

First Nations Culture in Schools

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Abstract

First Nations education is a relatively new area of educational concern in primary and secondary schools. If taken out of the context of Eurocentric public education and situated within a traditional First Nation's structural conceptual framework, one can see its advancement and potential future trajectory. Eurocentric formal education, as it currently exists, is rooted in Eurocentric mainstream standards and is geared toward Eurocentric mainstream culture, greatly overlooking the uniqueness and essential elements of First Nations heritage and traditions that instill pride and esteem in its students. First Nations activism and resultant changes in policy have enhanced education; however, immersion in and development within Eurocentric mainstream contexts complicates the differentiation between Eurocentric and First Nations perspectives and their impact upon school administration and programming. Furthermore, the trauma suffered from government-enforced assimilation practices still firmly reside within the consciousness of First Nations peoples, including First Nations teachers who tend to recycle Eurocentric customs and unconsciously reinforce Eurocentric educational foundations that are damaging to FN students. This study examines both Eurocentric and First Nations cultures in relation to education, aiming to understand and map them on the medicine wheel, specifically the First Nations Education Medicine Wheel, to distinguish between them, observe progress, and identify boundaries that enable First Nations to meet the needs of their students more efficiently. The study analyzes provincial education policy frameworks through a self-developed lens of First Nations culture from my Peguis Ojibwe childhood, Cree from my travels in my northern career experiences and various traditional spiritual experiences in an effort to reflect upon their effectiveness in addressing the needs of First Nations students and teachers.

Acknowledgement

There is an endless list of gratitude for me to acknowledge. There is the journey of my life and the experiences in it that shaped me to reach this very moment where I write this acknowledgement. First and foremost, I graciously acknowledge my Creator because of an image I get from one of my most favorite phrases: “Be good to one another, because when you’re good to them you are good to yourself; for we are all one.”

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I would like to acknowledge my ancestors because, through their foresight when they signed the treaties, they created an opportunity to stand strong in a Eurocentric, dominant culture. The strength of spirituality and education has afforded me the honour and privilege to advocate as a leader in education.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my students because, in their beautiful faces, one can see that they, too, are pioneers trying to navigate their way to a fulfilling life for themselves and those coming behind them.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgement.....	iii
Chapter 1: Introduction	6
Background	6
The Context of the Study.....	8
The Purpose Statement/Research Questions	12
Methodology/Research Design.....	14
Key Terminology.....	23
Researcher Positionality	23
<i>Part 1 – Character Roots</i>	24
<i>Part 2 – Personal Cultural Acknowledgement Experience in Writing</i>	25
Layout of Thesis	26
Chapter 2: Situating the Author within the Literature	28
The Pools in Which We Are Immersed – Every Child	28
The Pools in Which We Are Immersed – Assimilation and Residential School Culture	30
The Pools in Which Are Immersed – Mainstream Culture	31
The Pools in Which We Are Immersed – Traditional Indigenous Education.....	33
Acknowledging Cultural Differences in Education	38
Processing Through the Education Medicine Wheel Structure	46
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	51
Methodology and Methods.....	53
Documents for Study	57
Primary Documents	58
Secondary Documents.....	59
Tertiary Documents	60
Chapter 4: Findings	62
Tertiary Documents	63
<i>Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta (MOU)</i>	63
<i>Part 2 Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta; Long-Term Strategic Action Plan</i>	73
<i>Teaching Quality Standard: Alberta Education</i>	78

<i>Saskatchewan Provincial Education Plan (SPEP)</i>	81
<i>Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba</i>	85
<i>First Nations Control of First Nations Education (2010)</i>	88
Secondary Documents	93
<i>Aboriginal Studies 20 – Alberta Learning</i>	93
<i>Native Studies: A Curriculum Guide for Grade 11 International Indigenous Issues, Saskatchewan Learning</i>	99
<i>Grade 12 Current Topics in First Nation, Metis and Inuit Studies: A Foundation for Implementation (Manitoba)</i>	103
Primary Documents	108
<i>First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (Alberta)</i>	108
<i>Inspiring Success: First Nations and Metis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework (Saskatchewan)</i>	113
<i>Mamahtawisiwin: The Wonder We are Born With: An Indigenous Education Policy Framework (Manitoba)</i>	118
Chapter 5: A Discussion and Recommendations	124
Introduction	124
Challenges with the First Nations Education Medicine Wheel (MW)	125
The Broader Significance	126
Discussion	132
Critical Reflection	137
References	140

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

First Nations people (FN) and other Indigenous peoples of Canada have a unique relationship with the founding of Canada and Canadian public education. To this day, this relationship is unique as many FN never had an opportunity to genuinely and naturally immerse themselves in Eurocentric mainstream waters. Battiste (2005) explains, “Canada has participated in, ratified, and affirmed most international obligations. However, Canada’s educational institutions have largely ignored, and continue to ignore, Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy” (p. 9). Instead, Eurocentric assimilation tactics have been implemented throughout most of the historical FN experience to enact cultural genocide upon FN, which left a confused and traumatized culture in its wake. There has been recognition of some of the effects assimilation has had on FN people; FN-rooted policies have been created to improve conditions for FN people through education. For example, Indian Control of Indian Education was released in 1972 from the National Indian Brotherhood (renamed Assembly of First Nations; Assembly of First Nations, 2010), and the more recent 2015 report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and its 94 Calls to Action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

In order to understand the claims of importance for FN culture in this thesis study, we need to acknowledge that all people begin from a place of not knowing. Nanabush, a trickster resident in the stories of many First Nations people, is regarded by many as the first human on earth, characterized by a blend of clumsy innocence in certain narratives and divine attributes in others. When our children feel pain from new life experiences, we let them know it’s ok through the offering of a story of Nanabush and say, “we all begin from a place of not knowing.” This provides solace and enables them to perceive themselves as inherent beings on an unbounded,

affectionate journey of existence, rather than feeling insignificant and deviating from a predetermined framework established for them.

Modern Eurocentric education, and the way it regards culture, worldviews, and values, is a departure from the worldviews of FN peoples. Wilson and Schellhammer explain,

It is as if the [Eurocentric] teacher was on one end of a teeter-totter with the [FN] children on the other end. The teachers' weight is augmented by the whole educational system and keeps the end she or he is sitting on down. Meanwhile the children remain up in the air at the other end and will slowly one-by-one slide down to the teacher's side. Some may slide down kicking and screaming and even a few may hang on to the end of the board then drop down to the ground rather than slide down to the teacher's end. (2021, p.28)

The way modern Eurocentric education makes our children feel is like they are insufficient and this is not desirable. Given that such education occurs in the developing stages of student's life journeys, they take on this characterization and identify with it. It becomes a sickness that festers over time. As new and improved Indigenous education initiatives get implemented over time, the intergenerational trauma will begin to heal, and the reclamation of culture takes place, which will ground newer generations in their respective traditional ways. Unfortunately, older generations tend to carry unconscious intergenerational trauma and end up recycling it to the newer generation, and this includes FN teachers. As Morcom et al. (2017, p 27) explain,

Teacher education appears to have taken the form of apprenticeship with a practising educator in one of those institutions. These teachers often resorted to the same means of discipline and control as their mentors, and TRC describes various acts of cruelty that they inflicted upon their pupils.

Identifying specific issues affecting FN children and youth is exceedingly challenging when their lives are unconsciously measured against mainstream society. Battiste posits, “The Eurocentric strategy of universal definitions and absolute knowledge has made its scholarships unable to know and respect Indigenous knowledge and heritage” (Battiste, 2000, p. 38). The ailments are prominent, significant, and affect FN students. Battiste (2000) states,

Texts and public schools provide only Eurocentric knowledge bases, thus denying Indigenous children their cultural inheritance and perpetuating the Eurocentric belief that different cultures have nothing to offer but exotic food and dances or a shallow first chapter in history books. (p. 84)

While provincial Indigenous education frameworks have been developed that attempt to address these issues, they are still largely ineffective. Statistics Canada (2023) states,

Just under two-thirds (63%) of all First Nations youth had completed high school, compared with 91% of the non-Indigenous population. First Nations youth living off reserve were more likely to obtain their high school diploma (73%) than First Nations youth living on reserve (46%). (Jaclyn Layton, 2023)

As stated in Wilson and Schellhammer’s analogy FN students need some weight on their end of that teeter-totter by providing and nurturing their needs throughout their educational experience.

The Context of the Study

An article from Statistics Canada states, “Life expectancies for the First Nations, Metis and Inuit household populations were significantly lower than those of the Non-Indigenous household population” (Tjepkema et al., 2019, p. 6). Pollock et al. (2018, p.1) state regarding suicide rates: “Studies from high-income countries including Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Canada, and other Arctic Nations consistently find elevated suicide rates among Indigenous

populations, with substantial rate disparities compared to Non-Indigenous populations.” These are examples of how assimilative practices present in Canadian society for the last two hundred years have adversely affected First Nations peoples and communities and its effects.

Marraccini et al. (2022) explain: “the high rates of suicide deaths in American Indian/Alaska Native youth are compounded by a federal system of severely underfunded mental health care, mental health problems, chronic pain, and historical and systemic trauma” (Marraccini et al., 2022, p. 2). Unfortunately, these measurable observations are only a portion of the FN experience and there are the unobserved and unconscious factors. The government aimed to get rid of the “Indian Problem,” which was largely a role that John A. MacDonald and Egerton Ryerson were tasked with and through their influence it became a part of the cementing of the first layers of the Canadian foundation. Ryerson was a prominent figure in education and politics, primarily responsible for the establishment of public education in Canada. As the Canadian Encyclopedia shows:

Many educational institutions were named in Ryerson’s honour, including Ryerson University, which opened as the Ryerson Institute of Technology in 1948. Since 2021, however, several schools have been renamed due to controversy over Ryerson’s role in the development of residential schools and his involvement in the wider attempt to assimilate Indigenous peoples into Canadian society. (Sir John A. MacDonald, 2007, October)

Ryerson was also involved in the development of Canadian residential schools that destroyed Original First Nations Culture ¹(OFNC). As for John A. MacDonald,

¹ Phrase Developed from author

To ensure the railway's completion [due to the settling and expansion of Canada] across the Prairies, MacDonald made himself the Superintendent General of Northern Affairs. In this role, he could direct the activities of Indian Agents. They were responsible for enforcing and administering Government policy. (Sir John A. MacDonald, 2013, July 31)

Although Indian agents were dissolved earlier, the residential schools lasted until 1996 when the last residential school finally closed.

The legacies of MacDonald, Ryerson, and others have resulted in persistent trauma for Indigenous peoples, particularly regarding their educational experiences. Numerous additional cultural genocidal practices have ensued and persist to this day, including certain aspects of contemporary public education. Alternatively, as Settee explains: "Our literature and our curriculum must help our students and others to develop a critical awareness of colonialism and its impact on daily living" (2013, p. 109). Because in addition to assimilative practices, First Nation culture also continues to experience substandard education;

Governmental failure to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal children continues to the present day. Government funding is both inadequate and inequitably distributed. Educational achievement rates continue to be poor. While secondary school graduation rates for all Aboriginal people have improved since the closure of the schools, considerable gaps remain with the non-Aboriginal population. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. 5)

The above quote and those prior show the poor educational foundations and environments in which the previous generations have developed; it also shows the unconscious accumulation

of cultural traits they have adopted and identify with and the eventual transfer of the unconscious passing of these traits into the next generations; this includes FN teachers.

Throughout my career experience I have heard the desperation in the voices of each community telling their students to “get your education.” Although well intentioned and myself being in a position to understand their encouragement to the students as positive, it had always made me feel resentful. I couldn’t understand it at the time why it bothered me, but reflecting back on it now I could now see it as confused feelings of inadequacy – like we were not good enough as we were and had to surrender who we were to make it, to be successful. It was like we could not fit unless we shed our heritage. Wing Sue states, “Cultural racism is the overarching umbrella under which individual and institutional racism flourish. It is composed of a worldview that contains a powerful belief: the superiority of one’s group’s cultural heritage over another” (2010, p. 141). Wing Sue’s assertion is powerful and speaks to why FN community members, like my gran thought so highly of the Eurocentric cultured people and so little about herself. My gran is only one person and only one generation and this unconscious rejection from her and her generation that were processed through governmental assimilation would eventually contribute to a contemporary culture and its impact on some conditions on FN reserves. FN people acknowledge the value of education and the benefits that an educated population might achieve, but acceptance of mainstream Eurocentric education by FNs may be understood as a declaration of inferiority. First Nations and local teachers unconsciously teach that we are inadequate as we attempt to raise them from the cultural tar pits of a disgraceful dependent culture. Morcom et al. (2017) quote Hanrahan in their article,

Unless it makes a concerted effort to do otherwise, the academy is automatically part of the ongoing colonial project; rooted in Western values, traditions, and practices

and peopled by descendants of settlers... it cannot be otherwise. We – and here I am speaking as a member of the academy – rarely acknowledge, let alone value, Indigenous pedagogies and epistemology. We teach from a Western perspective, often without realizing it (Hanrahan, 2013).

However, what is not realized is that it is a process of progression and development, and this is the current position on a medicine wheel journey. It could be compared to Eber Hampton's five stages of Indigenous education, explained by Morcom et al. "These correspond to historical, current, and future periods in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras." (2017, p. 23).

It is essential to identify and address the various factors that inhibit First Nations education, which can create a cyclical pattern. This includes acknowledging that First Nations culture is distinct from the broader Canadian mainstream population and is a vital element of primary and secondary education. Continued usage of an education system that does not support the exploration of FN knowledge, heritage, consciousness, and tradition may be a detriment to children and youth who need to be immersed in their respective communal ways of being.

The Purpose Statement/Research Questions

An education that adequately reflects First Nation peoples and culture can be attained, provided we are ready to leave Eurocentric teaching and learning methods that are not connected to Original First Nation Cultural thinking. However, this may be difficult to distinguish since we exist inside the flood of Eurocentric waters that partly disable our views of our traditional identities. Perhaps the only way to grow as traditional First Nations peoples is through OFNC, which must be reclaimed in order to achieve an Original First Nation Education System.

Cultural fluency includes a keen awareness of cultural surroundings when immersed in both OFNC and in Eurocentric mainstream waters. One who is culturally fluent yet committed to establishing FN culture in schools (a dual-cultural navigator) may be said to be competent in

navigating the treacherous waters of a cross-cultural ethos and, as Muskrat in the Creation story of the Anishinabek is said to have done, swim down to retrieve a piece of the original earth for the betterment of those above.² The tiny earth our dual-navigator retrieves will be placed on the turtle's back for OFNC to blow on it to grow and create land for our students to walk on.

It is assumed that many dual-cultural navigators participate in the development of provincial Indigenous policy frameworks, but mainstream education is rooted and structured in Eurocentric, FN-centered arenas. If we were able to identify the absence of Indigenous and FN cultural environments in their on-reserve and inner school routines, observations, and knowledge contributions, and observe how it affects the final Indigenous policy product. This would be interesting to acknowledge and observe.

Considering that FN teachers are a part of the phenomenon in question, they may be understood to be responsible for creating the foundations of the next generation. The manner in which FN teachers are considered in Indigenous policy frameworks to create effective and meaningful education merits consideration. It is this one issue that informs the purpose of this study.

The purpose of this study will be to examine Indigenous education initiatives reflected in provincial policy with the use of a unique theoretical lens that has been developed by the author to reflect essential aspects of First Nations knowledge in an effort to understand how such initiatives support First Nations culture. To serve this purpose, this study will address the following research question: How can provincial Indigenous education policy be understood through the experience of a First Nations Educator who has established a strong connection to OFNC? An examination of historical and current FN culture will support how the author

² <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/movementtowardsreconciliation/chapter/the-creation-story/>

addresses these questions, with a focus upon mindsets, theoretical perspectives, and the historical assimilation tactics used against the FN people.

Methodology/Research Design

Education, along with other aspects of societal endeavour goes through evolutionary processes. Education, just a short 50 years ago, was very different from that of today. Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy, and Martin Brokenleg's (1988) Circle of Courage all have impacted education from a straightforward process of creating a fulfilling educational experience for all students. Consequently, education has become a process of nurturing students through a holistic view of collective and individual student needs. Some examples include implementing breakfast programs, awareness of students' various levels of processing information, awareness of self-esteem, and a sense of belonging.

Taking an evolutionary stance, education must also consider how cultural differences amongst communities play a role in achieving effective and meaningful education. This consideration would encompass a holistic approach, incorporating intergenerational elements in education, including the present generation of students, the preceding generation of educational personnel, and future generations.

The four-quadrant medicine wheel is a reasonable frame that is reflective of First Nation's traditional culture and movement and would be an excellent tool to measure movement and positionality in the development of the education system. The First Nation Education Medicine Wheel³ is a wheel where the quadrants are subdivided into two parts, giving each quadrant two parts. The first part is an exploration and development stage, where the second part

³ Developed by author

of each quadrant is an application stage. This conceptual structure can be used for a variety of concepts that show development and progress.

However, before I go on to describing the foundation of the First Nation Education Medicine Wheel (MW). I must acknowledge the origins and source of my teachings that enable me to create the MW theoretical framework. Raymond Ballantyne, now deceased, was such a beautiful man that radiated with such beautiful energy, fatherly energy. By the time I start attending ceremony, he had brought the sundance to Sandy Bay, Saskatchewan from Sagkeeng, Manitoba. Although, I had already been immersed in FN spirituality, I would say this is where my conscious connection to Creator and the grandfathers/grandmothers began. This is where my conscious identity and worldview began to form. Although identities are a combination of life experiences, I have to say this multi-decade experience has been the greatest contribution to who I am today and I will be forever grateful for it.

The four-quadrant medicine wheel has colours: yellow, black, red, and white; however, in the teachings from now deceased Raymond Ballantyne's Sandy Bay, Saskatchewan's sundance came the colours of the wheel: yellow (East), blue (South), red (West) and white. The application of sundance colours is attributed to its designation as "dancing for life," where "life" signifies the comprehension of the Creator's intentions for individual development. The colours and directions signify advancement, and there will be an acknowledgment of the conflict that transcends boundaries, enabling progression into the subsequent quadrants.

After being immersed in ceremony for many years, especially my Sandy Bay Sundance, I established a connection from the grandfathers/grandmothers and merging these teachings with my formal education I began to understand that we are born into a world where a particular worldview is already established (East: yellow). Pre-existing beliefs, values, and cultural norms

shape early development, which unfolds within the context of these inherited traits. During dependent childhood, individuals absorb these frameworks, and as they approach the midway boundary of the first quadrant (Southeast: yellow + blue = green), they enter an application stage. At this point, the foundational beliefs formed earlier begin to be actively used to navigate the world with increasing autonomy.

A critical transition occurs when individuals detach from the dependency of childhood and move into the second quadrant (South: blue). This phase marks the emergence of independence, grounded in the foundations established in the first quadrant. Exposure to alternative worldviews and cultural traits becomes more pronounced, prompting individuals to broaden and reassess their own perspectives. The early part of this quadrant is characterized by experimentation and exploration; it is often experienced as an exciting and relatively carefree period. Individuals form new relationships, model behaviors observed in adult figures from childhood, and begin to construct personal life goals based on their evolving understanding of how life *should* be, as informed by earlier developmental experiences.

The second half of the quadrant (Southwest: blue + red = **purple**) is one of the most difficult phases. This quadrant is heavy with stress and many emotions: regret, remorse, anger, frustration, grief, depression, and mental health issues. This is where the ideal life goals and applications from the original East foundation begin to break down; addictions often weigh a person down and interfere with relationships. Some individuals stay in this stage longer, until a feeling of burnout sets in, burnout with the unpredictability of life, addiction, broken relationships, financial difficulty, and repetitive conflict. At some point, there comes a time when the weight of these burdens cannot be held back any longer, and one gives in to their influence.

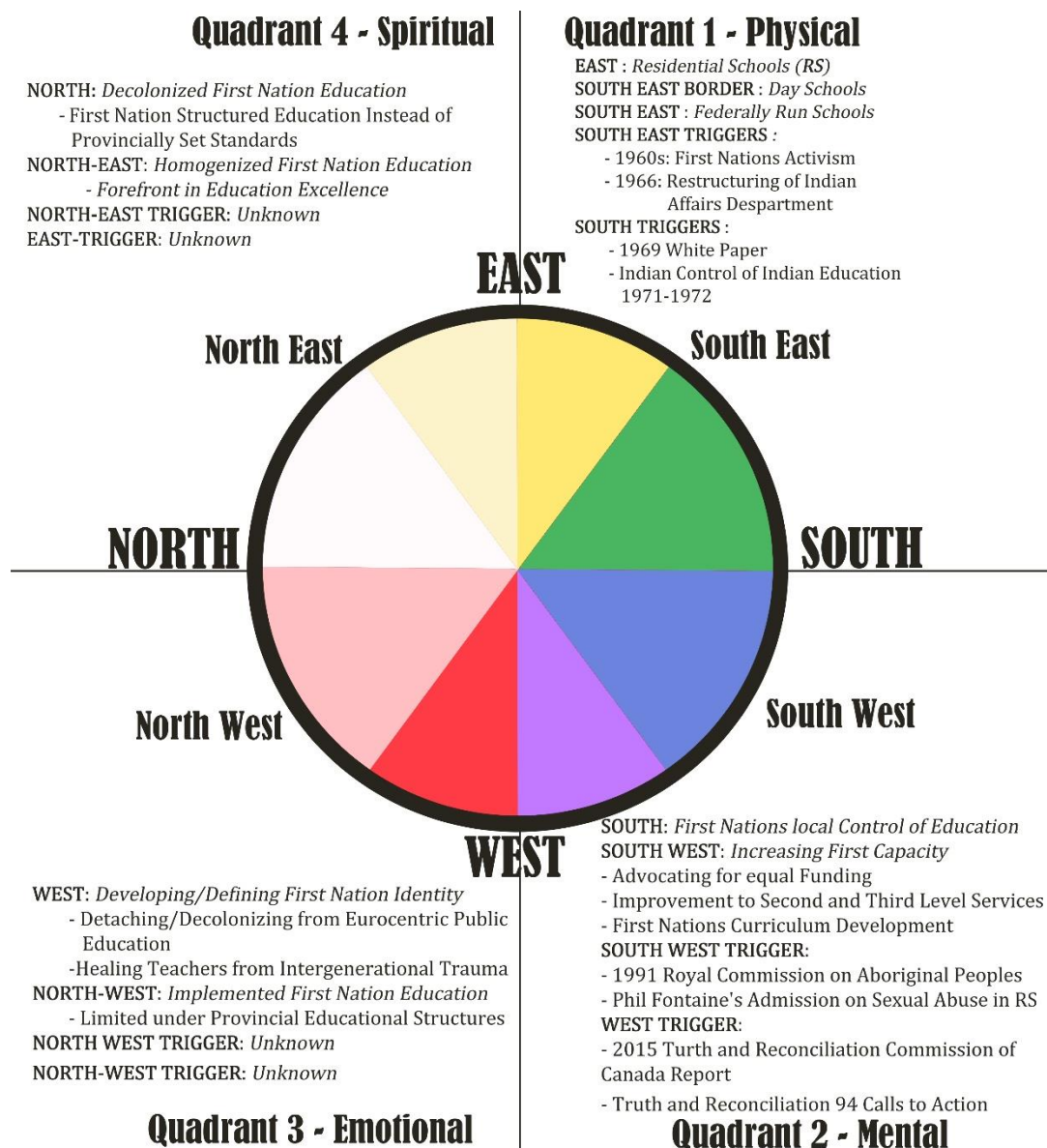
In the surrender phase, individuals begin to look for ways to lighten their burden (West: red) by reaching out for help with addictions, counselling, connecting with mentors, etc. It may take a few relapses, but they begin to understand and embrace a new life and let go of their old ideals. They begin to form new goals and discover new things about themselves. They begin to form a unique identity and new worldviews. They feel lighter and happier and continue to explore healthy options. Through their exploration, they begin to gain confidence in themselves, and with confidence comes independence, which is what they were learning (Northwest: red + white = **pink**). Once the confidence is in place, they begin to independently practice and create a foundation of understanding and begin to form an identity created by themselves. Once they are fully confident in themselves, they begin to share their teachings (North: white), especially to those in the southwest direction. They become teachers and actively help by providing opportunities for healing. Individuals may continue this stage until they begin to get tired, but this time it is a good tiredness, satisfaction, and fulfillment (Northeast: white + yellow = **Tan**). They then move on to the final stage of life, where they just sit in contentment with satisfaction and gratitude for the journey they had.

The Medicine Wheel conceptual framework in this study is combined with the symbolism of water and color to show the placement of education in the Medicine Wheel journey. This framework allows tracking the First Nations Education (FNE) by showing its current level of development and flow through the quadrants of the wheel. It also recognizes the historical influences of Indigenous-formulated policies that have influenced this path, and how new and updated education initiatives can help to keep the process moving towards greater heights of educational development. In this study, the provincial Indigenous Education will be examined using the indicators from the table on page 53-55 to determine how well they reflect

FN culture and pay specific consideration to teacher training that devolves intergenerational healing and developing the authentic values and practices of First Nations people, thus equipping teachers to serve as guides through two cultures.

Figure 1 below shows an illustration of the Medicine Wheel: First Nation Education

Medicine Wheel



The use of the First Nations Education Wheel (MW) can be impactful on First Nation education. Perspectives do matter in certain aspects, as they thoroughly reflect the needs of First Nations' students. Eurocentric perspectives incorporate Indigenous viewpoints in development processes; however, these are ultimately mediated through a Eurocentric framework, resulting in the dilution of essential elements. The recognition of the necessity for Indigenous education is equally significant. Moreover, education must incorporate First Nations' approaches that are rooted in authentic benevolence towards their respective communities. Perspectives, recognition and grass-rooted authenticity for assessing the efficacy of Indigenous education initiatives in the service of the ultimate destinations for students in their educational journey.

The provincial Indigenous education initiatives featured in policies of focus in this study come from Canada's Prairie Provinces: Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. The choice of these provinces is due to significant similarities in these First Nations' contemporary cultures and their historical assimilation practices in Canada. The First Nations in these regions are signatories to Canadian Numbered Treaties, and the provinces are geographically adjacent, sharing comparable land features. These shared environments contributed to similar Original First Nations Cultures (OFNC) and worldviews prior to the establishment of colonial political boundaries.

The education frameworks that will be of focus in this study are as follows:

Saskatchewan's *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Metis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework* (June 2018), Manitoba's *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With* (2022), and Alberta's *First Nations, Metis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2002). There was also a supporting document related to the FN initiative, like a Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations in Alberta (2010) and its *Long-Term Strategic Action Plan* (2013) that

contributes to the attempt of addressing the ailments affecting First Nation Students. Other documents that contribute to the development of the Indigenous frameworks include First Nations Control of First Nation Education (2010), originally released in 1972 by the National Indian Brotherhood (renamed Assembly of First Nations).

OFNC also includes a significant connection with Creator and the freedom to identify this way without the shame of existing outside of Eurocentric standards and social structure. However, FN education involve travelling through a journey from East all the way around and back to East. This not only includes students but the foundation upon which the students stand: the teachers, administration, and school board/division.

As it stands now, based on my experience teaching predominantly in FN communities, local FN teachers who were immersed in residential school cultures and their accompanying childhood trauma, the Eurocentric definition of poverty and other adverse intergenerational cycles. These intergenerational effects have been diluted into education.. The following quote from Canada's Residential Schools the Legacy (2015) explains,

Many former students told the Commission that they were denied the opportunity to learn nurturing parenting skills and they replicated the strict and uncaring discipline that they experienced at school. The lack of positive strategies for dealing with interpersonal conflict may have led to high rates of family breakdown and problems that youth carry with them into their adult lives. (p.155)

This legacy creates a weak educational foundation for FN students and as Sylvia McAdam states from her book, "Genocide is a new word, but the crime is ancient. The lethal impacts of genocide are the same all over the world, destroying nations, engulfing Indigenous people and leaving them in varying degrees of destruction." (McAdam, 2015, p. 82) In this varying degree of

destruction FN education and its educational staff is presently in, it could be said to be in a state of disconnection with its developing students. The following excerpt McAdam used to describe this state of being comes from Elder Juliette McAdam,

The man sat forlornly praying, deep in his consciousness he finds a place to pray.

The memories of his people's poverty, incarceration, suicide, the unending death after death, the children born into such conditions...reverberating in his silent words.

He wept as he remembered the land his people once roamed in freedom... the peace and solace evades his people, the nehiyawak.

As he wept, he calls out to the Creator "why have you forgotten my people, why have you forgotten me?" In the depth of his prayer, the silence is cut with sudden visions of beautiful trees, waters, and animals... he felt a vibration, a whisper in his mind that said, "I have not forgotten you, you have forgotten me."

The man saw his people had abandoned the gifts the Creator had given them, the animals to eat, the waters to drink, and land to provide livelihood.

It was then he realized the Creator had always been there. (McAdam, 2015, p. 35)

Disconnected FN teachers have difficulties connecting with students in a meaningful way, and this is due to intergenerational residential school cycles that they developed in both the educational environment and their familial environment as well.

These FN teachers significantly influence the cultivation of future generations through meaningful interactions with the emerging youth. The majority of FN educators originate from severe poverty and challenging living conditions, largely attributed to aggressive Eurocentric assimilation tactics, such as Indian agents limiting mobility and significant opportunities for

autonomy, as well as the suppression of emotional expression and its repercussions during upbringing in such an environment.

Again from my observations in teaching on FN reserves as well as building relationships with community members, through my spiritual work at healing camps and with Correctional Services of Canada, formal research for education and teaching secondary students, and talking to my parents and their experiences in how they grew up one comes to know and understand FN culture very well. Built relationships from all those experiences in those communities and the depth of some of those experiences go, especially in healing camps or in corrections involving families healing from suicide and other indescribable traumatic experiences of a daughter, son, brother, sister, mom and dad enable a unique sight that some formal research cannot catch. Finally, to have experienced both sides of these two different cultures and to see the differences and feel the resentful emotion creates such an undeniable distinction.

Most mainstream educators who teach in Eurocentric education systems do well in those settings since they have been socialized in those settings. They tend to form a classroom organization that promotes those values, which they may not even be aware of being culturally specific. Such educators often bring Eurocentric assumptions, norms, and expectations, which are not consistent with Indigenous educational contexts, and this results in a lack of understanding of why teaching and learning experiences vary so significantly when such educators work on reserve. Even though Indigenous policy frameworks are trying to solve these issues, they tend to overlook major structural and cultural barriers, and the new strategies that are introduced can unintentionally cause harm to First Nations students. Although such educators usually have good intentions, the unquestioned existence of Eurocentric cultural norms may have a negative impact on students. This study aims to identify the various components of FN

education through the lens of OFNC concept of sacredness and connection. That identification can then be used to deal with these underlying barriers and to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the documents in helping to propel education to greater heights within the First Nation Education Medicine Wheel Model.

Key Terminology

Throughout the thesis, the most common words used are as follows.

Original First Nations Culture (OFNC) – the culture of First Nations people before European contact.

Ignorance – the innocent state of not knowing. Unrestricted due to an unawareness of boundaries.

Residential School Culture – An altered by Eurocentric aggressive assimilation practices OFNC plagued with intergenerational trauma of residential school.

Mainstream – The current dominant culture and its attributes.

Indigenous – All original people of North America, specifically in Canada, in this study

First Nations – any of the groups of Indigenous peoples of Canada officially recognized as an administrative unit by the federal government.

Researcher Positionality

I would like to begin by acknowledging my First Nation heritage and culture, as I mostly grew up on-reserve as a member of Peguis First Nation. I would also like to acknowledge that my experiences in my childhood up to this point give me an insider perspective into First Nation culture on many different levels both timeline (evolution) and across various First Nation community and language cultures, including Corrections Canada culture. Due to personal experiences and the experiences of those close to me, I have personally experienced many of the issues discussed throughout this work and have been immersed in the state of intergenerational

trauma. I currently reside on-reserve and far from easy access to research resources. Some resources were inaccessible via the Internet and a thorough search could not be done when a source required a visit to the city to access a book that gave detailed information on certain topics. Many of the books required had costs of over \$40.00, and living on reserve has higher costs of living, where financial resources would not allow that sort of spending.

Although the above statement may offer the reader some sense of the author's personal circumstances, a more thorough exploration of the author's positionality requires more robust exploration.

Part 1 – Character Roots

Many components that establish a person's character and worldview are integrated. It is an important part of the thesis to consider the writer's position. I grew up on a reserve but often spent time in cities like Saskatoon because my mom attended a university, exposing me to mainstream and urban life in childhood. I spent most of my adult life on northern reserves for work and learned about the people and the land. Here, I experienced community unity, but at the same time, many tragedies and unfathomable extreme poverty living conditions.

I was a teacher, and I experienced firsthand the impact of intergenerational trauma and its effects, including the effects of poverty on my students. Through reserve culture, I experienced suicide, murder, infanticide, tragic accidents due to alcoholism, homelessness, student absenteeism, and poor performance of the local control of education (due to being in the infancy stages of having local control). It was heart-wrenching to observe, and I had such a feeling of helplessness and, at times, defeat.

I was also spiritual and became a ceremonialist through my thirty-plus years of exposure. I am a sundancer, a sweatlodge conductor, and I give out spirit names and provide numerous healing ceremonies. Ultimately, my education, coupled with the connections derived from my

lived and spiritual experiences, imbues my formal academic knowledge with vitality, rendering it dynamic and autonomous. I have an intimate relationship with Creator and can navigate that spiritual realm in confidence. It has made me dedicated to pursuing the health and well-being of First Nations communities, including education.

Part 2 – Personal Cultural Acknowledgement Experience in Writing

Conforming to mainstream academic writing standards is challenging when my personal perspectives see it as surrendering a part of the First Nation's identity. The rigid structure of academic standards and formatting coerces mainstream assimilation and obligates one to set down the very purpose of the thesis idea: medicine wheel comprehension and applications, and the significance of emotional intelligence. In addition to the thesis question, or what perhaps should have preceded this effort, an oversight may lie in the lack of an appropriate, culturally sensitive structural format capable of articulating cultural significance in a respectful and considered manner.

Subjectivity and objectivity are highly defined boundaries and expectations in academic writing standards. In reality, a Eurocentric value system dismisses the significance of other cultural foundations that place a higher importance and significance on subjectivity. This subjectivity lies in the higher plains of the emotional and spiritual realms of the medicine wheel and the objective realms in the lower plains. Finally, the process and formatting of academic writing standards separate, sort, and categorize into separate lumps of information that lose cultural significance. As in the teachings of the Sandy Bay, Saskatchewan sundance and the travelling discussions with the sundance chief, Parry Francois of Pukatawagan, Manitoba, it comes up time and again; in First Nations culture, everything is connected.

Layout of Thesis

The layout of the entire thesis attempts to maintain an active connection with the spirit and heritage of FN spirituality. Therefore, this study adopts the traditional pedagogical style of Original First Nations Cultures (OFNC), in which analogy is a central method of teaching and knowledge transmission. Analogies are intentionally woven into the writing to maintain and nurture cultural connection, reflecting how knowledge was carried and shared prior to contact. In particular, the analogy of water is used to represent conscious cultural environments and atmospheres, as water is understood to represent life. Following Chapter 1, which provides an overview of the thesis, Chapter 2 presents the literature review. This chapter seeks to develop a rich understanding of the diverse cultural environments in which education occurs, establishing a foundation for examining the relationship between culture and education across mainstream, First Nations, and Indigenous contexts. The chapter then progresses to an exploration of the application of the Educational Medicine Wheel Framework.

Chapter 3, the Methodology section will discuss the research and thorough study of provincial Indigenous education framework (IEF) documents and references to connecting documents. At the end of the study, the author hopes to identify where FN and Indigenous education are positioned in the medicine wheel in Chapter 4: Findings. The author also processes a critique of the IEF for readability regarding perspectives of both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people, and finally, Indigenous contributions.

Finally, Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations the Findings from Chapter 4 highlights are processed into recommendations. This chapter also includes my critical reflection and challenges I experienced throughout the thesis study process.

The author will also engage in continuous reflexivity as an ethical consideration in the research process to detect and eliminate conscious bias as part of the methodology. This involves

upholding respect towards the work and intellectual input of Indigenous scholars, educators and knowledge holders whose work has contributed to effective and meaningful Indigenous education. The thesis proposal ends with a bibliography and, where necessary, an appendix of supplementary materials, including cultural narratives such as Nanabush and the Creation Story, provided that their inclusion is methodologically and contextually appropriate.

Chapter 2: Situating the Author within the Literature

The Pools in Which We Are Immersed – Every Child

This section of the literature review will set the tone by beginning and using a quote from Nigel Blake's article,

If there are indeed such fundamental new development in either society or culture, they must have a major impact on what we teach – the culture we transmit – and even, more fundamentally, on the place of education itself within society. Those of us who intend education to be a major shaping force upon society and culture should therefore reconsider the context and possibilities open for education under the postmodernism condition. (Blake, 1996, p. 43)

As we move through life, our perceptions and impressions constantly evolve. Childhood concepts accumulate largely unconsciously, as children's consciousness is not yet fully formed and they are primarily focused on the present moment. Even in higher education, a person rarely has full self-understanding; much of who they are remains buried in a neglected, tangled unconsciousness. Using prominent societal example to demonstrate this unconscious phenomenon, we use the idea of gender defiance. For most people, self-identity is largely unconscious, and their awareness often runs on autopilot, shaped by cultural norms or societal expectations rather than by their true self. Catherine Lugg clearly showcases this societal expectation from her article,

Defining gender is more problematic because the term is a rapidly shifting sociological and cultural construct. During the past 10 years, gender has been defined and redefined by philosophers, sociologists queer theorists, queer theorists, feminists, and others – all weighing in with their own meanings (e.g., Butler, 1990; Rudy, 2000; Yoshino, 2002) For purposes of this article, gender consists of a set of

roles and behaviors that individuals are expected to follow as determined by societies and cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious groups of what it means to be male and female. (Lugg, 2003, p. 98)

Being part of society, there are similarities that define the structure of society. The individuals who do not fit within these norms, like gender-defiant individuals, are quite easy to identify, and they might experience social difficulties. This observation is very visible, yet in other instances, deviations in society are far more difficult to detect. It is unspoken that all people are supposed to conform to dominant ways of thinking, perceptions, and social constructs-or risk being labeled as outcasts. But numerous circumstances remain mostly unrecognized, and society turns a blind eye. The homeless or street-addicted people are at least visible, but the Indigenous people of this land, called Canada, are not very visible in the mainstream consciousness.

In this literature review, the analogy of cultural waters will be used, and it will be integrated into the conceptual framework through the use of colour to denote positionality in the societal structures, with short explanations to demonstrate the analogy. A sense of attachment to the land is one of the main ways of education in the First Nations culture. This method enables the learners to place themselves in a familiar and, in some cases, universal environment in order to receive and process new knowledge more effectively. When one is in water, the sensation is significantly different from when in air, air is so normalized that it has become mostly unconscious. In the same way, environmental features such as surrounding land, terrain, or other aspects can be used to differentiate cultural contexts, such as bodies of water. Through imagining and feeling these differences, it is possible to start to perceive and value the differences between cultures.

The Pools in Which We Are Immersed – Assimilation and Residential School Culture

Mainstream society does not have the experience of seven+ generations of childless communities, seven+ generations of being raised by people who hated them, with extreme neglect, and abuse. They have not experienced the eradication of their culture through governmental assimilation that is still active to this very day. They have not had their lands swiped from under their feet and get tucked away on tiny plots of useless land and have to watch the settlers prosper from it while they live in disgraceful living conditions in one of the richest countries in the world.

An article from Windspeaker gives an example of these conditions: “Stevenson revealed that he wanted his appeal for foreign aid to Pretoria S.A. on the record to embarrass Canada's federal government for its treatment of its own aboriginal people” (Compton, 1987). Imagine having to watch their homeland being sold off while they were tricked and swindled from land the Canadian government realized was valuable like the illegal land surrender of St. Peter's, near Selkirk, Manitoba. As Charbonneau-Fontaine explains: “St. Peter's Indian Reserve was a part of the original Selkirk Treaty on July 18, 1817 and Treaty 1 signed on August 3, 1871[,]” and to go on “From what occurred at St. Peter's including the eventual land theft, it is evident the true nature of Canada Indian policy was never really about assimilation or acculturation, but rather, the removal and restriction of First Nations from the most fertile lands in Western Canada” (Charbonneau-Fontaine, 2016, pp. 2-3).

This experience is not the only matter in the acquisition of land, but the living conditions in a developing Canada: imagine the little bit of land they had left being flooded for hydro energy and then having to pay for the hydro that flooded their land (i.e. James Bay Cree Nation, QC, Pukatawagan, MB, Sandy Bay, Sk.). Imagine growing up hungry beside a diamond mine

(i.e. Attawapiskat First Nation, ON) while most of the community members wait in long lines every two weeks for welfare; only for it to be gone by the end of the day on extremely expensive meats or alcohol from bootleggers. Imagine isolated communities when a washing machine or other necessity breaks down and they have to wash their family of 10-12 people in the bath tub. Imagine mattresses tucked behind the couch and pulled out every night because there is not enough room to sleep the 2-3 families sharing a shanty house. These are some of the stories from the author's experience that the mainstream of Canada does not hear.

The Pools in Which Are Immersed – Mainstream Culture

Mainstream culture requires little explanation because it is the primary body of water in which Canada and the United States are immersed. Its physical and mental patterns of being are pervasive and largely homogeneous. Even the way a person crosses the street reflects mainstream norms, down to the direction in which they look first. The judicial system, healthcare, higher education, transportation, every major institution, flows from this current, with long, deep, and winding roots in European culture and mindset.

From the Book *Geography is Destiny* by Ian Morris comes some history of the beginnings of education in the mainstream.

England was small, weak and divided. ... The Church of England therefore urged Englexiteers to make education the path to both saving souls and getting on in life. The number of members of parliament (henceforth, MPs) who had soaked up the new thinking at Oxford or Cambridge almost tripled between 1563 and 1593. The rich channeled charity towards politically correct grammar schools, teaching approved ideas to boys of the middling sort... (Morris, 2022, p. 243)

As the quote states, during the early years of formal education, England was unstable and had just come under the rule of Queen Elizabeth. Education emerged as a remedy to stabilize Europe—it became both a defense mechanism and a tool to spread religious ideals. This historical moment is significant because it laid the roots of modern education. At the time, the prevailing mindset was one of desperation: to defend land, build unity, and strengthen the nation. Education was intentional, purposeful, and imbued with direction and drive—a mindset that continues to influence contemporary education.

In contrast, the perspective of a seasoned First Nations ceremonialist offers a different approach. There is a state of simply being: no intention, no fear, no ambition—just presence. In this quietness, one can experience contentment and gratitude for the forces that shaped them. Even difficult experiences are understood as meaningful in the development of the self. From this perspective, moving forward in life emerges from a place of gratitude rather than fear or insecurity.

The education established in 1563, by contrast, was rooted in fear and desperation—a drive to prevent the repetition of past instability. This foundational force shaped the ambition and direction of education in ways fundamentally different from First Nations and Indigenous educational philosophies. The mindset of those in power—clergy, Englexiteers, and the wealthy—was parental and prescriptive. They identified perceived deficiencies in their pupils and sought to mold them according to political and religious ideals. This system did not recognize the fullness of a person—their skills, experiences, or individuality. Instead, students were viewed impersonally, as uniform “shades of grey.” Yet even this early education developed within specific cultural waters—the European social, political, and religious context—which influenced how education took root and flourished.

Finally, this quote highlights the patriarchal and elitist nature of early education. It was funded and controlled by the privileged, embedding social hierarchies, sexism, and assumptions of superiority into the system. These cultural imprints have persisted in mainstream education, reinforcing socio-economic divisions and perpetuating prejudice, particularly against women, from its very foundation.

The Pools in Which We Are Immersed – Traditional Indigenous Education

The landmass of this “North American” continent is the third largest of the world’s continents. It has an area of more than 24,474,000 square kilometers (World Atlas, 2026). When taking into consideration the terrain and how it shaped a culture, one could imagine the diversity of the cultures of this land before the time of European contact. First Nation’s education is difficult to describe, not that it is difficult to describe, but because of the prominence of the Eurocentric context and worldview, or the cultural pool in which we are immersed, makes it difficult. As Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel explain in their article:

It is important to identify all of the old and new faces of colonialism that continue to distort and dehumanize Indigenous peoples... ..It must be recognized that colonialism is a narrative in which the Settler’s power is the fundamental reference and assumption, inherently limiting Indigenous freedom and imposing a view of the world that is but an outcome or perspective on that power. As stated earlier, we live in an era of postmodern imperialism and manipulations by shape-shifting colonial powers: the instruments of domination are evolving and inventing new methods to erase Indigenous histories and senses of place. (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 601)

The many dialects of Cree, Ojibwe, Dene, and other language groups of Manitoba represent only a fraction of the diverse peoples of this land now called Canada. Viewed outside the immersive pool of mainstream culture, their ways of being would present an entirely

different landscape. Unfortunately, most populations within so-called “highly developed” countries remain largely unaware of the waters in which they are immersed, as this environment has dissolved into the normalcy of everyday life. The pool passes through them and, in time, becomes them.

This mindset is a complex mixture shaped by countless paradigm shifts, deeply rooted European social and religious systems, and ever-evolving ideologies. Accompanying these forces was a spirit of ignorance that traveled alongside colonial expansion across Mother Earth. The resulting cultural waters are saturated with countless solutes, beliefs, values, assumptions, and power structures, too numerous to fully examine within the scope of this study. However, the following examples offer a glimpse into some of the particles suspended within these waters.

In the *Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada* came a speech made on the Establishment of Manual Schools among Indians in July of 1846, from Captain Thomas G. Anderson, who was the superintendent of Indian Affairs, he states:

Brethren...As great changes are taking place in your condition, and your Great Mother, the Queen, having directed the Indian Department to make arrangements for your future benefit and guidance... ...Firstly – That the Indian Tribes shall use every means in their power to abandon their present detached little villages, and unite... ...Secondly – Manual Labour Schools will be established for the education of your children...[Thirdly: Intentionally left out], Fourthly – Give up your hunting practices... ...It has, therefore, been determined that your child shall be sent to the Schools, where they will forget their Indian habits, and be instructed in all the necessary arts of civilized life and become one with your white brethren...

(Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada, 1844-45, p. 269)

The previous quote provides an understanding of the intention of the government's views on FN culture and its intention to assimilate and absorb FN into their Eurocentric way of life. Following this excerpt, Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin explain a thorough definition of Eurocentrism "The conscious or unconscious process by which Europe and European cultural assumptions are constructed as, or assumed to be, the normal or natural or the universal" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2013, p. 107-108).

It is important to acknowledge this unconscious Eurocentrism mindset along with its' origins before an attempt to explain the significance of First Nations education, because due to this unconsciousness, there is an unconscious prejudice: a humouring and snickering attitude that creates an insoluble mainstream culture, disabling the possibility of First Nations ways of being to be appreciated or considered. There are so many challenges and layers to penetrate in order for the true understanding and meaning of First Nations education to hold some merit. However, as Alfred and Corntassel point out in the following quote:

Indigenous pathways of authentic action and freedom struggle start with people transcending colonialism on an individual basis – a strength that soon reverberates outward from the self to family, clan, community and into all of the broader relationships that form an Indigenous existence. In this way, Indigeness is reconstructed, reshaped and actively lived as a resurgence against the dispossessing and demeaning processes of annihilation that are inherent to colonialism. (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 612)

This quote can be understood as an invitation to "simply be Indigenous," suggesting that in this state of being, energy naturally reverberates outward. This provides a strong foundation for describing First Nations education, as First Nations cultures consciously

engage with vibration and reverberation, though all cultures do so unconsciously. The distinction lies in awareness: within First Nations culture, particularly among those deeply connected to traditional ceremony, this vibrational knowledge is recognized and intentionally practiced. In an interview Leroy LittleBear gives an example of The University of Lethbridge beginning to embrace FN cultural spirituality, “The University now has its own medicine pipe, so when they have an official function, they ask the Blackfoot elders to come and do a smoke ceremony using their own pipe. They have their own honour song.” (Youngblood-Henderson & LittleBear, 2020, p. 209)

For beginners, or “reclaimers,” the journey often begins within the cultural waters of the mainstream, largely due to immersion in formal public education. Teachings are initially interpreted through unconscious mainstream filters. At this early stage, individuals may not yet grasp the deeper significance of the teachings, but they feel their impact. This can be understood as original First Nations cultural waters beginning to drip into a pool of mainstream waters—subtly mixing, lightly tinting the water, almost imperceptible, yet undeniably present. With continued participation in First Nations ceremonies, additional waters flow in, gradually deepening the tint. While still faint, a growing sense of peace, belonging, and grounding begins to emerge.

As engagement with the ceremony becomes more consistent, the flow strengthens. First Nations cultural concepts begin to connect incrementally as the waters surrounding the individual become increasingly concentrated, diluting the dominance of mainstream cultural waters. Although the mainstream current remains present, it now contains the electrolytes of First Nations culture, and awareness of these elements begins to surface. With awareness comes agency: individuals start to recognize and intentionally draw upon

these cultural energies. This sustenance enables them, over time, to become carriers of First Nations knowledge, teachers and guides who reverberate their lived experience outward to others.

Alfred and Corntassel's assertion that one need only "be Indigenous" is accurate in essence, yet the process is far from simple. Aggressive governmental assimilation policies disrupted the natural flow of Indigenous cultural waters, forcibly flushing them out and replacing them with a fractured and imposed culture rooted in residential schooling. As a result, many First Nations people, including some educators, were conditioned through fear-based religious indoctrination to perceive First Nations cultural practices as dangerous or immoral.

The greatest challenge lies in the overwhelming saturation of mainstream waters. Yet, as individuals reopen their flow of First Nations cultural waters, these begin to gradually displace the mainstream current, allowing reclamation of identity and belonging. Over time, this reclamation becomes inevitable. Many First Nations do not find sustenance or fulfillment within mainstream waters; they seek balance, contentment, and wholeness. When they reconnect with their own waters and feel their inherent goodness, they recognize them—and embrace them. In addition, FN people are the fastest growing population in this land, they call Canada as Wilson and Battiste explain:

As between 1996 and 2006, the Aboriginal population in this country increased by 45%, a rate almost six times faster than that of the non-Aboriginal population, and Canada is now second only to New Zealand in the proportion of Indigenous people in its population (Wilson & Battiste, 2011, p. 7).

Applying this concept to FN education will provide opportunities for FN students to open that flow and remember who they are. In their own waters, they will find that they were always

perfect, and their experiences were perfect, and where they stand on this earth and in their life journey was always perfect. First Nation students will circle that medicine wheel journey and find gratitude in every experience they have, including the experience of adversity.

First Nations' spiritual culture points to the notion that OFNC life and spirituality were not separate; they were one, and the Creator was in everything they did. Their concepts of the circles and connections meant connection to all without placing more or less value on anything, and that included negative emotions. As a matter of fact, they recognize "negative" emotions in ceremony as a force that breaks the barriers of the medicine wheel quadrant boundaries and allows them access to higher levels. They move from physical experience, to mental experience, to emotional experience, and finally to spiritual experience, wherein the gift of gratitude lies, or as ceremonialists call it: life.

However, since the great flooding of mainstream waters, its effect on the land has flattened it and made it an alienating experience on their own original land. The residential school era made the contemporary experience similar in most FN communities. Now, most FN communities have a residential school culture, but their cultural waters do have their own unique characteristics, consisting of the land they come from.

Acknowledging Cultural Differences in Education

First Nations community cultures are nowhere close to the mainstream culture, and this must be considered, as culture creates education and education creates culture. In Fallon and Paquette's article, they explain:

Constructing a culturally relevant conception of educational leadership within a First Nations setting has been "hindered by the predominant hegemony of Euro-centric paradigms of educational leadership" (Blakesly, 2008, p. 445) that resulted in having indigenous ways of knowing the world devalued, marginalized, or

ridiculed in the marketplace of ideas (Turner, 2006). As a result, assumptions, attitudes and activities have been imposed on current First Nations education entities that include material acquisition, expansion, privatisation and common goods, competition and an obsession with technology and sciences. (Fallon & Paquette, 2015, p. 219)

First Nations education cannot be grounded in a culture that is not its own; rather, it must be rooted in the divided and disrupted culture that First Nations peoples currently inhabit. This does not suggest that FN education is incompatible with engagement in mainstream society or culture. Instead, once students reach the highest level of understanding represented in the medicine wheel, they are able to acknowledge, radiate, and reflect the Indigenous experience and its surrounding realities. Through this reflective process, students come to see themselves fully, who they were prior to contact, how colonial history and assimilation have shaped them, and how these forces continue to influence their present identity. In doing so, they recognize and appreciate their distinct cultural position in relation to the Canadian mainstream. FN education offers grounding and coherence, rather than leaving students to struggle with feelings of insufficiency within an educational system designed for an independent, individualistic culture.

In examining FN education policies, it is essential to question what constitutes the wholeness of an individual. This question marks a fundamental boundary between First Nations culture and provincial public education. Within this space, FN culture can be meaningfully woven into education through the knowledge and practices that remained unassimilated, cultural concepts preserved and carried by the people despite both overt and subtle assimilation processes. Rooted in the heart of ceremony and symbolized through the medicine wheel, education extends beyond the cognitive domain into emotional and spiritual realms. While

elements of this holistic approach have begun to surface in mainstream policy, most notably in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (2015) and the First Nations Control of First Nations Education documents (1972, 2010), these efforts remain partial and require deeper, culturally grounded integration.

However, a challenge remains in mainstream waters: the idea that emotional and spiritual have no place in education. Marie Battiste passionately explains this Eurocentric cultural dismissive mindset of anything that sits outside of its evolved set of standards from her book *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage*:

The government of the day, often our legal guardians and fiduciaries, do not want to discuss ways of transforming legal or political institutions to include Indigenous peoples in nation-states. They do not want to end their national fantasies and myths about their nations. They do not want to expose the injustices that informed the construction of the state institutions and practices. They do not want to create post-colonial states. They do not want to sustain efforts at institutional reform. They reject the idea of hybridized states that include Indigenous peoples in the political and adjudicative realms. ... They have no remedies for colonization. They are preoccupied with a different idea: how not to end colonization, and how to prolong their gross privileges. (Battiste, 2000, p. 7)

In this quote, she explains the reasons for the challenges and gigantic obstacles First Nation peoples have to overcome. It also gives evidence of why education continues to be used as an assimilative process. Her use of the phrase "...our legal guardians and fiduciaries..." explains the use of keeping First Nations in a dependent state of being by minimizing or dismissing traditional First Nations' original cultural knowledge.

The very idea of post-colonial states and the bewilderment it brings is overwhelming, as the fabric, the foundation of Canada, has racist, Eurocentric concepts so tightly woven and cemented into its structure. It is not only an obstacle for Indigenous peoples, but it is also an obstacle to mainstream culture. It would bring about a crumbling of Canada and a disruption to its progress up the socio-economic ladder of nation-states. However, even if it did make it to the top, not to mention up to this very point of progress, it would be made with the dirtiness of ignoring and without the acknowledgement of the people from whom they acquired the resources to climb that ladder in the first place.

Delving further into the topic of the state of dependency of the First Nations people of this land, they call Canada, we can consider a spectrum of dependency. The two discussed cultures could easily be viewed as sitting at each extreme end of the spectrum. Historically, historical ideologies such as the doctrine of discovery and manifest destiny, and the workings of the founders of Canada, like John A. MacDonald and Egerton Ryerson, have created this current dependent state that First Nations find themselves in today. In “The Legacy” chapter in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, it shows some of the historical roots of this dependency:

The closing of the schools did not bring the residential school story to an end. Their legacy continues to this day. It is reflected in the significant disparities in education, income, and health between Aboriginal people and other Canadians—disparities that condemn many Aboriginal people to shorter, poorer, and more troubled lives. The legacy is also reflected in the intense racism and the systemic discrimination Aboriginal people regularly experience in this country (2015, p.103).

Although educational structures and standards operate in both mainstream and First Nations contexts, it is necessary to consider the impact of imposing an educational system on a

culture to which it does not belong. Morcom, Freeman, and Davis, drawing on extensive research, note that while progress has been made in incorporating Indigenous perspectives into curriculum compared to earlier periods, provincial curricula remain largely Eurocentric across subject areas. Indigenous knowledge is frequently relegated to optional or suggested content, and when included, it is often presented superficially, offering little insight into the complexity, diversity, or sophistication of Indigenous cultures. As a result, Indigenous students are exposed to a “hidden curriculum” that implicitly teaches them that Indigenous histories, intellectual traditions, values, and perspectives are less valuable than Western Eurocentric ones (Morcom et al., 2017, p. 24).

First Nations education remains relatively young and continues to exist in a state of development and adjustment. It was not until 1972 that the National Indian Brotherhood introduced the policy paper *Indian Control of Indian Education*, which was affirmed by the Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chrétien, in 1973. Moreover, less than a decade has passed since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action were released. The transition toward local control of education has been further complicated by persistent governmental shortcomings. As early as 1971, when the first band-operated schools were established, the federal government adopted a “hands-off” approach to the content of education for students on reserves (Mendelson, 2008, p. 3), providing funding without adequate structural or curricular support. This resulted in an educational system that upheld only “minimum standards,” a model deemed unacceptable within provincial systems and insufficient for community needs (Stewart, 2006, p. 1007).

Public education, by contrast, is deeply entrenched and structurally fixed; its foundations cannot simply be undone or reshaped to meet Indigenous needs. This rigidity presents significant

challenges in supporting First Nations students, particularly in language revitalization. For example, at Peguis Central School, students are exposed to the community's language from kindergarten through Grade 12, yet fluency in Ojibwe remains limited. This outcome reflects an educational structure that prevents students from living the language as a daily, immersive experience. Compounding this issue is the filtering of First Nations languages through Eurocentric standards, such as the use of Standard Roman Orthography—developed by linguists to “standardize” Indigenous languages, often without regard for Indigenous epistemologies or linguistic sovereignty (Wilson & Schellhammer, 2021, p. 62).

Awareness is central to understanding the position of Indigenous peoples within their own homeland. As discussed earlier, mainstream culture has flooded the social landscape, painting all people with the same brush and obscuring the distinct position of First Nations. Given that life on reserve and off reserve constitutes a culturally isolated experience, First Nations education must also be distinct and self-determined. Only through an education system rooted in Indigenous context, language, and worldview can the needs, identities, and aspirations of First Nations learners be meaningfully supported.

In one article, *Reshaping Canadian History Education in Support of Reconciliation* by Lindsay Gibson and Roland Case, he states,

Our contention is that the significant and important changes that history education must undertake to address the TRC's Calls to Action can be implemented with radical epistemological restructuring of the discipline of history, as some would suggest. More specifically, we believe that the legitimate opposition of Eurocentric dominance of the history curriculum can be redressed without the wholesale

dismissal of the discipline of history and its methods (Gibson and Case, 2019, p. 254)

Assuming the perspective of colonial stance, one can understand the potential threat of their established foundation and its dependence on history crumbling and the inhumanity of colonization being exposed. However, the author goes on to suggest changes in three areas of educational practice that would retain Eurocentric foundations and acknowledge the Indigenous experience in that history:

- Educators must strengthen the representation of the centrality of Indigenous People in Canadian history courses.
- Educators need to alter the way history has traditionally been taught as an established body of conclusions about the past that students are expected to accept.
- Curriculum developers in each province and territory should establish one or more integrated, multidisciplinary courses in Indigenous studies dedicated to teaching about Indigenous historical and contemporary worldviews. (Gibson & Case, 2019, p. 254)

There are numerous challenges in developing Indigenous education, with many interrelated components that must be carefully considered. The example from the above quote gives an example that it is not always so challenging. It must also be acknowledged that this work takes place within a landscape flooded by Eurocentric worldviews. Among the most significant challenges is penetrating the barrier of insecurity and prejudice that often perceives Indigenous education as a threat to the mainstream way of life. Indigenous peoples of this land now called Canada face greater obstacles navigating mainstream systems in order to attain outcomes comparable to those of Non-Indigenous populations. When many individuals in First

Nations communities grow up within conditions of dependency, adversity, and poverty, these realities can become normalized and reproduced across generations. Formal education, as defined by the mainstream, is not required to sustain this way of life, which further complicates engagement with existing educational structures.

One of the greatest challenges in creating effective First Nations education lies in ensuring that culture is central to its design and implementation. This underscores the importance of cultural awareness, understanding one's position within the Canadian landscape, and addressing this through engagement with the fourth quadrant of the medicine wheel, which represents emotional and spiritual wholeness. Without this dimension, education remains incomplete and misaligned with Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

It may be important to clarify a personal mindset. Learning about figures such as John A. Macdonald and his role in the founding of Canada revealed a form of strategic ingenuity in nation-building, while Egerton Ryerson's influence on the development of Canadian education reflected a deep commitment to intellectual structure. At the risk of generalization, First Nations peoples are often characterized by humility and quiet strength. This may stem from a profound relationship with the land, seeing oneself as part of it, as well as from generations of imposed inferiority through assimilation policies that were repeated until internalized. Yet humility allows for deeper perception. It creates space to step outside dominant cultural pools and appreciate long-term processes of change and evolution.

Darrel McLeod's Peyakow offers insight into this worldview through the signing of Treaty 8. A highly educated leader involved in treaty discussions recalled that ancestors understood the hardships that were coming and accepted them not merely as suffering, but as an intergenerational ceremony: "Our medicine men say the moniyawak will dominate for ten

generations and their greed and selfishness will ruin them” (McLeod, 2021, p. 7). This perspective reflects a mindset fundamentally different from that of settlers or mainstream society.

From this view, First Nations peoples remain in the ceremony begun at the time of treaty signing. Some ancestors called upon the Creator as a witness, marking the treaties not simply as political agreements but as sacred commitments. Within this ongoing ceremony, beauty can still be seen through adversity.

Processing Through the Education Medicine Wheel Structure

Considering the historical context and its impact on education, the general experience of First Nations education can be interpreted through the First Nation Education Medicine Wheel (MW) as having travelled through both the East and South quadrants. First Nations education, which is distinct from broader First Nations culture, may be positioned just beyond the West due to its ability to value and integrate emotion and spirituality into its educational system, represented by the color red. This placement reflects the existence of foundational policy documents such as *First Nations Control of First Nations Education* and various provincial First Nations Education Frameworks. The presence of these documents signals an acknowledgment of the inadequacy of mainstream public education for First Nations learners and represents deliberate efforts to address and support their educational needs.

FN education can also be situated in the Yellow of the East, symbolizing beginnings. It emerges within pre-existing educational structures shaped by entrenched beliefs and values, most notably those established through the residential school system. This phase transitions into the green waters associated with the day school system and adolescence, where students remain embedded within a foreign educational environment characterized by continued “parental dependence.” During this period, Non-Indigenous public school teachers often reinforced

Eurocentric values, further deepening the divide between Original First Nations Culture (OFNC) and the people by replacing Indigenous worldviews with dominant Western norms.

Movement into the blue waters of the South reflects a critical shift, as First Nations began to establish an educational foundation rooted in self-determination. This stage corresponds with the response to the federal “White Paper” in 1969 and the subsequent development of *Indian Control of Indian Education* in 1972, marking the beginning of local control over education. This directional shift represents growth, assertion of identity, and the re-emergence of Indigenous agency within educational systems.

Here is an excerpt of the white paper from the Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy 1969:

Some changes could take place quickly. Others would take longer. It is expected that within five years the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development would cease to operate in the field of Indian affairs; the new laws would be in effect and existing programs would have been devolved. The Indian lands would require special attention for some time (1969, p. 4)

The White Paper was the trigger for a conflict over creating local control of First Nations education, where First Nations took over local control, meaning they had a vision for First Nations education. The First Nations Control of First Nations Education document states: “...document includes language immersion, holistic and culturally relevant curricula, well-trained educators, focused leadership, parental involvement and accountability, and safe and healthy facilities founded on principles that respect First Nations jurisdiction over education (2010, p. 3).

Implementing a vision is inherently challenging, particularly when the sources of failure are not immediately clear. While it was evident in much research as cited throughout this thesis works and personal observations that First Nations students were not achieving equitable educational outcomes, the contributing factors only gradually became visible. More recently, the House of Commons report *Braiding Learning and Healing: A Pathway to Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students* (May 2024), produced by the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, outlined a comprehensive set of recommendations to improve Indigenous education. However, an earlier and more significant shift of First Nations education into the South-East purple waters may be attributed to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). As Dickenson, Newbigging, and Miller explain, “a consequence of the Oka Crisis was Prime Minister Mulroney’s announcement in 1991 of [RCAP] to investigate and report on the situation of Indigenous people across the country” (2023, p. 451). This movement was further influenced by Phil Fontaine’s public disclosure of sexual abuse experienced in the residential school system, aired nationally in 1990, which intensified public awareness and accountability.

This period marked a time of admission, anger, and reckoning, anger toward federal governments for failing to adequately support First Nations local control of education, and acknowledgment of the severe abuses endured by students in residential schools. These realizations generated a broader awareness of the structural inequities within FN education and initiated a movement that carried First Nations Education, not First Nations cultures, toward the boundary between the purple and red waters of the West direction. The subsequent release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s report, including its 94 Calls to Action,

represented a further transition, with implementation efforts moving FN education more fully into the red waters associated with responsibility, reflection, and systemic response.

Indigenous education often experiences a temporal lag in achieving transformative breakthroughs, as meaningful change requires time to implement and to address challenges that emerge throughout these processes. It is the presence of vision that propels education toward the higher planes of the Education Medicine Wheel. At present, this vision is centered on the healing of intergenerational trauma, a process that must unfold deeply within the red waters until confidence, stability, and familiarity are restored. Only then can movement occur toward the higher realm of the pink waters of the Education Medicine Wheel, where renewed strength, clarity, and sustained transformation become possible. There may be other Indigenous peoples in these waters like the Maori of New Zealand and perhaps they are getting closer to the white waters of the North where they begin to teach the ways in which to have a successful education system it seems they have been successful with the revitalization of the Maori language, Smith explains:

In 1982 Maori elders came together for a major hui (large gathering)...., ...As a result Maori elders and leaders went back to their respective communities, families and tribal groups and began to develop what has become known as the Te Kohanga Reo initiative: to take preschool children into total immersion Moari language nurseries; to surround them with “nannies’ and elders who were fluent speakers of Moari language. (Smith, 2021, p. 63)

Although language is only one part of education, this shows the vision at work in the red waters of Education Medicine Wheel that includes actual practice with the culture included. Perhaps there are educational institutions in Canada in practice in the red waters,

but it is most likely in the arena of higher learning. However, to implement vision in elementary and secondary education on reserve is still just a vision in the provincial educational framework policies. Educational visions have made it to the red waters of the West and we just wait for the vision to take root for the culture to feel the impact of the policies and visions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Members of any society may be immersed in cultural environments that are mostly internalized and unconsciously experienced. Mainstream Canadian culture is largely influenced by Eurocentric culture, with contemporary, media-inspired manifestations. As Singh and Reyhner state,

While some aspects of modern life require new pedagogical approaches, such as the use of computers, one only has to look at modern youth and society to understand modern society has moved too far from traditional child rearing practices that taught Indigenous values, including respect and humility, and to be close observers both of their Elders and their surroundings in order to learn what they needed to survive and live fruitful lives. (2013, p. 48)

In this kind of environment, it becomes especially difficult to meaningfully impact the people who are in a position to make systemic change. The voices of First Nations are usually forced to manoeuvre through various structural, cultural, and ideological obstacles before their voices can be listened to and perceived. Until these obstacles are overcome, the First Nations communities will continue to live in closed cultural enclaves that have never been given a chance to engage in the development and transformation of Canada as the European settlers have been given. This recognition to overcome these stated barriers and connect to those First Nation voices is an access point to chapter 5, which aims to introduce educational experiences and perspectives as they are lived and perceived in the First Nations communities.

This examination does not overlook the achievements made by Canada and its provinces in response to Truth and Reconciliation endeavors. Nevertheless, the educational context of First Nations is still at the stage of development, and there is a need to equip general readers with the ability to think and act intelligently in the context of the findings that are provided. Education

has been just one aspect of the wider First Nations advocacy in the Canadian context during the times of activism, which has led to the creation of many educational initiatives in education. Many have been created in Eurocentric ways that do not have grounded First Nations views and thus are unable to respond effectively to the needs of communities. Others are developed by First Nations but are not easily implemented in the institutional systems that are largely Eurocentric. Other initiatives are either outdated or do not adequately reflect the high cultural, spiritual and linguistic diversity of First Nations. Collectively, these restrictions pose important questions regarding the efficacy of current educational policies and structures in the case of First Nation students.

A selection of these initiatives reflected in provincial education policy are examined using the conceptual framework of the First Nation Education Medicine Wheel (MW). The MW enables examination of the evolutionary stages of First Nations education alongside Canadian and provincial responses and achievements. This study focuses primarily on provincially developed educational directive documents, particularly Provincial First Nation Education Policy Frameworks, as well as broader provincial education standards and selected provincially developed curriculum documents.

The chosen Canadian regions or provinces to be studied are the Prairie Provinces. These groups share similarities due to the First Nations' original cultural identities, which were shaped by the physical landscape, the Canadian Numbered Treaties, and their experiences in residential schools, resulting in a hybrid culture: The writers of Truth and Reconciliation explain:

The closing of the schools did not bring the residential school story to an end. Their legacy continues to this day. It is reflected in the significant disparities in education, income, and health between Aboriginal people and other Canadians—disparities

that condemn many Aboriginal people to shorter, poorer, and more troubled lives.

The legacy is also reflected in the intense racism and the systemic discrimination

Aboriginal people regularly experience in this country (2015, TRC, p. 103).

This study aims to answer the research question: How can provincial Indigenous policy be understood through the experience of a First Nations Educator who has established a strong connection to OFNC?

Methodology and Methods

This methods section will begin by defining subjectivity and objectivity, as it is important to distinguish between learned thought and sacred thought that I had learned throughout my experiences of pipe ceremonies and speaking to the grandfathers/grandmothers. Blindly subscribing to societal standards is an example of learned thoughts, and its source comes from outside a person's being. Sacred thought comes from within a person's being; it often questions the outside societal standards. It almost feels like a betrayal to cage the process and poke and prod at its essence. However, it is also necessary to bring this forward into the academic community. Each of us has experienced a self-learning process: it happens in conversations, in writing, and in the quietness of meditation. Self-learning occurs when a conversation, writing, or thought flows so rhythmically and cohesively that we begin to learn from ourselves. It is an unveiling of hidden inner thoughts, prompting questions like, "What is the source?" and "How do we know it?" This experience transcends familiar emotions such as happiness; it is a deeper, more accomplished feeling.

Most people stumble upon this subjective experience by chance, while others, such as medicine people or shamans, have learned to intentionally engage with it. Routine and familiar tasks rarely stir emotion—they operate like autopilot. In contrast, subjective experiences,

removed from societal norms, allow emotion and spirit to nurture and unlock sacred thought. This can happen through committed passion in writing, the rhythmic beating of drums and eagle whistles, or the intimacy and trust of a deep conversation. Such experiences create conditions for the birthing of pure, fresh thoughts, new perspectives on lived experience, allowing information to present itself naturally for the task at hand.

Unfortunately, the essence of this experience is sometimes lost when processed objectively, as academic and professional standards tend to dissect and fragment it. Scientific inquiry necessitates the removal of emotion and spirit to achieve neutrality and objectivity. While objectivity is important, this process leaves a gap in holistic understanding. From a First Nations perspective, objectivity is akin to the physical world navigated by Nanabush, which provides sustenance leading to sacred understanding. The value of sacred thought is often unrecognized by the scientific community but deeply appreciated by medicine people. Just as one cannot achieve spiritual insight without participating in the physical rituals of a sundance or sweat lodge, subjectivity arises in response to objective experiences, a cyclical interplay of experience and reflection. This discussion is intended to highlight the importance of subjectivity for academic audiences, enhancing comprehension and integration. It is the sort of subjectivity discussed here that I will employ in this study.

With this deeper appreciation of subjectivity, the First Nation Education Medicine Wheel (MW) described in chapter 2 may be better appreciated. This subjective process forms the foundation of Original First Nation Original Culture (OFNC), which exists in its essence. Each document in this study was chosen to gain a thorough understanding on how First Nation education is viewed in these Prairie Province regions in relation to education and their education standards. They will be examined using the MW, examining each directional quadrant and its

two subdivisions (as illustrated on page 18). Each quadrant is represented by a set of indicators, against which documents will be compared. The North quadrant represents the highest level of the first cycle, though the full cycle concept is beyond the scope of this study and is mentioned only to show continuity.

The examination of the chosen documents will be discussed as a process of filtering through the lens of my close relationship with the grandfathers/grandmothers that I am consciously immersed in. This immersion includes life experiences that built my worldviews which includes FN culture, my formal education, my teaching experiences, my role as a medicine woman, built relationships with community, and my living spirituality. Throughout my life experiences of increasing consciousness and gratitude the processes is like a reward of epiphanies and joyful enlightenment over and over. It can be described as an unlocking or unveiling of realizations that were already in existence waiting patiently to be uncovered.

This process may be difficult for some to accept, but when one's worldview is immersed in the OFNC concept of a wholeness connection with Creator where everything is sacred and connected. The sacredness exists in everything and seeing that is what this examination is about, finding the sacredness in the things we do and are immersed in. For each document of this study, I will examine the respective documents through this lens. The MW is a measurement of this consciousness and after the reading of each document it will be then plotted in a sub-quadrant on that theoretical framework structure.

The following table lists the indicators for each quadrant.

Quadrants/Sub-quadrants	Indicators
East (Yellow)	1. Acknowledgement of environment/situation/challenge 2. Cultural realization and its effects on education have been made

	3. Explanation of obstacles 4. First wave of activism begins
South-East (Green)	1. Response to the East quadrant 2. Observable change has taken place 3. Acknowledgement of inefficient response due to the continuation of cultural turmoil and educational inefficiency for the First Nations population 4. Realization of governmental oppression 5. The second wave of activism has taken place
South (Blue)	1. First Nation direction of education begins with processes, including implementation and maintenance. 2. Educational arena exploration 3. East and South-East student abuses disclosed 4. Activism momentum in place
South-west (Purple)	1. First Nation Educational directives mimic Western education 2. First Nations seek governmental accountability for student trauma and abuses, including poor funding 3. First Nation student needs identified, and initial educational directives begin: First Nation content curriculum development, implementation of new action/structures 4. Educational exploration brings about First Nation cultural difference challenges 5. Activism gains a strong momentum to seek national acknowledgement and support
West (Red)	1. First Nation activism honed in on specific East and South-East quadrant effects, leading to the identification and meeting of First Nation student needs using a First Nations-developed approach. 2. First Nation experience national awareness and acknowledgement becomes common practice, and student supports are put in place. 3. Deeper First Nation educational effects uncovered and new layers of First Nation enhance First Nation Education. 4. First Nation formal educational entities developed.
North-West (Pink)	1. Identification of Original First Nation Cultural educational approaches and attempt at implementation 2. First Nation education continues to depend on federal and provincial funding arrangements. 3. First Nation entities' partnerships form 4. Government funding initiatives are created

North (White)	1. Advanced educational institutes take a leading role in assisting all First Nation communities. 2. Historic governmental assimilation practices related to genocide through education are addressed, and compensation is directed into education (i.e., radar ground searches) 3. Forerunner in First Nation education models (i.e., 2/5 of education will be First Nation reclamation of OFNC and Indigegogy) 4. Indigenous education trailblazers and dual-navigators honoured
North-East (Tan)	1. Original First Nation Culture is recognized, reclaimed, and implemented in First Nation Education. 2. Original First Nation Culture education models will be sought from Non-Indigenous educators and schools. 3. Original First Nation Education will have a department in the federal education directives 4. In order for First Nations to continue to thrive, OFNC education and Indigegogy must be grounded in traditional culture, ancestral, and Creator natural laws.

Documents for Study

The following documents were selected for examination in relation to this study and are organized into three sections: primary, secondary, and tertiary. The primary section consists of three documents representing the developed provincial frameworks for First Nations education in the Prairie Provinces. Chosen as they are the provincial governmental directives of FN Education. These form the core material of this study. The secondary section includes supplementary documents: First Nation education curricula that may or may not have been developed under provincial framework directives, but represent what content is being taught in secondary education. It offers a snapshot of the current understanding of what FN education is. The tertiary section contains political and governmental documents, including some developed

by First Nations that provide insight into broader educational direction. These were chosen because it forms the FN educational foundation which includes general formal education expectations and the voices of First Nation governments (their views on education).

Primary Documents

The first document, from Alberta, is the *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (FNEPF)*, published by Alberta Learning in 2002. As the earliest framework among the Prairie Provinces, it serves as a baseline for understanding how provincial education authorities approached First Nations education at the time. This policy is a forerunner in its field, preceding the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) report. The framework is clear in structure, outlining five goals, strategies for achievement, and measures for evaluation. While it proposes effective initiatives, it carries a Non-Indigenous “savior” tone, reflecting mainstream perspectives that filter the Indigenous experience. Despite including First Nations representatives and educational experts, the development process largely reflects Non-Indigenous interpretations.

The second document, from Saskatchewan, is *Inspiring Success: First Nation and Métis PreK–12 Education Policy Framework*, published in 2018, with the original framework released in 2009. This document demonstrates a more robust Indigenous-developed perspective, acknowledging assimilation practices and intergenerational trauma. It incorporates First Nation cultural concepts, such as trees and medicine wheels, and emphasizes reconciliation. However, upon closer examination, the framework presents shortcomings: on-reserve schools and students are largely ignored, and goals are often broad and non-specific. While the language suggests responsiveness to Indigenous issues, the document ultimately lacks concrete commitment and actionable plans.

The third document, from Manitoba, is *Mamahtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With, An Indigenous Education Policy Framework (MPF)*, released in 2022. As a post-TRC document, it benefits from previous provincial frameworks and aims to integrate extensive Indigenous content. Initially overwhelming due to its density, the MPF includes First Nations conceptual frameworks such as the Circle of Courage, wellness concepts (belonging, meaning, purpose, hope), and guidance from Indigenous dignitaries. Its structure, however, is difficult to navigate, and the use of Non-Indigenous language in policy statements creates a sense of partial understanding. Despite these challenges, the framework offers abundant resources and historical context, providing a strong foundation for Indigenous education.

Secondary Documents

The secondary documents include curricular materials that support or complement provincial frameworks. The earliest is Saskatchewan's *Native Studies: A Curriculum Guide for Grade 11 International Indigenous Issues* (1992). Despite outdated terminology, it offers a robust Indigenous perspective and serves as a trailblazing example of Indigenous-centered education. It illustrates principles such as "People are physical and spiritual beings," demonstrating an unfiltered declaration of Indigenous philosophies that precedes provincial frameworks and national TRC directives.

Alberta's *Aboriginal Studies 10–20–30* (2002) is a comprehensive high school curriculum covering twelve themes from origin and settlement patterns to legislation and cultural change. While inclusively titled, the outcomes are manipulative, guiding Non-Indigenous students to maintain a superior perspective while instilling shame in Indigenous students. For example, students are asked to describe the federal government's rationale for residential schools before exploring Indigenous experiences of aggressive assimilation, reflecting a Eurocentric and colonial mindset.

Manitoba's *Grade 12 Current Topics in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Studies: A Foundation for Implementation* (2011) is the closest approximation to a full First Nations curriculum. It organizes content into five learning clusters, offering resources and blackline masters. The document emphasizes decolonization, cultural competency, and reconciliation, recognizing Indigenous experiences while maintaining accountability. Nevertheless, it retains a Eurocentric base, with cultural depth limited by the overarching mainstream educational structure.

Tertiary Documents

The tertiary documents provide governmental and political context. The first, from the Assembly of First Nations, is *First Nation Control of First Nation Education* (2010), initially released in 1972 as *Indian Control of Indian Education*. This foundational document aimed to empower First Nations students, foster pride, and establish respectful relationships with Non-Indigenous communities.

Alberta's *Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta* (2010) reflects the implementation of these initiatives, outlining action items between First Nations and the provincial government. A continuation of *Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta* continue three years later with a *Long Term Strategic Plan* in 2013 outlining recommendations that came from the original 2010 MOU. Similarly, Saskatchewan's *Treaty Outcomes and Indicators* (2013) provides a framework for treaty education, identifying four goals with associated outcomes.

Two additional documents focus on educational quality standards, providing a baseline for evaluating First Nations education. Alberta's *Teaching Quality Standard, Ministerial Order #001/2020* (2023) and Manitoba's *Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming* (2022) offer criteria for measuring program effectiveness. These documents were selected to examine

alignment with educational standards and to explore gaps or potential violations based on the author's personal teaching experience in First Nations communities.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study is to examine Indigenous education initiatives reflected in provincial policy with the use of a theoretical lens that has been developed to reflect essential aspects of First Nations knowledge in an effort to understand how such initiatives support First Nations culture, this section will offer a reflection of that examination. The principal guide for this examination has been the research question how can provincial Indigenous policy be understood through the experience of a First Nations Educator who has established a strong connection to Original First Nations Culture? The coding that I have employed for this study is offered for the purpose of simplicity within the limited space of a graduate thesis.

The documents were organized into three categories: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary documents or provincial Indigenous policy frameworks are the main focus of the study, as they convey the provincial direction of Indigenous education. However, before the process is started terminology must be distinguished to respect the diversity of cultures with in this thesis, this region, Canada. According to Queen's University's terminology, "Indigenous is an umbrella terms for First Nations (status and non-status), Metis and Inuit." They further go on to describe, "Most, but not all, reserve-based communities in Canada refer to themselves as 'First Nations' (Queen's University, 2026). To go one step further in the context of this thesis study it will be assumed that First Nations include those who carry the culture of First Nation reserves or the hybrid culture of OFNC and intergenerational trauma of assimilation.

The way the documents were examined took on a rhythm of its own. It was a sacred process; prayers were often spoken before a session of evaluation began to establish a connection. Some see this as naïve; however, growing up and being immersed in First Nation culture and seeing, feeling, and experiencing the effects of assimilation on its people, it is work

not taken lightly. It creates a space of honesty and integrity, as it is also understood that conscious bias is an obstacle one must overcome.

In the examination of the provincial Indigenous education documents, the original intention was to examine First Nation provincial educational frameworks. They were intended to be the primary documents, but as the examination process unfolded, I realized they were connected or a product of political legislation. It was then realized that provincial curriculum became an outcome of most frameworks and these became secondary documents that also needed to be examined. Therefore, I began with the foundational tertiary documents, then move into secondary documents (curricula). Since the primary documents were the original centerpiece I wanted to be experienced in the examination process so I saved it as the final stage. This order was decided as I felt a strong and holistic foundation must be built in order to have a clear mental grasp on the various views of First Nation education and how educational standards contributed to it.

The MW sub-quadrant placements were added after the examination of each document in a manner explained in the previous chapter. Each document was individually examined, and findings were organized by highlighting key points from each document that emerged through the author's First Nations cultural frame discussed in chapters 1, 2, and 3. The findings will inform the discussion reflected in chapter 5.

Tertiary Documents

Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta (MOU)

The MOU comprises two parts: the *MOU for First Nations Education* (2010) and the *MOU for First Nations Education in Alberta: Long-Term Strategic Plan* (2013). The document is rooted in the Indigenous perspective and written in the Indigenous voice, because the document is based from the FN experience, "Whereas, First Nations students attending First

Nation schools or provincial schools are not achieving educational outcomes or levels of success similar to all other students in Alberta.” (1972; MOU, 2010, p. 2) There was so much honour and privilege in witnessing a process in improving First Nation education unfold. The examination of this document set will be conducted in two parts, beginning with the MOU.

The MOU is a formal initiative designed to enhance the educational experience and academic achievement of Alberta First Nations students. The agreement's signatories are The Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations, Treaty 7 Management Corporation, Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta, Her Majesty The Queen in Right of Canada (Minister of Indian Affairs), and Her Majesty The Queen in the Right of Alberta (Minister of Education & Minister of Aboriginal Relations). The document begins with a Preamble situated in the West direction of the First Nations Educational Medicine Wheel. It is paraphrased as follows: where the First Nations of Alberta assert themselves as an autonomous government at the federal level and will be treated as such (MOU, 2010, p. 2).

The idea of *asserting themselves as an autonomous government* reminded me of my mother recounting a memory of her and her siblings enduring physical abuse at their day school, highlighting their parents' powerlessness in stopping it. She said her parents had to make a choice between inhumane abuse (some experiences too obscene to share) and stay close to home or lose their children to a residential school. This makes the MOU quote of having an autonomous government, inspiring, because being of First Nation descent and culture, there comes an unconscious acceptance of assuming the position of children under the authority of all levels of government and mainstream culture. The idea of autonomy; to stand strong in ourselves – as equals – is a source of power in itself. However, this intergenerational inferiority complex

originating in residential schools has been cultured into contemporary First Nation culture and still resides among most FN people to this day.

This unconscious phenomenon that we carry as FN people can even be traced to Canadian legislation as seen in the Indian Act: “42 (1) Subject to this Act, all jurisdiction and authority in relation to matters and causes testamentary, with respect to deceased Indians, is **vested exclusively in the Minister** [bolded for emphasis] and shall be exercised subject to and in accordance with regulations of the Governor in Council.” (Minister of Justice: Canada, 1985).

This new awareness is essential, as it helps us to take the role of effective leaders who can support and meet the needs of First Nations students. FN people have endured more than two centuries of aggressive assimilation, such as the Residential School system. As stated from the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba website, “The first church-run Indian Residential School was opened in 1831” (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2026) and according to Eagle Speaker from The Galt Museum and Archives, the first residential school in Alberta was opened in 1884: St. Joseph’s Residential School (Eagle Speaker, 2021). The disempowerment status has become so ingrained in a residential school-hybridized First Nations culture that the restrictions placed on FNE have become invisible, ultimately preventing effective and meaningful development. Moreover, the claim of equal leadership in the name of the OFNC and the Creator is a revival of the spirit and the responsibility our ancestors had at the signing of the numbered treaties.

The directness and authority of the third point in the preamble, “Whereas, the First nations in Alberta believe the right to education is an inherent right granted by the Creator, reflects the original spirit and intent of the treaties, and therefore supports the vision of ‘Indian Control of Indian Education’” (1972; MOU, 2010, p. 2), reaffirms this foundational principle.

First Nations leadership, combined with their governmental status and delegated responsibilities to both the federal and provincial levels of government, brought pride, humanity, and dignity to the First Nations people of Canada. First Nations people could recognize themselves as Canadians, not just as wards of the state.

There have been many generations since the OFNC was complete, and the recovery unfolds in gradual increments of awareness. Reclamation entails gathering and reassembling the lost and broken pieces of OFNC in the present day. Until now, it has been confusing to love some aspects of Canada while resenting others. It is like living unsteadily on a fence, constantly falling one way or another. The feeling of security from the destruction of that same fence, which has always been there, is mind-blowing.

The preamble contains significant content that inspires pride; however, other sections of the MOU require scrutiny. In the *Visions and Principles* section, standards, attitudes, and expectations are established for all parties involved in the MOU. In *Part II – Commitments*, the Indigenous parties exercise their treaty rights and thoroughly direct federal actions, achieving increasing success and creating “...culturally appropriate and responsive education environment[s]” (MOU, 2010, p. 4) for Indigenous students. It is acknowledged that Indigenous dependency persists for various reasons, yet there is also a recognition of the importance of realizing their vision through increased funding, adequate collection and use of data, accountability, maintenance, and improvement (MOU, 2010). Once established, the independence it creates would allow a First Nation-oriented educational direction that supports culturally appropriate change.

There is an under-developed FN capacity observed in the MOU, this is due to age of aggressive governmental assimilation practices: “(4) Alberta will provide in-kind support and

expertise to build capacity in the following areas: a) data collection and management; b) Accountability and reporting; c) System improvement; and d) curriculum and resource development” (MOU, 2010, p. 6-7) that relates to Quadrant 1 of this study’s medicine wheel frame and its movement forward. This dependency is an outcome of historical assimilation practices, including the isolation of the Indigenous people. In Alberta, according a guide developed by the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortium, “The original inhabitants of Alberta were not asked to participate in politics and were left out of much of the political negotiations dealing with land or laws. First Nations people were finally allowed to vote in provincial elections in 1969.” (Alberta Regional Professional Consortium, no date)

By this point it was like a dam broke and filtered through my FN lens. My thoughts regarding this idea of under-developed capacity and FN dependency culture came flooding into me with rushing and stirring thoughts.

The Indigenous people of Canada were subjected to various levels of hardship and adversity. There are overt circumstances, such as the effects of assimilation experiences: residential school, Sixties Scoop, child welfare, and earlier in history, warfare, starvation; these occurred before political boundaries were erected, and cultural genocide. However, covert circumstances include the unconscious effects of government and Indian Agent oppression, which resulted in complex trauma and the normalization of the newly formed FN culture. This encompasses the various stages from the restructuring of the Indian Affairs Department to the dissolution of the Indian Agent occupation.

Following the isolation of FN individuals onto reserves, the first generations of people were conditioned to see themselves as powerless and inferior in their isolated cultural pocket, where life was significantly different from mainstream society. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin

explain, “Postcolonial cultures resist such concealment because it is impossible to discuss the culture of such societies without recognizing the power of colonial institutions, ideologies and patronage systems in validating some forms of culture and denying the validity of others” (Ashcroft et al., 2013, p. 201). They were not permitted to acquire an education without approval and were not allowed representation in the court system. In 2022, the Alberta Government released a 34 page document called A Brief Introduction to the Indigenous Peoples of Alberta. Although a similar experience across the regions of the Numbered Treaties it explains, “Indian agents also introduced a pass system that required First Nations Peoples living on reserves to get the Indian agent’s written permission to leave the reserve.” (Alberta Government, 2022, p.10)

An uneducated generation was suddenly subjected to a shift. However, they could not simply be educated or flood into urban areas and educate themselves, as there was no foundation to assume the mainstream role. It was an unfamiliar status that required adaptation and acclimatization, not to mention the prejudice of the mainstream, which is still prevalent, albeit shrinking, in mainstream society today.

Secondly, this “Canadian Land” is borrowed and paid for through treaty promises. From the perspective of a standard transactional agreement, the Canadian government becomes the borrower and must fulfill its commitments. The Alberta Government document explains, “Under these Treaties, the First Nations who occupied these territories gave up large areas of land to the Crown. In exchange, the Treaties provided for such things as reserve lands and other benefits...” (Alberta Government, 2022, p.9) But when First Nations have attempted to claim the fulfilment of these treaty commitments, they have often been depicted as irrational or ungrateful for demanding their rights. This framing has led to a deep-seated resentment of the First Nations peoples in the mainstream Canadian society, which can be traced back to the Indian wars and is

still present today through the discourse of treaty rights as “undeserved handouts”. These depictions distort the historical fact that Canada was the beneficiary of these agreements and also implemented policies that had a devastating cultural impact, which was comparable to cultural genocide.

Thirdly, FN individuals were portrayed as incompetent because they were unable to perform many tasks independently due to capacity-building limitations imposed by government restrictions. This also resulted in humiliation, both in how mainstream society perceived them and in how they perceived themselves, as they learned a new system that they had been purposely kept uninformed about. The Alberta Government document acknowledged FN conditions in Urban Communities, “...Indigenous people face discrimination and differing values and expectations. Poverty is widespread among urban Indigenous people, and statistically, a larger percentage of Indigenous people off reserve live below the poverty line compared to non-Indigenous people. (Alberta Government, 2022, p.30)

Fourth, the mainstream is unaware of FN culture, the effects of past assimilation practices, and the importance of FNC culture and spirituality. When one tries to process information about FN culture and is not aware of their cultural, historical, and political background, then any interpretation of such information is flawed. Starblanket and Rowe show a recent example, “This dangerous situation is likely to worsen now that Smith has pinpointed Indigenous people as a barrier to real Albertans and their democratic rights. (Starblanket & Rowe, 2026) It becomes impossible to analyze the FN experience correctly because the results are distorted by prejudice and cultural misunderstandings.

Fifthly, generations of FN students have been conditioned through their formal education to perceive themselves as inadequate. Mainstream education is based on the mainstream

experience, which includes background, capacity, and understanding. It developed in a cultural “soil” that allowed successive generations to flourish. Battiste explains, “EK [Eurocentric knowledge] has been constructed as the opposite of IK [Indigenous knowledge]. Through its applications and teachings, it has long ignored, neglected or rejected IK as primitive, barbaric and inferior, centering and privileging European methodologies and perspectives.” (Battiste & Henderson, 2009, p.6) In contrast, First Nations peoples witnessed this success and felt inadequate. They had no idea they were being compared to a system that did not reflect their cultural foundations. Intergenerational trauma and the coping strategies developed to deal with it are viewed as another layer of inherited influence, further reinforcing an overall sense of inferiority.

Sixth, poverty and the shame associated with it in this *independent society* have led to low self-esteem among First Nations peoples, who are often unaware that it is the consequence of different levels of government abuse. This misattribution further contributes to the stress that FN communities already experience. Battiste explains the successes and challenges to rectify this situation,

The Indigenous renaissance has deconstructed and discredited the traditional Eurocentric view of Indigenous people and their heritage as exotic objects that have nothing to do with knowledge, science, or progress. However, it has not yet displaced the educational empire of EK, which remains resistant to the Indigenous renaissance. (Battiste & Henderson, 2009, p.6)

There are other layers, most of which are unconscious. Nevertheless, FN governments know about some of these layers and are uniquely positioned to represent their communities. By doing this, they will have to overcome the pressures caused by the hard stance taken on them by

federal authorities. Humility is a characteristic feature of this course, but it takes immense courage and possibly the help of the other five of the Seven Teachings to break the bias of the mainstream society and governments. Notably, there is no shame in insisting on the implementation of FN treaty rights, including the provision of students with education of sufficient and culturally relevant levels.

There are so many flashbacks that are associated with the idea of dependency as I was growing up, two quick examples include lacking shame in collecting welfare, this was because most of my reserve population received it, I was 18. The other being shocked when I attended my first year of university on-campus and away from home. Finding out I had to choose my own courses and buy my own books scared me, I was 28. However, as one goes through the experiences of life accumulating broader perspectives from teaching on reserve, working in Correctional Services of Canada and especially in my graduate studies I began to see the gaps in education.

It began as frustration and discontentment early in my career, but at the same time I couldn't understand it or pin point where it was coming from. All I knew was my students were struggling, there was so much despair and the effects of that despair: suicide, thievery, gangs, absenteeism, etc. Yet there was so much love and connection, it was confusing. Luckily, I had a close relationship with Creator due to my ceremonial experiences and did many offerings in my confusion. I once went wading through hip high snow to put out an offering and cried in helplessness to my brother tree. I didn't know what else to do in such a helpless situation.

Although I cannot thoroughly explain the workings of the grandmothers/grandfathers or Creator due to its complexity, here I am writing a thesis on First Nation education, have the ability to recognize dependency, recognize some reasons for the dependency and suggest

remedies. Those might include FN unfamiliarity with the many components that are involved in developing a stable and independent FN educational structure and/or making efforts to fill those educational gaps with specific occupational trained FN cultured people.

There are other layers, most of which are unconscious. Nevertheless, FN governments know about some of these layers and are uniquely positioned to represent their communities. By doing this, they will have to overcome the pressures caused by the hard stance taken on them by federal authorities. Humility is a characteristic feature of this course, but it takes immense courage and possibly the help of the other five of the Seven Teachings to break the bias of the mainstream society and governments. Notably, there is no shame in insisting on the implementation of FN treaty rights, including the provision of students with education of sufficient and culturally relevant levels.

Overall, the MOU would fall close to the border of the West direction, but in the SW quadrant of the First Nations Education Medicine Wheel because it has not identified that FN education has the potential for independence using a FN developed approach. However, the FN entity has developed with the partnership of Alberta's Treaty 6, 7 and 8 as the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs in Alberta and are capable of restructuring FN education based on community cultural needs. They have identified specific needs of their students based in the mainstream educational arena. It must be acknowledged even if these FN governments had the idea of restructuring education to accommodate community culture, the foundation and capacity to uphold FN educational ideas is not yet realized.

It is a process of capacity building and that is not only concentrated in the possibilities of the FN educational structures, but within themselves as individuals to see their own greatness. In my career experiences I have spent years in various FN communities and the biggest affliction in

the FN people is low self-esteem and low sense of self-worth. This include the effects of those afflictions in order to compensate for the worthlessness they feel, such as gang activity (belonging and invulnerability), drug trafficking (more money than welfare), drug addiction and alcoholism (escape), etc. Our FN governments and community leaders are not immune to those afflictions.

Part 2 Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta; Long-Term Strategic Action Plan

This document was published in 2013, three years after the Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta was signed by the governments of Treaty 6, 7, and 8, Alberta, and Canada. The title page features their medicine wheel, with the quadrants labelled First Nations (East, white), First Nation Education Authority (south, yellow), Indigenous Knowledge Wisdom Centre (West, red), and Parent and Community (North, blue), centred around a smaller circle labelled “The Child.” It also gives a note describing the date all parties met to sign the draft. The document sets a tone with a quote from Chief Sitting Bull: “Let’s put our minds together to see what we can do for our children.” (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, from Opening quote), giving it an Indigenous distinction.

The Preamble explains its relation to the MOU signed in 2010 and its intended interpretation. It then provides a brief overview of the vision of First Nations Education in Alberta. These visions fall within the MW’s West, Northwest, and North quadrants, and they align with the First Nation Education Medicine Wheel Conceptual Framework, as the late West and northern quadrants represent future, unrealized goals, which is also where visions are situated.

The main vision of the document from the FN voices and experiences of the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs in Alberta is: “First Nations students are achieving or exceeding the full

educational outcomes, levels and successes of all other students in Alberta.” (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p. 1). Beginning with a quote from Dr. Leroy Little Bear immediately before the background section of the document one could see how meaningful FN culture plays a role in their vision. It expressed history as a renewal process: oral traditions, ceremonies, songs and place (representing land). (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p. 3). Although some visions may be realized sooner than others, like “Empowering First Nation Chiefs and Councils to establish/delegate First Nations Education Authorities to foster best practises in the delivery of First Nations Education, enhance availability of supports and services, be the recipient of education funding,” and “Establishing an Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre (IKWC) that will provide First Nation Schools with expertise and support to revitalize First Nations languages and culture.” (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p.10), these become the first initial steps geared toward the main vision, making them tangible goals with a vision encased within them.

In the next section, *Federal and Provincial Roles*, the phrase “...on-reserve First Nations students...” was greatly appreciated (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p. 1). It recognizes the needs of these FN students and identifies them as a distinct group whose needs have been overlooked. In my experiences, up to this point, First Nation students have either been generally labelled as the Indigenous/First Nations students or diluted into mainstream students. The dialogue continues to explain the funding needs or imply the funding shortfalls for this group of students. It further clarifies funding expectations and emphasizes the need to channel resources into the more proficient management of First Nations Education Authorities.

It is a forward-thinking and bold document outlining First Nations Government-imposed expectations for Provincial and Federal governments. The FN authors of the document have

thoroughly explained how the funding will be used within developed collaborative frameworks. Additionally, under the subheading of *Legislation*, they obligate existing legislation to be reviewed and “...examine options for a legislative base for First Nations education in Alberta.” (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p. 12).

The next section of the document, titled *First Nation Education in Alberta*, began with the previously mentioned poetically articulated quote from Dr. Leroy Little Bear that established a First Nation-oriented tone. To go further in the quote’s significance, it sounded like a traditional ceremonial drum song about First Nations education before the time of contact. It then goes on to discuss the *Background* of First Nations education, briefly mentioning previous education systems such as residential and day schools, before moving on to local control, with a focus on the latter. This emphasis on First Nation local control of education is as follows:

When management and operation of on-reserve schools was transferred from Federal Government to First Nation Governments, First Nations inherited a schoolhouse but not an education system. The current schoolhouse model of First Nation Education in Alberta is best defined by what it lacks when compared to a comprehensive system of education. (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p. 3)

This is a comprehensive label and description of contemporary First Nation education, and the coined terminology is valued for its capacity to facilitate clear stationary attributes. It explains how inefficient the schoolhouse education system was due to its isolation, lack of funding, capital, and second- and third-level services. It further explained the evolution of the mainstream education system as it integrated into the school division and its ability to meet educational needs, while First Nation education remained static in the schoolhouse education system (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013).

Furthermore, the document explains the challenge of improving education, including second- and third-level services, given federal funding that was inconsistent with the mainstream. This also led to highlighting other challenges from various studies, such as poor curriculum and resources, socio-economic conditions, teacher training, poor community involvement, and racism and bullying.

The MOU first discussed that “[w]hen their educational needs are not being met, students are less likely to attend school” (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p. 5). While it may seem self-evident, its acknowledgment formalizes the concept and encapsulates its essence. The 2006 census revealed startling statistics: “...67% of First Nations living on-reserve age 20-24 did not have a high school diploma, compared to 16% of non-Aboriginal students” (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p. 6). Recent data from the National Indigenous Economic Development Board show more current information,

In 2016, the overall gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population was 14.8 percentage points and has decreased to 13 in 2021. However, persistent gaps still remain, in particular between First Nations on reserve and Inuit, with 30.7 and 34.7 percentage point gaps, respectively (National Indigenous Economic Development Board, p. 105)

While the document further explains other challenges, we will proceed to the Call to Action and then to the *Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations in Alberta Background*. This MOU recognized the need for a “...modern education system...” (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p. 3) and for partnerships between the Treaty 6, 7, and 8, leading to the resolution and the creation of the MOU in 2009. The MOU created a vision with

commitments and “...- all of which amount to one of the most comprehensive First Nation education MOUs in Canada.” (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p. 5)

The Implementation of the *Memorandum of Understanding for First Nation Education in Alberta* was also formalized. Through the formalization process, it also seemed to clarify the term "First Nation Education" and distinguish it from mainstream or comprehensive education, enabling the creation of a card that could be presented to foster discussion. It also explained the partnerships involved in discussions to develop the MOU implementation framework and eventually the Creation of a *Long-Term Strategic Action Plan for First Nation Education in Alberta*. One hundred twenty recommendations were formulated to reform FN education, referred to as *The Proposed First Nation Education System in Alberta* (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p. 9).

The document was a well-rounded and thorough establishment and formalization of processes to enable and ratify FN authorities to implement FNS needs with an FN approach. Overall, the document concluded with an annex containing various flowcharts that provide a Joint Action Plan. Analyzing the document was like witnessing the unravelling of one education system to another. The tone of the authors and their admirable capacity and force, which have been built over time, stir the emotions of humility and pride. Both documents were extremely enlightening and brought awareness in many aspects, including the extensive efforts to “battle in an arena” that was previously unfamiliar to them.

In the First Nations Educational Medicine Wheel this document would fall at the beginning of the West Direction for their creation of the proposed *First Nation Education System in Alberta*. It seems in the 3 years since the 2010 MOU they have “...yielded over 120 recommendations to make improvements to the current state of First Nation Education in

Alberta” (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p. 9). Penetrating that Western border is a great achievement and the vision of a restructured education system that “[i]s sufficiently supported to be responsive to students’ needs and implement lasting action in priority areas such as language and culture” (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p. 1). Saskatchewan and Manitoba do not have such documents and it is extremely inspiring and an excitingly ground-breaking experience to witness and I hope to see such collaboration among the Treaty Chiefs in other provinces eventually follow suit.

Teaching Quality Standard: Alberta Education

This short document is a Non-Indigenous document and remains within the southern quadrant as indicated on the MW on page 18. This does not imply it is of lesser value; in fact, it is a valuable document that should be implemented in all schools. It has more to do with different worldviews and their respective values.

This document outlines the expectations for Alberta Teachers and their performance, as well as the trust we should expect from them. It then provides the document's context, along with a glossary of terms, ensuring the intent of the context is understood. It begins with the teaching quality standard, emphasizing the importance of teachers knowing their material and providing “...optimum learning for all students” (Alberta Education, 2023, p. 2). Secondly, teachers are expected to maintain the quality standard throughout their careers. Finally, it lists 6 Teaching Quality Standards, their competencies, and their indicators.

This document is part of a process that included reflection and a response to the first quadrant, but does not discuss the history or development of the teaching standards. From the indicators of the MW in the South-East sub-quadrant, it showed an observable change, and creating teaching quality standards is a part of that change. One example from the document

includes: Fostering Effective Relationships 1. d. inviting First Nations, Metis and Inuit parents/guardians, Elders/knowledge keepers, cultural advisors and local community members into the school and classroom” (Alberta Education, 2023, p. 3). This practice displays a commitment to students and community. Notably, education thus far is an evolutionary process. Some examples of change include students no longer being strapped, the establishment of school divisions, the need for second- and third-level services, and much more. The concept of trusting teachers has become a standard that is now frequently taken for granted in most families due to such standards as those written in this document.

I had some opinions on the First Nations Education Wheel (MW) coding system being unable to articulate certain aspects of First Nations cultural traits. Cultural tension, misunderstanding, and the possibility of prejudice or judgment may be natural when different worldviews are observed or experienced and can be conscious or unconscious. In this case, there is confusion, as it appears there are numerous oversights in the document and in mainstream education in general, when considering the MW: Demonstrating a Professional Body of Knowledge: 3. A teacher applies a current and comprehensive repertoire of effective planning, instruction and assessment practices to meet the learning needs of every student” and “Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Metis and Inuit: 5. A teacher develops and applies foundational knowledge about First Nations, Metis and Inuit for the benefit of all students (Alberta Education, 2023, p. 3).

Among such oversights are expectations of teachers in relation to First Nations content and diversity. As has been mentioned, curricula, publishing, instructional practices, and institutionalized education in general are still largely filtered through Eurocentric processes. What a teacher considers most appropriate is also a kind of filtration; even when they invite

guest speakers, those speakers have also undergone filtration by adopting mainstream worldviews. During the educational experiences of the author, as a student and as an educator, the words “Get your education” were often said by FN elders. Although this guidance is not discouraged, it can be frequently understood as a rejection of FN identity. FN students, along with the guest speakers, have been subjected to conventional standards, thereby influencing their perception. While the intention for these practices is good, FN communities have endured suffering through assimilation processes for centuries, drifting increasingly away from OFNC.

While teachers’ intentions are generally good, it is challenging to have an understanding of FN students’ prior knowledge and backgrounds, particularly for Non-Indigenous teachers who are unlikely to have family living on the streets, missing and murdered women, incarcerated, collecting welfare, murdered on reserve, parentless children, and so on. They cannot relate to the legacy of residential school or all the other atrocities, like healthcare, loss of life on the land and culture, isolation of reserve living, etc. Furthermore, the experience of community orientation in community life on the reserve highlights how everyone is connected and cultured, each with a different worldview. Teachers are unable to value or comprehend this prior knowledge because they lack knowledge of it.

Lastly, the First Nation Education Medicine Wheel (MW) serves as a culmination of experiences gained in all quadrants, before continuing to circle again on a higher plain, starting from the East once more—never-ending growth and evolution. Therefore, the main question is: since mainstream education remains confined to the first two quadrants and the emotional and spiritual realms go unacknowledged, does that education system plateau? Does it have an ending where their idea of education is complete? Does that idea of education change with a paradigm shift in society?

It is said one can never be done sundancing. It is a constant dance of movement forward, surfacing unconscious trauma to eventually unlock its effects, enabling healing and releasing its paralyzing grasp. It constantly leads to a fuller, freer and more confident version of ourselves. It happens at levels of individualism, community and society. It happens in education as a whole and in individual schools as well. This means education cannot ever be complete as it can be compared to the sundance as we dance for life in the lodge of education.

If education plateaus, that makes education vulnerable and creates vulnerable students as the southern realm is a challenging space, characterized by tiredness, confusion, and longing. Its students become society's next generation: inflexible, brittle, and ignorant. Life is not just about the quest to the top of the socio-economic ladder. The need to achieve this top position restricts the ability to comprehend and interact with other perspectives beyond the existing system, which underscores the necessity of a more comprehensive paradigm shift. The growth of the current education system will always be constrained by Eurocentric societal ideologies, oscillating within the same two quadrants until the Western barrier is breached, potentially through the advancement of FN education. However, this could be a clash of worldviews, as well as a limitation of the author's perspective.

One final thought on this document concerns collecting data, assessing standards, or evaluating goals. While the implementation of these standards and their evaluation by principals is commendable, the document lacks a crucial point. As it is a public document, it should describe the evaluation process.

Saskatchewan Provincial Education Plan (SPEP)

The Saskatchewan Provincial Education Plan (SPEP) is a short document that functions as a framework for educational or teacher standards. A key highlight of the document is *Saskatchewan's Growth Plan- The Next Decade of Growth 2020-2030*. The document not only

outlines its goals but also provides statistics to evaluate its progress toward those goals. Although minimal to no change at times a decrease, in First Nation student statistics, it is an admirable practice. Here is an example from the SPEP document: “For the 2023-24 school year, the overall three-year graduation rate was 77.6 per cent with 47.4 per cent of Indigenous students graduating within the three-year window.” And from the next bulleted point “For the 2024-25 school year, the overall three-year graduation rate was 79.1 per cent with 47.9 per cent of Indigenous students graduating within the three-year window.” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2025, from Provincial-Level Targets section). It reflects Saskatchewan’s commitment to improving education for all, with a special focus on First Nations students.

The priorities in the *SPEP are Learning and Assessment, Indigenous Education, Mental Health and Well-Being, and Student Transition*. The prioritization of Mental Health and Well-Being is noteworthy; it comes very close to crossing the barrier to the west. It is appropriate to understand that “Saskatchewan students will be supported to experience a positive sense of belonging and connection while feeling safe at their schools” (Government of Saskatchewan, 2025, from the Mental Health and Well-Being section). They also state that they will create a common language to speak openly about mental health and well-being. It is assumed this includes an authentic teacher-student connection without stating its emotional nature. However, a one-sided Eurocentric discourse limits this boundary, and Ashcroft and colleagues (2013, p. 83) explain, “The key feature of this is that the world is not simply ‘there’ to be talked about; rather, it is through discourse itself that the world is brought into being.” While not intentionally devious, it may be unconscious; Eurocentrism persists in establishing or maintaining societal standards, thereby influencing education in the eastern and southern quadrants.

Learning and Assessment section was examined in the South-East sub-quadrant as it responds to past cultural practices. They recognize the value of self-assessment, especially having an established plan “...pivotal points to better support each student’s learning” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2025, from Learning and Assessment section). Student achievement outcomes reflect the various levels of education, from the frontline to the provincial level. This is an excellent example of responsive education, in which humility and courage are the key qualities of thorough self-reflection.

The inclusion of Indigenous Education, it being a prominent part of their provincial educational plan in the Saskatchewan Government's priorities and reported statistics shows a commitment to addressing student needs. Although the success of First Nation students fluctuates, it does not detract from their commitment, as the outcomes serve as a direction for education.

From the Indigenous education section: *Actualize the vision and goals* its goal is create and equitable and inclusive education system for its Indigenous students to experience success. (Indigenous Education section). This is due to an implied acknowledgement and lack of Indigenous student success and inequality. Acknowledgement of cultural realizations marks the beginning of change: everything begins with awareness.

Its goals from the second bullet intends to develop measures to track progress and ensure effective practices locally to reach Indigenous student success. (Indigenous Education section). Saskatchewan Education indirectly acknowledges that no effective system is in place right now and recognizes that creating an inclusive system will lead to observable change. It also recognizes the value of shared practices.

The goals for last bullet for Indigenous students achieving educational success is to work toward an inclusive workforce strategy and integrate a more prominent Indigenous voice into education. (Indigenous Education section). Although historical perspectives and prejudices in education have not been directly acknowledged it is somewhat implied. It is understood and implied that previous education was inefficient and they believe Indigenous voice will contribute to equitable education for its Indigenous students. Although the irresolute language used in the SPEP evokes a little distrust in the plan, “continued efforts.” “Continued efforts,” I assume, is worded to show their Saskatchewan education was already in motion in creating inclusive and equitable education for Indigenous students, but can be interpreted as inefficient efforts thus far.

The final point on their educational priority list is *Student Transitions*. It has five sub-points: *Student attendance will improve annually, Overall graduation rates will increase annually with a focus on improved outcomes for Indigenous students, Upon Kindergarten exit, the percentage of students for learning in the primary grades will increase year over year, Student literacy and numeracy outcomes will increase year over year, All students will have an increased sense of connection and safety in schools.* They were all plotted in the South-East sub-quadrant for the indicators and for the statistical reports. All of the indicators can be interpreted as indirect responses to the East quadrants. As for the reports, these are direct reports, and, as acknowledged earlier in this section, although the achievements of Indigenous students are fluctuating, they remain honest and direct. The monitoring and reporting of statistics practice provides a sense of security, conveying trust and peace to the Indigenous community and all the Saskatchewan residents.

This document will be placed at the South-East quadrant, closer to the south direction because there is a prominent focus on FN education. It gives the impression that they recognize

mainstream education has not been meeting the needs of FN students in the past and they intend to pay more attention with the set goals in the plan. This document has a Non-Indigenous voice but it is also a determined voice. However, if Non-Indigenous voices manage to achieve those goals wouldn't that mean they are saviours of FN people?

From a FN community perspective, it seems positionality and stance make a difference. Cultural context plays a significant role in the success of FN education. Spirit/essence/energy frequency is a signature and are attuned to its people. It is not the same as claiming credit for achievement, it is more like a rite of passage and remains with the people from which it originates, anything other than that has discordance and interrupts rhythm. Genuine intentions are beautiful, but not always appropriate. That does not mean Non-Indigenous efforts are not welcome or appreciated, it just means that they should take the position as supporters rather than directors of FN education.

Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba

The document *Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming* (year?) provides a thorough explanation of Manitoba's Inclusive Education philosophy. The document addresses the identification, assessment, planning, discipline, dispute resolution, and services and support for the inclusion of all students. Every possible event or scenario is addressed; it is a useful document outlining student support.

This document can be empowering to families who have struggled with inappropriate treatment for challenging children. It is also a directive for educators when they encounter a difficult situation. It evolved over time, as it is based on the Public Schools Act (1987), the Educational Administration Act (originally enforced 1988), and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982). These documents have also undergone their own development processes. This document is an accumulation of many evolutionary experiences.

This document provides the necessary context and definitions of *Inclusive Schools*, School-Based Support Teams, and School Division Support Services. It also outlines a comprehensive policy covering *Access, Universal Design, Early Identification, Planning in Education, Student Discipline, Dispute Resolution, Coordinated Services, and Professional Support*. The entire document ensures a secure and appropriate education for all.

However, in the *Personnel on a School Support Team* (Manitoba Education and Childhood Learning, 2022), there is a minimal role for Indigenous peoples, with only two roles: an *Elder* or a *Knowledge Keeper*. It may serve as a way of learning that incorporates "Hands-On" instruction or more "One-on-One" interaction or guidance from a teacher or adult. The Elder or the Knowledge Keeper may interpret a child's learning need as "Contraire", or a "Windigokan" person, who requires alternatives to what mainstream education provides.

Windigokan almost functions as the opposition in politics, providing a comprehensive, holistic perspective on the political arena. From my Sandy Bay, Sk. Sundance experience, children identified as "Windigokan", create challenging situations and *appropriate education* kicks into gear to address this child's needs and often forces educational staff to get creative to address the student's needs. Children like this improve education and are a major reason why "inclusive education" exists, at least in the FN perspective.

The key aspect is that the Elder or Knowledge Keeper can quickly identify a Windigokan, as well as any other type of gifted or differently abled child. However, they lack the Eurocentric credentials, infrastructure, or designations necessary to meaningfully advocate for these specific students. The Western and Northern quadrants inform the Elder or Knowledge Keeper's words, diagnosis, or assessment on a higher level; it could even be considered a divine intervention from the Creator.

Additionally, the document is an excellent resource that meets the needs of students in the eastern and southern quadrants of the current education system. However, institutionalized education cannot be fully realized; it will continuously evolve.

As for education in Indigenous communities, a strong resistance that may arise when professionals attempt to diagnose or label an individual. There is still a great distrust due to numerous traumatic accounts in formalized institutions such as hospitals and schools. Hearing personal stories from community members of extreme abuse from teachers or siblings who have disappeared during a medical trip. This distrust may need to be addressed before conducting a psychological diagnosis. Some Indigenous people are afraid of the term mental health because of the negative connotations associated with diagnosis or assessment, as well as the heartache that has previously accompanied them.

Like any other document, it will evolve as society evolves, and all schools and educational institutions are fortunate to have such a document to ensure quality education for all. Although the implementation of the FN education concepts might not be possible now, it can be more achievable in the future as knowledge will become more profound. At this point, though, the issue of skepticism and the perceived naivety of First Nations worldviews are still a major obstacle.

The document, Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming are situated South-East quadrant mostly because observable change has taken place. The document in itself is a testament to the evolution of education as it has been developed based on the past experiences. It is equivalent to teachings of the sundance through the reflection and new found awareness of lived experiences, especially giving credit to Windigokans. The meditation is from the structured obligated actions such as whittling away at a peg intended to be used as either piercings from the

grandmother tree or the dragging of buffalo skulls. This document is intended for the general population and addresses the needs of all students in formal educational settings. This document was used to consider the blueprint of educational structure and understand how FN education needs are being considered in the examination of FN educational documents in this study. It was also examined to observe how FN education fit into the structure of appropriate education.

First Nations Control of First Nations Education (2010)

First Nations Control of First Nations Education (FNCNE) is a second version of the original Indian Control of Indian Education (1972). It was re-published in 2010. The document begins with an original excerpt from the 1972 document, a *Statement of Values*. This document is included in the examination because it forms the first formal layers of FN education in which all other formal FN educational documents rest upon. It begins with the statement, “We want our children...” (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 2), setting the tone in a strong and determined declaration that remained unchanged over time. There is a particular statement that should be highlighted: “The gap between our people and those who have chosen, often gladly, to join us as residents of this beautiful and bountiful country, is vast when it comes to mutual understanding and appreciation of differences.” (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 2). The words *mutual understanding and* would be one of the pillars of FN education.

The document then proceeds to the *Overview and Purpose of the Paper*, which outlines the history of the 1972 document and reaffirms its vision. Under the *Preamble*, it bluntly discusses, over two pages, how Eurocentric education has been used in the past and “... has been a tool of oppression, but it can be a tool of liberation founded on First Nation control over education” (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 4). Then, the *Outcomes Since 1972* section discusses the challenges posed by the lack of meaningful contributions from federal and provincial governments, as well as the achievements made under the original 1972 document.

The subsequent three headings are: *First Nation Learning Systems, Provincial and Territorial Learning Systems*, and *Recognition of First Nation Languages and Identities*. The document discusses the comprehensive education systems and how provincial and territorial governments must be accountable to those who leave reserves to attend their institutions. Finally, they voice the importance of language and identity using “...a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.” (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 9)

The actual framework discussion will begin with a quote from FNCFNE that sets the tone and context for the Assembly of First Nations. It comes from their Mission Statement: Education Policy Framework, “Governments must work together to ensure that this lifelong journey is built upon experiences that embrace both Indigenous and mainstream Western knowledge systems and that First Nations have access to the supports necessary to achieve successful education outcomes at all stages.” (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 10).

The FNCFNE Policy Framework is designed under three objectives. It is a lengthy document, and evaluations will be discussed under each heading.

1. Access to Lifelong Learning

The policy indicates “1.1.1 Languages: First Nations languages, knowledge, and diversity are an important national heritage that must be protected, supported, and preserved” (p.11). Protecting heritage involves numerous processes, one of which is communicating the essence of FN culture. Over the past few decades, various governments have done considerable work, including developing policies and curricula. Some documents have attempted to implement First Nation culture, but they frequently miss the essence, as the Eurocentric mainstream culture cannot comprehend the FN experience and thus cannot efficiently communicate certain aspects of heritage. As a result, this culture is prone to alteration and dilution. It could only be supported

by Non-Indigenous cultured individuals. Indigenous heritage should define the boundaries of where Non-Indigenous education entities can and should not provide support.

From *Curriculum Development* 1.3 subsection “1.3.1 ii) Meets standards identified by First Nations.” (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 12). This policy could implement that distinction. This distinction would be especially evident in provincial education institutions. Policy 1.6 *Cultural Competency* could also mandate this distinction through professional development.

2. *Community and Institutional Capacity*

Federal, provincial, territorial and First Nations governments must take immediate collaborative action to build and sustain the community and institutional capacity of First Nations to deliver a wide spectrum of quality academic and culturally-relevant programs and services across the lifelong learning continuum. (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 14)

Capacity encompasses funding, capital, and data analysis to facilitate effective implementation, as outlined in the policies under Section 2.3, subsection 2.3.1. “...There must be funding for second and third level support structures as determined by First Nations at the community, regional and national levels” (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p.16). This quote prompted the consideration of providing a fourth level of service, or First Nations-specific addresses, to identify and remove barriers common among First Nations students.

A study by Lola Baydala et al. found that: “The number of Aboriginal children found to have symptoms associated with ADHD is significantly higher than expected based on prevalence rates in the general population” (Baydala et al., 2006, p. 642). This data only includes ADHD symptoms; however, First Nations students face far more challenges than students in the

provincial school system, including residential school legacy effects. Policy 2.3.2. (iv) addresses the provision of “adequate funding for learners who must attend provincial, territorial, and other institutions, including those who may be incarcerated or in the care of the child welfare system. (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 16) It must be acknowledged that, of all the documents from this study, this is the only mention of this First Nation characteristic.

First Nation students have unique needs due to their culture's heightened adverse childhood experiences. It is widely acknowledged that there is an overrepresentation in the child welfare and corrections systems. Also, from personal experience in my childhood and adulthood, this holds true today as it did for past generations. Another study, *Reconciliation and Canada's overdose crisis: responding to the needs of Indigenous Peoples*, by Jennifer Lavalley et al., (2018), states:

Factors that increase vulnerability to drug-related harms for Indigenous Peoples are framed by the historical and ongoing traumas related to colonization, including the residential school experience, poverty and child apprehension and involvement in the child welfare system, as well as inadequate access to education, health services and social supports. (Lavalley, et al., 2018, p. E1466)

Numerous studies have found that Indigenous peoples are disproportionately affected by adverse experiences compared to Non-Indigenous peoples. If a fourth-level educational service could be developed to address these issues and disparities, they could be reduced to levels comparable to Non-Indigenous populations.

Before moving on to the next policy goal, it's important to consider First Nations' call “2.4.1. The government of Canada shall work in cooperation with First Nations to develop appropriate and relevant accountability and evaluation mechanisms and reporting protocols...”

(Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 16). There should be a call for Indigenous occupational needs to fill positions that will encourage Indigenous nations to gain greater independence. First Nation culturally oriented personnel could report accurately, potentially establishing an infrastructure for Indigenous-rooted representation within the Canadian government.

3. *Policy Implementation*

“Federal, provincial, territorial and First Nations governments must begin immediate consultations to develop concrete action plans to fulfill their responsibility to fully and effectively implement all aspects of the First Nations Control of First Nations Education Policy.” (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 17)

This section discusses increasing research capacity and enhancing student security in higher education. It also acknowledges Canada's obligation to fulfill its obligations under Section 35 of the *Constitution Act*.

The last sections of the FNCFNE discuss the outcomes of implementing the policy, before moving on to the *Next Steps*. This section prompted the idea of implementing various levels of education. First Nation education is a gigantic task. It is quite overwhelming due to its broadness, connections, and challenges. If it were divided into levels, this is what the next steps in the policy are about; it may be more manageable. It would also ensure accuracy and effectiveness in implementation, which would eventually lead to maintenance.

This document sits just before the boundary of the North-West direction in the West direction for meeting all four indicators and meeting the first indicator in the North-West direction. Atmosphere plays a big role in FN spirituality: the whistles blowing, drumming songs people dancing, the sight of the Grandmother tree at the sundance and at the sweat lodge the entrancement of the fire opening up the emotional vaults of everyone standing around it. This is

one awareness a medicine person (shaman) uses when working with Creator and the spirits (grandmothers/grandfathers). This is why a fourth-level service is important, it gives students access to the spiritual state of being, to go a sit with the grandmothers/grandfathers, to step into themselves.

FNCFNE mentions culture, but “culture” cannot articulate essence and this leaves the word empty and misunderstood. This is one problem with professional and academic writing. I would read this with a cultural contextual base and understand and connect to it, but those without cultural context may take it flatly and without meaning.

Secondary Documents

Aboriginal Studies 20 – Alberta Learning

Aboriginal Studies 20 is one of a three-part document published in 2002 by Alberta Education. The Rationale and Philosophy section was read prior to engaging with the curriculum and also after. The two readings were significantly different. This contrast underscores the extent to which the document reflects an unexpectedly archaic perspective. Although published in 2002, a new century, the curriculum positions students to adopt the perspective of assimilators, framing them as benevolent or generous saviours.

The document deserves criticism for its deceptive nature, presenting positive articulations to obscure the authentic First Nations experience. In some cases, this curriculum document could not be examined through the content of the Eastern Quadrant as it failed to meet any of the indicators. However, the document was predominantly situated within the E1Na category. Furthermore, they used the innocence of students in the *Rationale*, stating, “The program of studies explores concepts within the students’ own unique context.” (Alberta Education, 2002, from the Rationale section), following their examination of legislation spanning from 1763 to 1867.

The evidence strongly supports the justification of atrocious assimilation policies. The document omitted the traumatic experiences of the residential school system, which were strategically placed at the end of the curriculum. As any trained educator would understand, time runs out before all curricular outcomes can be met.

In the document's Theme II: *Treaties & Cultural Change*, the general learning outcome (GLO) seems neutral until the GLOs and specific learning outcomes (SLOs) are completed. "Students will demonstrate an understanding of the **effects of treaty relationships** between First Nations people and the Government of Canada." (Alberta learning, 2002, from the Treaties and Cultural Change section) To fully understand the context, it is vital to consider the specific learning outcome:

Students will demonstrate an understanding that First Nations people **perceived** treaties as recognized sovereign agreements:

- Analyze **how Britain recognized** First Nations sovereignty:
 - Discuss unique relationships among community, land and leadership based on **mutual support** and **consensus**.
 - Discuss how First Nations community **needs were met** by examining their cultural values, laws and regulations, decision making, nation/community support, discipline and lawbreakers.
 - Describe **similarities and differences** among clans, bands and families in the areas of leadership, cooperative efforts, governance, consensus, consultation, administration, law, and principles of sovereignty.
- Research the **intent** of treaties.

- Describe **how First Nations people developed** coexisting relationships through contact resulting from trading, making treaties, making alliances, and sharing territories.
- Describe **how First Nations established** crown land to be protected and held it in trust.
 - **Compare and contrast the First Nations views** of unique relationships to land based on laws of nature as opposed to economic pursuits, material wealth, and technology.
 - Appreciate that the unique relationship between First Nations people and the land is **rooted in traditional beliefs**. (Alberta learning, 2002, from the Treaties and Cultural Change section)

This curriculum outlines a framework using strategic verbs like *perceive* for instilling in students an appreciation for the treaties from the perspective of Non-Indigenous politicians. As a quote from the Government of Canada website shows politicians concerns from that time,

Western expansion was seen as a vital part of Canada's economic future. Without Rupert's Land, Canada would be hemmed into the North-East corner of the continent, unable to tap into the resources and riches of the Prairies, limited to the narrow strip of arable land between the Great Lakes and unable to attract new immigrants to boost the population and drive commerce. (Government of Canada, 2023)

Furthermore, along that trajectory, students risk developing racist and incompetent views on First Nations people. The document navigates all GLOs and SLOs for Non-Indigenous students to establish a rationale for peaceful residence on the land.

In contrast, First Nations students are positioned within a narrative suggesting that they have been adequately compensated and treated justly. The following excerpts, repeated for emphasis, from the above citations for developing FN students' worldview: "Analyze how Britain recognized First Nations sovereignty:" (Alberta learning, 2002, from the Treaties and Cultural Change section) This directs students to believe this is how Britain understood the treaties and that they were honest and the treaties were just, but did not explain the reality of the experience and how it was carried out. This is the angle this grade 11 curriculum is designed and there is so much more damaging plays in perspective throughout the entire curriculum. It places Non-Indigenous students in a resentful state toward FN people and FN students in a confused state in their current reality wondering why there is so much FN activism. In doing so, the document functions to shape FN students into manageable citizens. The curriculum developers and authors appear to have been aware of their deceitfulness, as the document is strategically artistic. Notably, the Royal Proclamation of 1763 is strategically used as the foundation for two of their SLOs.

Additionally, in alignment with the GLO *Treaties & Cultural Change* SLO 8: "Students will demonstrate an understanding that First Nations people of Canada and the world share a common view of inherent rights" (Alberta Learning, 2002, from Treaties & Cultural Change section). While this may be accurate, the purpose is to undermine the First Nations' experience and to portray colonialism as a standard practice, suggesting it is just an irritation we should put up with.

This curriculum is covertly racist, and that declaration cannot be exaggerated. Another example from the previous GLO 3 *Theme III: Legislation, Policies & Cultural Change* will be provided to demonstrate the document's archaic nature.. The following quote leads students to

believe Indigenous peoples are responsible for their own socio-economic conditions, because it relates that outcome to policy instead of intergenerational trauma of residential school. It also lifts the responsibility off the “nurturing” government and shifts Indigenous people into an incompetent light, like it is a part of their racial make-up. SLO 4: “Students will demonstrate an understanding of how the socio-economic and political positions of Aboriginal peoples are affected by the policies implemented by the federal government.” “Identify and discuss the impact of federal government policies, legislation, and practices on the socio-economic needs of Aboriginal peoples” (Alberta Learning, 2002, from Legislation, Policies and Cultural Change section).

The first bulleted expectation of this last SLO requires students to examine how the government is addressing the poor socio-economic conditions of First Nations people. However, it does not ask students to study why First Nations are in these socio-economic conditions.

Furthermore, within GLO IV: *Schooling and Cultural Change*, students are required to monitor formal education via prominent figures in SLO 2, before examining various school systems in SLO 3. (Alberta Learning, 2002, from Schooling and Cultural Change section).

In conclusion, this final section presents some quotes from the *Philosophy*:

- fosters a sense of self-worth and pride by encouraging Aboriginal students to appreciate their cultural heritage and social, political and economic contributions to society
- illustrates that traditional Aboriginal communities are as diverse as the current Canadian cultural mosaic
- enables all students to demonstrate an understanding that societies are made up of individuals, but each individual has a responsibility to the well-being of the society.

(Alberta Learning, 2002, from Philosophy section).

These quotes represent distorted interpretations of the curriculum's real intent. It seeks to balance perspectives by downplaying the First Nations' experience and portraying Non-Indigenous governments in a more positive light. Publishing such a document in 2002 would significantly elevate their status as racist supremacists; they are shaping innocent children to conform to their agenda.

This curriculum gives a new perspective to greatly appreciate the efforts of Manitoba's provincial education system. While Manitoba does have its flaws, in the study, they seem more like misinterpretations, an incomplete understanding of First Nations concepts, or an oversight. The documents from Manitoba contained minimal to no intentional racism, whether covert or overt.

My intention is not to imply that Manitoba education is better; rather, as an evaluator, Manitoba was my base of understanding. Through it, I understood the needs of First Nations students in education and felt that cultural ignorance was a major cause of educational disparities. I was stunned after reading this Alberta Aboriginal Studies 20 curriculum, I had no idea such ideals still existed in today's Canada. It made me proud of Manitoba and humbled me in seeing the progress they have achieved. It does not change the fact that First Nations education requires further refinement, but it does make me appreciate what we have so far.

This document barely made it to this contemporary level of the First Nations Education Medicine Wheel and would be placed just having arrived onto it: Early East quadrant. Since connection is a foundational attribute in FN culture Alberta seemed to have increased the gap between its people with this curricula. It does not recognize that Alberta people is one unit and the curricula drives a wedge between itself and their FN people. Everything begins with awareness and history is not being acknowledged and therefore healing cannot take place. It is

making or keeping itself sick by allowing historical hurts fester and allowing its Non-Indigenous people to live a lie.

Alberta's FN people are doing ceremonies and are doing their offerings, we know this from the curricula document of Saskatchewan giving great credit to a conference in Alberta, the MOU and MOU Long Term Strategic Plan. They are the ones maintaining the connection and carrying Alberta in their prayers in a direction of their choice. Although complex understandings comes with offerings (cloth, food, tobacco) a short description is it provides opportunity to become a greater and grander version of the individual (unit). Hopefully, Alberta will soon fall into rhythm with its FN people, otherwise they may get left behind.

Native Studies: A Curriculum Guide for Grade 11 International Indigenous Issues, Saskatchewan Learning

Native Studies: A Curriculum Guide for Grade 11 International Indigenous (NSC) is a curriculum document published in 1992. While the document's author is not mentioned, their Indigenous voice and perspective are prominent. For instance, they note: "Walk a mile in another person's moccasins." (Saskatchewan Learning, 1992, p. 163). Besides the political and tertiary documents examined in this study, this was, if my assumption is correct, the only Indigenous author in all of the curricula used in this study.

This curriculum was examined immediately following the Alberta Aboriginal Studies 20 curriculum, and the two documents were completely different, perhaps representing opposing ends of an Indigenous education spectrum. This distinction elicited numerous thoughts, realizations, and awareness of potential responses. These will be discussed in the sections below.

The 1992 NSC was a comprehensive document that included the *Native Studies 20 Case Studies and Reading Package*. The curriculum included unit and lesson resources. The resources were used as a competency-building component for the teachers. This document included many

Indigenous contributors and referenced a conference held in Lethbridge, Alberta, in December 1982, where "Indian elders, spiritual leaders, and professionals from across Canada offered fundamental elements that they considered common among Canadian Indian philosophies." (Saskatchewan Learning, 1992, p. 11).

The document's design strategically placed *Philosophical Statements* after the *Introduction*. This structure gave the curriculum a gentle, nurturing tone and character. It provided excellent resources, various implementation strategies, and Black Line Masters. A significant portion of the document was categorized under just past the North-West boundary in MW structure. Compared to all the documents examined in this study, it was the most outstanding, and it was surprising that the Government of Saskatchewan permitted the publication of such a document. The document seems so foreign, not in a negative way, but it seems counterintuitive to the ideals of the government that one is raised to perceive.

This introduces the first point of discussion. Briefly adopting a first-person personal perspective, I imagine myself as a grade 11 student exposed to such a curriculum. How would it have moulded me? Was it used as an elective? I imagine that if all students were to take such a course in high school, with its gentle, nurturing content of Indigenous concepts and philosophies, would this neo-liberalistic world exist? *Unit Three: Social Justice made me consider the Green Party in politics* and appreciate their platform. The same unit also helped me understand my societal programming and realise that my views of society were rigid. It helped me realize that I have a sense of impossibility about living any other way, but I recognized this as a limitation of the confines in which I have lived.

Another insight from my evaluation is that, in comparing the Alberta Aboriginal Studies Curriculum to that of Saskatchewan, the progress in First Nation education is movement either

forward or backward on a spectrum. As I examined those materials from Alberta, I was excited, although driven by anger. Examination of this work stirred a frustration in me that I needed to decompress for relief. This covert racism pushes away, severs, and disconnects.

The 1992 NSC from Saskatchewan was thoughtful, gentle, inclusive, and nurturing. Again, I was excited to write, but this time driven by inspiration, hope, and love. The 1992 NSC reminded me of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's peaceful protests, and I perceive this document as having a similar nonviolent resistance. It is inclusive because it does not reject Non-Indigenous students, and it connects and unifies using First Nation philosophies. It is like opening up a blanket on a cold winter's night to welcome anyone into its warmth.

Below are a few examples from the *Twelve Principles Common to First Nation Philosophies* from the Saskatchewan's Native Studies curriculum:

1. Wholeness. (Holistic thinking). All things are interrelated. Everything in the universe is part of a single whole. Everything is connected in some way to everything else. It is only possible to understand something if we understand how it is connected to everything else.
2. Change. Everything is in a state of constant change. One season falls upon the other. People are born, live, and die. All things change. There are two kinds of change: the coming together of things, and the coming apart of things. Both kinds of change are necessary and are always connected to each other.
3. Change occurs in cycles or patterns. They are not random or accidental. If we cannot see how a particular change is connected it usually means that our standpoint is affecting our perception.

4. The physical world is real. The spiritual world is real. They are two aspects of one reality. There are separate laws which govern each. Breaking of a spiritual principle will affect the physical world and vice versa. A balanced life is one that honours both.

5. People are physical and spiritual beings. (Saskatchewan Learning, 1992, p. 10)

The excerpt is inclusive and comforting, with bullets four and five shocking. In my thesis and throughout the evaluations, I characterized mainstream public education as impaired and condemned in the initial two quadrants. However, this is a mainstream public document that uses this curriculum in schools. While it might be framed within the context of First Nations philosophies and potentially offered as a Native Studies elective, it remains accessible to students.

This poses the question of the further academic paths of students who have taken this course since 1992, and makes me wonder how it impacted their life's journey. Evidently, I hold this curriculum in high regard. Although published in 1992, the Saskatchewan curriculum demonstrates a forward-looking approach to the First Nations Educational Medicine Wheel. Hopefully, other provinces, particularly Alberta, will recognize the value of such a document and its effects, including its capacity to foster unity.

In FN ceremony everything is about connection, one example is understanding how walking around the sweatlodge viewing it as a being, connecting to and allowing it to read individual's energy so it could address their individual needs. This document sits at the North-West direction for considering and implementing OFNC approaches. It gently allows individuals to lower defensive guards and connect to the curricula's intentions by looking at themselves and the environment they are in.

Grade 12 Current Topics in First Nation, Metis and Inuit Studies: A Foundation for Implementation (Manitoba)

The Grade 12 Current Topics in First Nations, Métis and Inuit Studies: A Foundation for Implementation is a curriculum document published in 2011, before the 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Its development may have been a response to the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). This document was released 15 years after RCAP; however, there was a 20-year agenda for change.

The primary author of this curriculum document was Non-Indigenous, but her development team included many Indigenous people. The team also included an Elder from the Norway House Cree Nation, as well as the Manitoba Education Staff, who were all Non-Indigenous. Although my first impressions were positive, and I considered it a comprehensive resource, there were some drawbacks, which will be discussed in this section. Some outstanding positive attributes were their consideration and preparedness for the needs of both First Nations and Non-Indigenous students. The writers were also aware of and prepared for the document's controversial nature. The document requires teachers to expect and respectfully tolerate controversial issues and provides advice on how to handle such discussions, including providing prior awareness and support for students in these situations. It encourages teachers to be aware of their cultural competency and how their worldviews might affect their teaching.

It encourages practicum placements for students as alternatives to final assignments. The *Clusters and Learning Experience* headings and sub-headings were straightforward and chronological. *Cluster 2: A Profound Ambivalence: First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Relations with the Government* was heavily emphasized, accounting for 40% of the course allotment. It appears there was a genuine intent to honor both the historical and contemporary Indigenous experience.

Among the drawbacks is the difficulty of capturing the essence of a culture without being immersed in it. However, it is not the writers' conscious fault, as their efforts were genuine. Furthermore, there is a disconnect—a logical, mainstream-style transfer of knowledge. Although cultural competency awareness is mentioned, it is different from cultural immersion. The significance of cultural concepts cannot be authentically captured or relayed, as the mainstream population lacks the capacity to understand the experience of these concepts and their branches and roots, which are linked to each Indigenous and First Nations student.

Most isolated concepts are only one sub-branch of a branch of a cultural experience. Intergenerational effects cause low self-esteem and detachment. This is like telling a First Nations' trickster story, like that of Nanabush or Weesaykeechak, and hearing the words, but not understanding the cultural meaning of elements such as the poplar tree, the geese, the muskrat, the crows, and the water. The significance of the poplar tree offers a wealth of teachings, branching even further into an oral history that cannot be grasped through this mainstream learning structure and style. Without it, this "living history," First Nations students are unable to fully reclaim the spirit and self-identity of their ancestors, preventing them from connecting meaningfully.

Mainstream education mostly functions in the first two quadrants: physical and mental. Original First Nation Cultural education functions in all quadrants: emotional and spiritual. Accessing these other quadrants creates a complete circle: fulfilling and satisfying. Even in the document's introductions, it could not be fully comprehended or expressed. “Traditionally, First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples share a worldview of harmony and balance with nature, one another, and oneself” (Manitoba Education, 2011, p. 11). This expression leaves First Nations

people and First Nations students being perceived as naïve, separate, and inferior to the mainstream, as it does not include FN students as a part of the proper mainstream worldview.

“Traditionally” seems to be a positive and respectful word, but the context implies “gone.” In their book *Indigegogy*, Stan Wilson and Barbara Shellhammer (2021) explain,

They [FN students] may have graduated with proper credentials, but their heritage language and culture needs are unmet. ... So, when teachers and educators use the term “pedagogy” they are reinforcing the retention, maintenance, and perpetuation of the status quo of the Eurocentric culture that was expressly designed to kill the Indian in the child. (Wilson & Shellhammer, 2021, p.19)

They go on to explain, “Naming something is a way of establishing ownership, or at least, that the name used establishes the mindset that the object named is from the language used and therefore must belong to its users” (Wilson & Shellhammer, 2021, p. 19).

While I can partially concur with the authors' assertions, I have a profound appreciation for the English language. English is a mosaic of cultural words, and enables almost universal connection. Numerous “traps” can maintain the status quo; however, they can also be liberating when used appropriately and with suitable syntax. Here is an example and the discussed quote should be expressed as follows: “First Nations, Metis and Inuit worldviews have a deep connection to the rhythm of the land and recognize themselves as a part of it.” The omission of the word *traditionally*, creates a living concept and a sense of pride and belonging. It may even evoke envy among mainstream, cultured students who desire to have that experience. In the mainstream cultural perspective, it is presented as discontinued and available for study. Whereas the latter presents it as a living entity worthy of respect for the connections it possesses.

Such nuances in language are challenging to identify when education is the environment in which students are immersed. The curriculum is written by Non-Indigenous people, specifically Non-Indigenous cultured individuals. The objective may be to cultivate awareness of language usage, as the intentions of the curriculum author appear authentic, yet may be constrained by the status quo. Therefore, this section of the curriculum would sit in the South-East quadrant, as awareness is beginning to emerge.

Another drawback is the lack of consideration for Indigenous students. While it is a curriculum document that considers both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous students, I could appreciate the value of exposing Non-Indigenous students to the Indigenous experience. It is valuable; however, it subtracts from the Indigenous educational experience. If we are to cultivate a generation of dual-navigators from both cultures, the unique needs of both should be addressed in their own contexts; perhaps in different sections of the document. However, that is beyond the scope of the study; it is merely a fact that subtraction exists for both cultures. It tends to lean toward the mainstream population, as most of the documents are developed, designed, filtered, and manifested within a Eurocentric cultural pool. It includes Indigenous contributions, but they are filtered through a Non-Indigenous cultured author.

The process infringes on the cultural and spiritual significance of the Indigenous contributions. Although students receive this output, most of the Indigenous significance has been processed, benefiting primarily Non-Indigenous students. Notably, reaching a stage where genuine Indigenous history can be taught in Manitoba, Canada, is a significant accomplishment for Indigenous activism, especially considering that other Indigenous nations have vanished and been assimilated into the Eurocentric narrative. However, this achievement does not signify the end. Reconciliation is the goal of both nations, and awareness should be prioritized.

Considering students, specifically Northern First Nations and Inuit students, a few perspectives need to be addressed. Firstly, when the curriculum was being developed, were their needs considered? The same question applies to Non-Indigenous teachers. A section on page 25 of the curriculum titled *Best Practices for Teachers of First Nations, Metis and Inuit Students* asks teachers to “Develop a holistic perspective where teaching and learning strategies address the intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of the learner” (Manitoba Education, 2011, p. 25). This expectation is nearly impossible and disrespectful to teachers, students, and the Indigenous community. Singh and Reyner (2013) explain:

IK [Indigenous Knowledge] is based on centuries of experience and close observation of one’s surroundings, including plants, animals, and weather. Indigenous Pedagogy (IP) is based on centuries of experience raising children to function productively in close-knit communities. Family members, Elders, and other community members pass on this knowledge to each new generation. Central to the transmission of this wisdom is language, which through oratory, storytelling, advice and conversations shows youth the way to live well. (Singh & Reyner, 2013, p.37)

Even though teachers can access and study resources, Non-Indigenous teachers are required to offer a holistic view without a background knowledge of FN spirituality. Without this basis, they cannot critically assess their materials. They are not able to express the years of attachment to the land and the intergenerational ties they experienced with the grandfathers/grandmothers. Students are therefore mostly exposed to knowledge that has been filtered through mainstream frameworks.

This gives the document a hollowness, consciously placed in the document but not honoured, and elevates it to the level of obligation to report on the Royal Commission on

Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). The way it has manifested holds considerable significance. However, when the Canadian government isolated First Nations peoples on reserves, the "Indian Problem" evolved into a new form. Singh and Reynier's (year) article emphasized culturally responsive education. Nonetheless, this concept requires further clarification, as culturally responsive education does not imply studying controversial First Nations, Métis, and Inuit issues.

The entire curriculum document is recognized as being within the early South-East sub-quadrant of the First Nations Education Medicine Wheel. Although not directly acknowledged, the inefficiency of past FN education system is implied through the document's tone and determined attention. It is truly two different cultures and cultural landscapes and just like the medicine wheel teachings suggest is that the beginning of each quadrant there is a learning stage, even for experienced Non-Indigenous educators and administrators. That is not to say their experience is not valuable, it just means they will use their strengths in different ways. They first have to recognize themselves as Nanabush, beginning at a place of not knowing, because FN education is a newly created world that they have been lowered to stand upon.

Primary Documents

First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (Alberta)

The First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (AEPF) is a 2002 document published by Alberta Learning. It was a major undertaking, as explained in *The Policy Framework* section, "The public consultation process, the foundation of the policy framework, was one of the largest consultation processes on Aboriginal education undertaken in Canada." (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 8). It was developed by the Native Education Policy Review Advisory Committee, "The Advisory committee consisted if representation from First Nations and Metis authorities, other key education stakeholders and government." (Alberta Learning, 2002, p.5).

There was a threaded process that began with the Ghitter Report, then moved to a 1987 Policy Statement on Native Education in Alberta, which Alberta Learning took great pride in, and progress was made under the statement. Fifteen years later, following the submission of the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in August 1996, the Native Education Policy was initiated in Alberta (Alberta Learning, 2002, p.2-3).

It is a well-organized, easy-to-read document, and structured around its objectives. It outlined the backgrounds, stated the vision, presented policy statements, and identified five goals. It also described plans for achieving these goals, measuring progress, and monitoring and reporting on them. These will be thoroughly discussed below.

The AEPF and its Aboriginal Studies Curriculum document were released in the same year (2002?) : February for the AEPF and September for the Aboriginal Studies curriculum. Most of the AEPF document falls within the Eastern and Southern quadrants. Although it offers many valuable insights in its vision and goals, it never surrenders control. The writing is eloquent in a favorable, idealistic manner, yet it loses value and authenticity due to its repetitive positivity. Below are some examples.

Goal 1: High-quality learning opportunities that are responsive, flexible, accessible, and affordable to the learner.

- Identify and reduce barriers preventing First Nations, Metis, and Inuit learners and community access and success.
- Prepare and support educators to meet the needs of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit learners and communities effectively.

- Use effective communication practices (e.g., indigenous languages) to improve the information flow between government and First Nations, Metis, and Inuit parents and communities.
- Strengthen the use, sharing, recognition, and value of indigenous knowledge and languages.
- Ensure education governance structures are representative of and responsive to First Nations, Metis, and Inuit parent and community needs. (Alberta Learning, 2002, pp. 11-12)

Notably, there is no transfer of power or responsibility to First Nations, Metis, and Inuit. They continue to be treated as state wards, a fiduciary responsibility. Below is a continuation of the next section.

Goal 2: Excellence in learner achievement

- Recognize and honor excellence in learner achievement and parental support.
- Maintain high achievement expectations for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit learners.
- Increase the knowledge and understanding of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit cultures and increase the level of support to teachers, other instructors, and school institution administrators and personnel. (Alberta Learning, 2022, p. 12)

This pattern continues throughout the goals, strategies, and measuring goals. The verbs increase, ensure, encourage, establish, identify, and improve are used repeatedly without giving First Nations, Metis, and Inuit control over their own education. Everything remains within their court and, thus, under their control. Below is the final example for the strategies section:

- Strategy 1.1 – Increase the quantity and quality of First Nations, Metis and Inuit curriculum, language, learning and teaching resources.
- Strategy 1.2 – Increase the availability of relevant K-12 and post-secondary education information resources and services for First Nations, Metis and Inuit learners, parents and communities.
- Strategy 1.3 – Encourage First Nation, Metis and Inuit participation in governance structures in school jurisdiction and post-secondary institutions.
- Strategy 1.4 – Create mechanisms and consultative process to improve First Nations, Metis and Inuit learner success. (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 16)

This does not imply that it was ineffective or that it lacked good intentions, but it does radiate emptiness. It leads to confusion regarding the release of the Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta (MOU) in 2010. Eight years after the release of this policy, the ambiguity lies in AEPF's "Goal 4: Effective working relationships" (Alberta Learning, 2022, p. 13). Is the MOU a result of this goal, or does it originate from Alberta Education's failure to uphold it?

The assumption is that it resulted from failing to honor the goal, as the MOU was released only four months before the publication of First Nations Control of First Nations Education (FNCFNE). The First Nations community is small, and could be compared to life before European contact in OFNC where they know each other from communities and their parents: everyone knows everyone. An evident feature is that Alberta First Nations' capacity increased sufficiently to initiate MOU prior to the FNCFNE's release.

Two additional considerations on blood quantum and the Canadian Census are pertinent to this evaluation. First, the *Performance Measures* in AEPF are presented as a challenge as

follows: “Limited Aboriginal-specific data currently makes monitoring progress a challenge. ...Aboriginal students who have “Registered Indian Status” but the ministry is unable to identify other Aboriginal students” (Alberta Education, 2002, p. 20). Although it is an older document, it remains quite enlightening, and the following points are still applicable to today's challenge resolutions.

In this case, blood or registration is irrelevant; what matters is culture: “Where have the students been cultured? Which pool have the students been immersed in throughout their childhood?” Being of First Nations descent, raised predominantly on-reserve, and spending most of my career on First Nations reserves in northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan, I have noticed a significant difference between students who have been cultured in First Nations pools.

This brings up significant concerns to the Canadian Census, especially in cases where the First Nations students have been brought up in residential school-inspired cultures that are associated with the numbered treaties of the Prairie Provinces. Shared cultural features can persist in such situations, whether or not the individuals are registered. Is this not the point of provincial education policy frameworks? Can the Canadian Census generate accurate statistics to reflect this trait among registered or unregistered Indians? This would then produce accurate results and enable specific targeted groups to implement the First Nation education policies.

This document sits in the South-East sub-quadrant as it responding to the inefficiency of past education systems. All rivers flow to the ocean of unity and one day we will all be one people, one culture, who have merged into each other. Celebrating the journey and landscapes of their rivers of origin contribute to wholeness at the end of the journey. Just as Nanabush stumbled through the first years of Creation, so have we as people. Life comes with hurt that became the greatest teachers of our existence, and humility allows us to value it.

Inspiring Success: First Nations and Metis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework (Saskatchewan)

Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework was published by the Government of Saskatchewan in 2018, building upon and replacing the 2009 *Inspiring Success – Building Towards Student Achievement: First Nations and Métis Education Policy Framework*. Several parties contributed towards this framework, including approximately half of First Nations organizations, as well as elders and knowledge keepers.

The framework's introduction discussed many documents that created a context for the renewal. A major highlight in this document is the language. The document uses phrases such as "...reduce the disparity..." (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018, p. 2) and statistics to create a mental picture. This practice establishes an accountable, committed tone for the document. The title and cover of the document also contribute to the tone. The image of a tree is significant for FN, representing many teachings from OFNC and contemporary FN culture.

The document has a Non-Indigenous perspective, but is not apparent as other Non-Indigenous documents. However, throughout this examination process of examining the documents prior to *Inspiring Success* I have also gained and accumulated experience before analyzing the main elements of this examination. This approach may have introduced bias, as insights from these materials and I could have distorted my perspective. The Non-Indigenous versus the Indigenous perspective became significant throughout the study.

A significant difference in depth was realized between the Indigenous and Non-Indigenous documents. The committed tone from language and statistics was notable, such as: "Saskatchewan is home to a large number of residential school survivors and their families. Twenty schools that were recognized in the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement were located in Saskatchewan, second only to Alberta" (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018, p.

5). It is worth noting that the code has not been widely used up until now, largely due to the honesty in the document, especially in a Non-Indigenous context. The document also presents statistics such as: “Nevertheless, when compared to the non-Aboriginal unemployment rate of 4.6 percent, there is much work to achieve equity.” (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018, p. 12)

However, most of the document remained in the first two quadrants despite its honesty and integrity. While this is not a negative attribute, it indicates that the other two quadrants of terrain are either unknown, unfamiliar, or uncomfortable to Non-Indigenous entities. Nevertheless, it is a new conceptual framework that is being evaluated.

The governmental level of the document would also play a significant role in the interaction with the First Nation Education Medicine Wheel (MW). Besides FN education, they are one level further from education: “Inspiring Success respects First Nations jurisdiction for the education on-reserve and the provincial education system recognizes there are many successes to learn from First Nations schools” (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018, p. 3).

Despite both cultures being distinct, there is only one document written for them. While there exists a conceptual framework, along with various *Policy Imperatives* and numerous inspiring words and aspirations, relying solely on these two distinct entities for guidance is insufficient, as it is entrusting ambitions to entities that lack the capacity to fulfill them. Although mainstream education can be properly organized to meet its goals, there is still a gap in the current system of First Nation on-reserve schools. Perhaps Saskatchewan documentation has a more advanced plan to meet this requirement. Such an approach would be reasonably expected to be clearly stated and highly emphasized in a provincial Indigenous policy framework of this nature. Nevertheless, although many related documents are mentioned, none seem to directly address this issue.

The document's authors, representatives of the Government of Saskatchewan, were adept at recognizing current FN student trends and determined to improve FN educational conditions, setting extraordinary goals. The document presents politically highlighted achievements, as well as an established obligation. “The Constitution of Canada defines aboriginal peoples as 'the Indian, Inuit and Metis people of Canada' and recognizes 'existing aboriginal and treaty rights of aboriginal peoples of Canada.' These rights reflect a responsibility for all levels of government to work in partnership with First Nations and Métis to foster an understanding of cultures, languages, and traditions, and to support better outcomes for all students.” (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018, p. 8)

This obligation may apply to comprehensive education systems (mainstream schools), but not to on-reserve schools. This explains why “In 2016-17, approximately 21.6 per cent of these students attended schools on-reserve while the remaining students attended provincially funded schools (74.8 per cent) or other schools in Saskatchewan (3.6)” (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018, p. 13). The FN students’ numbers are expected to change due to the considerable off-reserve population, potentially benefiting from *Inspiring Success* without including it in on-reserve statistics. However, these statistics are unlikely to change significantly, as the schoolhouse system on-reserve (MOU Long-Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p. 3) has not been directly addressed.

Assimilation has long been a central focus of governmental agendas, encompassing multiple levels. As the American Indian Policy Review Commission and Oleksa and Dauenhauer state in Eber Hampton’s paper:

(3) Schooling for Assimilation. Historically and in most contemporary situations, the education of Indians is carried out by Anglos using Anglo models to satisfy

Anglo purposes (American Indian Policy Review Commission 1976). In contrast to schooling for self-determination, these schools for assimilation have been characterized by high failure rates in literacy and educational attainment, having assimilation rather than self-determination as goals, poor school-community relations, negative attitudes towards Native cultures, and prohibition or non-use of Native languages (Oleksa & Dauenhauer, 1982, p. 33).

In the process of assimilating various observable and unobservable levels, the mainstream media, using its tactics and expertise, presents a compelling document that highlights significant FN disparities and the need for action. Meanwhile, the only mention of on-reserve schools is: “Inspiring Success respects First Nation jurisdiction for education on-reserve and the provincial education system recognizes there are many successes to learn from in First Nation schools” (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018, p. 3).

Although the document seems respectful and conciliatory, it is aimed at building trust rather than being substantive. This kind of framing can blur the underlying intentions, which can be more in line with the views expressed in First Nation Control of First Nations Education (2010).

Through the First Nations Control of First Nations Education 2010 policy, First Nations reassert their refusal to sacrifice future generations to the continued inadequacies of federal government policy and funding. First Nations can and must acquire the tools to achieve economic viability and sustainability through comprehensive learning systems. This requires Canada to uphold the Honour of the Crown by finally meeting its obligation to provide stable, sustainable and adequate resources for First Nations education. (FNCFNE, 2010, p. 5)

According to the *Vision and Conceptual Framework of Inspiring Success: First Nations and Metis Pre-K-12 Education Policy Framework's* Vision Statement: “A provincial Prekindergarten to Grade 12 education system that foundationally places Indigenous knowledge systems, cultures and languages within the structures, policies and curricula to ensure an equitable and inclusive system that benefits all learners.” (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018, p. 14) Canada has a fiduciary responsibility to First Nations people, which could be carried out with emptiness and deceit to further the assimilation agenda.

Initially, I was influenced by the respectful nature of the document and its seeming alignment with the First Nations Control of First Nations Education.. However, a closer look revealed inconsistencies, including questionable statistics in the Moral Imperative part of the document:

In 2006, 50.6 per cent of self-identified Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan age 15 and over had at least a high school diploma or equivalent, compared to 72.4 per cent of the non-aboriginal population. By 2011, these numbers had increased to 55.5 percent of Aboriginal people having at least a high school diploma or equivalent, compared to 78.2 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population.” (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018, p. 11)

The writers of the document deceive the reader into believing their education policy is making a difference among First Nation students. However, statistics show that both groups experienced an increase, with the Non-Indigenous population increasing by 0.9 percent more. This implies that while the policy is ineffective for First Nation students, it may be effective for non-Aboriginal students.

It is concerning to realize that the importance of First Nations students is entrusted to such individuals. It is astounding that the importance and title of the document, 'First Nations

Control of First Nations Education', are employed as an initial deception. It seems nothing is sacred; it is a desecration. First Nation Provincial Education Policies must be developed in First Nation space by First Nation people and filtered through First Nation processes, as they best serve the interests of all individuals, including First Nations children and students, as well as Non-Indigenous students.

This document was somewhat difficult to position on the First Nation Education Medicine Wheel as relays a considerate understanding of the FN experience, but its perceived agenda may be inauthentic. Therefore, this document will be situated at the beginning of the South direction as there is so much value in their declarations of FN disparity and its needs to be addressed. In the oral tradition stories of Nanabush and other FN tricksters there is a lot of deception that is used as a common action in their plots. Here are two examples, why geese now fly in a 'V' formation (from the Anishnabe)⁴, and from this particular website: Mohawk how the bear lost its long tail.⁵ Creation is still in the works and is not encased in a dead past and like the sundance teaches it is a never-ending dance for life's teachings and I look forward to the outcome of this legend in the making.

Mamahtawisiwin: The Wonder We are Born With: An Indigenous Education Policy Framework (Manitoba)

Mamahtawisiwin: The Wonder We are Born With: An Indigenous Education Policy Framework (MWWBW) was published in 2022 by Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning. It is the latest of the three provincial Education Policy Frameworks from the Prairie Provinces. It was the only one that had the privilege of responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and its 94 Calls to Action.

⁴ <https://glitcsnap.wordpress.com/2014/10/30/nanabozho-and-the-wild-geese/>

⁵ https://joebruchac.com/f/how-bear-lost-his-tail?srsltid=AfmBOooN8yDgkzhVq9Vy8gbs03_JpZjDWNFB8bP7LNztBw4k0Oqdw_m_p

After acknowledging the contributors to the document, including ten Elders and Knowledge Keepers, as well as representatives from various educational groups and Indigenous organizations, the author provided a land acknowledgement. To the best of this author's knowledge, there is no prior FN education policy framework to this document; however, there are several FN supporting and curriculum documents. These include *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into Curricula* (2003), *Kindergarten to Grade 12 Aboriginal Languages* (2007), and *Grade 12 Current Topics in First Nations, Métis and Inuit Studies: A Foundation for Implementation* (2011).

This was the last of ten documents analyzed; the author saved it for several reasons. The author had gained sufficient grounding and analytical experience after evaluating nine documents to interact more effectively with the final document. The process was a temporal journey through the educational landscape, characterized by cumulative knowledge development. Every document contributed new knowledge that aided in the interpretation of subsequent documents. Taken together, this development established a baseline and helped clarify what FN education should include.

There were certain conceptual issues during the coding of this document. Even though it included strong Indigenous voices, it was challenging to consider it a complete representation of them. The document is based on real concepts; however, without a close connection to the spiritual and cultural roots of the First Nations, engaging with these aspects can result in misconceptions or superficial interpretations. Nevertheless, the document provides insightful and sound strategies to address the needs of First Nations students, which would have been largely aspirational to educators in the 1960s.

Activism played a significant role in shaping the present educational landscape, and it is evident that the mainstream could not have produced such a comprehensive document without the contributions of all contributors, especially elders and knowledge keepers. While the authors did honour the voices of FN contributors, the South-West Indicator 1: *First Nations direction of educational directives mimicking Western education* most accurately describes the confusion. This tension reflects a continued sense of incompetence experienced by FN peoples, like the signing of the treaties all over again. In this regard, the cultural disconnect stemmed from FN not fully understanding the implications of surrendering the land; in this context, the “land” being the educational arena. This process involves the appropriation and modification of the cultural systems to fit Eurocentric institutional structures.

Additionally, FN potentially lacks the capacity and infrastructure to ratify such a document, as it must be filtered through Eurocentric processes to be valid. It was difficult for the author to determine indicator elements in the Western or Northern quadrants because these components are still encapsulated within existing educational and political systems and require validation. This difficulty is due to an identified gap and a missing indicator on the First Nations Educational Medicine Wheel (MW). The missing indicator might be *South-West 6: First Nations cultural knowledge systems to meet the needs of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students*. Once acknowledged and meaningfully animated, this indicator may be accepted as such, allowing the policy to function as intended.

Once the acknowledgement is in place, a proper evaluation can take place. As previously stated, it is the first provincial FN education policy framework in Manitoba. It should also be noted that previous educational documents served as a foundation for developing a compelling and meaningful document. The section "Manitoba's Indigenous Peoples are Diverse ", explains

the various FN groups and presents important statistics. It sets the context for educational institutions to consider during instruction.

The *Historical Overview of Colonization* provides an honest call for educational institutions to self-reflect: "As well, we need to better comprehend our shared history and collective experience." and "If we are to move forward in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, we must understand our past to better understand our present and dream of our future" (MB Education, 2022, p.12). It also provides a timeline of a *Brief History of Ongoing Colonization* from *Pre-Contact* to 2020. This approach moves beyond self-reflection to call for a meaningful convergence of two cultures. To this point, no other Non-Indigenous policy document examined has managed to articulate this integration. However, it is also important to acknowledge that earlier documents were not developed in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). The inclusion of this content, therefore, provides evidence of the TRC report's effectiveness and value.

The document subsequently develops a conceptual framework that builds on the Four Guiding Questions and the principle of Balanced Well-Being, using the key question of Honourable Murray Sinclair of TRC: "What would it take to create a world where we all feel we truly belong?" (MB Education, 2022, p. 16) This question serves as the primary structural framework for the document. The Four Guiding Questions: *Who am I?*, *Where do I come from?*, *Why am I here?*, and *Where am I going?*, the reflective focus of the framework. Then a secondary structural layer is created based on the Circle of Courage, symbolized by a Medicine Wheel, comprising the *Spirit of Generosity*, the *Spirit of Belonging*, the *Spirit of Mastery*, and the *Spirit of Independence*.

The *Conceptual Foundation for an Indigenous-Inclusive Education System* was difficult to conceptualize as it not only included the *Four Guiding Questions* but it also the *Seven Guiding Principles: Shared understandings of the rights of Indigenous peoples developed, Knowledge of First Nation, Metis, and Inuit world views held and valued by all educators, respect for diversity, student focused systems, shared responsibility and equity within systems*. The framework became clear after it was laid out on a table and divided into sections, with the y-axis showing the roles of the various levels of educators: *Teachers, School-Based Support Teams, School Leaders, School Division/District Leaders, and Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning* and the x-axis, the guiding questions, which encapsulate principles in the directional quadrants. As a result, the framework evolved into a comprehensive document that was appreciated for its dignity and strong Indigenous presence.

It is an exciting time in Manitoba with the release of The Truth and Reconciliation of Canada Final Report. It has opened floodgates that have been closed with overwhelming pressures of FN freedom, opportunity and expression to be released. Up to this point it seems, aside from Saskatchewan's FN curriculums, FN education has been a process of travelling against the current with activism as the canoe.

The release of the TRC Final Report it obligates Non-Indigenous population to take a look at its surroundings and watch their created land get flooded. In relation to this MWWBW Provincial policy framework the excitement creates a flood of declarations to be acknowledged, almost too much that it was overwhelming. It could also be that FN education is so new that the floods created an unfamiliar landscape in which it is currently not known where to begin and is using familiar educational tools to try and situate themselves. Therefore, this document could be plotted at South-West direction for mimicking Western education using FN concepts.

Chapter 5: A Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

The First Nations Cultural frame, the First Nation Education Medicine Wheel employed in this study is intended to be comprehensive and fit for processing information from a FN cultural lens. It could be compared to a beaded necklace, with the primary documents as the centrepiece, and the first beads on the string could be the tertiary, or the legislation that creates the foundation for the Provincial Prairie education policy frameworks (PPEPF). The centrepiece must be designed prior to placement, and each PPEPF is planned across various processes. The finishing beads could be strung, and these curriculum documents became a masterpiece in their own right.

Each PPEPF is intended to enhance vitality and growth, moving beyond the original plans toward the gradual realization of growth over time. A lot of this work can be assumed, and the different interpretations of the people who engage with the materials can result in narrow or biased results. The environments where these frameworks are applied determine the products that are produced and eventually are affected by this environment, and can be understood as a reflection of the environment. Although certain frameworks are fixed and limited by the social structures established in the mid-18th century, they are all converging towards a broader understanding. It may be regarded that all of these frameworks may be aggregated with common experiences and showing a common essence.

The author is informed by the experience of the First Nations and the intergenerational heritage that is experienced in the community with other First Nations people. Although conscious attempts have been made to reduce bias, any information is always filtered through a consciously and unconsciously formed worldview. This view, as any other, presents the possibility of bias in the study, but long-term reflexive consciousness and methodological integrity have been used to direct the research process.

Challenges with the First Nations Education Medicine Wheel (MW)

One of the major challenges is the notion of perspective. Perspective, though it may appear simple, is a significant indicator to comprehend and validate the differences between the two educational systems. The need to clearly define perspective points to a fundamental rift. This demand implies that Indigenous people are not fully incorporated into the mainstream of society; if they were to be, there would be a common or shared view.

Throughout the process, the First Nation Education Medicine Wheel (MW), as shown on Page 18, was able to examine both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous documents; however, the Non-Indigenous documents proved challenging. The indicators that were created concerning the First Nations experience were formed naturally and in accordance with the MW, thus validating it. Conversely, the Non-Indigenous documents were highly formalized and thus needed interpretive translation since their concepts needed to be translated into the MW. The most similar MW indicator concept was then determined to give the opportunity to be plotted on the MW.

Another challenge with the MW is that there were similar indicators, but in different sub-quadrant. For example, “First Nation developments.” While developments are always taking place, they occur at different levels with varying capacities. The author now recognizes that the indicators required greater specificity to more effectively explain differences in capacity, or that they should have been subdivided into categories such as experiences, developments, directives, and processes. However, as this was the first application of the MW, such refinement could only emerge through retrospective reflection.

Another challenge in implementing the MW was that the given colors could not be thoroughly helpful in the study. Nevertheless, they can be useful in discussions. Although the colors may have helped in understanding the plotting process, the indicator codes were more

specific than the colors. During the preliminary thoughts and discussions, prior to the formalizing the MW Indicators, the colours were useful in supporting dialogue and concept exploration.

The Broader Significance

The examination of each document generated one or two deep understandings and other minor clarifications and were processed through a FN lens of either/and spirituality, community, or land relations to determine situation on the MW. The author's gratitude was often overwhelming as validation, and awareness became a part of a growing identity. This leads to a realization and deep understanding stemming from a tertiary document: *the Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta (MOU)*, particularly *Part II – Commitments*. This section contained a lot of dependency statements: "...support First Nations...", "Alberta Agrees to...", "Canada agrees to...". In relation to the MW examination, most of these statements fell under in West quadrant: "1. First Nation activism honed in on specific East and South-East quadrant effects, leading to identifying and meeting First Nation student needs using a First Nations-developed approach." (First Nations Culture in Schools, 2025, p. 53-57).

In this regard, two concepts emerged: the dependency of First Nations and the strength and pride in their assertions. These were at first conflicting thoughts, and I was upset that they were placed in this position in the first place. This does not imply that FN are insufficient, because this group is relatively new to being fully immersed in this political arena: the restructuring of the Indian Affairs Department in 1966. It takes approximately 5-6 generations of capacity building before FN can stand on its own.

The assertions made were firm and confident. It was as if they were in control. In a moment of self-reflection, I felt proud of the leaders for their stance. I also realized my feelings

of inferiority to many mainstream professionals and other intimidating mainstream societal structures and components. Resentment arose at seeing myself at their mercy, a basic submission.

These two thoughts reminded me of an experience when I was owed money and had to go through the embarrassment of asking for it back. I ended up being the “bad guy” in that situation, even though it was my kindness and generosity that were at the root of it. In the experience, I had communicated that I should not be placed in such a position, as I was showing kindness, and that I had entrusted them to follow through on their end.

This understanding prompted the examination of the MOU document and the realization that the situation in which FN have been placed still persists, albeit on a larger scale. The shame of seeming inadequate and the implication this has on Settler Canadians when First Nations peoples demand that treaty commitments be met became clear. Going forward, the author concluded that there is no shame in claiming these rights, and the feelings of inferiority are neither justified nor acceptable.

The second part of the *MOU: Long Term Strategic Action Plan* emphasized the concept of the *schoolhouse model*, stating that, “...First Nations inherited a schoolhouse, but not an education system.” (MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan, 2013, p. 3). Yet simple, this phrase articulated a significant concept of what my study was about. I was delighted to learn of a coined phrase that captures extensive information regarding a FN educational experience. This term described how provincial education systems were flourishing because they now operated through school divisions, as well as highlighted the benefits of creating a comprehensive education system. While First Nations education continued to operate within the federal system, it struggled to provide second and third-level services.

Although the Standards of Appropriate Education in Manitoba are sufficient to support the general educational practices, a major weakness is the absence or underrepresentation of the First Nations concepts; for instance, how a special needs child is viewed in OFNC as compared to a Non-Indigenous child, as well as the concept of a *windigokan*, and its role in OFNC. However, it is a concept that currently lacks a substantial foundation for use in such an ancient formal system. Its use may only gain popularity after FN reaches the last North half quadrant from the MW.

The Teaching Quality Standard: Alberta Education is a document that outlines the expectations for Alberta Teachers. Firstly, the idea of formalized teaching standards is excellent. However, a gap in teachers' prior knowledge limited their ability to truly relate to the essence of the FN experience, leaving this need unmet. This evaluation subsequently addressed the static nature of education, which remains unchanged, either refining existing frameworks or adapting to societal paradigm shifts. This approach would not benefit students, whereas FN education can adapt and give access to the West and North quadrants.

The Saskatchewan Provincial Education Plan (SPEP) is a document that outlines goals and reports statistics. This evaluation created a sense of direction and security, whether the goals were met or not. The key insight from the SPEP document was the importance of having a sense of direction and recognizing the opportunity to use "trial and error" methods in education.

The final tertiary document was *First Nation Control of First Nation Education* (FNCFNE). It is an assertive document, both protective of FN students and clearly stating governmental expectations. The document clearly conveyed two ideal concepts: the idea of fourth-level services and the division of FN education into smaller parts. The fourth-level services would include new initiatives that address the needs of FN students, such as identifying

and addressing disproportionate characteristics. This may be a sensitive, challenging, and even a controversial issue. FN students face unique situations that relate to intergenerational trauma. The fourth-level services may include a First Nations approach, which includes working with school elders and knowledge keepers, teaching lodges where students can sit around fires, exposing them more to First Nations culture, providing age-appropriate traditional healing programs, and a range of other programs.

Dividing FN education is a challenging task that can be quite overwhelming, often causing disorientation. The FNCFNE is a comprehensive document containing both achievable and challenging goals. This can be attributed to the lack of experience of the author in political situations. The sphere of First Nations education presupposes the necessity to balance and coordinate several, sometimes conflicting priorities at once and attain significant results. When one item is taken, studied, and stabilized, it frees up attention for the next one. While there may already be frameworks in place that organize this process, a united provincial Prairie scale may also be beneficial.

The curriculum documents had a very clear distinction, demonstrating a spectrum of Indigenous cultural fluency. For reference, I have been engaged in cultural practices since childhood and have participated in ceremonies for over 30 years. Besides being highly educated, I have also worked in Northern reserves as a traditional healer in formal corrections and healing institutions.

Alberta's Aboriginal Studies 20 curriculum is a covertly manipulative and racist document. Surprisingly, despite being a 2002 document, it is still in use today. It places students in the mindset of early colonists before introducing contemporary concepts of Indigenous initiatives. It was developed and processed before the *MOU* and the *Truth and Reconciliation*

Report, but after the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* in 1996. This document characterizes its provincial government as deceiving and sly, because it holds their stamp of approval. The positive aspect of this document is that it reflects their perspectives on Indigenous peoples and can be used as a gauge, clarifying positionality. Saskatchewan's *Native Studies: A Curriculum Guide for Grade 11 International Indigenous Issues* may represent the opposite extreme. Materials presenting views falling between these two views can be regarded as being associated with Indigenous cultural content and Indigenous initiative fulfilment.

Saskatchewan's curriculum abundantly presents authentic Indigenous cultural content; it was obviously written by an Indigenous person. It meets the initiatives; in fact, it was ahead of its time. This document was released in 1992. Surprisingly, Saskatchewan Learning approved this document. While not overly controversial, the Indigenous concepts seemed to have a foundation that could not support the richness of FN culture and spirituality. However, much of First Nations education has its roots in Saskatchewan, and they may have a foundation and societal tolerance for appreciating this outstanding document. Furthermore, this author is pleased to learn that this document is still in use and should serve as a model for other provinces. It would be wonderful to explore Saskatchewan's other grade-level Native Studies curriculum documents.

The *Manitoba Grade 12 Current Topics in First Nations and Inuit Studies* curriculum document is a well-thought-out and considerate document. It has been filtered through Eurocentric processes—an enlightening realization. It may be one of the most significant; however, while the curriculum team's intention is genuine, cultural significance loses some of its essence when processed through another cultural filter. This is because they lack First Nation cultural connections, despite the Indigenous contributors. It demonstrates great integrity in

attempting to fulfill TRC's 94 Calls to Action, achieving a level that non-Indigenous individuals may perceive as sufficient. However, in the end, the document would have been more effective if it had been processed by Indigenous cultural personnel.

The main focus of this study are the provincial policy frameworks, including Alberta's First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (AEPF). A significant concept derived from this document is that, rather than blood quantum, there should be a greater focus on students' cultural characteristics. The document claims FN students are difficult to monitor; however, statistics often highlight the disparities in First Nations communities as compared to the non-Indigenous and off-reserve FN populations.

Another significant concept from this document was that FN was constantly under the control of the Alberta government. Being an older document, it may be a trailblazer for First Nations education in the Prairie Provinces. However, it should be noted that it was released the same year as the covertly racist curriculum examined in this study. Considering these documents together, their intention may be to retain control of First Nations education and hold onto it for as long as they can. FNCFNE explains, "Canada's ongoing colonial processes continue to have detrimental impacts on First Nations peoples. Being forced to move from self-sufficiency to dependency has undermined the individual, family, community and national well-being of First Nations." (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 4). This pertains to the Saskatchewan Inspiring Success: *First Nations and Métis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework* (SEPF).

The SEPF was initially an inspiring and exciting document to read, until one of its statistics revealed a discrepancy due to misleading wording. This discrepancy prompted a thorough read, revealing misdirection. This document demonstrated raw honesty and contextualized it within First Nation Control of First Nation Education in the First Nations

experience, presenting it as a First Nation-oriented policy. However, this document lost its value through deception and artistic articulation, despite its great potential in the beginning. It represents a perfect idiom, “too good to be true”. Certainly, it holds value if examined beyond the deception and the neglect of on-reserve students. This policy was not designed for FN education; it was designed for Non-Indigenous control, perhaps to fulfill a legislative mandate.

In conclusion, regarding the 1992 curriculum presented in this study, the SEPF contradicts the curriculum's genuine integrity, indicating that the province's mindsets do not align. However, the curriculum writer had an authentic Indigenous perspective, whereas the policy framework did not. In emphasis, First Nation Provincial Education Policies and curricula must be made in First Nation space by First Nation people and filtered through First Nation processes. They have the best interests of all people, including First Nations children and students, as well as Non-Indigenous students.

Manitoba's *Mamahtawisiwin: The Wonder We are Born With: An Indigenous Education Policy Framework's* (MWWBW) most significant concept was a revelation, acknowledging the need for using First Nations cultural concepts in a non-Indigenous work. This would make it “trustworthy” in effectively communicating an authentic intention. It effectively reveals the quality, distinctiveness, and authenticity of First Nation content and the essence it holds within its conceptual framework. It brings its power to the Eurocentric arena, forcing them to look to First Nations for validation.

Discussion

The First Nations Education Medicine Wheel (MW) was a valuable tool for evaluating the documents to answer the research question. The coding and assignment of the indicators allowed the characteristics of each province to appear as individual units while also connecting

with one another, similar to siblings in a family. It showed the influence of First Nations activism and the governments' respectful responses in some cases, as well as emptiness in others.

The goal was to determine *how provincial Indigenous policy can be understood through the experience of a First Nations Educator who has established a strong connection to OFNC.*

Notably, according to the findings, all three provinces fared differently. The objective was not to create competition among the provinces, but rather to obtain a thorough understanding of formal education in relation to First Nations cultural sensitivity in meeting the needs of both teachers and students. The goal is to distinguish and acknowledge that First Nations staff and students have specific needs that mainstream public education cannot address due to its traditional cultural base.

This concept considered FN cultural characteristics, rather than Non-Indigenous cultural characteristics. It also examined the FN development of cultural traits throughout the intergenerational colonial experience and its performance in the formal education system. The availability of formal documentation for First Nations' education confirms its distinctiveness, while the significant statistical differences divide education into two separate entities. Separating education into two parts was not a choice for First Nations; rather, it was a response to the inadequacies shown by statistics, thus proving culture plays a role in the effectiveness of education.

Pay now or pay later: prejudice seems expensive, and the merging of these two cultures into one seems too unlikely in this moment. During the treaty signing, the governments had the upper hand, and the legal processes were in their favour. They envisioned a gradual assimilation process running smoothly, with FN individuals incapacitated and controlled, with their reserves

gradually dissolving and eventually assimilating into the mainstream culture, never to re-emerge again. However, this became their downfall.

The First Nations Education Medicine Wheel conveys a different story. FN culture would not assimilate into mainstream culture; instead, mainstream culture would merge into them. This amalgamation is inevitable as people's contentment lies in a sense of wholeness. Distraction has its limits; when the feeling of emptiness becomes too strong to be neglected, it is not only inadequate but also expensive, resulting in a deterioration in mental and emotional health. Wholeness can only be achieved through emotional and spiritual fulfilment, which FN culture possesses.

All of the studied FN documents demonstrate emotional (West) and spiritual (North) intelligence, indicating that they have access to those quadrants as part of their cultural composition. Government colonial control and past legislative mandates of isolation have kept this connection intact. The majority of Non-Indigenous documents in the study, with the exception of the Alberta curriculum, have already invited First Nations to share their perspectives. However, it is not without challenges; penetrating that barrier is quite challenging.

Certain Non-Indigenous documents are gradually dismantling the barriers to the West, and it will not take long before it breaks. For example, *Mamahtawisiwin: The Wonder We are Born With* is on the right track but seems overwhelmed with First Nation content and knowledge. Another example includes, Alberta's MOU's dependency statements, or Inspiring Success' misleading direction. This implies that it could have been an issue of failure to recognize the problem, or manage information regarding FN diversity, or just unwilling to let go power. However, there has been an immense effort that had been invested in FN education so far and

feel excited for it to continue to snowball into the West and North quadrants. Below is a list of recommendations::

- A universal conceptual, post-residential school culture, language for First Nation education must be identified, endorsed, and shared: vocabulary, phrases, etc.
 - Without universally understood FN educational concepts it slows progress. The inconsistencies keep FN education confused and subject to repeated examination.
- First Nations education formal documentation has to be developed by First Nations cultural people, in a FN environment and processed through First Nations editors.
 - Non-Indigenous governments need to relinquish control of education and allow it to filter through First Nation processes.
 - First Nations would be able to trust documents without governmental language and processed deception.
- Non-Indigenous contributors and educators must acknowledge that they are doing their best with their limited understanding and must assume a position of support.
 - Cultural competency professional development has been used, with great gratitude from FN, yet it fails to account for the intergenerational culture and legacy that FN reflects.
- First Nations have been placed in an uncomfortable position as lenders and must demand fulfilment to ensure repayment from the signed treaty agreement.
 - This negatively affects FN self-image as individuals, family, community, and regional units.

- It also affects how Non-Indigenous people perceive FN people, creating racism and prejudice.
- First Nations face unique cultural challenges in the pursuit of independence compared to Non-Indigenous groups.
 - This does not indicate incompetence, insufficiency, or inferiority; rather, it is a reflection of FN's progression towards fluency in mainstream societal existence.
 - Over the next few generations, First Nations will surpass current standards.
- A First Nations educational and cultural foundation must be created for Non-Indigenous groups to receive and comprehend some FN traditional concepts.
- The trend of mainstream education must be looked into and be processed through the MW to find out if it will stabilize through rhythm of the MW?
- First Nation Education should be examined from a different perspective: cultural characteristics rather than status and blood quantum.
 - The Canadian Census should be restructured to reflect the cultural image.
- Educational fourth-level services consisting of FN cultural practices should be integrated into curricula that include FN traditional, spiritual and cultural attributes.
- First Nation education should be divided into focused goals and workable pieces.
 - The use of a goal-oriented approaches would help evaluate progress and the Alberta's MOU Long Term Strategic Plan and First Nation Control of First Nation Education is a good starting point. Both of these documents are FN oriented in a FN cultural pool.

In conclusion, the tremendous effort put into First Nation Education must be acknowledged. Frustration, resentment, and anger are natural emotions that come with cultural clashes and evolution. Empathy is not a highly highlighted characteristic in the mainstream cultural systems, even though it can bring about more thoughtfulness and justice. In this regard, First Nations activism and community support are vital and sustaining. However, regardless of the circumstances, FN education has come this far using Non-Indigenous processes, in a Non-Indigenous arena, against Non-Indigenous prejudice, and with no Non-Indigenous cultural knowledge.

These two cultures are in the process of merging, not assimilating. Despite significant losses and painful and shameful histories, Canada has responded: our First Nation education system is acknowledged and evolving. While some needs of First Nation students and teachers in the Prairie Provinces have been met through the various documents studied, there is still a long way to go. Cultural ignorance is a prominent barrier to education.

Critical Reflection

I cannot compare my experience conducting a thesis study to that of a Non-Indigenous person. I cannot say whether I have more confidence than an Indigenous person would. All I can say is that I was raised and cultured as a First Nations person in a First Nations environment, and I persevered through the cultural barriers to be at this very point, discussing my critical reflection on a thesis study. I stand on the foundations of my mom and dad, great Indigenous writers, and our ancestors.

In the process of writing this thesis, I spent most of my time feeling insufficient and afraid; I procrastinated many times, including for an entire year. However, rereading my list of findings, I realized that I might have made a significant contribution to education, for both public education and First Nations education. In retrospect, I would have done many things differently.

It was an emotional process; riding the roller coaster of integrity was the biggest challenge. I would have liked to have a study partner to gain broader perspectives and ensure bias was in check. I have done my best to manage this, but I could only catch the conscious bias.

Secondly, I definitely became aware of my cultural perspective throughout this examination. I had no idea the guiding indicators to plot the documents were from an Indigenous perspective until I read highly formalized documents like Alberta's Quality Teaching Standards. I now understand how unconscious worldviews are and understand those guiding indicators also need a Non-Indigenous cultural perspective to gain a more accurate plotting sequence on the MW.

I did not want to lowercase the word Non-Indigenous, because it implied inferiority to Indigenous. People are people, no matter where they were cultured. I also wish I had known the phrase “schoolhouse model” before I did the study. I imagine it would have saved a few thousand words, but in the end, it was a good realization that if we had a formally endorsed language, communication would be more efficient. I have been through nearly a decade and a half of personal education, and I have been a teacher since 2010, yet I have not come across much unified language. The lack of a common language caused articulation challenges, but I think this may be a general challenge for any Indigenous researcher. I have self-doubt and sometimes feel embarrassed by some of the concepts, suggestions, or ideas I bring forward. However, that may be a symptom of an Indigenous inferiority complex when stepping into a foreign arena.

I feel closer to our ancestors through this study. When they signed the treaties, they did it for me. Sometimes I would reflect on where I would be if they had not ensured education was a part of the treaties. The ancestors knew many other scholars, and they and I would bring our

people back to ourselves as we were in the Original First Nations Culture. Come to think of it, perhaps that was the one crucial component we never lost, after all, it is that spirit that brought First Nations education to this point: activism.

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