

**The Role of Recruitment Documents in Hiring Indigenous Teachers in Winnipeg**

by

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	6
List of Figures .....	7
Introduction .....	9
Significance of Research .....	15
My Positionality .....	16
Literature Review .....	18
Historical Context .....	18
Indigenous Worldviews and Epistemology .....	18
Indian Residential School System and Indian Day Schools .....	20
Contributing Factors Toward the Truth and Reconciliation Commission ...	25
Educational Context .....	27
Trends and Problems in Teacher Recruitment in North America .....	27
Perspectives on Indigenous Teacher Recruitment .....	32
Gatekeeping and White Sanctioning .....	39
Indigenous Perspectives on Education .....	42
Definitions .....	44
Colonialism and Settler-Colonialism .....	45
Decolonization and Indigenization .....	47
Meritocracy, Suitability, and the "Achievement Gap" .....	49
Limitations of Current Research .....	53
Justification of Research .....	54
Conceptual Framework .....	56

Land as Teacher .....	57
The Data-Spirit .....	59
Framework: The Moccasin Workshop .....	61
Methodology and Method .....	64
Selection of the Data/Gathering the Supplies .....	69
Analysis/Convening the Participants .....	72
Visual Analysis .....	78
Imagery .....	78
Layout .....	81
Summary of Visual Analysis .....	87
Textual Analysis .....	88
Length .....	85
Language .....	90
Louis Riel School Division .....	91
Pembina Trails School Division .....	94
St. James Assiniboia School Division .....	94
Keyword Analysis .....	95
Keyword Distribution by Division and Posting Type .....	97
Relational Language Inventory .....	102
Summary of Key Findings .....	111
Pembina Trails School Division as Data-Spirit .....	112
St. James-Assiniboia School Division as Data-Spirit .....	116
Louis Riel School Division as Data-Spirit .....	120

Situating the Data in Relationship .....	121
Implications .....	122
Theoretical Implications .....	122
Practical Implications .....	124
Recommendations .....	126
Recommendations for Theory .....	126
Recommendations for Practice .....	127
Recommendations for Future Research .....	132
Conclusion .....	134
References .....	136

**List of Tables**

Table 1: Categories and Sample Words ..... 68

Table 2: Divisional Teacher and Student Numbers ..... 70

Table 3: 2024 Environmental Scan Results ..... 71

Table 4: Average Word Count of Job Postings by Division and Position Type ..... 89

Table 5: Keywords ..... 96

Table 6.1: Louis Riel School Division Keyword Frequency and Usage ..... 98

Table 6.2: Pembina Trails School Division Keyword Frequency and Usage ..... 99

Table 6.3: St. James Assiniboia School Division Keyword Frequency and Usage ..... 100

Table 7: Relational Language in Job Postings ..... 106

## List of Figures

Fig 1.1: Louis Riel School Division Job Posting Header .....	79
Fig 1.2: Louis Riel School Division Job Posting Footer .....	79
Fig 1.3: St. James Assiniboia School Division Job Posting Header .....	80
Fig 2.1: Louis Riel School Division Sample Job Posting Layout .....	82
Fig 2.2: Pembina Trails School Division Sample Job Posting Layout .....	84
Fig 2.3: St. James Assiniboia School Division Sample Job Posting Layout .....	86

## Abstract

A persistent issue in Canadian K-12 education is the misalignment between teacher and student demographic (Ryan, 2009), particularly the underrepresentation of Indigenous teachers compared to the growing number of Indigenous students (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2017). This is an important area of research as the literature is in broad agreement that "like" teachers positively influence "like" students in the areas of belonging and academic achievement (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez 2019; Egalite et al., 2015; Miller, 2020; Ryan, 2009). Recently the Manitoba Government announced a mandate to lessen this gap by studying the ways in which Indigenous teacher hiring can be strengthened and sustained (Government of Manitoba, 2024). This thesis examines job postings of school divisions aimed at attracting Indigenous teachers. It analyzes the texts for cultural and theoretical positioning that may influence how teacher candidates respond to these postings. The research question that guides this study is **"What type of text is used in teacher job postings to signal institutional cultural positionality in relation to Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing?"** The theoretical framework applied to this study reflects the iterative nature of instructing a group in moccasin-making: assembling participants and materials (selection of documents and school divisions), introducing and getting to know participants (data analysis), construction of projects (discussion of findings), and trial fittings (implications and recommendations). Findings show that different school divisions embody an array of positionalities and epistemologies in their job postings. These wide differences not only illuminate issues of positionality, but also challenge school divisions to expand their approached to hiring and recruitment. In particular, there is an opportunity to recognize and value the gifts and perspectives of Indigenous educators. Hiring documents, in this context, carry significant weight. They can serve as a key tool for

communicating a school board's commitment to reconciliation and decolonial approaches, and for attracting and retaining Indigenous teachers.

## **Introduction**

Historically and presently in the field of Canadian public education, teacher recruitment methods are grounded on colonial assessments of merit and suitability. These methods favour educational and experiential accreditation coded by colonial institutions and bodies (Abawi, 2021; Lyiscott et al., 2018). Colonial viewpoints, by nature and definition, are aimed at elimination of Indigeneity (Wolfe, 2006). The colonial structure of public education has been shown to “privilege whiteness in teacher hiring” (Abawi, 2021, p. 2), thus, overlooking the importance of having Indigenous teachers in public schooling.

This privileging of whiteness is borne out of Canadian teacher demographics. Ryan (2009) found that while Canada does not keep consistent statistics on teacher identity, trends here mirror the United States and the United Kingdom. Those countries consistently demonstrate that as Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) populations increase, the number of BIPOC teachers in schools do not keep pace, and in some areas, even decline (Harvey & Houle, 2006, as cited in Ryan, 2009). Much of this disparity is correlated to recent immigration (Harvey & Houle, 2006, as cited in Ryan, 2009, p. 9), somewhat explaining the lag in educational attainment of teacher minorities. However, Indigenous Canadians are also a quickly-growing group with a key difference from recent immigrants – generational residency in Canada.

In Manitoba the Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) population has doubled since 1981 and as of 2021 accounted for 18.1% of Manitoba's total population (Statistics Canada, 2022). By 2041, it is expected that the Indigenous population in Manitoba will constitute as much as 22.5% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2021b). Yet, despite the ongoing

increase, and the uninterrupted residency, the teaching workforce does not yet approach a similar proportion of a school population, with just 12.4% Indigenous teachers as of 2017 (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2017). This continued disparity suggests systemic factors in the continued underrepresentation of Indigenous teachers in Manitoba schools.

Perpetuating a teacher workforce that primarily reflects the dominant cultural group and does not reflect student demographics, negatively impacts student sense of belonging and academic achievement (Steele, 1997). Research is clear in that schools that reflect the diversity of the communities they serve are correlated with higher feelings of belonging and positive influence on student achievement (Miller, 2020; Bristol & Martin-Fernandez 2019; Ryan, 2009). The interrelatedness and codependence of these two student traits – belonging and achievement – and the correlation between belonging and racial identity (Beech, 2020, p. 129; Beach, 2020, p. 177) demand further development toward equitable teacher representation. Abawi (2022) described teacher education as “white spaces that BIPOC educators must navigate carefully to succeed” (p. 322), implying non-white teachers must mask and codeswitch for acceptance and success. This directs school boards to examine policy and procedure to reduce this inequitable demand upon BIPOC teachers in order to reduce barriers to hiring and retention. Additionally, the centrality of “belonging” within Indigenous epistemologies (LaFrance, 2010, p. 23; Sammel et al., 2020) presents unique and inviting opportunities to decolonize and Indigenize teacher hiring process while boosting student achievement.

This colonial coding of teacher suitability is made more contentious when considering the context of Canada’s history weaponizing institutionalized education against Indigenous people through residential schools. The systemic interruption of inter-generational Indigenous methods of education by the ongoing disproportionate seizure of Indigenous children from families of

origin (Statistics Canada, 2021a) has further problematized the belief in education by Indigenous communities as a tool of public good. The enduring concept of teacher as ‘in loco parentis’ becomes ominous and threatening when colonial ideals of Indigenous assimilation are considered, creating an urgent need to critically examine education systems for opportunities to decolonize the harmful legacy of Canadian Indigenous Education. Teachers are the contact person, authority figure, and community leader most directly interacting and influencing students, and therefore it is imperative to generate and explore avenues to increase Indigenous teacher representation and success.

Beginning in earnest with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) Education Calls to Action (2015), Canadian public schools have begun responding to the needs of Indigenous communities and individuals by Indigenizing learning spaces, curricula and policy to offer a more balanced education experience (Clark et al., 2019; Sammel et al., 2020; White et al., 2012). Much is written on school divisions and their efforts, challenges and successes of this programming (Moon, 2014; Nguyen, 2011; White et al., 2012). For example, the practice of smudging ceremonies in schools has brought controversy and misunderstanding, including court cases and Charter challenges related to freedom of religion and concerns about respiratory effects (Clark et al., 2019; CBC, 2016; Globe and Mail, 2020). In a related example, Curwen-Doige (2003), examined the role and complications of ensuring spirituality is present in Indigenous education. Increasingly, schools and divisions include traditional land acknowledgements during commencement exercises. Wark (2021) wrote about this growing trend and the criticism and complications it brings. More broadly, large-scale reviews of successful Indigenous education practices in Canada have been undertaken (Bell, 2004; Fulford, 2007) in an effort to discern best practices. There has also been a profusion of extra-curricular

Indigenous education teaching supplements created since the publication of the TRC final report (see Clark, 2019). Additionally, days of national reverence and action have been declared at the federal government level, including a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, also known as Orange Shirt Day (Parliament of Canada, 2021), and Ribbon Skirt Day (Government of Canada, 2022). These activities demonstrate a national commitment to reconciliation and ongoing learning about past and present Indigenous realities.

As school divisions increasingly purport to place reconciliation with Indigenous peoples as a central value, it could be expected that hiring processes and recruitment communications in particular would increasingly reflect this. There is, however, a lack of literature available to support an assumption that the educational institutions are likewise evolving toward Indigenous worldviews and practices in teacher hiring and management. This demands attention, for if the structure of teacher recruitment and human resource management retains colonial armature, the result is tokenistic inclusion, itself a colonial construct (Abawi, 2021, p. 7; Landertinger et al., 2021, p. 37; Scully, 2020, p. 233).

Education administrators and hiring bodies (schoolboards) have slowly come to recognize the importance of a diverse teacher workforce which mirrors the student demographics (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Egalite et al., 2015). Yet barriers for Indigenous teacher candidates persist along the entire educative process, often referred to in the literature as the “leaky pipeline” (Ryan et al., 2009). This is further proven by data including the 50.9% high school graduation rate of Indigenous Manitobans (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, n.d.). Barriers to successful educational engagement create a troubling cycle: Indigenous students are being pushed out of school before grade twelve (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, n.d.) and face systemic barriers to teacher training (Trimmer et

al., 2018), perpetuating the imbalanced ratio of Indigenous teachers to students (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2017), thereby depriving students of the Indigenous teachers needed to influence their success (cite).

There is an urgency and importance to disrupt this cycle, thereby promoting and retaining Indigenous teaching talent, because research supporting the need for a diverse teacher workforce is in overwhelming agreement about the fact that “like” teachers positively influence “like” students (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Egalite et al., 2015). However, the methods and processes of teacher recruitment continue to mirror colonial practice modeled on corporate human resource methods (Brantlinger, 2019). These recruitment models rely on a synthesis of various interviews, reference checks, and oral or written tasks to assess teacher suitability (Van Nuland et al., 2020). Recognizing the colonial identity of this type of hiring procedure, this evidence suggests that in order to build a teaching force that more closely mirrors societal demographics, hiring and recruitment practices must be examined for colonial biases and recognized for the systemic exclusions they may produce.

The first point of contact for prospective teachers in attaining employment are now web-based textual interfaces. Thus, this thesis examines publicly accessible documents from across selected urban school divisions in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada for language and context that supports both/either Indigenous and/or colonial assumptions of candidate suitability for teaching. The data includes job advertisements for teaching positions from four urban school divisions in Winnipeg, Canada. As such, this thesis endeavors to create a comparative snapshot across selected urban Winnipeg school divisions, examining public-facing recruitment documents and communications against Indigenous worldviews. Opportunities to create relationship between the two practices and strengthen equitable hiring practices in education will be sought and examined.

Accepting that teacher hiring practices embody colonial norms, it can be predicted that an examination and collation of these practices should yield a construct of a hypothetical ideal teacher candidate. It is this hypothetical ideal teacher candidate who will be invited into relationship as place-based embodied spirit of colonial educative aspirations.

With the data thus embodied as this ideal teacher candidate, this thesis will enter into relationship with it to discuss: **"What type of text is used in teacher job postings to signal institutional cultural positionality in relation to Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing?"**

To answer this research question, critical discourse analysis (McGregor, 2003; Saarinen, 2008) was performed to examine and reveal trends in contextualized language regarding hiring criteria of merit, suitability, belonging and expertise. Documents were further analyzed for textual, visual and contextual information, using the following sub-questions as guidance:

1. What language, symbols or imagery, if any, do these documents incorporate to invite or reflect Indigenous or other perspectives? What visual or contextual cues demonstrate cultural literacy and reconciliation on the part of the school division?
2. How do the selection criteria outlined in these documents align with Indigenous ways of knowing? What opportunities exist to promote candidate expertise in Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing?
3. To what extent do these documents emphasize the importance of Indigenous representation and engagement in the hiring process, and how do they address the need for cultural competency among potential applicants and hiring committees?

## **Significance of Research**

This research is significant for practical reasons relevant to school administration. There is an urgent and clear need to address the disproportionate number of Indigenous teachers to Indigenous students in Manitoba schools. The current curricular emphasis on Indigenous education is not producing the achievement outcomes nor the increase in Indigenous academic achievement that is desperately needed. To ensure equitable outcomes as the Indigenous population of Manitoba and Canada increases, and to ensure authentic reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, school divisions must be proactive in adjusting their hiring practices to honour and promote Indigenous peoples, their contextualized expertise and ways of knowing. This research is also significant for policy reasons. The data allows the making of relevant policy recommendations for school divisions in their hiring practices. It suggests applying Indigenous epistemologies of interrelatedness (vs. individual merit), community capacity (vs. individual capacity), and continuous lateral learning (vs. hierarchical transmission of knowledge) to recruitment strategies. These changes clear the path for Indigenous knowledge and ways of being to be illuminated and activated within schools while continuing the pursuit of educational excellence and teacher professionalism.

Finally, the research is significant also for theoretical perspectives. Applying Indigenous worldviews and pedagogy to teacher hiring requires a shift in education delivery and construction. Conceptualizing a school staff as an interrelated and codependent community instead of a collection of meritorious individuals presents opportunities to hire individuals based on specialized skill sets instead of a core canon of information against which they compete with their colleagues. Taken together, this has the potential to increase the collective community

expertise and knowledge while also establishing an expectation of continual learning and growth laterally between teachers.

### ***My Positionality***

I am Red River Métis, and my homeland is near St. Andrew's, Manitoba. The ancestral familial names tied to the land there include Brown, Johnston(e), Thomas, Swanson, Truthwaite, Richards, and others. Being white-passing, I have the dubious privilege of being able to conceal my identity. More accurately, I understand that people perceive me as white until I disclose my Métis identity to them. In my professional role as a high school teacher, this has had the effect of placing me in conversations around Indigenous education in which I am perceived white, and others in which I am perceived Métis. When I am perceived as white, I am privy to the frustrations felt by school staff and administrators around topics of reconciliation and Indigenization. When I am perceived Métis, I find myself in conversation with other Indigenous educators, who encounter many of the same obstacles, frustrations and opportunities as I do.

The primary frustration and point of opportunity lie unsurprisingly in administrative lack of awareness of the underpinnings of colonialism upon which our current education system is built. In my experience, initiating acts of decolonization and reconciliation in schools requires an inordinate amount of labour on the part of Indigenous educators, not only in the practical aspects of educational programming, but in the endless explanations to colleagues and administration to justify the work. In essence, this amounts to colonial gatekeeping of Indigenous initiatives. This means administration and Indigenous teachers are currently locked in a loop where admin cannot lead *due to lack of representation*, and teachers cannot lead *due to lack of authority*.

I have chosen this topic for my research as I feel called to effect change in educational systems. I feel there is a fundamental flaw in educational administration during this era of Truth and Reconciliation: the intractability of the administrative establishment to embrace anti-colonial and Indigenous ways of operating. I see teacher recruitment and human resource management more generally as an exciting and rich area for development in this regard.

In researching, writing, and living Indigenous education principles and ways of knowing, I am struck by the incongruity of the expected joy and community of Indigenous learning methods with the often-gruelling thesis writing process. The irony is not lost on me that I am navigating and submitting to the very systems and requisites of achievement that I hope to change. I am aware, at every moment, that Indigenous knowledge is forced to be run through a colonial sieve in order to be accepted as legitimate. I liken this to an “itchy shirt” Indigenous educators must wear in order to succeed. Like an uncomfortable uniform, this imposed way of being will never feel right, and will always limit our ability to perform to our full ability in joy and curiosity.

However, in an effort to find comfort within this discomfort, I have created a novel approach to situating the research. Through the conceptual framework of a moccasin-making workshop comprised of participants with various experience and skill, the data will be gathered together into community, conversation and collaboration on a journey toward meaning-making.

It is my hope that this research might clear a pathway for Indigenous teacher candidates to display, celebrate and be honoured for their Indigenous identity and teachings, placing the labour of that task upon the shoulders of administration instead of their own.

Given the historical relationship of education with violence to Indigenous people, it is imperative that educational administrators understand the ways in which education continues to

harm not just Indigenous students, but also Indigenous teachers. Wearing an “itchy shirt” myself, I hope to be able to demonstrate that Indigenous teacher recruitment goals can be met in ways that ensure everyone is comfortable and able to succeed.

## **Literature Review**

### *Historical Context*

#### **Indigenous Worldviews and Epistemology.**

In considering an individual’s competencies or suitability for a particular role, Indigenous epistemologies and worldviews of merit and belonging differ from the patterns seen in current typical teacher hiring practices (Warner et al., 2007). Kirby (2017, p. 10) defined epistemology as a “a theory of knowledge, including how we come to know what we know”. In qualitative research this term has been used to refer to the assembled structures, traditions and patterns of thought upon which knowledge is ascribed a value (Carter & Little, 2007). Indigenous epistemologies differ somewhat from these previously understood definitions. Rather than being constructed as armature upon which knowledge is situated, Indigenous epistemology is “nested, created, and recreated within the context of relationships with other living beings” (Kovach, 2021, p. 52). This relational grounding of knowledge is dynamic, iterative and subjective by nature, and challenges the colonial belief of knowledge as privately-attained and privately-held asset. This thesis seeks to separate Indigenous and colonial epistemologies in order to compare the value systems prior to integration, thereby highlighting any disparities and/or similarities between philosophies in the context of teacher recruitment.

Much has been written about reconciling Indigenous/settler worldviews and epistemologies within education (Cannon, 2021; Clark et al., 2019; Colbourne, 2020; Corbett & Gereluk, 2020; Efimoff, 2022; Sammel et al., 2020; Spooner & McNinch, 2018; Thomas, 2013).

Yet, this literature is weighted heavily toward Indigenizing of curriculum and pedagogy, with few references discussing Indigenization of the administrative structures or relationships between leaders and staff.

Traditionally, Indigenous ways of being centre relationship and reciprocity as fundamental to community achievement (Deer, 2020; Hickey, 2020; Warner et al., 2007). Individual achievement is conceived only as it serves to benefit community, centering the notion of power within “the intelligent organizing power of the universe toward balance and harmony” (Hickey, 2020, p. 14). Whitford (2021) illustrated this philosophy in the experiences of an Indigenous education leader who, faced with a teacher concerned about the apparent passivity of their Indigenous teacher candidate, instructed the teacher to ensure the candidate was nurtured and in relationship with their community in order to succeed. The education leader, sharing the worldview of the teacher candidate, centred their success within an Indigenous epistemological definition, eschewing a western epistemology focused on the betterment of the individual. In doing so, she actualized LaFrance et al.’s (2012, p. 70) assertion that “Validity under Indigenous epistemology is holistic and relational”. Individual traits and experiences are positioned within the pre-existing repository of collective wisdom, where individual wholeness is aligned with and predicated upon community wholeness (Battiste, 2009, p. 30). This renders knowledge as a community-held asset, not a privately held asset, as in western educational paradigms. Moving from individual to communal perspectives has profound implications for reconceptualizing methods of teacher selection. This shift in perspective turns meritocracy on its head and reassigns collective knowledge and expertise throughout a school team, challenging the notion of specialists and creating a lateral responsibility of shared knowledge among staff. Indigenous pedagogy, broadly, is participatory and experiential (Battiste, 2009, p. 18), and knowledge is

conceptualized as a constant and collaborative entity which is built, maintained, and utilized communally (Warner et al., 2007). This stands in contrast to western philosophies of success, where education is associated with individuality (Grande, 2015, p. 96).

Because Indigenous individuals draw identity from the community to which they belong (LaFrance et al., 2010), the concept of belonging becomes central to discussions of suitability for particular roles, including when considering areas of professional recruitment. In Indigenous paradigms, belonging is synonymous with balance and harmony with people and the natural world (Sammel et al., 2020), and the nurture and sharing of diverse gifts and talents to benefit community (LaFrance, 2010, p. 23). Empowerment through belonging is based on one's ability to form relationships appropriate to that task, demonstrating not only the skills required but also the requisite mindset and relational patterns to be able to problem-solve, innovate, balance inputs and outcomes, and ensure the sustainability of innovations (Hickey, 2019).

Taken together, Indigenous epistemologies of knowledge, power and achievement differ greatly from prevalent colonial institutional structures. Divorced from notions of meritocracy, individuality and industry, Indigenous knowledge systems promote congruity and interrelatedness to define success. This presents opportunities for inquiry and discourse between epistemologies when placed within the context of teacher recruitment.

### **Indian Residential School System and Indian Day Schools.**

An examination of barriers and opportunities in Indigenous teacher recruitment would be incomplete without situating Canadian education within an historical context, and special attention must be given to Canada's legacy of "weaponizing education" (Sunday, 2019, p. 38) against Indigenous people.

Upon the arrival of Europeans and the institutionalization of education in what would become Canada, traditional modes of knowledge transmission were systematically and forcibly replaced by European ideals of teaching and learning by the constitutionally-supported Indian Residential School System (IRSS). The goals of this system were to enculturate Indigenous children into colonial value systems and requisite knowledge by severing them from their communities, traditional knowledge and culture (Coulthard, 2014; Durand-Moreau, 2022; Hickey, 2019; Julien, 2017; Tupper, 2012). This was achieved through forcible removal of the children from their families, and subjected many of the children to abuse, forced labour, and devastating neglect (Julien, 2017; Moon, 2014; Perley, 2019). The residential school system was in operation from 1831 to 1996, and an estimated 150,000 children were removed from their families to attend one of the 130 institutions established by the Canadian federal government (Miller, 2012). Of those, an estimated 6000 children are believed to have died while in these institutions (Miller, 2012).

Survivors of the IRSS suffer lasting psychological and physical harm including “emotional deprivation and cultural disparagement” (Tupper, 2012, p. 140), and “abuse – physical, sexual, emotional and spiritual” (Sunday, 2019, p. 37). The system is acknowledged to be a major force of ongoing intergenerational trauma and cultural genocide in Indigenous families (Gracy, 2011; Tupper, 2012).

The Indian Act of 1876 consolidated earlier oppressive laws and procedures pertaining to First Nations peoples. The aims of the preceding Acts and the Indian Act were the same: to assimilate all First Nations peoples and, thus, nullify their claim to land and suffocate cultural traditions. Policies to limit culture and ceremony, movement off reserves, and requirements to

forfeit Indian Status to attain military service, higher education, or voting rights were put in place (Canadian Encyclopedia, 2006).

Over time, some of the most restrictive measures in the Indian Act have been reversed or removed, however Indigenous-Canadian government relations remain fraught with conflict and Indigenous resistance to oppression continues its own storied history. Within these ongoing acts of resistance and self-actualization are particular milestones in the desire to regain Indigenous educational governance.

The 1971 document *Wahbung – Our Tomorrows* (Indian Tribes of Manitoba) was produced in an effort to define a First Nations narrative about rights and governance, and to call upon government to rewrite the Indian Act. Included in *Wahbung* are particular references to educational philosophies which reject the paternalistic methods of residential schools, and references to the failure of government to provide First Nations children with their educational rights (Indian Tribes of Manitoba, 1971, p. 14).

The following year saw the policy paper *Indian Control of Indian Education (1972)* submitted to the federal government. Authored by the National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the paper sought “education to give our children a strong sense of identity, with confidence in their personal worth and ability” (AFN, 1972, p. 3). Framed within First Nations' philosophical beliefs, the policy paper makes the case that First Nations' education should be overseen and controlled by Indian band governments (AFN, 1972, p. 6). This was revisited in 2010, with AFN’s *First Nations Control of First Nations Education* paper, which reflected on the successes of the past and the challenges of the road forward with regards to educational governance (AFN, 2010).

Métis people were not recognized as a distinct Indigenous group by the federal government until 1982, when the Constitution Act was amended (Government of Canada, 1982). Despite this relatively recent federal acknowledgement, many Métis were historically marginalized for their race, culture and history (Canadian Geographic, n.d.). Between 1870 and 1885, Métis citizens found themselves lost between provincial and federal jurisdiction, stripped of the right to education: "too white" for residential schools, and "too Indian" for provincial schools (Bourassa, 2004, as cited in Logan 2007, p. 67). If a family were unable to pay for their child to attend residential school, they were left without any formal education whatsoever. When enrolment in a residential school was possible, often Métis children were transported far from home in order to keep attendance at a distant school sufficient for operation instead of keeping children close to their home communities (Milloy, 1999). Some residential schools required families to pay, or to promise that the child would work to earn their position at the school (Logan, 2007, p. 102). Other practices included admitting Métis children based on attributes such as skin colour, style of living and proximity to an Indian Reserve (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2006, p. 75), with those of darker skin and closer proximity generally admitted before others.

Métis experiences in Indian Residential Schools are as varied as those of First Nations, but include the consistent characteristic of feeling like outsiders (Blondeau, 2000, as cited in Logan, 2007, p. 96). "The Métis were made to feel they were lesser than either of their halves, not Indian enough for benefits or Aboriginal rights, and not "white" enough to be seen as equal to the dominant society." (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2006, pp. 79-80). The schools, therefore, mirrored society, reinforcing and solidifying the illegitimacy of Metis identity. This

had the effect of severing Metis children from their language, culture and self-concept (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2006, pp. 87-88).

Inuit children and families were also subjected to forced schooling, separation and relocation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2016); however, the remoteness of Inuit communities influenced a more recent start to these experiences and included a sparser application of residential schools geographically (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2016, p. 3). These northern schools were largely the work of missionaries prior to 1950 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2016). In line with other resource-motivated treaty processes in Canada, Treaty 11 was only negotiated after the discovery of oil in the area. It was this treaty adherence that promised schooling for all Northern children, though this was pursued with "limited interest" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2016, p. 11).

Inuit families and communities endured trauma and social changes due to schooling policies of government agencies. The structure of schooling for Inuit families was different from the families in more southern areas. There were fewer residential schools, as well as smaller hostels and day schools throughout the North (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2016, p. 3). Due to the vastness of the north, children were often required to travel extensive distances to their schools, and sometimes for years (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2016). Children were reported to be sleeping on tables and in cupboards in what were essentially one-room schoolhouses (Duchaussois, 1919, p. 171), and food was reported to be insufficient (Duchaussois, 1919, p. 148).

Some schools were host to "prolonged regimes of sexual abuse and harsh discipline that scarred more than one generation of children for life." (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2016, p. 4).

The prolonged family separation led Inuit families to relocate to be nearer their children, moving them off traditional lands and closer to established colonial towns, cities and trading posts (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2016, p. 4). This altered the social structure and traditional livelihoods of many Inuit forever (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2016, p. 4).

The result of this nation-wide cultural assault and ongoing tension has been to situate education as unfriendly, or even hostile, toward Indigenous Canadians. Hickey (2019, p. 97) summarized this: “Indigenous people do not always see Western education as a safe or healthy pursuit”. In its’ dominant present state, public education continues to reinforce the colonial superiority of white supremacy by continuing to neglect, relegate or tokenize Indigenous knowledge within schools (FitzMaurice, 2011; Godlewska, 2010; Moon, 2014).

Reflecting upon the legacy and modern educational context of residential schools, Moon (2014, p. 11) stated that it is “imperative that practicing educators, policymakers and scholars in education attend to Indigenous modes of education”. “It is precisely because education was the primary tool of oppression of Aboriginal people, and miseducation of all Canadians, that we have concluded that education holds the key to reconciliation” is a rallying cry from Senator Murray Sinclair (2014, p. 7), which must be heeded and acted upon. A great and exciting potential to remediate some of the harm of the IRSS lies in the possibilities of public school systems to address inherent white supremacy and embrace Indigenous systems of governance. Job advertisements, as places of first contact, present opportunities for reimagined hiring practices that may serve a key mechanism toward reconciliation within education.

### **Contributing factors toward the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.**

Indigenous communities and organizations have been organizing in opposition to continued oppression and lack of due process in dealing with the federal government for

decades. This reached one boiling point in 1991 at Oka, near Montreal, when a proposed golf course expansion onto Kanehsatà:ke sacred land led to a 78-day armed stand-off. The protest precipitated the creation of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) to examine and critique longstanding relationship patterns between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. The 1991 final report of the RCAP fuelled renewed conversations around Indigenous reconciliation and specifically referred to the harms inflicted via the IRSS (RCAP, 1991). A compensatory fund and protocol was created, to be followed by an official apology from then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper in 2008 (Government of Canada, 2008), and a larger compensation agreement, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (ISSA).

The ISSA included the allocation of funding for a creation of a five-year Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to investigate and legitimize experiences of Indigenous children in residential schools, catalogue the stories of survivors, collect the historical records associated with the schools and make recommendations supporting reparation and reconciliation.

The TRC concluded with a final report released in December 2015, which included recommendations, named “Calls to Action”, some of which are specific to education (TRC, 2015). Specifically, Calls To Action 62-65 demand change in the education sector, including developing Indigenous curriculum topics and classroom-level instruction and pedagogy consistent with Indigenous knowledges.

These calls to action activated concrete reconciliation efforts in educational institutions across Canada, as well as created avenues for funding and promotion of education-affiliated initiatives which promote reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. It is because of these calls to action that an examination of systemic opportunities to promote reconciliation in educational settings is urgently and continuously needed.

## *Educational Context*

The ways in which colonialism and settler-colonialism were enacted upon Canadian Indigenous children was particularly violent and harmful to the continuity of Indigenous thought and culture (Julien, 2017; Moon, 2014; Perley, 2019).

The Indian residential school system was initiated to supersede Indigenous knowledges and familial relationships with colonial systems of education and advancement (Coulthard, 2014; Durand-Moreau, 2022; Hickey, 2019; Julien, 2017; Tupper, 2012). This was delivered by forcibly removing children from their family of origin and placing them in schools where they were denied aspects of holistic cultural integrity. In reality, these schools delivered systemic generational trauma amounting to a cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples (Battiste, 2018; Clark et al., 2019; Coulthard, 2014; Godlewska et al., 2010; Lawrence & Dua 2005; Tuck & Yang 2012; Whitford 2021; Wolfe, 2006).

Given the entwined history of colonial schooling with Indigenous trauma, it is necessary to recognize that education itself has been established to promote a colonial mindset and worldview which predicated the erasure of all others. Thus, we are called to recognize that current trends of indigenizing only pedagogy and curriculum (the “product”) and not the administration and allocation of resources and talent (the “process”) of the current system only perpetuate the rigidity of a hierarchical administrative structure which subordinates all others as inferior, therefore silencing Indigenous voices as a matter of course.

### **Trends and Problems in Teacher Recruitment in North America.**

Across North America, teacher recruitment often begins before candidates graduate from Bachelor of Education programs (Van Nuland et al., 2020). In these cases, school divisions will conduct hiring fairs or other large-call recruitment events to attract teachers (Ng, 2003), with

different pathways to employment presented through these fairs. Some teachers may be “pre-hired” into permanent contracts pending graduation, while others may find themselves on a substitute teacher list, enabling them to apply for term positions as they open (Van Nuland et al., 2020). These examples illustrate three pathways to early employment for teachers: permanent contract, substitute teaching, and term positions, which have differing levels of job security and benefits.

Pollock (2015) illustrated the rigorous and multi-leveled processes of teacher hiring in Ontario, where permanent employment is typically preceded by several years of substitute or term positions. This places increased demands to re-interview and re-apply throughout the first several years of teaching. When considering populations with low tolerance to this level of professional precarity, the time and effort of repeated applications can reasonably act to dissuade continued attempts. Permanent positions are usually reserved for internal (already permanent) candidates while new teachers must run the gauntlet of substitute teaching and low-security short-term positions (Jack & Ryan, 2015; Pollock, 2015). One reason for this internal hiring structure is the need to ensure unionized employees are prioritized within hiring, but nevertheless these systems work to perpetuate the barriers to employment of underrepresented groups such as Indigenous candidates and perpetuate the white majority in teaching staff.

Literature does, however, specify that some school boards enact prioritized hiring practices for certain teacher candidates based on expertise in a hard-to-hire specialization. Grimmet & Echols (2000, p. 334) found that school divisions in British Columbia “relaxed” qualifications for specialist teachers. Language proficiencies (Kohli, 2018, p. 321, Smith et al., 2023) and specialties such as special education or music teachers often receive preferential hiring

due to chronic teacher shortages in certain subject areas (Billingsley, 2014; Grimmet & Echols, 2000; Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010; Smith & Peller, 2020).

While these are longstanding priority recruitment practices in education, there is a more recent push to include diversity metrics in prioritized teacher hiring (Abawi 2021, p. 137; Landertinger et al., 2021, p. 42; Ryan et al., 2009, p. 18). This includes hiring Indigenous teacher candidates.

Literature and practice show an increase in the desire of schools and education entities to promote reconciliation (Clark et al., 2019; Sammel et al., 2020; White et al., 2012). In Manitoba, the provincial government has a stated objective to train and recruit Indigenous teachers (Government of Manitoba, 2024). Further, universities within Winnipeg have established targets for Indigenous student enrolment in their faculties of Education (University of Manitoba Faculty of Education, 2016; University of Winnipeg Faculty of Education, 2020).

Despite these measures, recruitment strategies generally involve passive communications and a reliance on candidates to seek out the school divisions for employment, in line with corporate human resource practices (Brantlinger, 2019; O’Meara et al., 2020). It is because of this emphasis on passive recruitment that critical hiring documents are being examined for this thesis, as these are often the first communication channels that currently “speak” to teacher candidates who are seeking employment, though their very passivity “may result in search committees producing less diverse applicant pools” (O’Meara et al., 2020, p. 321).

Certainly, strategic recruitment documents would not be enough to meaningfully reduce barriers to employment for Indigenous teacher candidates. Of particular urgency is the need to minimize implicit bias on search committees. Biased patterns of administrative and systemic preference and indifference to various groups of applicants was found to be overwhelmingly

common in the literature (Abawi, 2018; Abawi, 2021; Battiste, 2018; Benson et al., 2021; Brantlinger, 2019; Consul et al., 2021; Gershenson et al., 2022; Hossain et al., 2022; Noonan & Bristol, 2020; O'Meara et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2009; Settles et al., 2021; St. Denis, 2010; Swanson & Welton, 2019; Yoon, 2018). O'Meara et al. (2020, p. 313) cautioned that many people are “unaware or resistant to the idea” of their own bias, perhaps partly due to these biases being structurally reinforced, rendering them camouflaged within a biased system.

Consul et al. (2021) stressed that bias is unconscious and thus requires conscious identification and dismantling, and suggested several concrete strategies for mitigation. More generally, implicit bias training is broadly recommended for all administrators (Abawi, 2018; Abawi, 2021; Anthony-Stevens et al., 2022; Consul et al., 2021; Noonan, 2020; Tourand, 2020). Given the prevalence of unconscious bias throughout teacher recruitment, it is reasonable to expect its' appearance in digital recruitment documents. O'Meara et al.'s (2020) research is among sparse sources in analyzing job advertisements for bias. Though their area of interest was in post-secondary hiring, O'Meara et al. (2020) found that bias in job advertisements can signal “fit” (p. 320) to a potential hire, potentially causing applicants to self-exclude and not apply for the position. Abawi (2018) also found evidence that bias-free job postings and textual communications are sometimes stated as goals, however the success of these goals is rarely defined, stated nor measured. Hooper et al., (2024) examined job advertisements for headteacher positions in the United Kingdom, and found language and omissions which would impact women and minority candidates negatively throughout the hiring process.

The concept of “fit” was also a central theme in the literature, however conversations of “fit” as specifically regards Indigenous teacher recruitment were sparse. In general terms, “fit” can be conceptualized as “cultural matching” (Rivera, 2012), suggesting an element of

reproduction is influencing hiring decisions. This is supported by a large body of evidence that finds social reproduction manifests within education power and assessment systems (Abawi, 2018; Abawi, 2021; Backer & Cairns 2021; Beach, 2020; Calderón, 2006; Cho, 2012; Fine, 2018; Lysicott, 2018; McIntyre, 1997; McLaren, 2018).

Several suggestions for critically examining “fit” were found in the literature. One participant in Noonan’s (2020) study suggested ideas of fit are tied to political and apolitical aspirations of school boards, biasing conversations about race and culture before a teacher can even be hired (p. 7). Abawi (2018) helpfully suggested examining what makes a “poor fit” (p. 156) for biases and alternate pathways to successful employment of an individual. Additionally, King (2023) illuminated negative themes in the usage of “fit”, highlighting its exclusionary nature. “Fit” has a social connotation (King, 2023, p. 120) which works in concert with social reproduction in hiring circles. “Fit” brings with it concepts of microaggressions and implicit bias (King, 2022; Liera & Ching 2019), casting candidates as part of an “in” group or an “out” group, and its’ subjectivity has been weaponized to justify hiring exclusions (Logan, 2018, p.194).

Within an Indigenous framework, the concept of “fit” as cultural matching is problematic. Liera and Ching (2019) found that fit can “disadvantage minoritized applicants and devalue epistemologies different from Eurocentric epistemologies” (p. 118). Because colonial and Indigenous epistemologies greatly differ in their concepts of individual merit and credentialing, the concept of “fit” becomes a place of unavoidable conflict. Colonial concepts of fit promote sociocultural reproduction, and Indigenous concepts of fit rely on context, harmony and contribution to the whole. This may serve to disadvantage Indigenous teacher candidates throughout recruitment processes.

## **Perspectives on Indigenous Teacher Recruitment.**

Research provides some existing pathways to alternative recruitment philosophies, however the majority highlight the impact of alternative teacher training programs (Abawi, 2021; Billingsley, 2014; Brantlinger, 2019; Cantalini-Williams, 2015; Guarino et al., 2006; Landertinger et al., 2021; Ng, 2003; Tessaro et al., 2021; Young & Easton-Brooks, 2020) and others on incentives such as competitive salary or flex time (Billingsley et al., 2014; Gershenson et al., 2022; Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010; Shuls & Maranto, 2013). Though important, both of these foci are at different points along in the pipeline than the focus of this thesis.

Thompson (2011) presented a related case of the processes and lessons learned during a post-secondary faculty search for an Indigenous scholar through Indigenous methods. Though it examines a case in post-secondary recruitment, and not K-12 public education as is the focus of this thesis, Thompson's (2011) case study is important for several reasons, chief of which is that it is one of extremely few to problematize the specific issue of Indigenous recruitment within an academic setting.

In Thompson's (2011) case study, the search committee first recognized and reoriented their work around Indigenous ideas:

In place of normative conventions, our search required us to draw upon certain Indigenous methods including recognizing the land upon which we do our work; valuing elders and women; emphasizing face-to-face interactions and community networking (beyond the academy); valuing humility, humor, lived experience, reciprocity, and multiple truths; and recognizing that accountability to one's people and ancestry may trump one's commitment to an institution. (Thompson, 2011, p. 537-538)

Next, Thompson (2011) highlighted the limitations of textual academic recruitment documents and online interfaces for recruiting Indigenous candidates. To address the limited reach of textual recruitment documents when only posted in academy-affiliated publications, Thompson (2011) included publications such as “tribal publications; regional newsletters; activist newsletters; the Ford Foundation minority scholars’ mailing list; museum, park and theatre publications; and so forth” (p. 540).

Concurrent to this broadened textual pursuing of a parallel search strategy, Thompson (2011) and team activated Indigenous community and kinship modes of communication via phone calls, appearances at cultural events, and requests to further the call within and beyond geographically- or academically-contained parameters typical of higher education search committees. Key to these face-to-face and word-of-mouth transmissions was intentionally highlighting the location of the college as in a place of deep Indigenous history, meaning, and community, in recognition that connection to place is a powerful anchor for Indigenous scholars who may find relocation difficult (p. 539).

The result of Thompson’s (2011) case study was to broaden the reach of all modes of recruitment communication, and allow for valuable two-way pre-recruitment conversations with community connectors, leaders, and potential candidates to be able to help refine the messaging and positioning of the college. The researchers expressed surprise at the distances travelled by verbal communication through community and kinship networks, and the enthusiasm with which the message had been transmitted (Thompson, 2011, p. 542).

Taken together, Thompson (2011) provides some excellent guidance for textual analysis of hiring documents, and further contemplation of the necessary diversification of recruitment

strategy to be able to not only attract Indigenous candidates but ensure they feel at home in their new position.

From a Manitoban perspective, this may require looking at additional modes of communication not included in Thompson's case study; modes such social media preferences and radio or television engagement within Indigenous populations and ensuring the recruiting division works toward recognizing Indigenous geographic importance of the land which hosts their schools. Additionally, support for relocation and home visit costs may be considered.

If education administrators are entrenched in using textual and online interfaces for recruitment, there is data to support placement and timing of the recruitment materials for maximum impact. For example, Indigenous usage of TikTok and SnapChat is much higher than within the general Canadian population, Facebook and Instagram usage is close to the Canadian average, while Indigenous users of Twitter and LinkedIn are lower (Media Technology Monitor, p. 35). This has implications for recruitment strategy, especially in suggesting de-emphasizing the reliance upon LinkedIn as a primary recruitment portal.

There are also opportunities to involve community and emphasize Indigenous epistemologies in hiring. For example, while most recruitment communications are based online, there is abundant evidence that radio remains a viable communication media for Indigenous people, with 77% of Indigenous people in Manitoba listening via traditional or streaming methods (Media Technology Monitor, 2023, p. 29). This has implications in expanding the reach of recruitment communications and access informal kinship modes of information transmission, as suggested by Thompson (2011).

Diversifying recruitment methods may provide opportunities to engage not only the potential candidates, but also their families and communities. Modes of communication, textual

or otherwise, could be structured to emphasize community wellness, community contributions and familial connections in relation to recruitment, reflecting Indigenous worldviews and patterns of kinship. For example, a radio ad may not be heard directly by the candidate but may be heard by family members and community members who know the candidate. Ensuring the communications use appropriate channel, tone, and message could hold potential to increase the reach of recruitment calls.

Literature on the specific topic of Indigenous teacher recruitment is sparse, however, Abawi (2021) advocates for mandated data collection of diversity statistics, and ongoing professional development of staff to critically situate themselves within the colonial institution that is Canadian education (p. 115-137).

Hatt et al. (2015) provided an interesting alternative pathway to recruitment which presents opportunities for assessing a candidate's ability to thrive in a diverse school. Similar to Thompson (2011) a multi-stage, multi-modal recruitment procedure is advocated. Many of the suggestions can be reflected in Indigenous epistemologies, though not explicitly stated as relative to this worldview in this source. For example, Hatt et al. (2015) suggested a "cooperative community of learnership" (p. 179) be the guiding philosophy of teacher recruitment strategies. Additionally, they promote that understanding "how new hires are effectively positioned within educational landscape of the school/district can inform the development of strategies that attract effective teachers" (Hatt et al., 2015, p. 176). These concepts directly relate to Indigenous concepts of suitability and community cohesion as essential to individual success and belonging.

Further, Maynes and Hatt (2014) suggested including ongoing conversation and apprenticeship opportunities as part of the recruitment process for teacher candidates (p. 169).

Mentorship and apprenticeship, in particular, feature strongly in Indigenous pedagogies and evaluation, and may provide further opportunities for decolonizing teacher recruitment.

These suggestions from the literature begin to illustrate some overlap between Indigenous worldviews and contemporary management practices, creating opportunities for each to enrich the other. For example, an administrator may recognize an Indigenous conceptualization of the school as a harmonious community, and themselves as stewards of a self-sustaining and self-propelling ecosystem. From that position, they can craft interview questions and topics such as those proposed above by Maynes & Hatt (2014), providing space for Indigenous candidates to demonstrate their aptitude for employment without being confined to individualistic meritocratic and colonial markers of achievement.

Thompson (2011) reinforced this idea, advocating that conversations regarding what kinds of relationships and communities the candidate engages with outside of work can help assess candidates' worldview and illuminate strategic opportunities to foster a sense of belonging and empowerment within the school community.

Outside of the education sector, other Indigenous organizations have shown promise in promoting alternative methods of recruitment and retention, many of which align with the observations and implications of the sources discussed above.

Beaudoin (2019) studied three sectors of natural resource employment in Quebec (mining, forestry, fisheries), and found that issues of trust, belonging, relationship and mentorship were "key to the recruitment and retention of Indigenous workers" (p. 7). Juntunen et. al. (2001), in examining Indigenous perceptions of career pathways more broadly, also highlighted the centrality of family and community in career decisions, but noted this comes with the expectation of reciprocity and community support (p. 275). This expectation of community

reciprocity should be highlighted as a misunderstanding in current hiring practices, where time away from work is seen as worker weakness. Instead, it is an important caveat to balancing the need for more time away from work to attend to community responsibilities, with an expectation of enthusiastic resumption of duties and community participation for the benefit of the organization upon return to work so others may similarly attend to community responsibilities.

To address this perceived incompatibility, Beaudoin (2019) suggested flexible work arrangements that allow employees to flow between roles as needed and allow for workers to be rotated in and out, creating a workplace structure that integrates the community and kinship expectations of Indigenous workers. In essence, while creating pathways to flexible work arrangements, this type of structure creates the sense of community and mutual responsibility inherent in Indigenous ways of knowing and working anyway (p. 8).

Beaudoin (2019) further found that Indigenous leaders are more successful in recruiting Indigenous employees, due to cultural matching and sense of belonging, finding that specialized culturally-literate recruiters and liaisons further strengthen the probability of Indigenous hires (p. 7). This supports Thomson's (2011) desire for Indigenous representation and culturally-literate search teams to neutralize cultural bias (p. 543-544), and Schäpers et al. (2021) findings that organizations with diverse boards were more attractive than those without.

Relatedly, Boyd et al., (2013, p. 83), spoke of “two-sided matching” in teacher hiring, providing another entry point for discussions of cultural access points within recruitment documents. The authors drew upon game theory to develop their novel approach to teacher hiring, suggesting a more stochastic model for recruitment. This approach allows for extra-professional criteria to be included in job matching, such as proximity to place of employment,

socio-economic factors, and others, bringing to mind some of Thompson's (2011) strategies of recruitment that include community and place-based attributes of candidates.

In essence, the Boyd et al. (2011) model provides some additional potential for creating contextualized hiring; allowing the candidate and the workplace environment to assess for “fit” beyond institutional norms and sociocultural reproduction. However, this particular study does not emphasize equity nor diversity in its’ model, and, thus, some of their suggested criteria for matching (e.g., standardized test scoring) may work against holistic Indigenous concepts of competence and achievement. Further, the concept of "fit" is fraught with ideas of worthiness and readiness; themselves ideas that are foreign in Indigenous educational pedagogy which is recursive and never-ending.

Because Indigenous worldviews demand a community-based focus, and because individual identity can only exist within community, it is difficult to draw parallels between an Indigenous worldview of empowerment and suitability, and a colonial worldview of competence and “fit”, demanding the identification of common values between praxis and urging examination to Indigenize current hiring norms.

To summarize the current practices and aspirations of Indigenous teacher hiring and of Indigenous human resources more broadly, four calls to action have been identified in this thesis, based on the literature review:

1. A call to identify and value extra-professional positionality and values of candidates;
2. A call to diversify recruitment activities and language to address inherent colonial biases;

3. A call to conceptualize the teaching profession as one part of a vital community ecosystem;
4. A call to weave Indigenous worldviews throughout all aspects of teacher hiring.

All of the above four themes can be at least partly represented in textual recruitment documents, providing rich opportunities for assessing entry points in existing practices that may yield pathways to increased Indigenous teacher recruitment and retention.

### **Gatekeeping and White Sanctioning.**

A converse consideration in hiring Indigenous teachers are the concepts of gatekeeping, white sanctioning, and covert colonialism embedded in many hiring practices.

Gatekeeping involves permitting a certain class or criteria of candidate through a hiring process while filtering out others (Rivera, 2012, p. 1000). Abawi (2018) asserted that the

"hegemony of the white female educator is by no means accidental; rather it is the result of gatekeeping surrounding the profession through [...] hiring and advancement processes among school boards." (p. 104)

This white female educator archetype is prevalent in the classroom, and is perpetuated and promoted by those who make hiring decisions, generally "White, male, and authoritarian typologies of leadership" (Logan, 2018, p. 208). This mirrors colonial constructs of social power and decision-making authority, wherein the male archetype issues the directives, and the female archetypes work to protect and achieve those directives.

The result of these patterns of colonial replication often result in pervasive "epistemic exclusion" (Settles & Jones, 2021). This exclusion is enforced by an administrative body that decides which knowledge and which knowledge-keepers are perceived as legitimate, resulting in the "devaluation of nonmainstream scholarship" (Settles & Jones, 2021, p. 494). Additionally,

Indigenous applicants must be "nonthreatening to those in power" (Miheisah, 2004, p. 32), a difficult target to hit when Indigenous candidates may intimidate merely by possessing knowledge and experience inaccessible to those in power. Because administrative personnel widely reflect the colonial underpinnings of public education, they control access and change to existing systems that might permit non-colonial ways of knowing to be valued and celebrated.

Related to the concept of gatekeeping is white sanctioning. White sanctioning involves processes

"where the skills and capabilities of a BAME [Black, Asian, and minority ethnic] individual are, first, acknowledged and, second, endorsed/promoted by a white individual, who is positioned as a broker and/or mediator acting on behalf of or in the interests of the BAME individual" (Miller, 2016, p. 215).

Attaining the endorsement of white authority can have several effects, from providing the "sanctioned" teacher with increased trust and responsibility, to ignorantly conceptualizing nuanced cultural identities into those that are acceptable to the white leadership, and those that are not. This essentializing of acceptable identities and cultural representation brings with it another layer of gatekeeping, filtering out the "unacceptable" and promoting the sanctioned "acceptable" candidates. By engaging in white sanctioning, leadership personnel anoint one type of cultural representation as desirable and authentic, and delegitimize, even oppress, others, leading to teacher frustration, burnout, and disengagement.

Indigenous teachers are no strangers to this concept and many have experienced it firsthand. For example, in Manitoba schools, certain Indigenous ceremonies and cultural practices have become more mainstreamed than others. Most urban school divisions in Winnipeg now host an annual Pow Wow, and incorporate smudging and drumming into other cultural

events. Regalia, ribbon skirts and shirts, and other markers of Indigenous cultural identity in schools usually draw upon Cree and Ojibwe teachings. With virtuous goals of reconciliation, certain documents and communications are translated into certain Indigenous languages but not others. This exalting of certain traditions essentializes Indigenous experience and knowledge to favour a particular representation. This representation, sanctioned and encouraged by white authority, then creates its' own gate-keeping function, demonstrating that "participation in traditional practices confers authenticity to group insiders, while undermining the perceived legitimacy of those Aboriginal people who don't participate" (Comeau, 2005, p. 23). Thus, identities and skills outside of these practices are delegitimized and those who cannot perform these functions are less valued as employees and may be seen as less legitimate as Indigenous people and Indigenous knowledge-keepers by administration and colleagues.

Gillies (2017) interviewed several Métis teachers in Saskatchewan who expressed this type of exclusion, finding similarly to Settles & Jones (2021) that "marginalized individuals are perceived mainly in terms of their group and may experience backlash when they seek to expose disparities" (p. 503). This exclusion of Métis culture and knowledge from schools continues the gatekeeping and segregating functions of the residential school era against Metis citizens. The frustration and feelings of futility evidenced in the literature speak to the importance of the research: schools and school divisions must shift practices, beliefs and biases to better sustain Indigenous professionals. Mihesuah & Wilson (2004) concur: "We can only beat our heads against the wall so many times before the damage to our spirits outweighs whatever small gains we might be making within institutions that do not value our contributions" (p. 7). This theme of spiritual damage is throughout the literature: Indigenous teachers want to share and support

cultural practices, but can't participate authentically due to systemic barriers and biases within education.

The lack of acknowledgment, awareness or value placed upon cultural practices unique to a variety of Indigenous identities continues the essentialization of Indigenous people and culture in schools, and can only serve to oppress and discourage Indigenous teachers who have much knowledge to share, but are never asked nor valued for it. The question, then, must be asked: Do schools want to hire more Indigenous teachers, or do they want to hire more of the "right kind" of Indigenous teachers? If the former, it will be essential to examine current biases and epistemological exclusions to ensure the hiring process welcomes a diverse array of people. If the latter, then administrative personnel remain the foot soldiers of colonialism and Indigenous oppression.

Taken together, issues of gatekeeping and white sanctioning work in service of upholding colonial ideals of suitability and merit, and are important aspects to consider in the recruitment of Indigenous teachers. Discussions and examinations of recruitment materials will need to assess for key words and images that overtly or covertly work to strengthen these problematic worldviews and biases. If Indigenous teacher recruitment is to increase, we need to realize that "every step of the hiring process is an opportunity to interrupt the reproduction of racial inequity" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 574).

### **Indigenous Perspectives on Education.**

Educative practices, pedagogies and systems of honour and empowerment that exist in Indigenous societies in Canada predate the current state-established public education system. Indigenous pedagogy operates under different understandings of knowledge transmission,

expertise and power. There are crucial differences between Indigenous worldviews on knowledge and current Canadian state-led public education systems.

Indigenous knowledges are centred on interrelatedness and connectivity of the individual within community in relationship with specific environment (Deer, 2020; Hickey, 2019; LaFrance, 2012). Because of the importance of balance and harmony within community, individual learners are nurtured in their curiosity and critical thinking to apply themselves and their knowledge toward harmonious and beneficial relations (Hickey, 2019; LaFrance, 2012). As such, an Indigenous knowledge keeper is only defined by how well their knowledge compliments and contributes to health and harmony of community. Thus, there can be no assessment of individual merit without a parallel assessment of the health of community. This creates a relationship between curiosity and expertise which presupposes personal responsibility. Each individual is “tasked with contributing a social or material benefit back to the family or community” (Gaudry & Hancock, 2012, p. 20). Therefore, it is the learner who, through inherent introspection (Hickey, 2019, p. 93) is taught to self-recognize their abilities and needs for learning, and to seek out and develop the relationships necessary to procure it, in order to strengthen community and relationship between people and place.

This organization of knowledge and expertise requires a commitment to relationship within community, and relationship takes time to develop. Haig-Brown and Dannenmann (2002) have summarized this type of knowledge transmission as “learning through watching and doing” (p. 452). Knowledge is transmitted in activity and experience, and the learner is expected to attach new knowledge and meaning to the experience, which can then benefit community. This has systemic implications and opportunities for misunderstanding of any process involving assessment, as school communities are generally not organized in the same way as Indigenous

perceptions of community would assume. Instead, schools are organized hierarchically to transmit knowledge to students who are measured against one another in largely identical target knowledge outcomes.

In considering assessment for employment within schools, a candidate lacking knowledge of the needs of a certain school can only hope to fit into a yet-hidden community, and is dependent upon the assessment of that “fit” by someone from the community who is most likely not Indigenous and is not literate in this alternate conception of suitability and power. Whitford (2021) highlighted the experiences of several Indigenous school leaders, one of whom suggested that:

"interview process does not work well for our people. It's very linear, and that's often not how we work or communicate. It doesn't get to the heart of a person's skill set or what their strengths are". (p. 96)

An Indigenous repositioning of this scenario would be likely to involve the entire community, on several occasions and through several circumstances and activities, and allow the individual and the community both to grow in the presence of one another's strengths and needs.

Allowing that recruitment documents are the first point of contact for prospective teachers, and accepting Indigenous assessment practices are in conflict with a meritocratic worldview of teacher suitability, we begin to see the need to recreate recruitment materials which allow Indigenous thought and achievement to flow freely and benefit community.

### ***Definitions***

In discussing the disconnect between colonial and Indigenous perspectives of role suitability, it is essential to define some of the established and accepted theoretical ideas pertaining to the topic.

## **Colonialism and Settler-Colonialism.**

Settler-colonialism is predicated upon the goal of supplanting Indigenous populations. This continues to be enacted by elimination of Indigenous rights to territory, as well as exclusion and assimilation through legislation. Brayboy (2005, p. 430) conceptualized modern colonialization to mean that, “European American thought, knowledge, and power structures dominate present-day society”.

Modern Canadian systems are dependent on the colonial foundation upon which they were built (Wolfe, 2006, p. 394), and Canadian public education is itself a colonial construct (Stewart, 2020). By insisting Indigenous education staff and students participate in colonial meritocratic processes of achievement and promotion, school divisions are perpetuating the colonial agenda, which has remained unchanged for centuries. The imperative of this agenda is that until the collective, community-based identities of Indigenous peoples have been supplanted (by any means) by an individualistic, capitalistic self-concept, the Indigenous individual poses a problem that must be resolved, as they are incompatible with the established colonial order of achievement and promotion. Wolfe (2006, p. 397) described this requisite “death” of identity as “have our settler world, but lose your Indigenous soul”. Therefore, challenging colonial systems in education will necessarily be an uncomfortable and unwieldy task, as the very design of the system is predicated upon Indigenous identity elimination.

With this colonial worldview comes a necessary “othering” of perspectives, beliefs and ways of being which lie outside of colonial constructs. As Comeau (2005, p. 10) asserted, colonial education is founded on “white, Protestant, bourgeois, and masculine values, ideals and ways of living”. Education has been and still is at the centre of colonial ideology. This, of course, necessitated the creation of segregated schools for those who could never (due to racial

unambiguousness), or could never be *allowed* to (due to systemic exclusion), participate as full members of Canadian society. School segregation allowed not only for the subjugation and subordination of certain groups, but also for the reinforcement and continuation of the neutrality and normality of white supremacist positioning in educational settings.

Crucial to maintenance of colonial education is ensuring the conveyance of colonial morals and ways of being. Historically, the white, heterosexual, protestant, female teacher has been the archetype gatekeeper and role model of colonial “goodness” (Baines et al., 1991). The “white woman saviour” is an often-seen model of benevolence and kindness, and proffers opportunity through education in colonial lore, history and discourse (Bauer, 2023; Leonardo & Boas, 2013). This has formed an accepted preconception that white femininity is neutral and “cultureless” (Comeau 2005, p. 19), and therefore is the aspirational pure and natural way of being.

This stereotype must be considered for what it is and the context from which it arises – the Canadian teacher stereotype embodies a mission of feminine colonial assimilation. It is no wonder, then, that the teaching profession in Canada is overwhelmingly white and female (Ryan et al., 2009; Statistics Canada, 2014). This enduring demographic pattern harms non-white students, and particularly Indigenous students, through its reinforcement of the supremacy of white female custodianship and care, rendering other moral structures and ways of being – and therefore groups of people – as inferior (Bauer, 2023; Comeau, 2005). Because of this accepted inferiority, the non-colonial groups must be delivered from their lack of ability to care for themselves (Stewart, 2020, p 259) by this white feminine archetype. Indigenous students are particularly attuned to this type of alienation due to the historical usage of education to forcibly assimilate them in their own native territories, and this supposedly well-meaning deliverance

from themselves is particularly offensive (Boisselle & McLaughlin, 2021). Students view school as a “conditional environment” – as long as they follow the cultural norms and rules, they can be accepted and successful (Racette & Sammel, 2020, p. 92).

Other attributes seen as desirable in teachers include fluency in English, an English-sounding name, possessing domestic education credentials, cultural sensitivity, supportive of diversity, and technologically skilled (Cho, 2012; Ruecker, 2015; Sleeter, 2017).

The above list of characteristics points more emphatically toward the white woman savior as ideal teacher, for if a candidate is to meet all attributes and also be “supportive of diversity” (Stegemann, 2012, p. 266), they must therefore embody a perspective of white worldviews as neutral and benevolent, accepting of difference and tolerant of diversity. The assumed neutrality of whiteness in teacher identity is harmful but expected when positioned in this wider context.

### **Decolonization and Indigenization.**

If we accept that Canadian education is a colonial structure, and we heed the generational cries for Indigenous governance, then there is work to do in both decolonizing and Indigenizing Canadian education. Tuck and Yang (2012) cautioned against idealizing the concept of decolonization. Thus, though often used together, decolonization and Indigenization are not interchangeable terms and each must be considered separately.

The temptation and practices of intellectualizing decolonization are alluring and widespread. Tuck & Yang (2012), however, posit that a benevolent conceptualization of decolonization is dominant because it serves to pacify the settler conscious and absolve it of guilt, if not responsibility. Often, what is purported to be decolonization is actually reconciliation in practice. As Donald (2009) asserted, recognizing that we journey together on this land is not decolonization.

Rather, decolonization is conceptualized as the active reversing of colonization. This is meant in no uncertain terms: returning the land to Indigenous peoples and establishing wide-ranging Indigenous governance structures are among its goals (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In education, decolonial structures would

privilege the learning of indigenous values over Eurocentric knowledge, values the process of learning over the learning of subject-matter, eschews academic rigor, standards and competition [a rejection of meritocracy]<sup>1</sup>, assumes that students are equal to teachers [a rejection of hierarchical authority], and rates the development of self-esteem among students higher than the need to be literate or aware of other cultures.(Minnis, 2008, p. 30)

In this quote we can see the rejections of meritocracy and hierarchy consistent with Indigenous worldviews. Indigenization, therefore, is characterized by the actions promoting and mainstreaming Indigenous thought, knowledge systems and worldviews into colonial structures. Blair et al., (2020, p. 24) provided succinct characteristics of Indigenization as a concept.

Importantly,

“Indigenizing education is currently understood and practised as trying to fit Indigenous knowings into Western Knowledge. Indigenizing education does not include sprinkling Indigenous perspectives to spice up the curriculum through tokenistic, superficial, and decontextualized activities or experiences”. (p. 24)

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<sup>1</sup> Text within square brackets added by R. Chambers.

This is an important counterpoint, as it throws light on the problematic nature of curriculum and pedagogy as vehicles of Indigenization and strengthens the case for Indigenizing administrative and education delivery systems in addition to educational content.

Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) presented decolonization and Indigenization on a spectrum, where all three listed types of Indigenization exist in various places and various times. The three categories are inclusion (Indigenous people are present), Indigenization (Indigenous thoughts and ways of being are present), and decolonial Indigenization (changes in systems). Thus, their three categories do not represent goals or directives, but are useful in understanding the types of Indigenization being practiced in education. This inclusion-Indigenization-decolonization continuum is helpful in situating the thrust of this thesis and differentiating the modes of thought around Indigenous education more broadly.

There is no hierarchy in the discussed concepts and interpretations of decolonization and Indigenization. Rather, these concepts present a palette from which we may colour and customize the approaches and strategies needed to truly enact reconciliation in education and, as Murray Sinclair (2014) directed, begin to find a path toward healing through education, the same vessel which has delivered so much harm to generations of Indigenous students in Canada.

### **Meritocracy, Suitability, and “the Achievement Gap”.**

It should not be surprising that educational administrative and allocative processes favour a meritocratic approach to teacher candidate assessment. Littler (2017, p. 8) defined meritocracy as an “idea that individuals are responsible for working hard to activate their talent and thus one in which the majority will arrive at social positions for which they are suitable and appropriately rewarded”. Meritocracy has its roots in narratives of social mobility, democracy and capitalism

(Littler, 2017). Assertions that meritocracy creates equal opportunity for all have been resolutely disproven by scholars and political analysts (see Bloodworth, 2016).

Literature consistently states that meritocratic systems reinforce social standing and replicate patterns of privilege (Bloodworth, 2016; Brantlinger, 2019; Wysong et al., 2016). The assumptions that a meritocratic system will allow each to perform according to their ability is conclusively disproven because meritocracy fails to include equity and privilege in its assumptions (Bloodworth, 2016).

Colonial schooling has traditionally been built on individual, competitive, quantitative assessment of ability (Abawi, 2021; Reimer & Longmuir, 2021). Quantitative standardized testing is a longstanding measure of merit for students in Canada (Dagenais, 2011), and teacher recruitment and selection has been shown to prefer time-saving, simplistic screening processes which favour a narrow selection of attributes (Jack & Ryan, 2015).

Considering the meritocratic scaffold upon which colonial schooling has been premised, these colonial, meritocratic viewpoints may be considered to be “baked into” not only the curricula and delivery, but also the structure and operations of the system more broadly.

Literature clearly illuminates that the hiring practices of white-majority school administration are greatly influenced by meritocratic, “colour-blind” philosophies of suitability (Abawi, 2021; Kohli, 2018; Matias, 2014; Noonan, 2020; Sleeter, 2016; Swanson, 2018; Tupper, 2012). Colourblindness assumes a false equality between all race-affiliated characteristics of individuals. This philosophy neutralizes the truth of inequities that are endemic in colonial power structures including public education. While celebrated as an equality-assuring outlook, colourblindness silences the voices of racialized individuals by declaring all race-based

differences to be irrelevant to achievement or treatment, and therefore unworthy of attention or validity (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Kohli, 2018; McIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 2016).

Similar to colourblind perceptions, meritocracy shares a goal of “levelling the playing field” (Abawi, 2018, 2020; Kohli 2018) by reducing the complexities in individuals to only their perceived skills and attributes for the task at hand. This may seem a noble and empirical method of creating fairness in assessment, however, research has shown meritocracy privileges those already conforming to systemic and cultural norms (Brantlinger, 2019). A co-requisite of meritocracy, therefore, is the silencing and negation of the value of the lived realities of non-dominant groups, thereby reinforcing their systemic exclusion (Abawi, 2018).

It is important, especially when considering the topic of Indigenous-settler relationships, to align meritocratic philosophy with colonial goals. Because meritocracy essentializes the morals and values of the settler culture, a disregard and erasure of other values automatically occurs. Because the goal of colonialism is to assimilate and erase, the aim of meritocratic approaches to assessment and recruitment is, sadly, the same (Abawi, 2020, p. 87).

In education, an adherence to meritocratic hiring strategies is particularly problematic. The mandate of Canadian public education is to provide “adequate school accommodation” to all children (Government of Manitoba, 1987, 41(1)(a)), yet Indigenous children are provided with mentors who largely embody colonial standards of achievement, ability, appearance and values. Once these patterns are examined and connected, a clear correlation can be seen between underperformance of racialized students and underrepresentation of racialized teachers (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Egalite et al., 2015). In a sector that is built around assessing achievement, a departure from colonial meritocratic philosophies is essential and pre-requisite to the setting of decolonization goals.

Like many industries, hiring entities in education see the value in retaining a diverse workforce, and have sought solutions to “level the playing field”. The trend toward colourblind, meritocratic hiring processes has been applied in an effort to reduce barriers to non-majority teachers (Abawi, 2021; Noonan, 2020) but often has the adverse effect. Because it is the majority-colonial cohort that comprises hiring entities, the “level playing field” they seek is one that only exists for those already embodying white, heteronormative position.

Thus, a call to decolonize and Indigenize the hiring procedures grows louder. Without addressing the problematic colonialized concepts of merit and suitability in teacher hiring, authentic recognition of Indigenous gifts cannot take place.

Before examining the push for Indigenous teacher representation, we must first acknowledge the Grade 12 diploma as a colonial construct now requisite to attain certain standards of living in Canada. The metrics pertaining to Indigenous school completion in Manitoba speak to a systemic issue in education delivery (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, n.d.). These metrics have been consistently referred to as the Indigenous “achievement gap” (Fine, 2018; Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2023; Nguyen, 2020; Shuls & Moranto, 2013). Accepting this fact and its immutable, immovable positionality, causes us to view Indigenous “underachievement” (Minnis 2008; Stewart, 2020) in a new perspective. The language used to describe Indigenous school attainment is rooted in deficit epistemologies, centering the conversation on rehabilitating Indigenous learners, instead of rehabilitating an ineffective system of education.

Instead of speaking in meritocratic terms of “closing the achievement gap” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, we must recognize that the system has been a catalyst of colonial reproductions and cultural exclusion far beyond the Indian Residential School System

and historical exclusion from schooling. There is a pervasive and significantly reduced access to high school credits on reserves (Statistics Canada, 2025), with students required either to travel vast distances for education or participate via correspondence (Statistics Canada, 2025; Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, 2025). While the grade 12 diploma is requisite for Canadian participation, the segregation of First Nations people, invalidation of Metis identity, and rigid adherence to post-industrial colonial schooling practices remain incompatible with Indigenous achievement.

Therefore, is with good reason that Indigenous teacher recruitment and retention is of particular interest and urgency. Without addressing the problematic colonialized concepts of merit and suitability in educational structure as a whole, authentic recognition of Indigenous gifts cannot take place, and, thus, the so-called “achievement gap” rhetoric persists.

### **Limitations of Current Research**

This thesis looks only to assess for opportunities for Indigenous-specific recruitment processes presented by the language and images used in job postings from selected urban school divisions in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Due to a professional conflict of interest, it was necessary to exclude data from the largest of these urban divisions, the Winnipeg School Division, reducing the available data by 79 schools. Two other school divisions were excluded due to anomalies in the timing and format of recruitment documents.

Though outside the scope of this thesis, it is clear from the research that a holistic review of Indigenous teacher hiring practices and issues needs to be undertaken. Of particular import is the call to broaden recruitment strategies beyond the status quo three-stage model of advertisement, CV assessment, and interview. Further, the methods and placement of recruitment

materials deserve further analysis. Documenting individual experiences of Indigenous teachers and teacher candidates would yield crucial insights yet is currently out of scope of this thesis.

Because of the lack of information specifically pertaining to this topic, literature was consulted that included sources from outside of Canada, sources that discussed all non-white teachers as a group, sources which examined other under-represented demographic groups, and sources from higher education and human resources more broadly. While literature exists regarding gendered language in job advertisements, and some regarding Black teachers' perceptions of biased language in job advertisements, I have so far found none that specifically identify Indigenous in/congruence with job advertisements in K-12 education. Also outside the scope of this thesis is the examination of how Artificial Intelligence and computer algorithms influence who sees particular job advertisements, an interesting and recent development that deserves further inquiry.

### **Justification for Research**

The literature is in strong agreement that the language and presentation of job advertisements affect the diversity of the applicant pool, but few resources directly assess nor recommend practices specifically to increase Indigenous teacher recruitment in K-12 schools. It is known that bias and discriminatory language can often be found in education and other professional job advertisements (Wiener et al., 2022), and even when subtle, can have measurable effects on dissuading certain candidates from applying (Flory et al., 2015; Kuhn & Shen, 2013).

Because a job advertisement is still the first point of contact for prospective teachers, it is an extremely important juncture in the "pipeline" to examine for biases and opportunities to strengthen Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships in education. Job advertisements are crafted

to attract desirable candidates, but the characteristics of desirability rest in the mind of those crafting the applications. This speaks to the importance of the self-awareness and humility in education administration looking to craft advertisements that appeal to Indigenous candidates.

"Non-racist" (Jung et al., 2022, p. 3) language alone is insufficient to attract diverse candidates, nor are abstractions of personal traits like "determined" or "motivated" (Tran, 2024, p. 82). Instead, administrators need to know and value Indigenous ways of knowing and leading, in order to communicate them in job advertisements in ways that are appealing to Indigenous candidates, and provide avenues for candidates to demonstrate and be valued for these skills and ways of being at the interview and beyond. Undertaking a mindful and informed examination of specific opportunities to demonstrate cultural understanding and acceptance will be essential to successful recruitment and retention of Indigenous individuals. Unfortunately, because job advertisements are drafted by predominantly white educational administrators, they frequently show signs of unconscious bias that reinforce cultural reproduction (Gonzalez, 2022, p. 77) instead of promoting increased diversity.

In looking at gendered patterns in human resources, Gaucher et al., (2011) found that even "subtle variations in the gendered wording used in advertisements may affect people's perception of jobs, such that men and women will find jobs described in language consistent with their own gender most appealing precisely because it signals they belong in that occupation" (p. 111). Conversely, conscientious and carefully worded advertisements have shown positive potential to attract more diverse candidates (Consul et al., 2021; Gonzalez, 2022), showing that "language can have important implications for who applies and/or gains access to school leadership roles" (Weiner, 2022, p. 5).

The application of these questions and observations to a Canadian Indigenous landscape is needed. Patterns of social reproduction in schools and the increasing call to diversify the teaching force further reinforce the need for this research.

Landertinger et al. (2021) insisted that "an Indigenous-centric curriculum must be aligned with and cannot be separated from Indigenous pedagogies" (p. 46). This is a powerful message that the Indigenization of curriculum is not enough. The process and procedures for enacting Indigenization must also be Indigenized. This must include administrative and hiring practices.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Indigenous researchers, policy-makers, and knowledge-keepers have often provided conceptual frameworks upon which to situate their findings. The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2018) structured their Indigenous education framework as a white birch tree, where concepts and domains were structured both vertically in trunk and branches, and laterally, in concentric rings. Donald (2009) drew upon the history and meaning of fur trade forts to center conversations about colonial education practices more broadly. Cram et al. (2018) built upon the Indigenous New Zealander concept of braided rivers to conceptualize the relationships between Maori and non-Maori knowledges. A braided river is a geological feature characterised by two waters that are intersecting, mixing, but unique in their pathway. Mashford-Pringle (2023) structured her research in health upon the medicine wheel. There are countless other examples which seek to illustrate and communicate research design through experiences, structures, natural features, and importantly, through story.

Storytelling is a useful, powerful and legitimate tool in Indigenous research (Baskin, 2005, Hickey 2017, Kovach, 2009). "Story is a component that will accentuate and authenticate the richness of data collected from the participants" (Whitford, 2021, p. 54). In Indigenous

epistemologies, storytelling is the authentic and comprehensive repository of collective of co-created knowledge (Rowe, 2022; Whitford, 2021). It is not only a useful paradigm for examining or explaining ideas, but for communicating complex concepts through analogy and parable (LaFrance et al., 2012, p. 61). Storytelling is an effective pedagogy (McDrury & Alteiro, 2001) and is implemented here in celebration that all research is knowledge, and knowledge is meant to be shared.

In this chapter, personal stories will be woven into the research narrative to illustrate and justify a theoretical framework built upon my positionality and personal experiences as a teacher.

### *Land as Teacher*

Standing on the dock beside my friend, we survey the sky as we prepare to depart on a canoe trip in the Canadian shield. We're in our early 20s, young and adventurous, and have assembled a multi-generational ragtag group of children, young adults, dogs and older friends for this May long weekend trip from Wallace Lake, Manitoba. One of the other paddlers is my friend's German instructor from the university, and as she walked up the dock toward us, she remarked, "Looks like rain. That's a dark sky."

I breathed in deeply, smelling the air, then exhaled and said, "Maybe, but it doesn't smell like rain is coming. Not soon, anyway." My friend beside me similarly inhaled deeply and agreed. The German instructor threw up her hands. "Canadians! They even smell the weather!"

I had never considered that this might be unique to our place in the world. The air just before rain has a distinct smell. And so does the air just before snow. And they don't smell the same. There are innumerable lessons and communications that come to us from the natural world around us: the rocks, plants, the wind, the trees and the animals. But for many of us, these

communications go unheard, because we don't know how to hear them, just as our German friend didn't know the language of the rain on the breeze.

The land is our original teacher, and a relational, place-specific, contextualized positioning of knowledge is essential to understanding Indigenous ways of knowing (Kovach, 2021). By situating learning and knowledge in a relational context, we honour place-based pedagogy as Armstrong (1998) spoke of it: "The land constantly speaks to us. It is constantly communicating. We survived and thrived by listening to its teachings—to its language—and then inventing human words to retell its stories to our succeeding generation" (p. 178). Indigenous pedagogy is predicated upon the active curiosity and participation of the learner, rather than the prescriptive pedagogy of colonial schooling. This was humorously portrayed in the 2022 television series *Reservation Dogs*, during a scene in which a young man, Bear, takes a break from his first day on the job as a roofer. Frustrated that his new coworkers aren't teaching him how to work, he enters into a conversation with his often-irreverent spirit guide.

Bear: This is bullshit. I don't even know what I'm doing, and I almost fell off the roof. It's like, they don't even teach you anything. Just expect you to know.

Spirit: Yeah. That's the Native way of teaching. We have this, uh, traditional pedagogy of, uh, "just get out there and learn, fucker." (Harjo et al., 2022)

Learning is done in dialogue, even between human and non-human learner communities. By defining knowledge as adaptations and characteristics refined over the practice of generations, the context speaks to the learner, and the learner develops an ability to hear and to understand the lesson.

Just as years of living in this place primed me to know what the air smells like when rain is approaching, so too do other non-human knowledge-keepers speak to us and educate us of

their intention and ability.

### *The Data-Spirit*

To bridge Indigenous and colonial research traditions, I am naming this silent voice of wisdom the data-spirit: the assembled knowledge and teachings that come from entering into dialogue with something that calls you to listen, be it human or not, sentient or not, as data calls us to listen in research. The data-spirit is the voice that tells us there is something of interest here, and beckons us to lean close, pay attention, and make meaning from what we are presented with.

The data-spirit is one actor in a framework which uses storytelling to define research model. In this thesis, a data-spirit is borne of the assembled documents drawn upon to form the research base. To "get to know" this character, we must spend time together in dialogue and observation, here done by coding and analysis of job advertisements. Once properly introduced we may invite this data-spirit into contemplative conversation with Indigenous thought, pedagogy and experience (itself another data-spirit), with the aim of defining reliable pathways to Indigenous teacher recruitment in Winnipeg schools.

To define our two main characters, and to situate them in an analogous landscape, I will draw upon my own experience of teaching moccasin-making workshops and classes.

Outside of my work as a researcher, I have conducted many workshops on Métis handcrafts, specifically on beadwork and moccasin-making. The process and product of creating something with one's hands seems to awaken a particular patience, curiosity, and understanding in people, including myself. These teachings come from the participants, the circumstances of the workshop, and from data-spirits of the materials and products themselves. When confronted with a student who can't decide how to proceed through a problem in construction, I have many times directed them to really look at the problem, look at the materials, and discern carefully

how the materials "want" to be put together, instead of forcing the student's will upon unwilling parts. In practices like this, I help bring to life the data-spirit, that is, the spirit of the assembled knowledge about a particular thing. The data-spirit that speaks to one student through their moccasin or beading project will not speak with the same voice to another student. While we are indeed journeying toward the same goals, we acknowledge there are many ways to get there, and charting a path toward the goal depends on many factors.

A particularly enlightening teaching came from a group of young women, who persevered in patience and goodwill over many weeks to finish their pairs of moccasins. Nearing completion, a conversation was initiated by one of them, in which she imagined ever having a boyfriend who would be worth the effort to make moccasins for. Several of the young women agreed, saying they'd be measuring these future romances by the metric, "Is he worth making moccasins for?" They discovered this data-spirit and instrument of measurement through taking in the teachings given to them by their own handiwork.

Other data-spirit voices arise as novel vocabulary and turns of phrase. I have never taught a group of people who did not come up with their own unique ways to give voice to certain processes and concepts. In particular, the process of gathering the toe of the moccasin produces some interesting words: "puckers, grabbies, lil pinchies" are some that I remember.

A particularly difficult session happened among a group of professional women who had asked me to give a workshop. None of the women were Indigenous and did not appear to have had much grounding in Indigenous worldviews or ways of knowing. This is not generally a problem for me, as I work in some introductory teachings as we progress through the project. A big part of these workshops is intentionally and carefully cultivating friendship and relationship with those assembled. This is an integral part of the experience: we do not merely get together to

make something, we get together to be in community and learn from one another as well as the instructor and materials.

However, this particular group were interestingly difficult to knit together. One participant would repeatedly redirect the other learners or prompt me for next steps when unrelated conversations began happening amongst group members. In her view, we were there only to learn to make moccasins. She did not know that learning to make moccasins includes aspects of conversation and community. And why would she? This participant was so hungry for knowledge she was missing all the teachings! Most learners of mine begin to hear the data-spirit intuitively by how it makes them feel: this is Indigenous pedagogy.

These are all examples of learners who have gathered knowledge, named it and related it to current and past learning and experiences to be able to work with this new knowledge in a productive way.

### ***Framework: The Moccasin Workshop***

Standing firmly footed and from my Métis eyes looking, I must also believe that the collected teacher recruitment materials also contain a data-spirit. That is, these collected recruitment materials have a message, a voice and a spirit if we but develop the capacity to listen.

I had to learn, as I worked, to truly listen and enact a framework that would encompass the needed rigor of research while also reinforcing the recursive, observational and relational nature of Indigenous epistemologies. This thesis will be structured as a moccasin-making workshop, in four parts.

First, we must gather supplies. We must know about the variables at stake. In the workshop, we will need to know the amount of people coming, their experience, their

preferences and their budget for materials. We will have to make decisions about where to purchase the supplies and how much of each to get. We will have to choose between variety and economy. And once assembled, we will need to inventory and sort the supplies for accessibility and to ensure we have what we need to be successful.

As research framework, this stage is the physical gathering of the data. First, deciding which data will be important, and when and how it will be collected.

Next in the workshop is to bring people together. People come to the workshop in various ways, and they hear about it in various ways. They also bring their own stories, experiences, skills, fears and beliefs about their ability. No assemblage of learners is the same, and thus takes time to really get to know, to work within, and to develop harmony between.

This stage of the framework supports analysis of the data needed to begin to hear the data-spirit. Once we know who the data-spirit is and what they want, we can work with them toward a shared goal.

Next in the workshop is the actual construction of moccasins together. Generally, this is where learners' expectations of the workshop are challenged. Accustomed to colonial patterns of education, learners anticipate step-by-step instructions with "right ways" and "wrong ways" of doing things. But once we are underway and learning, participants usually quickly discover they must make decisions that relate themselves to the unique data-spirit of their personal work, much like the young women contemplating moccasin-worthy boyfriends heard a lesson from their experience that was only for them. A learner's affinity or dislike for certain parts of the project, their ambition and design goals, their willingness to learn, their motivations for being there at all: all of these will impact their work and inform their learning. The data-spirit within the materials similarly makes itself known: the toughness of the leather, the needle that keeps bending, the

availability of bead colors: these all speak to the learner about how the moccasin wants to look when it's done. Dialogue between oneself and one's work may become strained, and many participants have commented that their project is "fighting" them. In this stage of creation the maker and the moccasin are in constant conversation and negotiation for who will get to make each decision.

This is the discussion portion of the thesis. What does the data-spirit say about who it is? What parts of it can be negotiated? How can they be negotiated in ways that serve Indigenous worldviews and yet still exist within colonial school systems?

Finally, the fun part: the moment of completion and modelling. Photos are taken and compliments are given. Everyone can share in the triumph of one another's success because each are now aware of the difficulty and some of the individual characteristics that have influenced the final outcomes. This point in a workshop is always over-the-top joyful. I taught one workshop in Surrey, British Columbia where a group of adults chanted the name of anyone close to finishing, and then cheered as the final stitch was knotted and the final thread was cut. The triumph of wearing something you made, the new understanding of a different way to learn and be, brings immense sense of accomplishment and empathy with others who are working.

This portion of the workshop is analogous to finding recommendations in the data. At this point, we have all been in dialogue and struggle together for sometime – myself and these data-spirits. Together, we've worked to discover one another's differences and motivations, and strategize ways to move forward together. Recommendations are the paths upon which we walk with our new shoes and new knowledge.

## **Methodology and Method**

Qualitative text analysis guided the design of this stage of analysis. Qualitative text analysis "applies one or more methods for drawing inferences from text populations" (Roberts, 2000, p. 259). Kuckartz (2014), suggests five processes involved in qualitative text analysis, including reading and interpreting the text, building categories, coding segments of the text, analysis, and presentation of results (p. 40).

The idea of gathering knowledge from data is also present in Indigenous pedagogies. At its' essence, land-based learning is a practice of query, observation and meaning-making. This type of learning and expertise can be conceptualized as elegantly as smelling an oncoming rain shower. The idea of allowing the data to determine the structure of further learning is also at play within the moccasin workshop framework. Allowing the materials to communicate their wishes, instead of insisting upon the maker's imposition of wishes upon the materials, is analogous to the inquisitive and generative nature of knowledge gleaned through data analysis.

A general analysis was conducted to look for similarities, patterns, trends, and differences between job advertisements and school divisions. Characteristics examined included word count, font size, inclusion of a mission statement or Diversity, Equity and Inclusion statement, and inclusion of graphics or images. This initial comparison sought to identify some of the themes and strategies employed by the data-spirit to recruit teachers, revealing some information about what the data-spirit values and how they communicate.

This methodology was employed to ensure contextualized comparisons between school divisions would be possible. For example, the number of keywords is assumed to be somewhat relative to the entire wordcount of a job advertisement. Further, any specific decisions that were

made regarding how the types of teaching positions cause differentiation in job advertisement language, length or design was also examined.

Attention was paid to the varying ways divisions use photographs or graphics in their job advertisements. Choices about font and text sizes were also studied as they communicate the value placed on various components of the job advertisement such as the name of the division, the job title or the school. These characteristics were noted and recorded.

Next, an in-depth reading of all assembled documents suggested the research utility of coding words that denote merit, suitability, belonging, and expertise which were used throughout the job advertisements. These key concepts were selected due to their presence in both colonial and Indigenous values, yet each may be interpreted differently based on the epistemology in which they reside. In essence, this is the stage wherein we begin to get to know the data-spirit by discovering their concepts of merit, suitability, belonging, and expertise through their use of language surrounding these ideas. This type of language revealed assumptions about the nature of relationships between school divisions as employers, their teacher candidates (applicants), and their expectations of how applicants relate to administration and students.

The initial environmental scan revealed some opportunity to categorize vocabulary used in the job advertisements according to the various value systems espoused by Indigenous and/or colonial worldviews. This became apparent through careful re-reading of all materials, as suggested by Bowen (2009, p. 32). As relationality is central to Indigenous concepts of fit and belonging, three concepts were established into which each of these occurrences of relational language were placed: Indigenous Relationality, Intersectional Relationality, and Colonial Relationality. The term "concept" is preferred over "category" in this stage of analysis to align with Kuckartz' (2014) differentiation between the terms, in which a concept is something that

cannot be measured, whereas categories imply various value (p. 43). Importantly, this conceptualization format was chosen as it does not infer any value system as "good" or "bad" but instead only seeks to illuminate the positionality of the data-spirit.

Coding was then applied to words within this concept. Coding, in this usage, means "analysing, naming, categorizing, and theoretically organizing the data" (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 43). An important standard of assigning codes is that they must be consistent and specific enough that any coder may confidently assign them (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 43). Therefore the relational words within the job advertisements have been carefully assessed for particular characteristics that align with the research and analysis questions.

Words such as "collaborate", "share", "community", "mentor", or "member" were coded as Indigenous, due to their relational implications. This was done in alignment with Kovach's (2021) illumination of Indigenous epistemologies as "all about relationship between subject and object, tangible and intangible, self and others, self and the world" (p. 74). These words indicate belonging and reciprocity in some way, and each imply at least two parties actively work together to fulfil an objective.

Words such as "knowledge", "skills", "support", "attend", and "appreciate" were coded as intersectional values as they could be applied both in an Indigenous value system (relational) and a colonial value system (hierarchical). These intersectional concepts occupy spaces rich with opportunity for reciprocal learning. For example: "knowledge" may be perceived as the successful establishment of harmony and an understanding of interrelatedness in Indigenous value systems, but as a canon of individually-possessed information assets in a colonial value system. Likewise, "support" could mean a reciprocal relationship or conversely, a paternalistic

one. In essence, in order to be coded as intersectional, the relational word must be able to be applied both hierarchically and reciprocally.

Words such as "intervention", "evaluate", "champion", "accommodate" or "policy" were coded as colonial, due to their alignment with meritocratic education practices, the implication of students as vessels in need of reform, and the situating of the teacher as a superior provider of moral and educational knowledge. While these words also indicate the presence of at least two parties, they imply that one party is active and one is passive. Put another way, these words imply there is a power structure of sender and receiver, actor and acted upon, plaintiff and judge, or leader and subject.

The keyword inventory and categorizations are summarized in a Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Categories and Sample Words*

Category name	Sample text
Indigenous Relationality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collaborate</li><li>• Share</li><li>• Community</li><li>• Mentor</li><li>• Member</li></ul>
Intersectional Relationality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Knowledge</li><li>• Skills</li><li>• Support</li><li>• Attend</li><li>• Appreciate</li></ul>
Colonial Relationality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intervention</li><li>• Evaluate</li><li>• Champion</li><li>• Accommodate</li><li>• Policy</li></ul>

Because evidence shows that the text of job advertisements influences the probability of an individual's perception of their "fit" within an organization (Hooper, 2024), this sorting of keywords sought to illuminate perceptions of "fit" within them. This is important due to the oppositional concepts of "fit" in Indigenous and colonial value systems. Specifically, in

Indigenous understandings, "fit" is conceptualized as a measure of contributing to community wholeness and harmony, and not as conforming to established procedures and hierarchies as in colonial understandings.

Taken together, the analysis lives in service of the research question: **"What type of text is used in teacher job postings to signal institutional cultural positionality in relation to Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing?"** The methodological design seeks to answer this question by giving voice and character to the data-spirit identified in the job postings. Thus, the results of the keyword, contextual and design analyses will be synthesized to provide an in-depth character sketch that provides answers to the analytical guiding questions. For the purpose of analysis, a character sketch is defined as "a brief analysis of the character of a type of person or of a particular individual" (Oxford University Press, n.d.). This type of synthesis was chosen to honour the data-spirit as a living entity in keeping with overall research design and Indigenous perspectives on knowledge and ways of knowing.

### ***Selection of the Data/Gathering the Supplies***

In service of the research question, teacher job advertisements were the targeted data for this thesis. This data set was chosen due to its underrepresentation in the literature regarding Indigenous teacher recruitment and retention, and with acknowledgement it constitutes the first planks in the bridge between teacher education and teacher employment.

School divisions in Winnipeg were selected due to personal interest and a sense of responsibility borne from being a Métis researcher living in the city with the highest urban Indigenous population in the country. Due to professional conflict of interest, Winnipeg School Division was omitted from study. As an employee of Pembina Trails School Division also, a

conflict of interest was identified, and permission was sought and granted from the senior administration for inclusion of this school division in the study.

No conflict was present for the other urban Winnipeg school divisions included in the study, including St. James-Assiniboia, Louis Riel, Seven Oaks, and River East-Transcona. Because the focus of the research is publicly-available documents, permission was not needed from these divisions. Together, the five named divisions represent over 75,000 students and over 5000 teachers (Louis Riel School Division, 2024; Pembina Trails School Division, 2024; Pembina Trails Teacher's Association, 2024; River East Transcona School Division (2025); River East Transcona Teacher's Association (n.d.); St. James-Assiniboia School Division, 2024; Seven Oaks School Division, n.d.).

**Table 2**

*Divisional Teacher and Student Numbers*

School Division Name	Data year	Number of Teachers	Number of Students
Louis Riel	2024	1,190	17,526
Pembina Trails	2024	1,200	18,065
River East Transcona	2025	1,400	19,000
St. James - Assiniboia	2024	555	8,514
Seven Oaks	n.d.	800	12,000

All urban school divisions in Winnipeg conduct much of their recruitment in late Spring each year. Thus, an environmental scan was conducted at weekly intervals from all relevant school divisions between May to June 2024. Documents collected included job advertisements, social media posts regarding recruitment, and recruitment webpages, all publicly available

sources. The social media sites consulted were Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. To avoid algorithmic bias, each divisional social media account was accessed directly via url input, and posts were organized from newest first. The assembled data included 371 job advertisements gathered from divisional websites. These were sorted by division and source, saved as a pdf on a private computer. A summary of the document inventory is in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
*2024 Environmental Scan Results*

School Division Name	Job advertisements
Louis Riel SD	92
Pembina Trails SD	127
River East Transcona SD	122
St. James Assiniboia SD	26
Seven Oaks SD	4

The focus on publicly available data was meant to mimic the experiences of a first-time jobseeker. Thus, any webpages accessible via registration, sign-in, or other form of pre-acceptance were not included in the data.

Because some school divisions in Winnipeg advertise some positions to internal candidates only, it is assumed that this data collection is not representative of the entire cache of teacher job advertisements produced in the city. Additionally, some of the school division websites were more user-friendly than others and job advertisements were easier to find. This would likely impact the ease with which a first-time teacher candidate could navigate and find job advertisements, however a discussion of this barrier is outside the scope of this thesis,

confining the analyzed data to job advertisements retrieved specifically from divisional websites. Finally, it was determined that one school division, Seven Oaks, posted some specific positions externally prior to May 1, so a decision was made to broaden the research to April 1-June 30 2025. Unfortunately, in 2025, Seven Oaks School Division posted these advertisements even earlier, necessitating their exclusion from final analysis as there was not enough data available to provide an authentic comparison.

Administrative postings and French Immersion postings were excluded from analysis.

### **Analysis/Convening the Participants**

Both language and visuals used in job postings to attract candidates matter, as they implicitly indicate information about the cultural positionality of the organization. Specific to this context, visual tools and language has the potential to promote a worldview that is inclusive (or not) of Indigenous concepts of suitability, readiness, and belonging as central to assessment for employment.

Document analysis practices were applied. While varied in usage, document analysis generally seeks to examine textual data with the goal of creating knowledge (Bowen, 2009). In this case, the documents were examined through the accepted process of "skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation" (Bowen, 2009, p. 32), resulting in a research design that began with visual analysis of the postings, followed by linguistic analysis and, finally, coding.

Three types of coding approaches were applied to the linguistic analysis and presented in tables. The tables (see tables 4-7) display and correlate data about linguistic choices, frequency and pervasiveness of keywords, and how the data correlates to institutional positionality in the discussion of Indigenous teacher recruitment. In this study, document analysis is used to examine

the positionality, knowledge and other contextual information about the data spirit present in the selected job postings, in service of the research question, **"What type of text is used in teacher job postings to signal institutional cultural positionality in relation to Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing?"**

Thus, the selected job postings were interrogated for the words and symbols they contain and assessed through a multi-stage cross-cutting analysis to begin to hearken to the voice of the data spirit therein. The analysis process sought to discern patterns and meaning through first assessing visual cues in the job postings, particularly layout and visual attributes. Next, word count was assessed for patterns among school divisions and job type. Finally, keyword analysis was conducted to discern positionality of the data-spirit based on word choice.

An important characteristic of textual data is that it is non-reactive, that is, it is unchanged by the researcher's presence (Bowen, 2009, pp. 38-39). This does not assume neutrality of the documents but instead provides highly contextualized data pointing to the positionality of the data-spirit, without a relational interaction with the researcher as might be present in interviews or conversations. This presents both a benefit and a limitation of the proposed research. Nuanced and culturally inclusive indicators of a given school division cannot be expected to be fully integrated into every document produced, affecting the effectiveness of the material to create a portrait of the school division. However, containing research to job advertisements helpfully disallows some of the code-switching and fairweather tokenizing of Indigenous knowledges that I have personally encountered as a white-passing Métis educator. Because the job advertisements hold a monopoly on initial attempts at relationship with prospective employees, their explicit and implicit messaging of extreme importance even when compared to the other communication efforts put forth by school divisions.

Documents exist in relationship with their authors and readers. As Davie & Wyatt (2021) assured, "Documents do not exist in a vacuum but are produced by individuals and groups who have aims and motives. They are fashioned for specific purposes, for an intended audience, and often paint a picture of the authors' understanding of reality" (p. 246). Prior (2008) agreed, visioning documents as "active agents in the world...rather than a set of static and immutable 'things'" (p. 821). Carew (2018) also sought Indigenous relational concepts of qualitative research, and recalls discussions with Dr. Tom Cavanaugh, who conceptualized this as "experiencing the data" (as cited in Carew, 2018, p. 73), and prompted data analysis with, "We need to live with the data" and "What is the data telling us?" (as cited in in Carew, 2018, p. 72-73). These sources speak to the relevance of conceptualizing the data-spirit as a relational being, and one with whom a two-way relationship is possible.

In the visual analysis of teacher job postings, attention was given to how the design, layout, and imagery might reflect or obscure Indigenous worldviews. The analysis examined whether postings included symbols, images, or references to Indigenous cultures, communities, or land acknowledgments, and whether these elements were prominent or peripheral. Conversely, the absence of such visual elements was noted, as their absence represents a preference for text-only information and a lack of multi-modal communication. This visual analysis provided insight into how Indigenous values might be communicated—or neglected—through the presentation of teacher job postings.

For textual analysis three sets of tables were created: a) analyzing length (measured in word count); b) keyword analysis, and c) analysis of relational language.

Word count was identified as a viable data point as it conveys a willingness to disclose information, provides a sense of readability of the posting and a sense of potential implicit

barriers (e.g., extensive lists of ideal candidate requirements signaling what is the expected norm). A job posting that lists only the assignment and application procedures contains the bare minimum number of words, whereas a posting with a higher word count can be assumed to contain more information and therefore more information pertinent to the contextual landscape of the institution who created it. Lack of information can be interpreted to be indicative of assumptions of prior knowledge and familiarity with the position or school division on behalf of the candidate. Assumptions by omission presume culture and context are already understood by the candidate, raising questions of bias and cultural reproduction. Without contextual language, a candidate is left to only hope they conform to the unspoken norms of the division, and all power rests with the division in assessing that "fit", instead of providing the candidate with opportunity to highlight, tailor or reconceptualize their knowledge and experience to increase their chances of hitting that mark.

Alternatively, comprehensive lists of ideal candidate qualifications may signal efforts toward anti-bias practices in hiring. By making institutional culture and priorities explicit, a school division can minimize implicit bias in both the hiring committee and in the candidate themselves. By providing concise desired qualifications, a job posting provides navigation markers which allow a candidate to assess cultural matching, without relying on often biased assumptions.

However, simply making these qualifications and institutional cultural contexts explicit, does not necessarily serve an anti-biased outcome to the hiring process. Conversely, the content and language that makes up these postings may have the effect of making biases and cultural assumptions explicit, alienating groups of candidates. Word count alone is insufficient in

assembling data on positionality of the school divisions, even where much detail is presented. Thus, a keyword analysis was deemed essential to better understand and contextualize the data.

Keywords were selected from within the job postings based on the criteria that they presupposed a two (or more)-person relational context or signaled some kind of hierarchical or analytical competency. For example, the word "demonstrate" suggests one person demonstrating and another observing, while "target" suggests an analytical process that identifies and acts upon priorities based on performance metrics. Ball (2003) problematizes this notion of performativity within the teaching profession as one that devalues qualitative attributes and ideas of worthiness that are outside of the understandings within a capitalist private sector. Ball's (2003) observations and concerns are evidenced in the practices of teacher hiring as conceived through private-sector human resources norms, a problem also discussed by Brantlinger (2019). As relates to the present study, Ball (2003) specifically calls attention to the importance of language in this performativity-oriented landscape: "The new vocabulary of performance renders old ways of thinking and relating dated or redundant or even obstructive" (p. 218). If the performance measures are decidedly colonial, and, as Ball (2003) asserts "An organization will only spend money where measurable returns are likely to be achieved.", then Indigenous teachers and Indigenous values cannot possibly be seen as useful to the school division, illustrating the impact and importance of language used in job advertisements.

These considerations are important to identify as they speak to the expectations of the division regarding a teacher's skillset and also, when cross-referenced with word count data, the willingness of the data-spirit to be specific about what kinds of skills they most value. These expected skillsets communicate a worldview which can then be examined for biases and opportunities of intersection with Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

The keywords were identified, collected and then sorted according to the previously discussed categories of merit, suitability, belonging and expertise. As previously stated, these four categories were chosen for their ability to reveal assumptions about the nature of the relationships between school divisions, teachers and students. Understanding these assumptions helps to further clarify the worldview of the data-spirit.

Finally, these data were subjected to a cross-cutting analysis sorting the keywords into one of three categories: Indigenous Relational Keywords, Intersectional Relational Keywords, and Colonial Relational Keywords, in a bid to identify patterns between Merit, Suitability, Belonging and Expertise, and utility to convey different relational worldviews.

Throughout analysis, care was taken to respect both the inescapable colonial context of textual modes of communication as well as Indigenous perspectives and language. Thus, analysis sought to expose areas of convergence and divergence between epistemologies by first applying open coding to identify themes presented by word choice (Merit, Suitability, Belonging, Expertise), then assessing the broader context of how the language was used in individual job advertisements (Indigenous, Intersectional, Colonial). Taken together, this part of the analysis sought to begin to construct the identity of the data-spirit, so that we may engage with them in relationship and mutual desire for understanding.

This stage of analysis parallels a first meeting of a moccasin workshop group, during which we begin to learn about one another through working together on a common task. Early relationships strive for common understandings, and initial workshop "small talk" is important to identifying topics of shared interest even among diverse participants.

The "small talk" guiding keyword and thematic analysis of the data include:

- Who is the data-spirit? What do their words tell us about their identity?

- What do they value?
- Who do they assume they are speaking to, or how do they indicate assumptions about their intended audience?
- How do they offer, engage in, seek out, or value Indigenous cultural understandings?
- What opportunities are there for growing in relationship with the data-spirit?

These "small talk" moments of first introductions took place in the reading and re-reading of the gathered documents. Following the method of document analysis suggested by Bowen (2009), every posting was carefully read and initial patterns and gaps were noted. Keeping with the "small talk" guide above, the postings were questioned about their imagery, layout, and length. Impressions of assumptions and values were recorded by questioning the general tone and positionality used in the documents and formatted as charts.

### *Visual analysis*

#### **Imagery.**

Louis Riel School Division job postings include the divisional logo at top right, and a stylized geometric rainbow prism pattern at top left, which is feathered into the white background. This prism is repeated at bottom left, and the divisional motto, "Thriving learners ∞ Flourishing communities" is bottom right, with the infinity symbol presumably representing the Métis identity of the division's namesake.

## Fig 1.1

### *Louis Riel School Division job posting header*



This division's use of imagery adds some context to the postings. The prism graphic evokes thoughts of sunlight or of quilting, perhaps even a star blanket, which is constructed by many small pieces of fabric shaped like diamonds. Either way this produces some level of visual interest. The use of the infinity symbol within the divisional slogan will be immediately recognizable to those in the Métis community (and many outside of it also). Outside of this symbol, there are no other overtly Indigenous symbols or graphics, however it should be noted that both the prism and the Métis symbol have multiple possibilities for interpretation, making the imagery in this posting very accessible and inclusive of various cultures.

The visuals in these postings help to position the data-spirit as open to conversation and interpretation, and at least possibly ready to hear and embrace Indigenous ways of being, doing and knowing.

## Fig 1.2

### *Louis Riel School Division job posting footer*



Pembina Trails School Division job postings have no imagery. This lack of contextual cues mutes the voice of the data-spirit, suggesting a desire not to enter into conversation, or

perhaps a self-assuredness where positional justification or explanation isn't considered necessary.

St. James Assiniboia School Division job postings contain the divisional logo, name and motto, "Great Schools for Growing and Learning" at top centre. The logo is comprised of a circular seal in blue and yellow, and includes an airplane, water mill, and lamp, denoting location, history and commitment to learning respectively, according to the division's website (St. James Assiniboia School Division, 2019).

The seal of the division assumes a certain familiarity of symbol and heritage, and while the image of the water mill is meant to reference the Omand's Creek mill of Métis leader Cuthbert Grant, the symbolism isn't overtly Indigenous and gets lost without having any background historical knowledge. Similar to the dual meanings of Louis Riel School Division's use of the infinity symbol, St. James-Assiniboia has displayed a graphic which could be interpreted as a symbol of geography and history, or of specific Métis identity. This indicates at least a point of entry into conversation with the data-spirit, a place where we may begin a conversation around shared meanings and histories.

### **Fig 1.3**

*St. James Assiniboia School Division job posting header*




**St. James–Assiniboia School Division**  
*Great Schools for Growing and Learning*

## **Layout.**

Louis Riel School Division's job postings are arranged in a table format, where the position title is given the largest and darkest font. The next highest heading is the school name, in bold font and all caps. The application deadline is in bold font at the bottom of the document and above the graphic and motto. The sections of the document are clearly noted in deep red, all caps, bold text. Each section occupies its' own area of the table. The sections are: bulletin number, date posted, school, position description, required and preferred qualifications, application procedure, and application deadline. The posting provides a detailed description of desired attributes of applicants and professional and philosophical expectations of applicants.

**Fig 2.1**

*Louis Riel School Division sample job posting layout*

			
<h2>1.0 Senior High</h2>			
<b>BULLETIN NUMBER</b>	405/T/25	<b>DATE POSTED</b>	June 6, 2025
<b>SCHOOL</b>	NELSON MCINTYRE COLLEGIATE		
<b>SUBJECTS</b>	Gr. 12 English and Global Issues, Gr. 10 English, Geography, & Science		
<b>COMMENCING</b>	September 2, 2025		
POSITION DESCRIPTION			
<p>This teaching position requires an individual who embraces our divisional Multi Year Strategic Plan through collaboration and effective and inclusive educational practices that are student centred and data driven.</p> <p>We are looking for equity minded teachers who share Louis Riel School Division's philosophical beliefs. If you can see yourself as part of a group of educators who are visionaries, innovators, life-long learners, risk takers, student-focused thinkers, collaborators and team builders, you are encouraged to consider applying to be a part of the team.</p> <p>Please visit the school's website for more information.</p>			
RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES			
<p>Grounded in our Multi Year Strategic Plan and its commitment to decolonization, reconciliation, Indigenous ways of being, inclusion, and anti-racist/anti-oppressive/anti-bias pedagogies, the successful candidate will demonstrate their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice to develop and support communication and relationship skills with Students, Parents, and Colleagues.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Employs strategies to include student voice and choice.</li> <li>○ Effective communication with caregivers.</li> <li>○ Collaboration with colleagues.</li> <li>○ Managing conflict.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Practice to develop and implement an effective instructional process.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Demonstrates infusion of Indigenous ways of being and knowing.</li> <li>○ Demonstrates equity-centred practice and inclusive pedagogy.</li> <li>○ Demonstrates understanding of pedagogical practices that positively influence individual student learning such as differentiation.</li> <li>○ Demonstrates understanding of curriculum and use of data in planning.</li> <li>○ Demonstrates effective use of ICT as a teaching tool.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Practice to develop and implement effective assessment strategies.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Demonstrates use of learner centred assessment strategies.</li> <li>○ Demonstrates use of assessment data to inform instruction.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Commitment to professional development.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Demonstrates commitment to professional learning through the application of learning to their practice.</li> <li>○ Ability to make connections between MYP and their professional learning.</li> <li>○ Ability to critically reflect on practice to inform professional growth, particularly around inclusive programming.</li> <li>○ Demonstrates curiosity.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			
CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manitoba Teaching Certificate.</li> <li>• Satisfactory Criminal Record Check, including Vulnerable Sector Search.</li> <li>• Clear report from the Child Abuse Registry.</li> <li>• Respect In School or Commit to Kids certification.</li> <li>• Review and comply with divisional policies and guidelines.</li> </ul>			
APPLICATION PROCEDURE			
<p>The Louis Riel School Division is committed to employment equity and accessibility. We encourage applications from members of equity-seeking groups with diverse abilities, backgrounds, cultures, identities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply by using the LRSD online submission process at <a href="http://www.lrsd.net">www.lrsd.net</a>.</li> <li>• Include in your resume and cover letter your strengths and abilities and clearly define how you meet eligibility for the role.</li> <li>• Identify the names and contact information of three references.</li> <li>• Address cover letter and resume to Michelle Jean-Paul, Assistant Superintendent, Staff Services, Louis Riel School Division.</li> <li>• Quote the Bulletin Number on the application; a separate application is required for each job bulletin.</li> <li>• Upload your resume and cover letter as one document.</li> </ul> <p>We thank all applicants for their interest. Only those selected for further consideration will be contacted.</p>			
<b>APPLICATION DEADLINE</b>	4:00 p.m., Wednesday, June 11, 2025		
<p>LRSD.NET                      Thriving Learners ∞ Flourishing Communities  <small>900 St. Mary's Road   Winnipeg, Manitoba   R2M 3R3   Tel: 204.257.7827   Fax: 204.256.8553</small></p>			

This formatting is accessible, easy to read and guides the eye of the candidate through the text. Including some contextual information about the division in the "Position Description" field indicates not only that the data-spirit wants to invite others into the community, but that it wants to be known for who it is as well. This would be the right way to introduce oneself in many Indigenous cultures. Antoine et al. (2018) suggest an introduction that includes not only one's name, but also an ancestral place of origin (p. 29), with options to include the names of parents and grandparents. In beginning all job postings in Louis Riel School Division with contextual phrases, the hierarchical nature of education is flattened, inviting candidates to consider ways in which they may feel a sense of belonging there. In essence, the school division is introducing itself in the correct manner within an Indigenous context. To take this introduction a step further, the division might include a statement tying the history of the land and their namesake to their current vision, providing intergenerational continuity.

Pembina Trails School Division job postings are organized with a header including the division name and position title, including start date and document codes. Under the header is the heading "Job posting" in all caps and a horizontal rule denoting the beginning of the posting. The headings: Job Details and Applications Accepted are in bold, underline font, left justified and the sub-headings: title, posting ID, description, shift type, salary range, location, start date and end date are left justified, italicized text in a smaller size. The job title and associated codes are repeated three times on the page: Once in the header, once in the "Title" subheadings, and again, in larger font in the description. The school name is repeated in the Location and the Description subheadings. The most prominent text on the page is in red, bold, all caps font in the Description subheading, stating that **\*\*\*\*ALL UPLOADED FILES MUST BE IN PDF FORMAT\*\*\*\*** followed by further application instructions also in red. For classroom positions, the rest of the

description is comprised of the divisional accessibility and accommodation statements, and the reiterated position and school. For specialist and non-classroom teaching positions, additional descriptive information particular to the role is included in this area.

**Fig 2.2**  
*Pembina Trails School Division sample job posting layout*

**PEMBINA TRAILS SCHOOL DIVISION**  
**1.0 FTE Term, Grade 1/2 Classroom Teacher (274T BE) (09-25-274T BE)**

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**JOB POSTING**

**Job Details**

<i>Title</i>	1.0 FTE Term, Grade 1/2 Classroom Teacher (274T BE)
<i>Posting ID</i>	09-25-274T BE
<i>Description</i>	<p><b>***ALL UPLOADED FILES MUST BE IN PDF FORMAT*** Please include a PDF of your Manitoba Permanent Teaching Certificate and confirmation of completion of Commit 2 Kids or Respect in Schools training</b></p> <p>Pembina Trails School Division is committed to removing barriers to ensure employment opportunities are accessible for all applicants. If you require accommodation supports during the recruitment process, please contact: <a href="mailto:ao-humanresources-email@pembinatrails.ca">ao-humanresources-email@pembinatrails.ca</a></p> <p>Pembina Trails School Division is committed to the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. We encourage applications from members of equity-deserving groups with diverse abilities, backgrounds, cultures, and identities.</p> <p><b>1.0 FTE Term, Grade 1/2 Classroom Teacher</b>  <b>Effective: September 2, 2025 to June 30, 2026</b>  <i>Beaumont School</i></p>

<i>Shift Type</i>	Full-Time
<i>Salary Range</i>	PTTA Collective Agreement (available for viewing online)
<i>Location</i>	Beaumont School

**Applications Accepted**

<i>Start Date</i>	06/03/2025
<i>End Date</i>	06/06/2025


Page 1 of 1

The impersonal position of Pembina Trails School division that was first noted when examining imagery is also present textually. The red bolded text is somewhat jarring, communicating that the need to conform to particular file format is the most important information on the page. The lack of detail in the postings contributes to the impression that conformity is key to success, and that further qualities desired of teachers are considered self-evident, and thus unnecessary to publish. This is problematic when reminded that neutrality and meritocracy carry with them certain ideas of whiteness and colonialism. The absence of cultural cues or descriptions of job duties does not allow meaningful interaction with this data-spirit, instead seemingly insisting that they will be the judge of worthiness, as they know what a "good" teacher is. The problem here is that "good" is subjective, and culturally dependent.

St. James Assiniboia School Division job postings are organized with the logo, name and motto at centre top, followed by the statement, "Applications are invited for the following position:". There follows a small table which includes the Job number, school and subject/grade. The rest of the posting is comprised of a single sentence on eligibility, a hyperlink to apply for the position, further application processes, and the divisional diversity and accessibility statements. Like the other divisions, positions for specialist and non-classroom teachers contain additional information describing duties than do postings for classroom teachers.

**Fig 2.3**

*St. James Assiniboia School Division sample job posting layout*



**St. James–Assiniboia School Division**  
*Great Schools for Growing and Learning*

**Applications are invited for the following position:**

Job #	School	Subjects/Grades
26-96	Brooklands	<b>Grade 4/5</b> Part-time (50%) TERM approx. Sept-Dec 2025 or earlier depending upon return to work of teacher on leave

Candidates must possess a valid Manitoba Teacher's Certificate or be eligible to obtain said certificate.

**Please apply by clicking the link below:**  
[CLICK HERE TO APPLY FOR JOB 26-96](#)

**Application deadline is Wednesday, May 7, 2025 at 4:00 p.m.**

All applicants are thanked for their interest; however only applicants selected for an interview will be contacted. Employment is contingent upon the provision of clear Criminal Record and Child Abuse Registry checks.

*The St. James-Assiniboia School Division is proud to employ staff who represent the diverse community it serves and is committed to providing an inclusive and barrier free work environment. We value diversity in our workplace; hence, we invite and encourage applications from people that self identify as members of designated groups (Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, members of a visible minority, and women).*

*If you need to be accommodated during any phase of the hiring process, please contact Human Resources to request special accommodation. All information received relating to accommodation will be kept confidential.*

Similar to Pembina Trails, the St. James-Assiniboia School Division appears to consider the qualities of a "good" teacher to be self-evident, as the posting does not contain any specific expectations or cultural contextualization. The information is presented in a clean, simple hierarchy which prioritizes the most important information – the school name and teaching assignment – at the top. "Indigenous peoples" are mentioned as part of a "designated group", however no other mention of Indigenous identities, perspectives or practices are present.

### **Summary of Visual Analysis.**

The analysis examined whether postings included symbols, images, or references to Indigenous cultures, communities, land acknowledgments, and whether these elements were prominent or peripheral. Considerations about accessibility, readability and welcoming messages were also a focus. Based on the analysis and the reading and re-reading experience it became apparent that the visuals used in job postings impact the overall readability and communicate priorities of the school division.

Particularly the images and layout choices made by Louis Riel School Division communicate accessibility, welcome and readability through the clear hierarchy of headings, the attractive and colourful header and footer motifs, and the inclusion of a school motto that incorporates the Métis infinity symbol and the word "communities": itself a word which is coded as referencing belonging and Indigenous worldviews.

Pembina Trails School Division job posting layout is somewhat jarring, with the eye drawn to the all red, all caps note about ensuring PDF formatting of application materials even before the job title. The absence of any type of imagery or cultural indicator creates a detached feeling for the reader, and a feeling of being shouted at by the red text for reasons that

convenience the division and positions the applicant as someone about to do something wrong, before even applying for the position!

These are some reflections on how the visual landscape of a job posting have the potential to communicate welcoming, inclusive and approachable first impressions about the workplace. Considering the profession of teaching is one that requires constant upskilling and further learning, one would expect communications between divisions and prospective teachers would be one of welcome and growth.

### ***Textual Analysis***

#### **Length.**

It was during deeper reading that it became apparent the postings would need to be separated into three types, based on a strong correlation between word count and job type. The word count disparity between classroom teacher postings, specialist postings, and non-classroom teacher postings across all three divisions was noticeable, making an examination of word count necessary. For clarity, definitions of these three types of postings are provided below.

A classroom teacher is defined as a generalist, someone who teaches core subjects primarily in a traditional classroom settings. A specialist teacher teaches outside of a traditional classroom. This may be a music teacher, physical education teacher, vocational or industrial arts teacher or other specialty. A non-classroom role typically meets with individuals or small groups of students. These roles include reading clinicians, school counsellors, resource and support teachers.

The findings are summarized in the table that follows.

**Table 4***Average word count of job postings by division and position type*

School Division name	Average word count: classroom teachers	Average word count: specialist teachers	Average word count: non-classroom teachers
Louis Riel School Division	487	538	707
Pembina Trails School Division	173	289	649
St. James Assiniboia School Division	202	201*	240

\*Sample size: one posting in this category

Consistent across all divisions, the word count for classroom teachers was lowest, and for non-classroom it was highest. One reason for this disparity could be due to a need for wider levels of education and skills for non-classroom teachers. For example, many resource or student services roles require a Post-Baccalaureate or Master's degree. Relatedly, a specialist position such as Music or Physical Education requires a related undergrad degree, thus, these positions are not generally available to students who graduated from a direct-entry Bachelor of Education program. It is curious, however, that in two of three divisions studied, the roles for classroom teachers have virtually no qualifications listed. It can be argued that the qualifications of a classroom teacher are universal and therefore redundant in a job posting, however the omission also creates opportunity for biased assumptions, and provides no cultural or professional cues for a candidate to anticipate their working environment nor specific expectations of a particular school division. It also communicates an assumption that the details of each classroom job are essentially identical; an assumption any teacher would certainly disagree with.

The disparity in word count between these three categories of posting was universally and consistently due to the specificity of expected tasks outlined in the posting. Both Pembina

Trails School Division and St. James Assiniboia School Division have no job description nor desired applicant characteristics in classroom teacher postings. The word count, therefore, includes only the division, school and position name, application instructions and diversity and accessibility statements. Louis Riel School Division classroom teacher postings included desired characteristics and a statement of divisional culture. Expectations of candidates were also listed. Note, however, that these descriptors were largely identical across classroom teacher postings.

Word count is a necessary contextual data point, as it gives us some insight into how willing the data-spirit is to share about itself and its' expectations of candidates. It can be assumed that using more words results in conveying more context, or alternatively convey what the norms/expectations are, suggesting there are norms around “ideal candidate” and who may fit, creating implicit barriers for Indigenous applicants. Those assumptions were traced through keyword analysis. Like in a moccasin workshop, some people talk a lot but convey very little, and some people talk very little, but convey much by which words they choose. Thus, word count, images and layout alone are not enough to develop a portrait of the data-spirits of these school divisions, and a deeper analysis of language must be conducted.

### **Language.**

A broad analysis of language usage was conducted, assessing for patterns and tone within the postings. This was done prior to a detailed keyword analysis to allow for an overall impression of the personality and communication style of each data-spirit. In keeping with the research design, this stage of "small talk" is essential for learning about how the data-spirit approaches learning and how they conceive of their own positionality and experience. For this analysis, commonalities across all postings within each school division were exclusively

identified and assessed. Specific keyword analysis of each type of posting is addressed in the following section.

***Louis Riel School Division.***

Louis Riel School Division, with the highest word count of the three divisions, was consistent in emphasizing the type of candidate desired for the position, under the heading "Position Description". With some minor variation across postings, this statement read: "This teaching position requires an individual who embraces our divisional Multi Year Strategic Plan through collaboration and effective and inclusive educational practices that are student centred and data driven" (Louis Riel School Division, 2025). This statement assumes familiarity and agreement of the candidates with the divisional strategic plan. This again relates to Ball's (2003) findings on performativity in education. Adherence to, or, as in this job description – embracing of – a divisional document is a form of "manufacturing consensus" (Ball, 2003, p. 226) in which a teacher may feel they need to separate themselves into one who pledges allegiance without contextual familiarity or one who must perform allegiance even without context:

We are looking for equity minded teachers who share Louis Riel School Division's philosophical beliefs. If you can see yourself as part of a group of educators who are visionaries, innovators, life-long learners, risk takers, student-focused thinkers, collaborators and team builders, you are encouraged to consider applying to be a part of the team. (Louis Riel School Division, June 6, 2025)

Some of this language hearkens to neoliberal ideals of continuous improvement, measurement and productivity. This may appear "objective and hyper-rational" but "central to its functioning is the translation of complex social processes and events into simple figures or

categories of judgement" (Ball, 2003, p. 217). As discussed earlier, some of this language referring to performance indicators is contrary to Indigenous values.

Some postings included the additional phrase "the Division provides education to over 17,500 students in 41 schools in a predominantly residential and urban environment." (Louis Riel School Division, June 10, 2025), providing some additional context for consideration by the applicant.

In these paragraphs, the school division emphasizes the importance of relational positioning with prospective candidates. By explicitly illuminating desired characteristics of candidates and shared goals with the school division, St. James-Assiniboia School Division effectively places the candidate in relation before even applying for the position, allowing candidates to envision the community into which they may be hired. These statements reinforce Indigenous priorities of belonging and reciprocity, providing cues to candidates about the suitability of this community to welcome them.

Explicit mention of Indigenous priorities in the division are strongly emphasized in the "Responsibilities and duties" section of each job posting, further down the page. This section begins, "Grounded in our Multi Year Strategic Plan and its commitment to decolonization, reconciliation, Indigenous ways of being, inclusion, and anti-racist/anti-oppressive/anti-bias pedagogies, the successful candidate will demonstrate their..." (Louis Riel School Division, June 6, 2025). What follows is a bulleted list of job responsibilities and duties of an individual candidate, including expectations of collaboration, professional development, and curricular expertise.

This would have the effect of ensuring non-Indigenous candidates appreciate the expectations and priority of Indigenous education in the division and also may confer a sense

cultural safety to Indigenous candidates. However, the language "the successful candidate will demonstrate" signals a shift from shared responsibility and belonging to individual merit: a shift from Indigenous to more colonial value systems.

Language that denotes power and ownership of the division is sparse, however phrases such as "we are looking for" and "we encourage" as well as "our Multi Year Strategic Plan" create some hierarchical and custodial space between candidate and school division. These personal and possessive terms ("we" and "our") imply insider/outsider relationships. By using possessive and exclusive language, the school division communicates a particular society (and a norm) that an applicant is to conform to, suggesting that if accepted, the candidate becomes property of the Division. An alternative formatting would be to contextualize the culture of the division and allow the candidate to see themselves within it, instead of the Division as reducing candidates to specific attributes. While this may, indeed, be the goal of the hiring committees, the language used to convey this goal is deserving of scrutiny.

In Louis Riel School Division's postings, there are also examples of language that denotes teamwork, belonging, shared responsibility. Phrases such as "teachers who share Louis Riel School Division's philosophical beliefs", "part of a group of educators", "part of the team", and "collaboration with colleagues" communicate a desire to welcome, and therefore a desire to create belonging, among new hires and existing staff. This, again, is helpful in communicating cultural safety and a holistic vision of "fit" which pushes back at meritocratic hiring language.

In longer job postings, such as those for specialist and non-classroom positions, the additional language remains neutral, generally comprising a list of duties.

***Pembina Trails School Division.***

Though Louis Riel School Division includes descriptions for every position, Pembina Trails School Division does not include such descriptions in classroom teacher postings. Each posting does include a diversity and accessibility statement, using language such as "committed to removing barriers". This is also common phrasing in education when discussing leading students to learning. When using this language regarding students, the concepts of "barriers to learning" are conceptualized as those a teacher must identify and strategize to overcome. When applied to recruitment, the responsibility for identifying them would necessarily fall upon the candidate, as there is no prior relationship during which these barriers may be discovered in other ways.

The postings do not include the word "we" as in Louis Riel postings, suggesting a more impersonal institutional identity of the division and also avoiding creating an us/them position while reinforcing the detached, mute voice of this data-spirit as seen in the other textual and visual analysis above.

***St. James Assiniboia School Division.***

St. James Assiniboia School Division, like Pembina Trails, does not include descriptions or contextual information in classroom teacher postings. Within the diversity and accessibility statements can be found "The St. James Assiniboia School Division is proud to employ staff who represent the diverse community it serves", "we value", and "we invite", suggesting the school division occupies a place different from that of the candidate, but invites the candidate into community.

While more attractive, visually, than Pembina Trails, nevertheless St. James Assiniboia School Division job postings lack depth of contextual information that would help an Indigenous candidate anticipate understanding and cultural safety.

This disparity in word count illuminates the data-spirit's willingness to share and disclose cultural and contextual information about itself, or simply that it values words which may or may not convey important information. Word count doesn't necessarily impart information about the quality of those words, however, making keyword analysis another vital data point.

### **Keyword analysis.**

Continuing with Bowen's (2009) method, the postings were read again, this time highlighting and cataloging all keywords that denoted merit (defined as quantitative attributes and goals), suitability (defined as indications of fit, culture and positionality of the school division), belonging (defined as being part of something, or in relationship with something/someone), and (defined as skills). As discussed in the previous chapter, these four categories were chosen following this stage of deep reading due to their ability to encompass all available keywords denoting relationship between people and/or ideas and concepts, while providing an array of interpretation through both Indigenous and colonial lenses.

The keywords were recorded, and then the postings were reverse-searched for the identified keywords to reduce the possibility of errors and omissions. Noticing consistent disparities between postings for classroom teachers, postings for specialists such as music, art, physical education or industrial arts; and postings for non-classroom roles such as teacher-librarians and various resource and support roles, these three types of posting were considered separately.

A summary chart of the identified keywords follows.

**Table 5**

*Keywords*

<b>Merit: quantifiable attributes and goals</b>		<b>Suitability: indications of fit</b>		<b>Belonging: being part of something, or in relationship with someone/something</b>		<b>Expertise: skills</b>	
administer	assessment	celebrate	champion	citizenship	collaborate	accommodate	advocate
data/evidence	deliver	culturally-responsive	decolonization	collective	community	coach	consult
demonstrate	employ	embody	empower	contribute	co-plan	coordinate	communicate
enhance	ensure	encourage	equity	co-teach	engage	conflict	connect with
evaluate	give	experiential	hands-on	family	interpersonal	management	nature
high yield	identify	help/assist	holistic	inclusive/inclusion	liaise	create	design
implement	integrate	identity-affirming	lead/leader	member	participate/participate	develop	differentiate
intervention	influence	promote	recognize	partner	part of a group	facilitate	foster
legislation	manage	reconciliation	restorative	relationship	role	Indigenous perspectives	land-based
match	observe	safe(ly)	self-determination	/relational		mentor	model
off-site/off-campus	operationalize	strengths-based	student-focused/centred	team	work with	nurture	practice
outcome	policy	trauma-informed	well-being	wraparound		project-based	responsive
program	prove					support	sustain
provide	service					teach	
take	target						
ownership							
triangulation	use/utilize						

***Keyword distribution by division and posting type.***

Each school division and posting type was then considered separately, recording the instances of each category of keyword. To enable comparison between school divisions and posting types, the data is presented as a) the percentage of postings containing the keyword and b) the average iterations of the keyword category per posting. This was deemed necessary in order to contextualize the data. Simply discussing the prevalence of various keywords without contextualizing their frequency of use would present an incomplete description of their usage, thus this percentage-based and numerical tabulation was deemed essential. Overall sample size was also recorded.

**Table 6.1***Louis Riel School Division keyword frequency and usage*

		<b>Merit</b>	<b>Suitability</b>	<b>Belonging</b>	<b>Expertise</b>
<b>Classroom positions (n=37)</b>  <b>Avg word count: 487</b>	<b>% of postings containing at least one keyword</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%
	<b>Number of unique keywords</b>	5	2	9	7
	<b>Average number of keywords per posting in which any appear, including repetitions</b>	23.3	9.8	12.2	18.9
<b>Specialist positions (n=15)</b>  <b>Avg word count: 538</b>	<b>% of postings containing at least one keyword</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%
	<b>Number of unique keywords</b>	7	2	9	8
	<b>Average number of keywords per posting in which any appear, including repetitions</b>	25.8	6.5	12.2	19.3
<b>Non-classroom positions (n=19)</b>  <b>Avg word count: 707</b>	<b>% of postings containing at least one keyword</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%
	<b>Number of unique keywords</b>	10	9	18	13
	<b>Average number of keywords per posting in which any appear, including repetitions</b>	31.4	19.2	30.5	35.7

**Table 6.2***Pembina Trails School Division keyword frequency and usage*

		<b>Merit</b>	<b>Suitability</b>	<b>Belonging</b>	<b>Expertise</b>
<b>Classroom positions (n=65)</b>	<b>% of postings containing at least one keyword</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Avg word count: 173</b>	<b>Number of unique keywords</b>	0	0	0	0
	<b>Average number of keywords per posting in which any appear, including repetitions</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Specialist positions (n=7)</b>	<b>% of postings containing at least one keyword</b>	71%	71%	71%	71%
<b>Avg word count: 289</b>	<b>Number of unique keywords</b>	6	3	5	9
	<b>Average number of keywords per posting in which any appear, including repetitions</b>	2.8	2	1.8	4.8
<b>Non-classroom positions (n=20)</b>	<b>% of postings containing at least one keyword</b>	95%	95%	95%	95%
<b>Avg word count: 649</b>	<b>Number of unique keywords</b>	19	7	13	17
	<b>Average number of keywords per posting in which any appear, including repetitions</b>	25.4	7.9	15.2	24.7

**Table 6.3***St. James Assiniboia School Division keyword frequency and usage*

		<b>Merit</b>	<b>Suitability</b>	<b>Belonging</b>	<b>Expertise</b>
<b>Classroom positions (n=6)</b>	<b>% of postings containing at least one keyword</b>	0%	0%	0%	17%
	<b>Number of unique keywords</b>	0	0	0	1
	<b>Average number of keywords per posting in which any appear, including repetitions</b>	0	0	0	2
<b>Specialist positions (n=1)</b>	<b>% of postings containing at least one keyword</b>	0%	0%	0	0
	<b>Number of unique keywords</b>	0	0	0	0
	<b>Average number of keywords per posting in which any appear, including repetitions</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Non-classroom positions (n=3)</b>	<b>% of postings containing at least one keyword</b>	100%	33%	33%	100%
	<b>Number of unique keywords</b>	6	2	1	5
	<b>Average number of keywords per posting in which any appear, including repetitions</b>	3	2	1	5.3

The tables above begin to illustrate some trends in communication and language among the studied job postings. Consistent between school divisions is that there are more selected keywords used in non-classroom positions than in other categories. Also, the use of keywords in classroom postings is consistently the lowest. This may indicate less attention being paid to specific skills of classroom teachers, an understanding or assumption that all classroom teachers are equipped with some unwritten baseline level of common skills, or some other factor is affecting the specificity of classroom teacher job postings. Even in Louis Riel School Division, which abundantly uses keywords in their classroom postings, the postings themselves are largely identical despite differences of subject, grade level and school. Considering the overwhelming emphasis in education literature regarding contextualized learning and the importance of relationships in knowledge acquisition, it may be beneficial to consider school-, subject- and grade-specific context cues in classroom job postings.

The above pattern evident throughout all job postings communicates that the data spirit of all three school divisions takes for granted that the role of a classroom teacher is generally homogenous in expectations and also that this homogeneity is generally understood and accepted by applicants also. This, therefore, also infers certain understandings of the candidate can be taken for granted and serves to support the existence of an "ideal candidate". In order to meet the division's unspoken requirements, this would need to be a candidate who has had a similar schooling experience to the offered position and an inherent and common understanding of the role of a classroom teacher. This assumption on the part of the school division is problematic and sets up certain candidates for failure not through a lack of ability, but due to a diversity of educational experience, beliefs and understandings. This sets the stage for an incredibly biased recruitment process, disallowing diverse candidates the opportunity to prepare sufficiently and

denying the division the diversity needed in our schools. Though the scantily-worded classroom teacher postings may be due to the workload of describing important contextual information about school, neighbourhood or strategic goals of the community in dozens or hundreds of postings, they nonetheless have the potential to alienate and disadvantage diverse candidates.

This lack of position-specific contextual information suggests an assumed neutrality in the hiring division. This is problematic due to the historic and present reinforcement of colonial values being the neutral or default mode of educational delivery, with all other cultures being subject to "accommodation" within. Without explicit or at least intersectional points of entry for an Indigenous teacher candidate to specifically see themselves as not only welcome, but fully belonging and valued, reinforces the unspoken expectation that all teachers conform to colonial norms. Indigenous knowledges and perspectives appear only as desired traits in postings specifically for Indigenous cultural positions and are not emphasized in other postings except in language which tolerates Indigenous viewpoints such as "reconciliation" or "anti-racist", again assuming a colonial positionality of the candidate.

Contextualized, community-based relational learning is central to Indigenous education concepts, adding further support for this type of language usage. Suggestions for opening the language to include that which welcomes Indigenous candidates can be deduced by further analysis of the postings. The inventorying and sorting of keywords according to merit, belonging, suitability and expertise only brings us partway to understanding the motivation and desires of the data spirit.

### **Relational language inventory.**

Cross-cutting analysis was then conducted, re-sorting specific keywords that referred to Indigenous, intersectional, and colonial concepts. As defined in the previous chapter, keywords

and short phrases were collected that denoted any relationship between people or things. These were then catalogued into one of the three categories, mentioned above. This resulted in a reduced list of keywords and yielded interesting results.

It is noteworthy that the word choices such as "Indigenous perspectives" vs. "Indigenous ways of being/knowing/doing", where one is passive and vague, and the other is active and specific are relevant to job postings. Yet the latter does not appear in the postings at all. Thus, "Indigenous perspectives" was eliminated from the list of words below as it does not meet the required relational criteria for inclusion in this stage of analysis. Similarly, "decolonization" had to be removed, as it was not present. "Reconciliation" was included.

Despite an assumption that "merit" could only be recognized as a colonial term, it nevertheless also covers such keywords as "integrate", "match", and "enhance". While these keywords could be used to define a colonial perspective on merit, they may also be used in an Indigenous context by suggesting understanding of group dynamics and ways in which individuals contribute to them. Additionally, the keyword "provide" could be conceptualized as colonial (to prescribe), or Indigenous (to contribute).

Despite the concept of "belonging" as central to Indigenous epistemologies, the actual word "belonging" appears in none of the examined postings. Nor do words such as "ceremony" or "reciprocity" nor any of their derivatives. Aside from boilerplate diversity statements which name Indigenous people as one homogeneous group, no postings attempt to discuss nor contextualize Indigenous experience. Land acknowledgement statements were not included on the postings either. Diversity statements were on each posting, and are examined below.

The statements from Louis Riel School Division and Pembina Trails are very similar. "The Louis Riel School Division is committed to employment equity and accessibility. We

encourage applications from members of equity-seeking groups with diverse abilities, backgrounds, cultures, identities" (Louis Riel School Division, June 6 2025) and "Pembina Trails School Division is committed to the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. We encourage applications from members of equity-deserving groups with diverse abilities, backgrounds, cultures, and identities" (Pembina Trails School Division, 2025).

In these statements Indigenous groups are not clearly mentioned and thus invisible. They are merged into equity-seeking category without recognizing the unique position Canadian Indigenous peoples held in Canada. By collapsing Indigenous identities into a generalized diversity framework, the postings risk erasing the historical and ongoing obligations that school divisions in Manitoba specifically have to Indigenous communities. This erasure is well documented as harmful. Maulucci & Moore (2015) caution that this deletion of specific groups works towards "reifying injustices or asserting our power in ways that further the marginalization or invisibility of our participants" (p. 3).

Specific to an Indigenous context, this type of erasure "essentially glosses over the diverse experiences, cultures, and nations into one conglomerate generic group which may not be truly representative of any specific Native Nation" (BlackDeer, 2023). This approach also reflects a Eurocentric equity model that positions inclusion as a matter of fairness or representation, rather than as a responsibility to uphold Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and knowledge systems.

St. James Assiniboia's diversity statement is the following: "The St. James Assiniboia School Division is proud to employ staff who represent the diverse community it serves and is committed to providing an inclusive and barrier free work environment. We value diversity in our workplace; hence, we invite and encourage applications from people that self identify as

members of designated groups (Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, members of a visible minority, and women)" (St. James Assiniboia School Division, 2025).

This diversity statement includes specifics regarding which "designated groups" are being referred to. This listing is preferable to the all-in-one "equity-deserving" or "equity-seeking" terminology used in the previous two examples, however conspicuously omits LGBTQIA2S+ candidates, illustrating the double-edged sword that is at the heart of decisions surrounding naming specific groups. In this instance, the umbrella "Indigenous" term can be forgiven, as a job posting is not geographically constrained, and listing all possible Indigenous identities would be inarguably impractical and result in some other erasure by omission.

Each diversity statement is slightly different, with a striking similarity between Louis Riel and Pembina Trails School Divisions' statements. St. James Assiniboia School Division is the only one to explicitly name Indigenous peoples as a group, making them visible and included.

Louis Riel School Division is to be commended for including some contextual waymarkers by which prospective employees may orient themselves, such as "student centred", "equity-minded", "collaborators" (Louis Riel School Division, June 6 2025) however the literature points to a need for specific geographical and cultural touchstones absent from the examined job postings (Thompson, 2011). Therefore, a particular missed opportunity is the lack of a statement providing information on Winnipeg as a place of great importance, both historically and presently, to Indigenous people, and a place where rural and northern Indigenous teachers may find cultural continuity, community and identity-affirming experiences.

The following table shows keywords sorted into three columns: Indigenous Relational, Intersectional Relational, and Colonial Relational keyword. Each keyword is accompanied by a

symbol denoting its type: †Merit, <sup>Δ</sup>Suitability, <sup>Ω</sup>Belonging, or <sup>§</sup>Expertise. The school divisions and posting types are denoted by abbreviations: LR (Louis Riel School Division) PT (Pembina Trails School Division) and SJ (St. James Assiniboia School Division). The types of posting are distinguished by the codes C (classroom) S (specialist), and NC (non-classroom). The numerical value is a percentage of postings containing each keyword, separated by type and school division.

**Table 7**

*Relational Language in job posting*

Relational Keyword	Type	LR	PT	SJ	Intersectional relational keyword	Type	LR	PT	SJ	Colonial relational keyword	Type	LR	PT	SJ
citizenship <sup>Ω</sup>	C	8	-	-	advocate <sup>§</sup>	C	-	-	-	accommodate <sup>§</sup>	C	-	-	-
	S	7	-	-		S	-	-	-		S	-	-	-
	NC	-	-	-		NC	63	-	-		NC	-	15	-
collaborate <sup>Ω</sup>	C	100	-	-	coach <sup>§</sup>	C	-	-	-	administer <sup>†</sup>	C	-	-	-
	S	100	29	-		S	-	-	-		S	-	-	-
	NC	95	95	-		NC	-	90	-		NC	-	85	-
collective efficacy <sup>Ω</sup>	C	-	-	-	consult <sup>§</sup>	C	-	-	-	assess(ment) <sup>†</sup>	C	100	-	-
	S	-	-	-		S	-	-	-		S	100	43	-
	NC	20	-	-		NC	-	90	-		NC	32	95	-
communicate <sup>§</sup>	C	100	-	-	coordinate <sup>§</sup>	C	-	-	-	deliver <sup>†</sup>	C	-	-	-
	S	93	29	-		S	87	43	-		S	-	14	-
	NC	37	5	-		NC	58	95	-		NC	63	5	-
community <sup>Ω</sup>	C	11	-	-	demonstrate <sup>†</sup>	C	89	-	-	empower <sup>Δ</sup>	C	-	-	-
	S	7	-	-		S	93	14	-		S	-	-	-
	NC	74	-	-		NC	100	5	-		NC	21	-	-
connect with nature <sup>§</sup>	C	8	-	-	differentiate/individualize <sup>§</sup>	C	100	-	-	encourage <sup>Δ</sup>	C	-	-	-
	S	7	-	-		S	93	14	-		S	-	-	-
	NC	-	-	-		NC	95	90	67		NC	5	-	-
contribute <sup>Ω</sup>	C	-	-	-	facilitate <sup>§</sup>	C	8	-	-	evaluate <sup>†</sup>	C	-	-	-
	S	-	-	-		S	7	-	-		S	-	-	-
	NC	63	20	-		NC	89	90	-		NC	-	20	-
co-plan <sup>Ω</sup>	C	-	-	-	foster <sup>§</sup>	C	-	-	-	influence <sup>†</sup>	C	89	-	-
	S	-	-	-		S	-	-	-		S	93	-	-
	NC	89	-	-		NC	89	15	-		NC	95	-	-
co-teach <sup>Ω</sup>	C	-	-	-	give <sup>†</sup>	C	-	-	-	nurture <sup>§</sup>	C	8	-	-
	S	-	-	-		S	-	-	-		S	7	-	-
	NC	89	90	-		NC	11	-	33		NC	-	-	-
engage <sup>Ω</sup>	C	8	-	-	guide <sup>§</sup>	C	-	-	-	policy <sup>†</sup>	C	89	-	-
	S	7	57	-		S	-	-	-		S	93	-	-
	NC	100	-	-		NC	16	20	33		NC	100	95	-
family <sup>Ω</sup>	C	-	-	-	help/assist <sup>Δ</sup>	C	-	-	-	prove <sup>†</sup>	C	-	-	-
	S	13	-	-		S	-	14	-		S	7	29	-

	NC	11	85	-		NC	5	25	33		NC	16	95	66
integrate <sup>†</sup>	C	-	-	-	intervention <sup>†</sup>	C	-	-	-					
	S	-	-	-		S	-	-	-					
	NC	84	-	-		NC	-	85	33					
interpersonal <sup>Ω</sup>	C	-	-	-	lead(er) <sup>Δ</sup>	C	-	-	-					
	S	-	-	-		S	-	-	-					
	NC	5	-	-		NC	89	95	-					
inclusive <sup>Ω</sup>	C	100	-	-	manage <sup>†</sup>	C	-	-	-					
	S	100	14	-		S	-	-	-					
	NC	100	90	-		NC	63	75	-					
land-based <sup>§</sup>	C	-	-	-	mentor <sup>§</sup>	C	-	-	-					
	S	-	-	-		S	-	-	-					
	NC	11	-	-		NC	84	90	-					
liaise <sup>Ω</sup>	C	-	-	-	model <sup>§</sup>	C	8	-	-					
	S	-	-	-		S	7	14	-					
	NC	68	5	-		NC	74	95	-					
member <sup>Ω</sup>	C	-	-	-	observe <sup>†</sup>	C	-	-	-					
	S	-	-	-		S	-	-	-					
	NC	74	25	-		NC	-	85	-					
participate <sup>Ω</sup>	C	-	-	-	promote <sup>Δ</sup>	C	-	-	-					
	S	-	-	-		S	-	-	-					
	NC	21	85	-		NC	68	20	-					
partnership <sup>Ω</sup>	C	8	-	-	provide <sup>†</sup>	C	-	-	-					
	S	-	-	-		S	7	29	-					
	NC	74	5	-		NC	16	95	66					
part of a group <sup>Ω</sup>	C	89	-	-	recognize <sup>Δ</sup>	C	-	-	-					
	S	93	-	-		S	-	-	-					
	NC	100	95	-		NC	5	-	-					
reconciliation <sup>Δ</sup>	C	100	-	-	service <sup>†</sup>	C	8	-	-					
	S	93	-	-		S	7	-	-					
	NC	37	-	-		NC	-	90	33					
relationship <sup>Ω</sup>	C	89	-	-	support <sup>§</sup>	C	89	-	33					
	S	93	14	-		S	93	57	-					
	NC	37	-	-		NC	100	95	100					
responsive <sup>§</sup>	C	-	-	-	teach <sup>§</sup>	C	-	2	-					
	S	-	-	-		S	-	29	-					
	NC	84	-	-		NC	5	15	-					
restorative <sup>Δ</sup>	C	-	-	-										
	S	-	-	-										
	NC	11	-	-										
student-focused/student-centred <sup>Δ</sup>	C	100	-	-										
	S	100	-	-										
	NC	100	-	-										
team <sup>Ω</sup>	C	100	-	-										
	S	100	-	-										
	NC	100	95	-										
work with <sup>Ω</sup>	C	-	-	-										
	S	-	-	-										
	NC	5	85	33										

This table illuminates where keywords of different value and utility are being used by school divisions, and how pervasively. This is useful information in helping to identify some opportunities to leverage the already-present patterns in the language to explore possibilities for enhancing how it may potentially be understood by Indigenous candidates. Based on the table above, across all usages (merit, suitability, belonging, expertise), the largest number of keywords can be coded as Indigenous (2-way relational) context. Interestingly, only one word in the Indigenous column, "integrate", is from the "merit" category, and most words are from "belonging". This presents exciting opportunities for attaching more explicitly Indigenous language and characteristics of successful candidates. In relating to the research question, the cumulative effects of the "small talk" have been to discover that the participants already have many of the requisite skills and attitudes needed for success, but may need some assistance in understanding how to apply them in this context. To use the moccasin-making workshop analogy, these participants have all threaded a needle before, they have all seen others making moccasins, and they all have some experience in creating and assembling other projects. The data shown in the table tells us there is fertile ground for growth and ample opportunity to enrich existing information through further education and discovery.

When intersectional keywords are examined, there are a few more "merit" words, and a strong mix between the other three. There are fewer of these words as compared to the Indigenous-coded words.

Colonial relational keywords feature "merit" category words, but also include some in "suitability" and in "expertise". This group of words is the least numerous, suggesting less importance placed on these types of top-down relationships. This is another encouraging

sentiment from the data-spirit as it illustrates a cultural philosophy embedded in many beliefs which are common in Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing also.

Within each school division are patterns of usage also, with obvious disparity between classroom, non-classroom and specialist roles. This is where we may begin to tease out the individual voices of each division's data spirit.

Louis Riel School Division consistently uses the most keywords of the divisions analyzed. Of these, most of the keywords appear in non-classroom and specialist roles, although it should be noted that this is the only division to use keywords at all in classroom roles. In Pembina Trails and St. James Assiniboia School Divisions, there are no instances of relational keywords at all in classroom positions. St. James Assiniboia uses no keywords in specialist positions either, and very few in non-classroom positions. Pembina Trails School Division, however, includes keywords in 71% of specialist positions and 95% of non-classroom positions.

It is problematic that the non-classroom roles are the ones that contain the most keywords to do with relationships and relationality, as especially non-classroom roles are sometimes less engaged with students and more engaged with adults. There may be several reasons for this.

This may be because administrators will be interacting more with people in these roles, and therefore have a finer understanding of the relational demands of the job because those demands include relationships with administrators themselves. It may be that teachers in these roles work with smaller numbers of more vulnerable students and require more training and experience. It may be that these positions are crafted by different people than classroom postings – consultants instead of administrators, for example.

Regardless of the reason, the influence on the data spirit is clear - Louis Riel School Division is leaning to ensure the candidate understands the culture and priorities of the division.

Despite using a boilerplate template for classroom positions, this boilerplate nevertheless includes references to being part of a team and an emphasis on reconciliation and inclusion. This is analogous to a workshop participant who has some information to share, some experiences to chat about, and is issuing an invitation to candidates that they would also share their priorities and philosophies.

St. James Assiniboia School Division uses few keywords, and of those, only in non-classroom positions. As a workshop participant, this division may have extensive knowledge but they are not open to sharing it, preferring instead to let others talk and decide for themselves whether or not they fit. This doesn't mean they will be less successful in their outcome, but it does mean they may turn off some candidates from venturing further. Without clear cultural or philosophical touchstones, it is impossible to anticipate what the workplace will be like, and whether or not there will be obvious cultural safety and inclusion.

Finally, Pembina Trails School Division, with their off-putting big red warning and no keywords for classroom teachers, does include keywords for 71% of specialist positions and 95% of non-classroom positions. This suggests they value relational qualities and skills in these roles more than in classroom roles, or that there is a presupposition of understanding of the responsibilities of a classroom teacher. However, the true reason for this discrepancy is not detailed in the literature nor made clear on the divisional websites, leaving only questions about why this pattern exists.

With this high level of keyword inclusion for specialists and non-classroom teachers, this workshop participant is skilled enough to engage in the moccasin lessons, but perhaps a bit more hesitant when it comes to ensuring everyone else feels welcome.

While this discussion between participants is ongoing, we come to realize we now have the necessary information and materials to begin to assemble our project – constructing meaning and utility from the data as moccasins are constructed from leather, fur and beads.

***Summary of Key Findings.***

Analysis of the documents was analogous to a "small talk" session at the beginning of a moccasin workshop. During this phase of analysis initial patterns were observed and identified. Having taken the time to get to know the data-spirit of each selected school division, it is now possible to make introductions in more detail, based on the information provided through data analysis, in service of the research question: **What type of text is used in teacher job postings to signal institutional cultural positionality in relation to Indigenous ways of Knowing being and doing?**

Overall, the data indicated that the research structure was effective in answering the research question through document analysis. It was possible to situate and converse with the school divisions as data-spirits in relation to their positionality revealed through this analysis. Each division is examined separately below, and a brief discussion of overall findings follows.

The abundant literature finding that public education privileges and perpetuates colonial hierarchies throughout its' organizational structure is evident in this conversation with these data-spirits, but it is by no means homogenously represented among school divisions. This is consistent with findings from the literature which affirm the colonial underpinnings of education and teacher recruitment (Abawi, 2021; FitzMaurice, 2011; Godlewska, 2010; Lyiscott et al., 2018; Moon, 2014). The data does suggest, however, that there is opportunity to explore and expand in areas of confluence between colonial and Indigenous worldviews in education, if these various data-spirits can be made to interact to learn from and guide one another.

Though there are varying results regarding the evidence of Indigenous positionality in the job postings examined, these are still not overtly oriented to Indigenous worldviews. In fact, the structure of the analysis provided a generous method of assessing positionality, allowing for even intersectional views to be perceived as a somewhat decolonial perspective. That the data must be treated with this level of sensitivity speaks to the work that still needs to be done. This is an important reminder of the distance between Indigenous worldviews and colonial education, despite the known harm and added emotional and professional workload of BIPOC teachers experiencing "white sanctioning" (Miller, 2016).

Because education in its current form is built upon and reinforces colonial structures and values, it can hardly be surprising that reorienting the positionality of job postings to reflect a non-colonial worldview would prove difficult, if not impossible. This is evident in other instances of Indigenous integration in textual education documents. For example, recent curricular updates in Manitoba have attempted to integrate Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews, with varying success. A recently announced new grade 12 Social Studies course, Land and Treaties, has just been released. Many of the topics and outcomes of this course could be integrated across senior years Social Studies curricula, if only curricula were structured in a way so as not to exclude those viewpoints by design.

Thus, it is with an open heart and an understanding of history that we are introduced to our data-spirits.

**Pembina Trails School Division as data-spirit.**

This school division's data-spirit is deeply affected by the shouting red script at the top of each job posting:

**\*\*\*ALL UPLOADED FILES MUST BE IN PDF FORMAT\*\*\* Please include a PDF of your Manitoba Permanent Teaching Certificate and confirmation of completion of Commit 2 Kids or Respect in Schools training**

It is as though upon being invited into a space to deliver a workshop, the first thing they do is yell at me to stay off the rug with my shoes, when I hadn't yet even crossed the threshold of the doorway. They may mean well in an attempt to streamline the process and save work for themselves, but they give an unfriendly first impression.

With little other text on postings for classroom positions, the effect is somewhat alienating and disorienting. Continuing the analogy above, it is as though attempts at pleasant small talk are rebuffed and little is shared about the Division's positionality or personality, limiting the ways in which we may get to know one another at this early stage and leaving me (the candidate) wondering if I am truly welcome or being assessed against unseen and unexpressed criteria. This aligns with evidence in the literature of the expectation of Indigenous teachers and job applicants to be able to code-switch or filter their responses to conform to colonial norms of acceptance (Gillies, 2017; Settle & Jones).

In contrast to these classroom teacher postings, Pembina Trails is somewhat more forthcoming when discussing specialist positions. The wordcount nearly doubles to 289, and the appearance of keywords jumps from 0 to appearing in 71% of postings. This has the effect of communicating that the Division values specialist teachers specific strengths and abilities more than those of classroom teachers, and that the gifts and experiences of specialist teachers are more unique than those required by classroom teachers. In essence, they warm up to a discussion of specialist teachers.

Like the other participants, Pembina Trails has the most willingness to discuss the details and virtues of non-classroom teachers, that is, the job postings for these positions have the

highest word count and the highest number of keywords. For non-classroom teacher postings, the word count doubles again, to 649, and keywords appear in 95% of these postings.

If I have made it as far as crossing the threshold and removing my shoes, I begin to understand my quest for friendly small-talk is best served in conversations about specialist and non-classroom roles.

However, the lack of communication about classroom teachers does not equate to a lack of information. On the contrary, the dearth of keywords, descriptions, or contextual information about the division or position conveys much about the positionality of the Division. Instead of illustrating the desired characteristics of candidates and welcoming culture of the schools, the division assumes a neutral and "level playing field". But as discussed in previous chapters, a "level playing field" is in fact a guise for implicit bias and unspoken norms to influence decision-making (Abawi, 2018, 2020; Brantlinger, 2019; Kohli, 2018).

By omitting contextualizing information, the Division has positioned itself within a colonial positionality of meritocratic and colour-blind hiring practices. This is unsurprising, as it is status quo within education hiring systems, but research demonstrates how this status quo may be perpetuating colonial aspirations, or even enact harm (Gonzalez, 2022, p. 77) by devaluing culturally inclusive practices and culturally diverse candidates.

This positionality is confirmed by the analysis of the types of keyword used. Pembina Trails heavily favours keywords coded by merit or expertise, using them at a rate of double or triple those denoting suitability or belonging. At first glance this may seem discouraging, if looking for pathways for Indigenous employment opportunity. But further analysis of these keywords shows most – 20 unique keywords – are intersectional-relational and 15 are Indigenous-relational. Only seven are colonial-relational. This provides information about shared

understandings and opportunities for finding common ground between Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers and readers of job postings in Pembina Trails School Division.

In summary, while Pembina Trails does favour meritocratic language, it is used in ways that provide opportunity to highlight Indigenous concepts of relationality and belonging, though is not yet doing so in any fulsome way, especially in classroom postings. As a participant in a workshop, I would be intrigued by this student. They are highly skilled and knowledgeable, but not aware of how those skills and knowledges can be presented and applied in ways that appeal to Indigenous people and create a sense of acknowledgement and belonging.

One challenge of engaging a student like this is helping them to recognize this intersectional common ground as unthreatening to their current worldview. This need for sensitive treatment is seen in the literature when discussing issues of white sanctioning and gatekeeping and must be done carefully so as not to threaten those in power (Miheusah, 2004, p. 32). When someone has worked to attain a canon of knowledge in a particular field and through a particular lens, it can feel threatening to reframe this. A student like this sometimes works ahead of the class, feeling they already know the correct next steps to take without considering places where learning pathways may diverge and yield unexpected knowledge. Fixated on an end product, they grow frustrated with deviations and side conversations, preferring efficiency of language and specificity of content. Like one real-world workshop participant discussed earlier, this can cause them to "miss the teachings in the pursuit of knowledge". In this context, this means they have unknowingly closed their ears to Indigenous expertise and skills of candidates by not inviting nor providing enough space for those knowledges to express themselves.

Their unspoken assumptions of characteristics of classroom teachers in particular belies their positionality as arbiters of "good teaching", where "good teaching" aligns with the

undefined culture in which they position themselves. By exploring ways in which the language and design may be more explicitly intersectional, they may find opportunities to stay true to their expertise while appealing to a broader and deeper pool of candidates. In particular, the aggressive red text and omission of classroom teacher characteristics would need to be addressed as a first step.

### **St. James-Assiniboia School Division as data-spirit.**

St. James-Assiniboia School Division (SJASD) leads off their job postings with their divisional crest: a circular arrangement of lamp, mill, and airplane. Even if a candidate is unfamiliar with the place- and mandate-based context for these symbols, this small bit of ornamentation does invite some curiosity and an entry point into their positionality. It is as though someone at a workshop is wearing a particular piece of beaded jewellery. This bit of regalia at the top of the postings invites the candidate to query its meaning and origin, and perhaps enter a space where common knowledges may be discovered. The graphic of the Mill, in particular, will be one of self-recognition for Métis people, as it is widely known that the old mill within SJASD boundaries belonged to Métis leader Cuthbert Grant.

However, as regards classroom teachers, this is where an invitation to conversation ends. Much like Pembina Trails School Division, SJASD provides extremely few keywords and a very low word count (average 202 words) in postings for classroom teachers. Unlike Pembina Trails, this word count does not rise in postings for specialist teachers (average 201 words) and the postings are only moderately more descriptive for non-classroom jobs (average 240 words). Thus, while keeping with the trend that non-classroom postings contain the most words, even in these roles SJASD vastly under-describes desired candidates when compared to other school divisions.

This lack of language used for classroom and specialist positions communicates a position that good teaching characteristics are self-evident, again pointing – by omission – to some undeclared bias in hiring. This prevents the candidate from being able to see themselves as part of a healthy community aligned with their values, and assumes colonial values and performativity measures will be assessed as meritorious. Research suggests the sense of belonging and ability to contribute to community are central to Indigenous notions of success (Beaudoin, 2019; Deer, 2020; Juntunen et al., 2001; LaFrance, 2010, p. 23; Sammel et al., 2020), and omitting this information makes that relational endeavour impossible. Regardless of the true positioning of the school division, this lack of descriptive language necessitates the making of assumptions on the part of the candidate. This creates a hinderance to their ability to "hit the mark" when it comes to being found suitable for hire.

When examining SJASD job postings for keywords, the division strongly deviates from patterns seen in Pembina Trails. SJASD does have a single keyword in classroom postings ("support") but none in specialist positions. In fact, these two sets of postings are nearly identical in word count and specificity. This singular word, "support", is coded as intersectional as it could apply one giver and one receiver of support, or it could be applied to a mutual relationship of support.

The keyword count rises to 13 in non-classroom positions, however only one of the 13 unique keywords used are coded as "Indigenous" (collaborative) – "work with" as it denotes cooperation. Eight keywords are "intersectional" (reciprocal) and four are "colonial" (hierarchical) in nature. Of the other 13 unique keywords, most are cross-coded under "merit" (6) and "expertise" (5).

This analysis reveals the positionality of SJASD as being different from Pembina Trails, despite the similarity in quantity of unique keywords used. SJASD places heavy attention upon colonial and meritocratic language and nearly none on Indigenous and collaborative language. This hierarchical language points to an emphasis on measurable data and outcomes, a method discussed in the literature with some skepticism for Indigenous inclusion and well-being (Minnis, 2008, p. 30). While there is significant usage of "intersectional" keywords, the emphasis on "colonial" values remains strong.

This positionality in a workshop participant may present a challenge to accepting and valuing Indigenous perspectives. They may come to the workshop with a preconception of moccasin-making as simply a handcraft and not a fulsome pedagogy and may be resistant to alternate views of knowledge acquisition. This positioning may work to alienate or at least silence Indigenous candidates who will not find any clues pointing toward a description of an holistic and collaborative community within these postings, muting the expression of Indigenous knowledge and gifts.

Where Pembina Trails presents some opportunity for community with candidates through Intersectional/Indigenous language, SJASD's language describes an Intersectional/Colonial community. This suggests Indigenous concepts of achievement and learning may be unfamiliar to this division and thus difficult for administration to assess in a teacher candidate.

This is analogous to a workshop participant who may politely listen to explicit lessons about the data-spirits resident in their handiwork, but may secretly feel that this line of thinking is a bit too "woo woo" for them to really get on board with. In a worst-case scenario, they simply do not understand the concept at all and would not note it as a strength, and in fact may note it as a weakness or evidence of disordered thinking.

Despite the evidence of positionality, SJASD is the only school division to mention Indigenous people in the accessibility statement. This is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, the mention of Indigenous people is reassuring in that we are being acknowledged explicitly at all in a posting. However, it is somewhat problematic that Indigenous people are listed in an accessibility statement within an otherwise colonial value system of language. This suggests a colonial neutrality, where Indigenous people are "othered" and must be accommodated. Interestingly, though SJASD mentions several other groups in the accessibility statement, they omit the LGBTQIA2S+ community, which seems like an egregious oversight. The omission of certain specific groups writes them entirely out of the community, while the amalgamating of different groups under a homogenous title ("Indigenous") is another type of omission in not defining any specific nations. This, combined with the colonial tilt of SJASD job postings, revisits the conversation around having an "ideal" type of Indigenous candidate: one that conforms to the administration's ideas of what skills, identities and perspectives are of value at the expense of others. This may point toward attitudes of Indigenous essentialism and "white sanctioning" (Miller, 2016).

This may be a tricky participant to have in a workshop. They have pre-conceived notions of success and career attainment, and appear to have very few explicitly Indigenous experiences. They are likely to attach new learnings to hierarchical ideals, instead of exploring the possibility of entirely new ways of learning and knowing. Nevertheless, there is still opportunity to engage with this participant where they are, as they clearly show they value some reciprocity evidenced by the strong use of "intersectional" keywords. This type of participant would challenge me to frame Indigenous teachings through a colonial lens, thereby providing an opportunity for them to attach the new learning to old, and slowly guide the participant toward new ways of knowing.

An Indigenous candidate interacting with these postings may find they must apply a similar filter to adjust their experiences and perspectives for a non-Indigenous gatekeeper. This amounts to extra labour placed on Indigenous candidates in order to communicate expertise and experience, presenting a barrier to hiring that may be invisible to the recruiter but well-documented in the literature (Gillies, 2017; Mihesuah & Wilson (2004); Miller, 2016).

### **Louis Riel School Division as data-spirit**

Louis Riel School Division (LRSD) shows some key differences from the other two school divisions examined. First, this school division has a significantly higher word count for all postings, across all three categories of job. Within classroom and specialist postings, much of this additional word count is comprised of a contextualizing statement which appears directly below the job title on every postings. This contextualising statement is the only such example in the divisions studied, and is an important feature of LRSD job postings, as it results in 100% of postings including keywords: 22 in classroom positions, 26 in specialist positions, and 50 in non-classroom positions. Because a reciprocal sense of belonging is essential to Indigenous success (Beaudoin, 2019; Juntunen et al., 2001; Kovach, 2021; LaFrance, 2010, p. 23; Sammel et al., 2020), this statement is small but invaluable in orienting the candidate with the community.

Of the 22 unique keywords present in classroom postings, fully half are coded as "Indigenous", with the other categories split between intersectional (six unique keywords) and colonial (seven unique keywords). This is a fascinating result, and proves there is ample opportunity to indigenize language in job postings without adding much length nor deviating from a common job-related language. The average word count for classroom positions in LRSD is still only 487 words, and most postings fit on one page.

Further, in all job categories in LRSD (classroom, specialist, non-classroom), the highest usage of keywords are coded "belonging", supporting the research design and reinforcing the Indigenous perspective of LRSD. Again, this is a strong endorsement of Indigenous values, and supported by Indigenous scholars (LaFrance, 2010, p. 23; Sammel et al., 2020).

Consistent with all other divisions, keywords in LRSD rise in non-classroom positions, totalling 50 unique keywords across the 19 postings retrieved. As with classroom positions, fully half of these unique keywords are coded "Indigenous", and the highest usages of these keywords are in the category of "belonging". LRSD is consistent in its perspective and worldview independent of word count or type of posting.

This keyword usage shows LRSD as a workshop participant with values aligned with Indigenous ways of relating and learning. Clearly favouring "Indigenous" and "belonging" keywords, LRSD communicates they understand an alternative schema of recruitment and have utilized language that is accessible to Indigenous candidates and non-Indigenous candidates alike. In fact, the heavy usage of "belonging" words may even be invisible and indistinguishable to non-Indigenous candidates, yet communicate clearly about alternate values and worldviews. In a workshop, I would imagine LRSD would be able to shift between modes of perception and able to describe and appreciate ideas and concepts from various worldviews.

### ***Situating the data in relationship***

Typically, attendees at a moccasin workshop will gather around a large table. This way, it is easiest to share knowledge and peek over one another's shoulder. The findings, therefore, have been arranged thusly, where the various data-spirits from the examined school divisions are placed strategically so they may learn from one another and from Indigenous ways of knowing.

Individual characteristics as illustrated above sought to understand how each data-spirit sees the world and where they may benefit and grow by adjusting where they sit within community and on their learning journey. As we are all participants in the workshop, it is right that we sit in a circle, where we may relate to and learn from one another as we journey toward the construction of meaning from data, just as participants construct meaning from making moccasins. It is also important that we know we can pick up our bundle of supplies at any time, and move closer to someone who needs our help, or who may help us. It is through the conversation and co-construction of knowledge and skill that we begin to hear the data-spirit speaking about the importance of our work.

## **Implications**

### ***Theoretical implications***

This thesis represents one of very few papers regarding the topic of Indigenous teacher recruitment in K-12 schools. Responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action (2015), as well as the recently announced Manitoba government goal to recruit and retain more Indigenous teachers (Government of Manitoba, 2024), the data presented here allows further examination of this important and timely topic.

While there has been much research published on alternative, novel and emerging possibilities for creating more equitable teacher training programs (Abawi, 2021; Billingsley, 2014; Brantlinger, 2019; Cantalini-Williams, 2015; Guarino et al., 2006; Landertinger et al., 2021; Ng, 2003; Tessaro et al., 2021; Young & Easton-Brooks, 2020), research on the continued professional success of Indigenous teachers during and after hiring is largely absent. It is as though there is a point in the "pipeline" (Ryan et al., 2009) of teacher hiring where assimilation becomes permitted and expected, and where systems still rigidly cling to colonial standards of

achievement. That point of withdrawal of cultural safety and procedural customization begins at the hiring process. By examining job postings – the first step in an applicant's journey to employment – this thesis suggests an imperative to Indigenize human resource policies and processes further up the pipeline.

This research confirms prior literature that finds biased language in job postings (Gaucher et al., 2011; Gonzalez, 2022). Conducting analysis to support an examination of language use and positionality in job postings is supported by research that finds that language influences the diversity of the pool of applicants for a particular job (Consul et al., 2021; Gaucher et al., 2011; Gonzalez, 2022; Weiner, 2022).

Through this research, increasing Indigenous representation among school staff also directly counterbalances some of the intergenerational pain and trauma of residential schools by creating positions of authority and safety occupied by Indigenous people themselves. This research is a tangible act of reconciliation directly addressing the harms of assimilation and the goals of erasure upon which the residential school system was built.

Applying a critical lens to recruitment documents through Indigenous epistemologies creates opportunity to engage with documents in new ways and assess for strengths not defined by colonial, meritocratic standards. This addresses the needs of the education system to Indigenize the administrative structures that underpin it, giving space for Indigenous gifts and knowledge to be expressed. This counteracts the colonial imperative of education to place white narratives as central to the structure and processes in school divisions. Applying Indigenous epistemologies to job postings also challenges the problematic notion of "fit" by repositioning this concept as a reciprocal and two-way relationship-dependent goal, instead of reinforcing social reproduction shown in the literature to be pervasive in school hiring decisions (Abawi,

2018; Abawi, 2021; Backer & Cairns 2021; Beach, 2020; Calderón, 2006; Cho, 2012; Fine, 2018; Fine, 2018; Lysicott, 2018; McIntyre, 1997; McLaren, 2018).

The research also addresses the "achievement gap" by rightfully tasking the administration with the job of "closing the gap" instead of placing that on the backs of students and teachers by consistently only measuring achievement by way of colonial markers of merit.

### ***Practical implications***

The data-spirit(s) present in this thesis are pointing urgently to examine other textual documents for the invisible exclusions they produce, and also to examine policy for gaps in governance that support or endanger Indigenous staff members. Further, it is clear through this research that the job posting and interview process are deeply related and therefore crucial to examine for biases and opportunities to promote understanding and appreciation of Indigenous perspectives and knowledges.

By providing space for Indigenous gifts and knowledges to feature in job postings, and providing context to the anticipated teaching placement, school divisions are throwing open the doors to more modes of self-expression and concepts of success than with purely colonially-coded language and processes.

All communications from school divisions carry bias and covert messaging about belonging and suitability, but two of the three school divisions included in this study used very few words to describe the role of classroom teachers, leaving much to interpretation and assumption. This research demands that these communications be treated with more weight and import, as they are powerful documents that can invite or discourage candidates to apply.

The responsiveness of the education system to the TRC calls to action and the edict from the Manitoba Government must be commended. Institutions have begun examining and

promoting reconciliatory practices in curriculum and school culture (Clark et al., 2019; Sammel et al., 2020; White et al., 2012). With the increasing knowledge, impact and import of Indigenous principles in education, deeper reflection upon processes, attitudes, and policies promoting Indigenous staff representation is a natural next step, especially given the overwhelming research finding that student achievement increases when school staff represent the cultural communities they serve (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Egalite et al., 2015). This thesis responds to these calls, providing background, groundwork and one example of research-proven method of assessing opportunities within the hiring practice to increase Indigenous engagement.

In practical terms, this research provides a roadmap for interrogating established institutional norms in job postings. These norms must be critically examined for opportunities to begin to reflect Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. This work cannot be confined to policy and formal processes, but will need to be embodied by the structures and people in administration, and that shift in perspective will require sustained, vision-driven energy, study, and community experiences.

This research further invites lateral knowledge-sharing between divisions. This is currently lacking but valuable. Deepening understanding of Indigenous methods of teaching and learning means heeding the call of the data-spirit to talk to one another, share information and build collective wisdom as regards the hiring of Indigenous teachers and the language used to do so.

Lastly, it must be emphasized that Indigenized curriculum and programming is not enough. The very systems that underpin education are themselves anti-Indigenous and must be

challenged and improved, and this includes the job postings that are the first point of contact for prospective teachers.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Recommendations for theory***

The research points to several important theoretical considerations when crafting job advertisements for teaching positions.

The first area of theoretical interest is in the concept of "fit". The concept of "fit" features widely in discourse regarding teacher recruitment. Widely accepted to be closely tied to cultural reproduction (Abawi, 2018; Abawi, 2021; Backer & Cairns 2021; Beach, 2020; Calderón, 2006; Cho, 2012; Fine, 2018; Lysicott, 2018; McIntyre, 1997; McLaren, 2018), alternative concepts of "fit" are presented here through Indigenous epistemologies, yielding possibilities for new interpretations.

Because fit is predicated upon implicit bias, the next area of theoretical interest is the ways in which implicit and systemic bias appears in textual communications. This thesis provides a comprehensive and linear method to assess job postings for systemic bias and presents a structure of analysis that respects the limitations of textual data while honoring alternative worldviews.

Integrating Indigenous epistemologies into textual communications will naturally be an uneasy task, as Indigenous epistemologies are sustained by oral tradition. However, some points of intersection are possible.

This research suggests recasting a school and school division as nodes in an ecosystem, wherein all players have vital and unique gifts to contribute to the whole. This approach

encourages broadening and deepening the current theoretical beliefs around teacher recruitment to include Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

School divisions must have difficult conversations about their positionality on meritocracy. Meritocratic language was found in many of the job postings discussed in this thesis, and yet examples of detailed and professional postings could be found within the data that do not rely on meritocratic language. Meritocracy still underpins public education in Canada and works to further colonial goals of assimilation and even erasure of non-meritocratic cultures (Abawi, 2020, p. 87), including Indigenous culture. This thesis suggests a shift from a meritocratic structure of assessment to a holistic and interrelational structure of community health, lest we again fall victim to what Ball (2003) terms "the terror of performativity."

Related to bias and fit is the fraught concept of "white sanctioning" (Miller, 2016), that is, the preferential treatment of some Nations/practices over others, and the idea of an ideal Indigenous candidate.

An Indigenous epistemological lens must be applied to textual communications regarding recruitment. The research presented in this thesis points strongly toward the need of school systems to consider Indigenizing their practice for the benefit of students and an essential action for true reconciliation in schools. In doing so, they may begin to move toward accepting and actioning their role in the pervasive and theoretically problematic "achievement gap" among Indigenous students.

### ***Recommendations for practice***

As part of anti-bias training, delivery of Indigenous professional development should be delivered via Indigenous pedagogy, that is, "learning-by-doing" (Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2002, p. 452). Therefore, any examination and determination to Indigenize aspects of the

administrative process should be done in community, with others, and in ways that honour Indigenous knowledges in authentic relationships. This means professional development conversations addressing the role and power of job advertisements must be done in community with Indigenous education professionals and pre-service teachers from a variety of traditions and homelands.

Louis Riel School Division's contextual positioning paragraph at the top of every job posting should be commended. This information allows a candidate to imagine the array of relationships they will create, participate in, and nurture. This helps Indigenous candidates prepare for an interview, as they can already picture the community with which they will be in relationship. All school divisions should examine and work to define what kind of community they create and perpetuate, and work to authentically represent that community in textual documents, using care in crafting truthful and fulsome statements that reflect Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

However, across all school divisions studied, meaningful inclusion of the land within the community is missing. Echoing Thompson's (2011) recommendation, the data suggests a meaningful reorientation of job postings around Indigenous epistemologies should include a statement of the traditional importance of Winnipeg to Indigenous peoples. Different from a land acknowledgement, this statement relates the contextual statement directly to the land upon which the school division is located. Illustrating that the school division exists in ongoing relationship with land and community may serve to influence Indigenous candidates to apply from outside of Winnipeg, while demonstrating the school division's commitment to and knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing to all candidates.

Where Indigenous perspectives are listed as desired attributes of candidates, many of these instances position Indigenous people as outside of the school community and needing to be considered and included. The data suggests that this "othering" of Indigenous knowledges can be addressed by using language that communicates an expectation that candidates have a personal connection and desire to deepen learning in Indigenous ways. This language is inclusive of all peoples, communicates the position and priority of the school division, and will not alienate Indigenous candidates because Indigenous knowledge is assumed to be never-ending anyway.

This method of repositioning the values of the school division illustrates a commitment to recursive and self-directed learning, itself a major tenet of Indigenous ways of knowing. In examining language for opportunities such as these, meaningful, deep and layered communications that speak to Indigenous candidates become attainable.

Research further found that aspects of current corporatized Human Resources practices in education are colonial in nature, predicated upon "the terror of performativity" (Ball, 2003) and overly-reliant on interviews and assessments of "fit", a practice which has been said to work poorly for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and skills (Whitford, 2021, p. 96).

A critical examination of "fit" should be undertaken in a quest to itemize what "fit" really means to a particular school division. By defining "fit", administration may be able to identify how the concept is excluding candidates or perpetuating implicit bias, and design professional learning and policy to repair this. Especially in divisions where textual communications lack detail, a conversation and learning in implicit bias is desperately needed.

Thus, it is recommended that interview structures, processes and scripts be assessed similarly for bias and inclusiveness in service of recognizing Indigenous talent in Indigenous

ways, encouraging administrators to heed the voices of the data-spirits that are calling from the pages of their own documents.

All of this will be difficult without a prerequisite anti-bias mindset of administration. Thus, implicit bias training is recommended for all administrative and human resources staff. This recommendation is consistent across the literature (Abawi, 2018; Abawi, 2021; Anthony-Stevens et al., 2022; Consul et al., 2021; Noonan, 2020; Tourand, 2020) and is a crucial starting point for reimagining educational human resource management.

Regarding specific keywords used in job postings, these documents should be assessed with the goal of moving from intersectional/colonial language to language of belonging and reciprocal learning, conceptualizing education and schools as ecosystems, not corporations.

Abawi (2022) provides excellent thoughts on policy for bias-free hiring of teachers, including the emotional and cognitive labour placed upon BIPOC candidates when they must contort themselves to conform to a colonial system of values for acceptance (p. 322), and then are expected to continue this exertion by leading and educating their school communities about diversity and cultural inclusion (p. 81). Far better would be a system which is built to provide welcome to an array of candidates representative of the communities they hope to serve. In this alternative universe, BIPOC teachers are not made to add layers of invisible labour and mental gymnastics in order to traverse the hiring process.

A job posting does not exist without context. The research points to an examination of where postings are placed (Media Technology Monitor, 2023) and offers of pre-application/pre-interview communication to establish relationship (Maynes & Hatt, 2014; Thompson, 2011). Therefore, a scheduled mandate to review language, placement and method of recruitment texts

is recommended. This could begin with an audit of current postings and placements, assessing for evidence of bias or preferential treatment of certain groups.

To ensure authenticity and lessen tokenism, all processes toward Indigenization of job postings and Human Resource practices should always include Indigenous people. This would necessarily include Indigenous people present in interviews with Indigenous candidates. This may also make visible the "white sanctioning" found in the literature (Miller, 2016). Specifically, care should be taken to consider: Do administrators want Indigenous teachers, or only the "right kind" of Indigenous teachers? Job postings need to be assessed for language that signifies a specific Indigenous group or practice, and when found, interrogated for motive and objective. If a particular Nation or practice is desired, the administration must be willing and able to justify the preference and assess for balance across the school division, or risk hierarchical and lateral gatekeeping of Indigenous knowledges from across the diversity of Nations in Canada. This will require deep thinking, learning, planning and a willingness to learn on the part of administration, as current schooling practices are deeply rooted in colonial structures that will need to be made visible in order to be addressed.

Carefully crafted community context statements and land statements will allow Indigenous candidates to see themselves among the advertised school community. It is suggested this contextual information relate directly to the school for which the candidate is applying, and not to the division as a whole, for every educator knows that each school has a unique community culture that cannot be substituted for divisional culture more broadly.

This inclusion of contextualizing information in lieu of a more Indigenized method of welcoming someone into community, in which multiple community experiences and collaborations would take place over time. Instead of a multi-stage recruitment process as

suggested by Thompson (2011) and Maynes and Hatt (2014), school divisions would do well to include Indigenous teacher candidates within a professional circle of Indigenous in-service teachers, creating reciprocal and lateral spaces for continued learning and communication, not unlike a moccasin workshop wherein we develop relationship through our work.

Applying an Indigenous epistemological lens to job postings will require intention and care, however the benefits are well documented in the literature as regards other marginalized groups.

### ***Recommendations for future research***

The focus of this research is but part of the larger process and field of corporate Human Resources practices within K-12 education. Thus, there is ample opportunity to examine research questions pertaining to all manner of topics in Indigenous teacher recruitment and retention. Particularly important is to align Human Resource practices with Indigenous epistemologies throughout the organization, but this cannot be done without careful study of current practices and desired results.

Now that these postings have been studied and codified, a study examining the impact of language on job postings could be conducted. This would seek to test the results of this thesis against real-world perceptions of job postings by Indigenous teacher candidates. This would lend strength to the findings and provide more evidence of the power of documents in recruitment more broadly. There is precedent for this type of study in the work of Flory et al. (2015), Gaucher et al. (2011), Kuhn and Shen (2013), and Tran (2024).

A policy/procedure review of the process of creating job postings will further understanding of how and why the positionalities of institutions are expressed in them. An examination of how teacher job postings are crafted, when and how frequently they are

reviewed, and who the writers are would help contextualize the data. This would help expose and improve the policies, procedures and personnel that these documents are constructed upon/by and permit reflection of ways in which institutional norms are reproduced within educational Human Resources management.

The current study provides a method by which other institutional documents may be examined. Because a central theme of the research is the conflicting worldviews on merit and suitability, further research should include a critical examination of teacher performance evaluation documents and processes. It would be logical for evaluation documents to co-relate to recruitment documents as benchmark, however considering that most job postings contain very few indicators of performance, it is worthwhile examining how performance metrics are decided. Aligning performance indicators and teacher evaluation methods to Indigenous epistemology is a logical next step in ensuring school staff are approaching goals of reconciliation and Indigenous education in an authentic manner.

Because diversity is an emerging priority criterion in hiring (Abawi, 2021, p. 137; Landertinger et al., 2021, p. 42; Ryan et al., 2009, p. 18), as specialist and language teachers have been (Billingsly, 2014; Grimmet & Echols, 2000; Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010; Kohli, 2018; Smith et al., 2023, Smith & Peller, 2020), it would be of interest to ensure alignment of Indigenous teachers with their career goals further along the "pipeline". Are they being "slotted into" roles in order to fulfill diversity quotas? Do they enjoy the same freedom of movement between positions as do non-Indigenous staff post-hire? What proportion of Indigenous staff accept positions outside their area of study, and how does this affect their efficacy in the job?

Research is clear that "learning-by-doing" and contributing to community wholeness is integral to Indigenous concepts of success (Battiste, 2009, p. 30), therefore it would also be interesting to adapt Thompson's 2011 case study as a guide for an Indigenized K-12 recruitment process. The specific research question might be: "What could be the impact of Indigenous circles of professional learning that included pre-service, in-service and retired teachers learning and teaching together in schools?" This learning and mentoring structure mimics intergenerational learning in community and may provide a strong sense of belonging for junior teachers even before employment.

This research also highlights the importance and suitability of the interview process. As one case study subject in Whitford's (2021) study pointed out, the interview process "does not work for our people"(p. 96), suggesting alternative ways to demonstrate Indigenous brilliance and gifts. Perhaps a multi-stage approach as recommended by Thompson (2011) and Maynes & Hatt (2014) facilitate better results in recruitment and/or retention of Indigenous staff.

These are but a few opportunities for further study based upon this research. Sensoy & DiAngelo (2017) reminded us that "every step of the hiring process is an opportunity to interrupt the reproduction of racial inequity" (p. 574). To meaningfully respond to the calls of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it is imperative we continue to examine current systems for ways in which we may ensure the success of Indigenous students through the processes and patterns that define their learning environments and experiences.

## **Conclusion**

Job postings are the first point of contact, and research agrees the language employed in them is of extreme importance and power. Yet, the colonial underpinnings of schooling and the

corporate structure of education HR work together to silence and negate Indigenous knowledge and talent from being brought to the forefront during the recruitment process.

This research responds critically and actionably to the mandate from government and the calls to action from the TRC. There is much more work to be done, and much more research to be conducted. There is value in considering a top-down wholesale reform of educational human resources practices as regards Indigenous perspectives, however this study works within the current status quo to identify and strategize change within the system as it currently exists.

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