the standard print by the door.

Chad spoke to the vulnerability of Indigenous knowledge in all learning contexts and speaks to cultural protocols as a means to protect knowledge from being used against Indigenous people:

I try to share my own experiences, in a way that I can connect with people, especially new learners and those who I get a sense that they are being genuine. And the information that we share is not going to be exploited, or used against us. I think there’s been too many negative experiences in the past, where the information that is shared or taught, is perceived in the wrong way, or it’s utilized in the negative way, that might have a negative impact for communities or families, or their nations. So I’m really aware of who the audience is, who the students are, and what their intent is, because of the information that we share. There are intellectual property rights that go along with that, as being sealed knowledge. So we’re just really aware of that.

**Purposes of education and what success means.** Participants noted ways that their respective Indigenous concepts of success differed from Western notions of success. Some felt that Western concepts of success had the ability to harm Indigenous students’ learning, and that Indigenous concepts of success enhanced educational success.

Influencing dialogue on success were perspectives regarding what the purpose of education is, and thus, what success means.

Education as a means of improving the wellbeing of families, communities, and/or nations as well as education as a tool for the perpetuation of culture itself were common threads throughout all four interviews. Here Laura talks about the relationship between education and community:

I think and I believe that people need to understand the value of education and recognize that they can take the education from mainstream and apply it to their own values instead of conforming to the education system. I think that is best for students to learn that they can learn the tools of
education and use it as an empowerment tool to create more self-
awareness, self-determination, and to be able to use it to their advantage.
That they can contribute to their communities and their families and the
cultural context.

Both Chad and Laura tied the purpose of education to sustainability and
environmental protection. In order to illustrate the relationship between education and
sustainability Laura shared a conversation that she had with one of her sons:

One of my sons asked me he said well “how many more years till I
graduate? Do I have to go to school when I'm done?” And I was talking to
him and I was telling him the point of education and how that can actually
be used as a tool to empower him you know. If you are so concerned about
environment and preservation, language, culture, the environment, the
ecology, you can focus in a study that concerns that, that is relative to that,
and then use that as a tool to protect and preserve maintain the natural
environment and the ecology, for the animals, or for the culture for
sustainability and for our community so he says “oh okay” but that's just
an example.

Chad provided a context for and definition of what sustainability means:

So when we think about if from our Syilx perspective, how intertwined all
of the parts of who we are, and where we are in place, time, and location;
is that our survival is really going to depend on how adaptive we are. Our
survival, our identity, you know? So I really am passionate about that, and
I share my passion and my pride in that work that I do, because fortunately
I work in something that I really believe in, and that I hope makes a
difference in peoples’ lives. Not just in their lives, for them to benefit
from, but for them to take on that responsibility and make a difference in
the world. Even if it’s in a small corner of the world, it’s our corner. So a
lot of it’s linked to the environmental issues, and a lot of it’s linked to
water quality and just that whole concept of sustainability. Not economic
viability, that’s not what I mean by sustainability-- I mean the regeneration
of the natural world, so that it can continue in perpetuity. So that our
grandkids and our great-grandkids have an opportunity to swim in the
water.

Chad emphasized that the educational process of contributing to the
community is beneficial to students’ learning and the ability to work with community is a
valuable learning outcome in and of itself:
So a lot of the research, and a lot of the things that we do involves community and it’s community-based research which could be utilized as a practical application. So it’s not so much hypothesized scenarios or concepts, but it’s the things that really affect us. And I think it’s really important that, like I was saying in my introduction around what I do, that when you’re doing something, it feels like you’re contributing to something greater than just yourself, and that it’s going to help provide support to others and to the future. So a lot of the work that we do is around language and story-based research, knowledge and stuff like that. So, trying to figure out how to interpret that. And it really promotes a collective perspective of the classes and the students, so I think it really enhances the opportunities to do more of that kind of collaborative, project-based learning. Not that all of them are, but we like to do that as much as we can, because I think the mainstream education focuses more on the individual, and ‘What can the individual succeed at?’ versus a group, or a collaboration of what people think, and how to do things, and how to move forward.

Laura spoke to community learning opportunities as a form of social emotional support for students, and contrasted community driven learning with individualism which she considered to be detrimental to Aboriginal students’ success:

A lot of times I think that postsecondary institutions don't meet the values of Indigenous students, Indigenous learners, because so many of them are very Eurocentric and driven for individualism. Individual success is based on one person oneself. The ability to go and venture on their own and like loneliness, whereas Aboriginal self-government post-secondary education is still community driven, it still focuses and acknowledge the Aboriginal paradigms of teaching and learning, hands on interactive engagement, acknowledgment, ceremonial, language, elders - so there is more inclusiveness.

Laura’s description of conventional educational success is less focused on academic outcomes, but rather the social and cultural well-being of students. Likewise, Wendy turns away from conventional concepts of success as an individual pursuit and towards a collective definition of success which asks students to provide social and emotional support to each other:

In many ways the teaching philosophy of post-secondary is like kindergarten. So we’re teaching competition with self; the success of one
is the success of all. The failure of one, the hurt of one is the hurt of all. So sometimes I have to go back to fundamental ideas of creating safety--challenging yourself to be your best. To improve from yourself, and not have that Western idea of success being competition or one-upping or doing better than the guy next to you.

When speaking about the direction she would like to see education move towards, Wendy speaks about success as a clear sense of self and an increased ability to learn and live in a cultural way:

I know in Ontario there’s a Masters Program of Social Work that they go fasting, and they do ceremony, and it’s worth credits. Masters credits. And I believe that’s the direction our people need to go in order to truly succeed in this Western terms of, ‘What is success?’ It’s not going to be a multiple choice exam at the end of the term, it’s going to be establishing a more clear sense of self. And when our students have that, the possibilities are endless to where they’re going to go, and how they’re going to share their gifts. So, my only hope is that these types of institutions continue on and there’s more of them, more opportunity to be immersed in culture. To wake up and start your day and end your day in a traditional form, whether it’s song, dance, prayer.

Chad’s perception of success includes bringing community together. In this example he speaks about how to resolve differing perspectives on the right way to do something. In this example, success is measured by the degree to which the activity brings people together:

People are always saying, ‘Oh why are you doing that?’ or ‘Why are you doing it that way?’ But the way that I think about it, is in our beliefs, that spirituality is not something that we believe but it’s who we are. And that relationship with the Creator is between me and the Creator, and if it feels right in my heart, then it’s okay. But if it doesn’t feel right, and I’m getting pressured to do something or to do it a different way, that I have an open mind. I can be diplomatic about it, and be sensitive around what other peoples’ ways of doing things are included in that process. Because there’s no right or wrong way to pray, or right or wrong way to do anything, because we all want the same thing, and that’s to achieve that success, right? To feel like we are successful— not from a mainstream concept of success, but the things that we strive for are achieved if it’s bringing the community together. That’s a success. people are always saying, ‘Oh why are you doing that?’ or ‘Why are you doing it that way?’ But the way that
I think about it, is in our beliefs, that spirituality is not something that we believe but it’s who we are. And that relationship with the Creator is between me and the Creator, and if it feels right in my heart, then it’s okay. But if it doesn’t feel right, and I’m getting pressured to do something or to do it a different way, that I have an open mind. I can be diplomatic about it, and be sensitive around what other peoples’ ways of doing things are included in that process. Because there’s no right or wrong way to pray, or right or wrong way to do anything, because we all want the same thing, and that’s to achieve that success, right? To feel like we are successful-- not from a mainstream concept of success, but the things that we strive for are achieved if it’s bringing the community together. That’s a success.

The Hawthorne Report, the result of a national government inquiry into Indian education was critical of mainstream discourses around education:

It is difficult to imagine how an Indian child attending an ordinary public school could develop anything but a negative self-image. First, there is nothing from his culture represented in the school or valued by it. Second, the Indian child often gains the impression that nothing he or other Indians do is right when compared to what non-Indian children are doing. Third, in both segregated and integrated schools, one of the main aims of teachers expressed with reference to Indians is ‘to help them improve their standard of living, or their general lot, or themselves,’ which is another way of saying that what they are and have now it not good enough; they must do and be other things.

It is illuminating to contrast the aims articulated in the Hawthorne Report description with the National Indian Brotherhood’s 1972 *Indian Control of Indian Education* description of success which emphasizes:

We want education to give our children the knowledge to understand and be proud of themselves and the knowledge to understand the world around them.

We believe in education: ...as a preparation for total living; ... as a means of free choice of where to live and work; ... as a means of enabling us to participate fully in our own social, economic, political and education advancement.

The time has come for a radical change in Indian education. Our aim is to make education relevant to the philosophy and needs of Indian people.

These principles were explicitly reaffirmed in the National Indian Brotherhood’s successor organization, the Assembly of First Nations, in their 2010
publication *First Nations Control of First Nations Education* (Assembly of First Nations, 2010). These concepts of success illustrate the degree to which education remains contested ground and speak to the need to reconcile the aims of Aboriginal people with the aims of mainstream education.

**Misconceptions regarding what it means to be Indigenous.** In order to effectively facilitate culture in the classroom teachers need to be aware of the impact of colonialism on Indigenous identity. Teachers need to be aware of the ways that colonialism has influenced perceptions of Indigenous identity within the minds of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Recognition that this is an ongoing issue is critical:

> And there’s a lot of that Euro-Centric influence, into what it means to be Indigenous. Five hundred years of colonialism has really affected the way that our people think, and what we believe.

All of the participants addressed the impact of colonialism on Indigenous knowledge. Two of the participants explicitly talked about the ways that this influences Aboriginal students’ own perceptions regarding what it means to be Indigenous. Chad spoke about misconceptions in public schools and how his programming directly addresses these misconceptions:

> And with the public schools, you know there’s a real sense of disconnection around what ‘indian people’ are, or where they exist, or what they practice. That’s changing in the last couple years, because we’re really starting to develop a better working relationship with them. So, one of the approaches, and I don’t know what your questions are going to be later, but one of the approaches that we’re trying to project into mainstream education is around practical learning experiences. Something that they can connect with, personally, like ownership. We teach about the plants, and we give the kids plants to put in the ground, and it becomes part of who they are. And it’s been expressed that, if you know the name of something, you’re more likely to respect it, than if you don’t know what
it is, so a lot of those foundational teachings around respect, gratitude, wisdom.

In her own practice Wendy points to critical thought and the contextualization of Indigenous identity within colonization as a tool of empowerment:

It can be a fine line in education, between empowerment and disempowerment. I think, from my personal experience, that line has to do with an understanding of colonization, because education, without critical thought, can also be a limitation to our people, in terms of understanding themselves, and their families, and their communities, because some of the western thought and theory. The parameters are really limited, and it doesn’t always acknowledge some really important facets in what it means to be Indigenous. So I try to be mindful of that, as well.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) highlighted the issue of misconceptions and stereotypes in their report:

The values reinforced by the teacher, in inclusion or exclusion of Aboriginal materials and perspectives in the course, the type of interaction in the classroom, and the relationship between teachers and parents will all affect the comfort of the Aboriginal student. Other education staff – principals, counsellors and psychologists – make professional decisions every day that affect the lives of children. All these educators must be able to fulfil their professional responsibilities with sensitivity and energy to help their students blossom.

RCAP suggested increased education to combat the perpetuation of misconceptions about Aboriginal people and stereotypes in Canadian education:

School staff in various roles must have the opportunity to develop this commitment to high-quality education, based on understanding of Aboriginal culture and values and on issues in Aboriginal-Canadian relations. We emphasize the need to correct erroneous assumptions and to dispel stereotypes that still about in the minds of many Canadians, distorting their relationships with Aboriginal people.

As educators increase the degree to which they integrate Aboriginal knowledge and culture into education systems, the pervasiveness of misconceptions
about Aboriginal people within education will decrease. However, this would require educators to question their own conceptions about Aboriginal people in order to prevent themselves from perpetuating the problem.

**Varying levels of knowledge of own culture.** Culturally responsive teaching emphasizes the practice of having students bring their own culture into the classroom. Student then become vehicles through which diversity is carried into the classroom. What happens, though, when students have a limited understanding of their own culture due to the ongoing oppression and marginalization of Indigenous thought within mainstream Canadian society?

Wendy explains some of the factors influencing the varying levels of culture that her students come into the classroom with. While varying levels of cultural knowledge is something universal to any cultural group, in Canada Aboriginal culture is particularly impacted by specific government policies explicitly aimed at eradicating Aboriginal culture.

But what I find in the classroom is that students are at very different levels with their relationship to culture. Whether it’s kind of a pan-Aboriginal culture, or their individual Nation. Their relationships are very different, as some were in residential schools and they don’t have that foundation. They may be Christianized; we don’t create any hierarchy of understanding, but it’s kind of interesting to navigate culture with people on such a huge spread. So some people have grown up knowing their language, knowing their dances, their songs, their oral histories; they can recite stories that they’ve been told, and grew up in close proximity to their traditional territories. And so, culture can be challenging at times, to infuse sensitively because of the diversity of the students’ relationship to culture. But I would say that it’s fundamental to my way of teaching, of knowing my role as a life giver, as knowing my role as a Haida woman, as a Six Nation Mohawk woman. So it’s fundamental to my practice, but I always find it kind of interesting to navigate the differences in cultural understanding. But it’s very much welcome, no matter where anyone’s at,
and I do construct different activities, so that it doesn’t matter where anyone’s involvement with culture lies, you know.

In its conclusions the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Interim Report called residential schools an assault on Aboriginal children, families, culture and nations and highlighted the ongoing intergenerational nature of the assault (Siclair, Littlechild, & Wilson, 2012, p.25). Wendy refers to the experience of students within educational institutions and Canadian society as “traumatic”:

And like I said, that range is huge. Some students are just tiptoeing into identifying themselves as Indigenous, while others can speak their language. Indigenous people and our history of Indigenous people and educational institutions in Canada is traumatic. And I don’t even think trauma is a fair enough word to use, because I think it’s so much deeper than that. So when I talk about safety as an Indigenous teacher, with Indigenous students, it’s a recognition of that traumatic past, and it’s a welcoming space for cultural expression, for identity, for self. And like I said, that range is huge. Some students are just tiptoeing into identifying themselves as Indigenous, while others can speak their language.

Both Wendy and Grant emphasize the term “safety” when talking about facilitating culture in the classroom. Laura acknowledged that knowledge loss has occurred while also looking for opportunities for students to share what cultural knowledge they do have:

They don’t know because they weren’t taught or they never practice so a lot of the skills that they do have are just simple traditional technology skills such as basketry, weaving, sewing. Some of them have oral stories. so if we get onto a topic where any of that knowledge is relevant or can contribute to the class then I invite them to share their knowledge or their experiences or their stories.

Local protocols. All participants emphasized the importance of engaging with local Indigenous place through community and culture. Two participants in particular noted that the inclusion of local knowledge must be done through local
protocols. Grant explained that each nation has its own protocols regarding the sharing of knowledge and provided an example from his nation:

We all have policies, we all have rules within our nation… not to be distributed to the public or anywhere else. Like a song or a dance that might be sacred, that may be significant to you, would have to avoid those things and respect those terms. Like the Tsilhqot’in language, one is not allowed to tell the old old history in that language, it is called a long long time ago. One is not allowed to be talking about that during the day and instead it was taught toward the evening and into the night. As a Tsilhqot’in person all one has to say to you is ‘be careful, you might go blind,’ and it is a reminder to let you know that it is not the right time for you to be telling this story. And that goes for other nations as well, they have their own policy that they are familiar with and usually people will tell you. People will know that.

Chad also provided an example from his nation and linked respect for local protocols to honouring the expertise, authority, and autonomy of local communities:

Chad: “Recognizing local community: I think one of the things that I always consider is governance structures, and being aware of that. In the Okanagan, as a traditional hunter, I have family in the entire valley, but I was raised in Penticton. So when I go somewhere else close to another Okanagan community, I’ll go over there and I’ll see the hunters from that area. And that transferred into kind of the governance concept, even educational concept that each community has certain ways of thinking about things: protocols, practices, and processes. And I guess, from what I learned from my teachings is that authority or that responsibility-- and that autonomy-- is important at a real local level, because they are the experts. They’re there all the time, they know what’s going on. And they know the people, they know the families. And that’s a really big part of being a part of community, I think. So, having respect for that autonomy, and that responsibility, and honouring that, I think it’s a really important part of Indigeneity. It’s a really important part that we often are not accustomed to in mainstream society, because they look at BC as being BC, but how many different Indigenous communities are in BC?”

In all areas local protocols is an important consideration. In BC this need is particularly pronounced because BC is the most culturally and linguistically diverse region in Canada. The need to recognize local culture is even embedded in the Ministry of Education’s 1701 student data collection form which requires that Aboriginal
programming recognize local First People: “The languages and cultures of the First
People whose traditional territories are served by the board must be respected,” (Ministry

**Institutional Structures**

The following table outlines the major themes covered in this section as well as
the presence of each of these themes within interviews.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Grant</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Chad</th>
<th>Wendy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit expectations regarding integration of culture and knowledge</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freedom and/or support to take students into community</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connections between community and institution</td>
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Figure 6. Structural Elements which Enhance Integration of Indigenous Knowledge and Culture

All of the participants felt that their institution supported their pedagogical
choices. In particular they discussed explicit expectations regarding the integration of
culture and knowledge, the freedom and/or support to take students into the community,
and connections between the community and their institution.

As Grant explains, the explicit expectation of the integration of Indigenous
content is a form of support for him as an instructor:
The people that I work for clearly stated that that’s what they would like to practice was a lot of Indigenous knowledge, a lot of Indigenous teachings, and things like that, and when everyone is on board with you like that it makes it much more easier because you know someone is behind you on that so that’s always a good thing.

Chad spoke to leadership and vision regarding these elements in the formation of his institution and how that legacy continues to influence the institution and his work:

I don’t see us operating really any other way, because of the mandate from the board. They established the mandate 32 years ago, and provided some really great direction. And a lot of the people that have helped create that vision, they’re not here no more, so it’s like the ‘old people’ have really provided the vision for the work that we do. So the mandate of the En’owkin is education, language, and cultural revitalization. Those are the three priorities. So, anything that we’re involved in, or anything that we do has to support that vision, has to support that mandate. Or has to perpetuate it, so that it can be maintained.

Chad’s description of how connections are created underscores the reciprocity within relationship between the institution and the community:

We do a lot of community-based programming, because sometimes it’s easier just to bring the programs into community life. You know, evening courses, weekend courses. Having that flexibility, to accommodate the requests that come from community around any of the subjects. Especially the language, because our language is being really threatened. It’s really a dynamic, but I think the leadership and the support from the board, being from the Nation, it’s important to have somebody who has the bigger vision in line, and it’s not solely just about the organization, but really community-minded, big picture thinking, around where we fit and how we can adapt as an organization to meet the needs of the people. One of the stories, the Four Foods stories, it talks about when we were created. And one of the concepts in that story is around-- it was a question, put to me around, ‘What are they going to do to give us the best chance at survival?’ And one of the essential elements of survival is food, so the question was asked to them about, ‘How are you going to feed the people?’ So if we think about that concept from an organizational perspective, how do we feed the people?
Laura describes how her institution provides support for the integration of indigenous culture and knowledge as well as for herself as an Indigenous person:

Aboriginal self-government post-secondary education is still community driven, it still focuses and acknowledge the Aboriginal paradigms of teaching and learning, hands on interactive engagement, acknowledgment, ceremonial, language, elders - so there is more inclusiveness. And then as well for myself as I educator, you know I myself feel acknowledged and valued.

Laura hoped that the impact of the work happening in her institution would lead to long term and far reaching positive change:

The joys of teaching and learning within the community for the community for the betterment of the community, praiseworthy, demonstrates a model of a governance structure that could be benchmarked to provide hope to other communities and nations, neighboring nations, leadership is really important, provides hope to our own communities that you know they can teach here too, they can pursue a career in education and teach based on the values of our community.

Wendy expressed appreciation for the nature of work in her institution and hope that the work in Indigenous institutions forwards the field of Indigenous education as a whole:

I think we have that intimate connection with the community, being self-governed. And I think that allows us to push the bounds in Indigenous education, because we have that greater flexibility, and greater ability to--what the government might see as risk taking. To look at a Mental Health and Addictions program using ‘this,’ or the integration of ceremony, and all of that good stuff that we have.

The participants overwhelming linked the nature of their institution to their ability to do their work in a way that supported student achievement. This should be cause for all involved in education to consider the impact of Aboriginal involvement in educational governance on Aboriginal student success and structural approaches to improving outcomes for Aboriginal learners.
Chapter 5 – Conclusion

At some point in our youth my sisters and I realized that we did not answer questions with yes or no, but rather with long and elaborate explanations. To this day if asked to pass on information from one party to another we include all of the details from the original party, even though we may not see the immediate relevance. For example, the question “is there dinner next Sunday?” might elicit the answer “Mom said that she is picking up a pork roast tomorrow from the butcher shop beside the movie theatre and putting it in the freezer. She will take it out of the freezer on Saturday if she confirms that her meeting on Sunday is cancelled.” To elaborate on someone else’s statement or leave details out may lead to a later conversation where a decision is explained in the context of the original statement in front of the original speaker now hearing their information third hand. If something is inaccurate the other party may say “I didn’t say that,” implying that a personal offense took place. Worse, they may say nothing and make a mental note never to pass information on through you again. To relay a statement accurately reflects your own integrity as a person as well as the degree to which you can be trusted to represent another person’s integrity. If you consistently leave out information or elaborate on someone’s statement to the detriment of their intended meaning eventually you will be excluded from the role of information sharer.

Ours is an oral culture. In his 2007 decision Justice Vickers pointed out that when passing on an oral history each generation interprets it, so you are not just passing on information, but rather successive layers of interpretation that you may or may not be aware of (Tsilhqot’in 2007, p.45), thus your credibility rests on the degree to which you provide a full account of what was said. Even if you don’t think it is important, someone somewhere down the line felt it was important enough to pass on, and perhaps a listener, now or in the future, might consider it a critical piece of information. If your credibility is damaged people will stop sharing information with you and stop listening to you.

With this in mind you can imagine the trepidation with which I approached the act of splicing up interviews and excluding pieces of them and even more so the act of heavily layering my own interpretation onto pieces of statements. I take comfort in the fact that participants all have post-secondary education and likely entered into the interviews knowing that this would happen. I also take comfort in the act of member checking, and if participants saw something which by omission and/or interpretation implied that they said something which they did not, they did let me know by saying “I didn’t say that,” as opposed to making a mental note never to convey information through me again. I return to the question Kovach’s work elicits: how do you integrate indigenous knowledge into formal institutions without distorting it or destroying it in the process? At the end of this project I have to say that this process does distort it to some degree. What is shared is what fit into the inquiry question and aligned with the literature review. There is not enough space to discuss all of the amazing things participants
shared with me. It’s a necessary compromise built into the process and I don’t think there’s a way around it within the format of multi-case analysis.

In future academic work I will probably pursue co-constructed narratives because as a human being this process made me feel uneasy. During the interviews this process made me an outsider looking in. The relationships of sister, fellow nation member, friend, and colleague shifted to researcher and researched. During the process of data analysis and representation I worried about othering participants. There was a quote which was a strongly worded indictment of public education but I did not include it. I still wonder, did I exclude it for space and continuity, or was I sanitizing the participant’s words to make them palatable for my audience, and if so, is that a breach of trust? Three of my participants had graduate degrees, but I am the only one who will benefit from this publication Co-construction would address the issues regarding researcher relationships, priorities, representation, and benefits.

Initial inquiry

My initial inquiry was composed of three related questions: How do teachers integrate IK into their work? Does working in a self-governed Aboriginal post-secondary institution present unique opportunities in terms of the integration of indigenous knowledge? What advice would they give others who wish to integrate IK into their classrooms?

Findings within the Context of Key Themes in the Literature

Within the academic literature surrounding Indigenous pedagogy several key themes surfaced as possible areas that might emerge in the interviews. Themes included the nature and transmission of Indigenous knowledge and decolonization at the individual, institutional, and societal level. What was absent in the literature was an explicit comprehensive instructional framework which described unique aspects of Indigenous pedagogy including the relationship between teachers and learners, evidence regarding effectiveness, specific strategies, and models of instruction. The absence of such a framework could be due to the relatively recent participation of Indigenous people
in academia, the diversity of Indigenous cultures resulting in diverse practices of
knowledge transmission, and the nature of Indigenous knowledge themselves. In the
absence of such a framework culturally responsive teaching was used as an
organizational framework for data analysis and point of entry for bringing Indigenous
knowledge into the field of education. Studying the two in unison increases the ability of
those from educational fields to understand the integration of Indigenous knowledge and
culture into formal educational institutions and expands scholarly work on culturally
responsive teaching by noting ways in which it can be enhanced in order to integrate
Indigenous knowledge and culture into the classroom. These findings are useful in and of
themselves, and they may help those who use Culturally Responsive Teaching effectively
integrate Indigenous knowledge and culture into their practice.

The distinct nature and transmission of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous
knowledge is distinct in nature and in the ways that it is transmitted. Features which make
it distinct include epistemological pluralism (Anderson, 2011; Davis, 2011), its situated
nature (Anderson, 2011; Heckler and Sillitoe, 2011), and the degree to which it is
epistemological pluralism by framing knowledge within their own knowledge systems
and encouraging students to explore their own knowledge systems. Rather than
attempting to reconcile divergent knowledge about things such as ceremonial protocols or
theories about childrearing differences, they were acknowledged and it was a matter of
fact that differences existed. Rather than there being a right way and a wrong way,
knowledge was framed as coming from diverse sources and subsequently differences
would arise. Examples were given where different experiences and bodies of knowledge
were elicited. Classroom discussions and teacher modelling nurtured an environment where different knowledge could co-exist, and emphasis was placed on a collective understanding of diversity within the classroom as opposed to an authoritative and universal truth.

**Facilitating the transmission of situated knowledge.** The situated nature of Indigenous knowledge means that it cannot be taught in isolation. Participants provided examples of ways that they addressed the situated nature of knowledge by providing students with access to the land and community through events such as pithouse building or canoe carving. Students were brought to community through special events or service learning in order to access knowledge situated in community. Elders and resource people were brought in as sources of knowledge. Stories such as the Four Foods Story, along with diverse interpretations of the lessons contained within, were used as teaching tools. This form of teaching required teachers to let go of their privileged position as the one who knows and instead take on the role of learner and/or one source of knowledge among many. Participants consistently demonstrated that their role was as facilitator who created opportunities for students to access knowledge. They also recognized that students carried knowledge and went out of their way to ensure that students could contribute cultural and Indigenous knowledge and emphasized that in order for this to happen it has to be actively encouraged and supported.

**Interacting with community.** Protocols (Simpson, 2011), responsibility to local Indigenous community and knowledge (Cannon, 2011), and equipping students with the tools to engage with community and elders were also themes in the literature (Heckler
and Sillitoe, 2011, Cannon, 2011). Two of the participants explicitly explained the
importance of local protocols in their work. One, who taught on his territory, explained
how he respected the authority of local families and communities when he left his own
community. The other, teaching off of his territory, explained that he might not always
know what the protocols were when he goes somewhere new however he has a
responsibility to ask and someone will let him know what the protocols are. All
participants emphasized the need to acknowledge and collaborate with the First Nations
on whose territory you teach. Participants did not discuss explicitly teaching students
how to engage with elders and communities even though they did say that students came
in with a variety of levels of background knowledge. It is likely that the skills of
interacting with community and elders are tacit skills acquired through modelling and
experience and encouraged by an educational environment that holds those who carry
indigenous knowledge as valuable experts.

Colonizing/decolonizing. The themes of colonizing and decolonizing came up
several times in interviews. Within academia the concepts have been used by scholars
such as Franz Fannon and Marie Battiste for decades. One participant mentioned Dr.
Jeannette Armstrong as influential and another mentioned Dr. Martin Brokenleg,
however, aside from those two references academic theorists were not part of the
conversations. What is important to note is that during the time that this research took
place Idle No More was sweeping the nation. Idle No More popularized concepts like
colonization and decolonization and made them accessible to people outside of academia.
Visually the meaning of decolonization was illustrated when Aboriginal leadership
marched to Ottawa to share concerns regarding changes to environmental protection laws.
and were physically denied access to Parliament and when Prime Minister Stephen
Harper refused to meet with Chief Theresa Spence. The public display of culture was a
way to bring attention to longstanding inequities such as the dilapidated and polluted
trailer which was supposed to be a school house in Chief Spence’s community. A fist
holding a feather, a spiritual symbol within a political symbol, was a frequently used
logo. I participated in some of the Idle No More events. As a person I was raised with
stories about and firsthand experiences of racism and oppression but it took me a long
time to find the theoretical concepts to explain them and once I found the words
colonization and decolonization suddenly I had a powerful tools to explain the injustices
that happened to generations of my family. What struck me is the degree to which these
concepts are now common in the vocabulary of Indigenous youth, spiritual leaders, and
activists. While I am unsure as to whether or not participants were influenced by specific
scholars or Idle No More in their choice of words, I can say that participants viewed
colonization as the invisibility of Indigenous knowledge systems and/or degradation of
Indigenous knowledge, and viewed decolonization as the revitalization of Indigenous
knowledge and models of transmission through practice and by explicitly asserting the
worth of Indigenous thought.

Invisibility. Participants’ experiences with racism through the
invisibility/degradation of Indigenous thought in formal educational institutions gave
them context from which to be compassionate towards their students’ own lack of
Indigenous knowledge, reluctance to share culture and Indigenous knowledge, and/or
initial inability to see themselves as carriers of culture and Indigenous knowledge, much
like self-subjugation (Couthland, 2007) and cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2000) were
discussed in the literature review. Safety and the explicit valuing of Aboriginal identity were often discussed in tandem, indicating that if educators wish to create safe environments for Aboriginal learners explicitly valuing Aboriginal identity is crucial.

**Experiences with and perspectives of mainstream education.** Mainstream educational institutions were not generally regarded as safe places for students to express their Indigenous identity. Two participants did not consider mainstream institutions to be safe places for themselves as instructors to express their Indigenous identity. When participants spoke of colonization part of identifying it was this lack of safety and the impact it had on the students’ ability to express and explore their own identity. Couthland speaks of self-affirmation as the antidote to self-subjugation (2007). Participants modelled self-affirmation to their students by actively asserting the value of their own culture and Indigenous knowledge as well as the value of others’ culture and Indigenous knowledge and culture and validating the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge embedded in traditional activities, concepts within language, and stories. All participants recognized that because of the ongoing vulnerability of Indigenous knowledge in education and the ongoing vulnerability of Indigenous people in Canada, some students don’t spontaneously self-affirm culture and Indigenous knowledge. Special care must be taken to free students from their “institutionalized mind” (Grant) through the dual processes of healing and critical consciousness.

**Healing, critical consciousness, Indigenous knowledge as pillars of freedom.** In the data, healing from residential schools and trauma caused by colonialism was a process presented in tandem with students’ own awareness of their location in
colonialism. Anderson discusses healing and liberation (2011), Youngblood Henderson discusses critical consciousness and cultural emancipation (2000a), and Settee discusses developing critical consciousness through Indigenous knowledge (2011). After talking with participants, I can imagine a triangle with healing in one corner, critical consciousness in another corner, and Indigenous knowledge in the third corner. Each supports the other. Students who are aware of this history of colonialism are able to begin the healing process. Becoming aware can be painful, as Laura explained; however, Chad explained how students can gain strength for healing from Indigenous ways. Grant explained that by freeing students from the institutionalized mind students are able to see and value themselves as carriers of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge challenges authoritative discourses (Davis, 2011) and western hegemony (Settee, 2011) and as such Indigenous knowledge helps students see colonialism. An important element of colonization was a concerted and ongoing attack on Indigenous knowledge, thus healing involves the reclamation of Indigenous knowledge (Battiste, 2000). Healing also involves acknowledging and pushing back against colonialism through activities mentioned in interviews such as ecological advocacy or giving back to the community, and thus the process of finding ways to heal through personal decolonization by necessity requires critical consciousness.

These activities occur in unison at varying degrees of intensity. Together they provide a structure through which to see what decolonization in education looks like at the individual level. Freedom was an ongoing theme, and to some degree a product of this process. Students are free to be themselves as Indigenous people. Laura spoke about students initially not understanding the degree to which they are colonized and how she
provides them with opportunities to learn in an environment infused with Indigeniety to help them become empowered. Chad spoke to the impact of colonialism on perceptions of what it means to be colonized and how he challenges those perceptions through community interaction and interaction with the land. Grant spoke to freeing students from their institutionalized minds by teaching them the true history. These are all examples of colonialism and decolonization within students. Wendy spoke to decolonizing herself every day and decolonization as an ongoing lifelong activity. With this in mind, institutions which actively promote the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge are inherently decolonizing forces in society. One wonders what impact students have as they move out of self-governed post-secondary and into mainstream institutions, as many do, and into communities.

Limitations

Teaching is a profession which requires constant reflection. Decolonizing ourselves and our practices, as participants have noted, requires ongoing reflection on identity within the context of the colonial legacies of Canada. What this work has provided is an exploratory inquiry into decolonizing pedagogies which integrate Indigenous knowledge and culture into formal educational institutions. Indigenous knowledge and culture are situated and relational so I would caution readers from drawing universal generalizations from this work.

Implications

The instructors in this work were all First Nations, however, this work is not intended to benefit only First Nations educators. The issues that their students faced, such as racism and the invisibility of Indigenous identity, are issues that Aboriginal students of
non-First Nations instructors experience as well. The practices that participants felt made a
difference, such as explicitly acknowledging and honouring Aboriginal identity, are
practices that non-First Nations instructors could utilize as well.

In British Columbia are there over 60,000 Aboriginal students in the public school
system who account for 11% of the student body (Ministry of Education, 2013). While
participants taught in institutions where the vast majority of their students were of
Aboriginal ancestry, this work will likely be helpful to those who teach in mainstream
institutions which contain a significant number of Aboriginal students.

**Classroom Practice.** In terms of pedagogy for those teaching outside of self-
governed post-secondary institutions and possibly those who are not Aboriginal these
findings are relatively simple to employ in theory but possibly more difficult in practice
due to the ongoing legacy of colonialism. In this section I will describe how educators
might employ these practices, and in the following section I will talk about the import of
confronting colonialism within the profession of education. Educators can integrate
Indigenous knowledge and culture into their classrooms by nurturing a safe space for
students to bring in their own Indigenous knowledge, attending local events, connecting
with community to bring students to local areas of significance to the local community,
and bringing in elders and community members to share with the class. Educators can
integrate Indigenous stories, interpretations of Indigenous stories, and concepts drawn
from Indigenous languages into their practice. The effectiveness of these activities will be
enhanced by the degree to which educators actively promote the value of Indigenous
knowledge and culture, acknowledge the impact of colonialism on Indigenous knowledge
and culture, model respect for diverse knowledge, resign their authoritative role of the
expert in favour of the role of one knowledge carrier among many, and model the skills of interacting with community and elders in culturally appropriate ways.

Confronting Colonialism with the Teaching Profession: While the above suggestions seem relatively straightforward, participants’ experiences and perspectives of mainstream education show us that doing this constant challenging of the legacies of colonialism and racism in educational institutions and within ourselves is needed. Pre-service teacher educator Schick says “teacher identities have also been shaped through colonial relations, especially if teachers have been educated in Canada” (Schick, 2009, p.188). Often increasing educators’ knowledge about Aboriginal people is seen as a way to combat the perpetuation of racism through education; however, Schick claims that often this does little to challenge privilege and instead becomes an act of privilege where “white subjectivities desire to be or consume the other in a way that leaves white entitlement and subjectivities intact” (p.124). Schick recommends a critical ontology in which educators constantly ask themselves “who do you think you are?” and teaching them to constantly problematize the answer (p.125). Jeffrey and Nelson (2009), speaking about the education of social workers who face similar challenges of confronting or perpetuating institutionalized racism in their practice, recommend Patti Lather’s doubled practice where critical thinking informs practice and practice informs critical thinking. Ideally, practitioners would develop new skills based on critical and post-colonial theories, and engage with critical and post-colonial theories through practice. The processes are ongoing throughout an individual’s career. Anything less could result in “superficial attempts at accommodation” (105). Sammel, speaking about the integration of First Nations science into classrooms, says educators need to “recognize, deconstruct,
and resist the inherent racism in Western science” by becoming more “reflective and
critical of the ideological foundations and implementation of educational policy” (2009,
62). Likewise, speaking about anti-racism work Green suggest that change cannot
happen as long as the myth of harmony and the illusion of inclusion exist, and urges us to
name, confront, and dismantle colonialism (2009, p.146). This challenge is extended to
Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike, as Green states “solutions proposed for
Aboriginal problems amount to suggestions for inclusion into the dominant processes and
paradigms, while the dominant population is not expected to change at all. Thus, the
patterns of the past and present are likely to extend into the future” (2009, 146). Smith
acknowledge that even radical scholars exist within a capitalist and white supremacist
society and does not believe that anti-racist work in academia is enough (2009). Smith
advocates that anti-oppressive work have relevance outside of academia and recommends
engaging with community in order to create a more radical vision of a just society and
then moving towards that long term goal through collaborative movement building
(p.85).

**Support for Self-Governed Aboriginal Post-Secondary Institutions.** The
literature review section of this work looked at research’s recommendations for
integrating culture into education as well as the challenges of doing so within a formal
setting and within the ongoing legacies of colonialism and assimilation. Participants
demonstrated that they had found innovative ways to address these challenges, and as
such I would consider self-governed Aboriginal Post-secondary Institutions to be sites of
strength for Aboriginal pedagogy. As a society we should be honouring this and
supporting self-governed Aboriginal post-secondary institutions; however, Aboriginal
self-governed post-secondary institutions do not receive core funding (Weismiller & McBride, 2010). Rather, they are funded on grants. As such, they do not have the ability to plan for the long term and lack the security afforded to mainstream public colleges and universities which leads to shortfalls in areas such as technology and facilities (p.46). Colleagues in these institutions are on the cutting edge of pedagogical innovation while underfunded and under-supported. Imagine what they could do with ongoing adequate funding.

**Future Directions: Areas for Further Inquiry**

The above section discusses implications as they relate to teacher education as well as a number of future directions teacher education might take up in order to increase the capacity of all educators to meet the needs of Aboriginal students, a potential area for further inquiry. This research focused on decolonizing pedagogy within largely Aboriginal student bodies, however, ultimately any decolonizing effort must include non-Aboriginal people as well. Decolonizing pedagogy with non-Aboriginal or blended Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student bodies might be a further area of inquiry. Aboriginal participation in educational governance structure is also a possible area of inquiry.

**Illustrative Examples of Decolonizing Professional Education:** It’s worrisome that participants consistently referred to their own experiences with racism in education and highlighted the lack of accurate Aboriginal representation within formal education because that means that the people who are teachers or in the process of becoming teachers experienced an education system where the suppression of Indigenous knowledge was modelled for them and without the benefit of accurate information about Aboriginal people. As an Aboriginal educator on my own personal and professional
lifelong journey of decolonization I can say that this holds true for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators. If the very presence of Indigenous knowledge challenges western hegemony it is inefficient to promote the integration of Indigenous knowledge as a pedagogy without also advocating that teachers become critically conscious about colonization themselves. What would Canada look like if teachers in mainstream education institutions were encouraged and supported by their employers to embark on a lifelong journey of decolonization? What does effective decolonizing professional education, pre-service and in-service, look like? How can we support it?

**Decolonizing Pedagogy of Non-Aboriginal Student Bodies.** Participants noted that their student bodies were largely if not entirely Aboriginal students. It would be exciting to examine in depth what the development of critical consciousness and reconciliation through the integration of Indigenous culture and knowledge looks like for non-Aboriginal students. From experience I can say that teaching Aboriginal content to non-Aboriginal and mixed populations poses significant challenges in terms of creating a safe environment, particularly when parents and colleagues resist the inclusion of Aboriginal content because they see it as only benefitting Aboriginal students. Does effective and meaningful integration look different when employed to a mixed or entirely non-Aboriginal student body? If so, how?

**Addressing Institutional Barriers.** In his study of BC First Nations Studies 12 Mason found that even when the explicit goal of teaching Aboriginal content was in place institutional barriers in mainstream education abound (2007). Participants noted that the self-governed aspect of their institutions was a supportive factor in their pedagogy.
leads me to believe that increasing Aboriginal participation in educational governance will lead to positive results in terms of increasing the degree to which Indigenous knowledge and culture are integrated into formal education and it would be interesting to see whether or not educational institutions which reserve seats in their governing bodies for Aboriginal people integrate Indigenous knowledge and culture to a higher degree resulting in higher levels of Aboriginal student success. For example, under Ontario’s Education Act school districts with tuition agreements with First Nations must have at least one Indian School Board member, unless the Indian pupils make up at least 25% of the population, in which case the minimum is two Indian School Board Members (Education Act, 2009). It would be interesting to inquire into whether or not Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators felt that Indian participation in governance increased their ability to integrate Indigenous knowledge and culture into the classroom.

Yesterday was a day of celebration because the federal government announced that it rejected Taseko’s proposal for a mine in our nation. I participated in both the 2007 and 2013 Canadian Environmental Agency’s Assessment Panel Hearings to protest the mine, as did other members of my family. From our participation, and by witnessing and observing others’ presentations, I realized that Indigenous knowledge played a key role in this form of land defense. Last fall the Tsilhqot’in successfully defended rights and title at the Supreme Court of Canada. My late grandmother Elizabeth ‘E-li’ Jeff provided key testimony in the Tsilhqot’in case because the stories that she carried contained evidence related to territorial boundaries and land use, so Indigenous knowledge played a key role in another form of land defense. Within the Canadian legal framework Indigenous knowledge is a means of asserting rights and title and as such it is a political tool in the struggle for self-determination.

Throughout this project I have been troubled by the possibility that the integration of Indigenous knowledge into educational institutions in a meaningful way - that respects the integrity of the body of knowledge itself including forms of transition - is impossible because it is not in the best interests of the state, especially given that the state is often on the other side of the courtroom. According to Kuokkanen, public debate regarding sovereignty and rights results in negative stereotyping of Indigenous people and leads to indifference towards Indigenous people in educational institutions and ignorance about
them (2007, p.73). Smith endorses Althusser’s concept of educational institutions as “ideological state apparatuses” and considers racism endemic to educational institutions (2009, 83). The misrepresentation and/or invisibility of Aboriginal people and Indigenous knowledge in British Columbia’s classrooms could certainly be explained by the fact that many BC First Nations, including and especially my own, and the Crown have been at odds over land from the point of contact to present day.

I decided at the outset that while this is a logical assertion I refuse to endorse such a cynical stance for three reasons. First, it makes this entire project as well as my career to date and future aspirations entirely meaningless. Smith and Kuokkanen would claim that I have been coopted into the academic industrial complex but I know in my heart that my refusal to endorse such a stance is not based on self-interest alone. It’s based on my understanding of the profession of teaching in British Columbia. While educational institutions are state-based organizations in British Columbia, teachers regulate their own profession through a body called the BC Teachers’ College. The BC Teachers’ Council is composed of government appointees and representatives appointed by constituency groups including the BC Teachers’ Federation. The BC Teachers’ Federation has a reputation as the most radical teachers union in the country and strives towards social justice because teachers are professionals, and as part of their profession they know that injustice undermines their ability to meet the needs of learners, especially those who come from marginalized groups. I remain hopeful because of my colleagues’ commitment to their profession. That is my logical reason.

The second reason has to do with my faith in the power of human connection. Yesterday I facilitated a day long workshop on residential schools for educators from across the province, most of whom were non-Aboriginal. After going through blackline masters, source materials, and instructional frameworks at the request of a participant we asked everyone who was a survivor or intergenerational survivor of residential schools to stand. I was already standing, and remained standing. After a brief pause hesitantly one person stood, then another, then about a quarter of the room stood. We stood there and made eye contact. We only stood for a moment, but it was a powerful moment. The room changed and I can’t describe how it changed because I have never experienced it before. Decolonization is often discussed as an abstract thing but in its most powerful moments decolonization happens in moments of human connection and the ability to connect with others free from the manacles of racism. I believe my colleagues want to sincerely connect with Aboriginal people, and that they would never intentionally harm an Aboriginal student. I do not believe my colleagues view themselves as agents of the state and I do not know them to act as such. My scholarship is an attempt to engage with them for the purpose of changing practice at the classroom level and changing institutions at the systemic level.

Third, the idea that the integration of Indigenous knowledge into state funded education is impossible is a form of nihilism which relieves individuals from the responsibility to pursue positive change. As Grand Chief Stewart Phillip of the Union of
BC Indian Chiefs says, "We don't simply engage the fights that we know we can win. We engage the fights that need to be fought" (Phillips, 2013). Expressing deep cynicism gives people permission to give up which is why I was not going to include the issue at all. When one of my committee members arrived naturally at a similar conclusion I realized that I had to include it for readers who might naturally come to the same logical conclusion. I include it only to refute it.

I have hope and I believe that positive change is possible in education. I hope that you do too.
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