Honouring the Knowledges of Indigenous Leaders in Education

By

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Abstract

The horrific history of Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples has no doubt left deep wounds and scars which continue to perpetuate systemic colonial racism and continue to oppress arguably the most marginalized and disadvantaged group of peoples in Canada. The role Indian Residential Schools have played in the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples has left a devastating legacy of a deeply damaged relationship with an education system engrained with Westernized Eurocentric hegemony. It is no surprise that the academic achievement of the Indigenous population is well below the national average of the non-Indigenous population. Inevitably, there lacks any representation or acknowledgment of Indigenous knowledges which could inform educational practices in all facets to better reflect the growing population of Indigenous peoples. We must interrogate, revisit, and redesign current practices and preparation of educational leaders to better equip them to meet the needs of our changing demographics in Canada. Senator Murray Sinclair (2014), Chief Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) states, "education has brought us to the current state of poor relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country, but education holds the key to making things better" (p.7). This research puts emphasis on exemplifying the knowledges of Indigenous leaders in education to inform leadership practices to create a shift that puts Indigenous ways of being, doing, and leading at the forefront of leadership theory and practice. I sat with and listened to the journeys of Indigenous leaders in education and documented the strengths that emerged within themes of *refusal*, *resistance*, *resilience*, and *resurgence*, as well as articulated specific leadership nuances congruent with Indigenous ways of knowing. Through story and connection, I unveil the knowledge Indigenous leaders carry within their leadership role, and work to shift the deficit paradigm that plagues the way Indigenous people are often

viewed. A true valuing and acceptance of Indigenous knowledges can, and should, inform leadership foundations for the future of education in Canada for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

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Miigwetch to all my relatives who shared their stories, supported this journey, and drove this work forward. My relatives, by blood or otherwise are included in my gratitude which goes above and beyond in ways that cannot be expressed through words. To the Indigenous leaders that shared their stories, these words were honoured through ceremony. My relatives also include my advisor who has proven to be so much more than simply that, Dr. Jerome Cranston. My committee members Dr. Melanie Janzen and Dr. Merli Tamtik, thank you for walking with me throughout this learning journey and sharing your words and actions of encouragement. Most importantly, my family both present and past that have paved the way for me to be the person I am today, that instilled a knowledge base so valuable to me, and for the generations that follow. Without the love and support from Brad, my passion would never be followed so authentically in which he gifts to me the space to be true to myself, and gives me opportunities to practice my teachings on the land and water in order to enrich our lives and our family's future. To our kids, this work is all for you, for your kids, and for the many generations to follow. Miigwetch, I give thanks.

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Chapter 1: Honouring the Knowledges of Indigenous Leaders in Education

The horrific history of Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples has left deep wounds and scars that continue to perpetuate systemic colonial racism and continue to oppress arguably the most marginalized and disadvantaged group of peoples in Canada. The role Indian Residential Schools have played in the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples has left a devastating legacy of a deeply damaged relationship and a resulting education system engrained with Westernized Eurocentric hegemony (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000; Smith, 1999). It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the academic achievement of the Indigenous population is well below the national average of the non-Indigenous population (Stats Canada, 2016). And, the effect of centuries of the colonization processes and government policies that intended to eradicate Indigenous life and Indigenous people (Canadian Encyclopedia, 2018) have also ignored any sort of representation of Indigenous knowledges that could be used to inform educational practices in all facets of education to better reflect the growing population of Indigenous peoples.

It is clear that educational institutions must collectively interrogate, revisit, and redesign current educational practices and preparation of educational leaders to better equip them to meet the needs of our changing demographics in Canada. With the Indigenous population being the youngest and fastest growing peoples, this in itself is an act of strength and resilience which must be acted upon and reflected through educational practices. Senator Murray Sinclair (2014), Chief Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) states, "education has brought us to the current state of poor relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country, but education holds the key to making things better" (p.7).

In order to better understand the context of reconciliation in Canada, one must know the truth of the long past, present, and future relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples. Without a basic understanding of Indigenous life prior to European contact it is impossible to fully comprehend the disastrous effects of colonization on Indigenous people in Canada which has affected all aspects of life; social, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual. For the purpose of the educational context, it is also important to know the interrelatedness of Indigenous life in regards to land, environment, language and culture. A more wholistic approach which correlates more congruently with Indigenous pedagogy makes researching and working within colonial norms difficult. One cannot simply segregate specifically the education of Indigenous peoples, without doing it justice. The living relationship of life and land has been severed due to colonization, and an essential part of that life was education. Leadership nuances amongst Indigenous peoples have been all but lost as a result of the colonial systems mainstream Canadians have been estranged to which privileges leadership attributes that are grounded in Eurocentric practices and worldview. The stories and knowledge Indigenous leaders hold must be revived, relived, and viewed as a valuable source to guide the efforts of future generations of educational leaders.

The sacredness of the land, Mother Earth, which was stolen from the people of Turtle Island - what we now call Canada, United States of America, and Mexico - contained a spiritual connection, so sacred that Mother Earth looked after us, the Indigenous people, and we looked after her. All our needs, food, clothing, shelter, and more were provided by the land. Our entire health and existence depended on the waters, the animals, the vegetation, and we were taught by the land and on the land. The land was our school, and *pimatisiwin,* the “good life” was, and continues to be our curriculum. When this is your way of life and you are no longer able to live

this way, no longer able to live off the land, no longer able to pass on those valuable knowledges, the disturbing effects of losing the land and a force of values put forth by European colonizers have, and continue to be felt today.

It is the power of the Machiavellian implementation of a punishing series of legal instruments in the form of Doctrines, Acts, policies, and laws initially introduced by European colonists and sustained today by the Canadian government and its agencies that continue to devalue, assimilate, and oppress the Indigenous population in Canada. By way of context see for example: *The Doctrine of Discovery*, *Royal Proclamation of 1763*, *British North America Act, 1876*, *Terra Nullius*, *Indian Act, 1876,* and the *Comprehensive Land Claims Policy, 1986* among others. The brute force that Indigenous people suffer under today, namely the *Indian Act* (1985), is regarded by many Indigenous peoples as one of the strongest acts of apartheid legislation ever passed (Barrera, 2017). The *Indian Act* continues to oppress by dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their land, leaving Indigenous people dependent on the control of and oppressed by the Federal Government of Canada (Manuel, 2017). The *Indian Act* controls all aspects of Indigenous life. It strips Indigenous peoples' life connection to the land. It results their inability to provide for themselves. It creates a perpetual dependency with shattering effects.

The loss of 99.8% of sacred landmass to colonial-settlers meant a loss in hunting, fishing, trapping, and living on traditional territories for Indigenous peoples. This dispossession resulted in the loss of Indigenous approaches to education for their own children in an authentic, appropriate, and meaningful way. The remaining 0.2% of Canada made into so-called "Reserves" for Indigenous peoples to be forced unto to live impoverished, in humiliation, and with no way of passing on essential Indigenous knowledges to their children (Manuel, 2017).

Colonization, and later strengthening the goal of assimilation and annihilation of Indigenous peoples, the *Indian Act* changed the way of life with drastic and devastating results.

Researcher Positionality

I feel it is important to share my positionality within this context to better understand where I come from and how this work in honouring Indigenous knowledges in leadership came to be. It is also an indicator of my own commitment to decolonizing, thus improving the education system in which I work and study. I must acknowledge and disclose the influence of my own positionality which will no doubt affect the relational research process (Cranston & Whitford, 2018). As I partake in this sacred journey with other Indigenous colleagues, the openness and reflexivity allows the development of organic authentic relationship, and exposes my own worldview, perspective, and bias. This positionality is evidence of how the contribution of my own story relates to the perilous need for myself as researcher to apply decolonizing research methodology as I walk alongside my research participants throughout this endeavor (Savin-Badin & Howell Major, 2013).

I was born and raised in Sandy Bay First Nation by my parents, grandparents, relatives, and community members. My parents, both having varying degrees of experience and exposure to the Residential School system, embodied their experiences and passed on the resulting effects. Although the trauma inflicted throughout the community as a result of Residential Schools was, and is very much evident, I feel blessed and privileged to have lived the life I lived, and learned the knowledges passed onto me during my time living on the "Rez".[1]

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[1] Rez is a slang term for a First Nation Reserve.

Despite the hundreds of years of colonization, I see the strength and resilience within my people. The community-based way of life, although fractured, remained strong. Very much a "non-perfect" community by Western standards, its members still embraced much of a traditional lifestyle in many regards. I was raised partially by Nookomis and Ni-mooshomis, my grandmother and non-biological grandfather, as were many of my friends and family. There were no need for daycare centres and I had not heard such a word growing up. My grandparents played a key role in my "informal" education. Nookomis, I called her "Ko-ko", attended a Residential school until about grade six. Ni-mishomis was illiterate. I do not know for how long he attended a Residential school. I learned so much and cherish the knowledge they gave me. Those teachings and my learning is, in many regards, an invaluable asset to my life today. By today's Western standards these teachers and knowledgeable leaders in my life would be considered "uneducated".

Ojibwe was my first language. It was taught to me by my Ko-ko who kept me during the day since the time I was two weeks old while my mother and father went to work. My grandfather also worked, but remained grounded in a traditional lifestyle of hunting, fishing, and trapping. My grandparents' home, still heated by a woodstove, held the smell of fresh drying hides, duck soup or some other wild meat, and the aroma of a pot of tea that remained on the stovetop. That house, owned by the federal government as all houses on the reserve are, was surrounded by bales in the winter for insulation, as well as a mountain of firewood. In the summer, the backyard was a garden, and later on a chicken coop. It was not uncommon to come home from school to see my grandparents sitting on their porch – my Ko-ko smashing berries between two rocks, and my grandfather cleaning vegetables from the garden, or fish from the lake.

My Ko-ko was skilled in canning, cooking, sewing, and money management. My grandfather may not have been able to read, but he could tell us the profit made from all dried and stretched skins lined up in the dining room where they sat drying. Growing up, I never saw them go to the grocery store much, but I did see them lift up the section of that ragged kitchen floor to expose shelves of preserves they had made together, stored in the cool underground of their house. Where they received this knowledge to live this way of life, I can only speculate it was perhaps, maybe a combination of Residential school and lived experiences passed on from their leaders.

Ojibwe may have been my first language, but Creator was never spoken of. Eagle feathers remained stowed away while Crucifixes and images of the "Last Supper" could be seen in almost every house in Sandy Bay. I went to school at a time when the Catholic Church still had a very strong influence on education throughout the reserve. My parents did not want me speaking Ojibwe, and it was not infused at home. Cultural ceremonies were not spoken of nor celebrated openly until much of my later life. It was not until I was six years old in 1988 when the community had its first Pow Wow club, and it was then when I started to explore more of my culture. And, it felt good.

I grew up with the stories from my close relatives; aunties, uncles, and cousins that shared their experiences in Residential school. These stories were the norm in my upbringing. I knew nothing else of what education for adults at that time would have looked like when they were children. When my family moved to Winnipeg, my world was rocked not only in terms of education, but also by the way of life. People look at how reserves in Canada are portrayed in the media and how it often appears as though you are driving through a developing country when

passing through on the highways of Manitoba, and they say "why don't they just leave?" Life was by no means perfect on the Rez, but I wanted no place else to be, but "home".

Despite the numerous struggles throughout my remaining years of school, I did graduate, and I did attend university although it was a long laborious journey. I graduated with both a Bachelor of Science and a Bachelor of Education degree. I became a teacher in an all-Indigenous high school, and began my own deeper exploration of identity, culture, and language. It was here where I learned, felt, and experienced the Eurocentric, Westernized, colonial system of education we have today. I saw the struggles not only of Indigenous students straining to stay afloat in this system, but also amongst the Indigenous staff within.

It became evident very quickly, that there were a lack of educational leaders to steer and guide us in a direction that was congruent with our ways. Indigenous representation in educational leadership was much fewer and far between. I admired Indigenous leaders in their ability to "walk in both worlds" for the good of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, but it was not enough. We need allies, willing to learn our ways, to better reflect the needs of the changing demographic in Canada and diverse needs of our students. The missing reflection of the knowledge base of Indigenous leaders was not a problem with the leaders themselves, it was a problem with the system and a complete disregard for alternative ways of leading. A system which is built upon the Eurocentric hierarchical educational empire has no room for the valuing of Indigenous knowledges, let alone a valuing of Indigenous leadership ways. The bureaucracy, hoop jumping, and competitive nature of leadership roles within the education system is incongruent with Indigenous epistemologies, and is designed to produce "cookie-cutter", like-minded individuals who share similar Eurocentric values. The key problem has been, and continues to be that this monolithic conception of leadership within the school system only

reflects the Eurocentric paradigm, thus negating all educational contributions from Indigenous peoples.

Preparing Educational Leaders for Contemporary Reality

The current Manitoba educational context and system does not prepare educational leaders with knowledges and practices that align with Indigenous leadership pedagogies. Indigenous ways of being and doing can better inform educational practices that will steer education towards reconciliation for the benefit of not only Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, but for the future of reconciliation in Canada. Senator Murray Sinclair (2014) states:

> We know that making things better will not happen overnight. It will take generations. That’s how the damage was created and that’s how the damage will be fixed. But if we agree on the objective of reconciliation, and agree to work together, the work we do today, will immeasurably strengthen the social fabric of Canada tomorrow. (p. 7)

Current educational leadership preparation programs, which are largely designed to reflect the Westernized Eurocentric framework, are insufficient and inadequate to serve the needs of the rapidly changing population demographics in Manitoba. If we are serious about our dedication towards reconciliation, we must make space for Indigenous paradigms to be a valued component to what it means to be educated as a Canadian.

There are, however, strong Indigenous leaders within the educational community in Manitoba who have vast knowledges and experiences we can draw upon. Although these leaders come from various leadership roles in a variety of capacities, for the context of this research, I will focus primarily on Indigenous leaders that are recognized as part of a colonial education system. Much can be learned from these trailblazers, who are unfortunately too few and far between. There is an evidential need for an investigative inquiry into their journey to leadership,

as well as their experiences which can inform leadership preparation programs for future educational leaders both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, but may also lead to a higher representation of Indigenous leadership that better reflects the growing demographic of Indigenous youth.

There is little disagreement regarding the significant role that school leaders play in supporting student achievement. In a Manitoba context, the Indigenous population, both urban and rural, is growing at an exponential rate. Between 2011 and 2016, Manitoba was identified as one of the provinces having the highest increases of Indigenous people by 13.5% (Statistics Canada, 2016). Yet, the knowledge base that informs the preparation of school leaders is largely anchored in Western, Eurocentric philosophies and values that perpetuate an educational system grounded in Eurocentrism (Cranston & Whitford, 2018). This disconnection between a Western neo-liberal hegemonic education system and Indigenous ways of knowing is not servicing the achievement of the Indigenous population. Although the Indigenous demographic is largely under represented within Manitoba educational leaders, it is imperative we investigate their knowledge base, and work to decolonize school leadership practice and preparation for the benefit of all learners both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

Indigenous knowledges differ from that of the Eurocentric hegemony within our current education system. Indigenous learning is a sacred and wholistic lifelong journey without timelines, standards, and hierarchy. Battiste (2009) views Indigenous knowledge as “experiential, purposeful, relational, and a lifelong responsibility” (p. 5). In most recent years, there is an emergent inquiry by governments, international organizations, universities, scholars, and policy makers into the investigation and validation of Indigenous knowledges and how these ways can be useful and significant for informing inclusive practices to benefit all (Battiste,

2009). Honouring this way of being reconceptualises resilience and self-reliance of Indigenous peoples and reinforces the strength within their own philosophies and educational processes. Clearly there is much to learn and an immense value in hearing the voices of Indigenous leadership in the community. It is only through the trust in the words of our people, and the action of non-Indigenous allies in partnership with Indigenous peoples that the decolonization of the knowledge base in education will result in positive change.

Reconciliation is not pleasant work, it is not a comfortable process for either sides, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. In fact, we need to get out of the “us versus them” dichotomy and start the conversation and the footwork to put ideas into action from both sides. It seems the idea of reconciliation is a “good thing” with many non-Indigenous people in agreeance. However, the notion of reconciling Canada’s past in regards to restoring the broken relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples has not come close to touching the displacement of the educational empire held strong by Eurocentric principles. There is still a resistance to make space within a system and put stature aside within a system of education that perpetuates the colonial hierarchy which seeks to benefit those in power even though as Battiste (2009) states, “when Indigenous knowledge is naturalized in educational programs, the learning spirit is nurtured and animated” (p. 13). The immediate challenge then, is the balance between Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy with current colonial legitimacy, authority, and capacity in educational leadership roles. Through the decolonization of educational practices and pedagogy throughout the community and institutions, lending itself to transformation and change, everyone benefits from this reconceptualization. Reconciling Indigenous knowledges with Eurocentric knowledges will be essential in the contemporary Canadian education system.

While teacher quality is the single most impactful factor that influences student success, the evidence strongly supports the positive effects of school leadership on school-wide student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Therefore, in order to improve the educational opportunities for all students, especially for those who have historically faced the greatest obstacles to success, more attention needs to be focused on the essential roles that school leaders play in creating positive change, and the ways in which they are prepared for these roles (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Policy makers have become increasingly interested in developing the competency and capacity of school leaders to make a difference in student outcomes by reducing "the persistent disparities in educational achievement between various social and ethnic groups" (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 636). In a Canadian context, nowhere are the disparities in education outcomes more evident or acute than in the educational achievement gap that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2011). Thus, there exists an evidential need for more inquiry into the journeys and knowledges current Indigenous leaders in education have faced in order to gain a better understanding of how we can work together to inform current leadership preparation and practices for the benefit of Canada's future.

Numerous scholars (for example, see Ahnee-Benham & Napier, 2002; Battiste, 2002, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2003) contend that school leadership needs to be re-conceived and practiced within culturally relevant educational contexts if those responsible for preparing school leaders are serious about rejecting the "status quo" of the mind-numbing rhetoric of "closing the achievement gap" and are willing to "meaningfully contribute to the well-being of Indigenous peoples and their communities" (Archibald, Lundy, Reynolds & Williams, 2010, p. 2).

In many regards, despite attempts to re-conceive the knowledge base of school leadership as either a “big tent” with room for numerous and, at times, contradictory theories (Donmoyer, 1999; Hallinger, 2005), or as a patched-together “quilt” of theories that correspond and cohere (Murphy, 2007), the knowledge base has remained anchored in Eurocentric concepts, theories and practices that reflect the dominance of a Westernized cultural context (Ahnee-Benham & Napier, 2002; Battiste, 2002, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2003; Goodard & Foster, 2002). In rare instances in which Indigenous knowledges and value systems have been considered, they have been relegated to a rarely visited corner of the “big tent” or they have been forcefully sewn onto the “quilt” to represent little more than a decorative and quaint fringe to the dominant ideologies of school leadership (Byrne-Jimenez & Borden, 2015; Hallinger, 2005).

Arguably, in order to better support the educational needs of a diverse population of students within Manitoba, a Canadian province with a rapidly growing Indigenous student body, it is essential that those in positions of authority examine the Eurocentric hegemony engrained within the current model of school leadership preparation (Battiste, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2003). The socio-political history of Canada has resulted in both the systemic mistrust of schooling by Indigenous peoples and the devaluation and elimination of Indigenous worldviews, languages and cultures in schools (Battiste, 2013). A critical examination of these theories and practices are necessary to break down barriers toward a more inclusive and equitable education.

After a review of the practices and theories used to prepare school leaders for Indigenous schools and communities, d’Arbon, Fasoli, Frawley and Ober (2009) conclude that the current domains of knowledge used to inform the professional development of principals and vice-principals “ignore, to a certain degree, the significance of culture on leadership development and continue to privilege a Western perspective” (p. 3). In the Canadian context, even though the

Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) have identified the need for school leader preparation to reflect intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, it is clear that the systems in which school leaders are trained are heavily influenced and structured in a Westernized, Eurocentric framework (Goddard & Foster, 2002; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996).

There is no question that a diverse set of essential skills and a thorough knowledge base school principals hold should reflect and be suited to the needs and demographics of an ever-changing student body. If a reflection of diverse knowledges that are put into practice is to be held in utmost regard for the good of student success and achievement, we must inquire into existing norms, beliefs, protocols, and standards in which educational leaders are encompassing as well as how they are obtaining such knowledge. More importantly, it is vital to examine existing archaic practices of leadership development to desegregate colonial practices that do not currently serve a growing Indigenous student population in Canada. A strong case can be made that the current knowledge base that underlies school leadership preparation remains anchored in Western, Eurocentric philosophies and values. This knowledge base has failed to support Indigenous students and other students who come from socio-historically disadvantaged groups. Current research does not deeply reflect Indigenous contributions to leadership, let alone in an educational context. Pairing existing research with stories of Indigenous leaders in education can provide insights into how the knowledge base of school leadership can be better developed to reflect a dynamic reciprocal relationship between Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledges and improve the ways in which we recruit and prepare school leaders.

It is hard to ignore the fact that the vast majority of the published theory and empirical research on school administration and leadership continues to perpetuate the assumption that

leadership is being enacted in a Western cultural context (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Such assumptions are highly problematic because as Goddard and Foster (2002) contend, the socio-historical and cultural realities of the Indigenous peoples in Canada are markedly different from those of the predominantly "White, Anglo-European majority" population. Race and ethnicity are not just relevant factors to be considered in discussions about school leadership, but are, in fact, "integral" dimensions of what it means to effectively lead schools and their communities (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016).

The dominant, hierarchical models of school leadership preparation controlled by colleges, universities, Ministries of Education and professional associations draw from a limited, rather self-referent "expert" knowledge base that reflects hegemonic, Eurocentric values that are continually reinforced by colonial discourses and practices (Battiste, 2002). In order to serve the needs of Indigenous students and their families, Ahnee-Benham and Napier (2002) state that school leadership should reflect a deep understanding of Indigenous peoples' historical struggle against colonialism and cultural assimilation. What is needed, Fitzgerald (2003) posits, is a reconceptualization of the knowledge base of school leadership that positions Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledges on an equal footing with the dominant, Western, Eurocentric ones.

In light of recent injustices of Indigenous people - such as the outcome of the Colton Bushie trial in 2018[2], and the Tina Fontaine trial in 2018[3], among many others - it is clear there

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[2] Colten Boushie was a 22-year-old Indigenous man who was shot on a farm in Saskatchewan by Gerald Stanley. Stanley went to trial for second-degree murder as well as manslaughter and was acquitted.

[3] Tina Fontaine was a 15-year-old Indigenous girl who was reported missing and died in August 2014. Raymond Joseph Cormier was charged with murder in December 2015 but was later acquitted by a jury in February 2018.

needs to be more education on the historical influence of colonization on Indigenous peoples. In order to fully educate in meaningful and effective ways for a better tomorrow, a collaboration between the relationship of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population to work towards a renewed relationship that honours both perspectives and ways of being are imperative to move forward towards true reconciliation. Now, more than ever before, is the crucial time for the active decolonization of the knowledge base of school leadership so that Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and leading become equally important central tenets for practice and theory (Battiste, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2003).

Through a relational conversation approach, honouring storytelling and oral tradition, we can gain rich information from the paths of current Indigenous leaders in education. Their journeys can inform us of valuable knowledges and experiences that helped or hindered preparation for leadership in an educational setting. We can also receive their stories as an authentic source of knowledge to inform future pedagogy and epistemologies into the breakdown of current systems to decolonize current leadership preparation programs to better reflect Indigenous ways of knowing, leading, and being. The strengths and struggles are not only a representation of immense resilience within Indigenous leaders, but also a way of guiding education towards decolonizing the knowledge base of school leadership preparation.

Research Questions

My major research question that guided this research project was: what can we learn from the stories from Indigenous leaders in education that can guide and inform school leadership practices and preparation? Throughout this relational process, I asked Indigenous leaders in education to share their journey with me. These leaders were those whom I had varying degrees of relationship and trust we could build upon throughout this process. The individuals who I sat

with and shared in story were principals and vice-principals with experience from both an urban and a rural setting, however, were all currently employed within the city of Winnipeg. During our conversations, I asked questions such as: What was their path, family involvement, culture and language influence, relationship to the land, and their education (both informal and formal)? I also asked that they share their perceptions and feelings around identifying as a leader, and if their perceptions had changed over time. How did they define leadership, and when (if at all) did they self-identify as a leader? Did they always know leadership was for them? When did they know? Did they plan to be where they were today? What were the significant stories that contributed to their path? In addition to the stories that contributed to their position, I also asked what effects of colonial trauma they experienced and how they find healing. I felt that this last question would speak to their strength and resilience in battling systems of oppression that continue in today's Eurocentric education system. I also wondered what colonial systems worked and/or did not work for their development and attainment of a leadership role. What did that preparation look like? What helped and hindered their preparation, as well as who was instrumental in where they were today as a leader? I asked if there were any surprises along their journey, and what they wished they knew prior to the attainment of such a position in education? Ultimately, with students at the center of the purpose of education, how can we use Indigenous leadership knowledges to inform other prospective leaders both Indigenous and non-Indigenous? With this knowledge, how do we use what they know today to drive student learning through leadership? I felt these questions and the resulting stories that emerged, would benefit future generations of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners. This research is my small contribution towards informing the path of reconciliation in Canada.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, in their S*ummary of the Final Report*, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future* (2015) defines “reconciliation” as an “ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships” (p. 16). A prescribed pathway within the 94 *Calls to Action* (TRC, 2015) has been clearly identified for educational systems to makes the necessary steps towards building and repairing that relationship. It was important throughout this process that I encompass my own Indigenous roots as a vouch towards my own dedication in decolonizing educational leadership preparation and practices, as well as for the greater foundation of reconciliation. My heart has remained true to my own inherent ways of being, working, and leading this timely and important work.

To advance the aspirations of reconciliation through education we need to anchor this practice in decolonization (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In order to move forward through decolonization, Smith (1999) purports that we must first understand the systems that gave rise to this alienation, that created the narrative of huge devastation, painful struggle, and persistent survival of Indigenous people in Canada. There needs to be a shared language that both sides can use to discuss education, science, social sciences, the humanities, and the politics of the complex narrative laid upon all of us. Only then, will be begin to attempt an unmasking of colonialism in and out of education. A commitment to sharing through focused conversations with Indigenous leaders in education both rural, and in urban settings will assist us in learning about their journey to leadership and open our perspectives to an Indigenous way of knowing, leading, and being. Utilizing an Indigenous axiology by applying a narrative inquiry approach, educational experiences were drawn upon to gather data through stories that honoured the lived experiences and knowledges accrued throughout their life that led those gifted leaders to a path in educational leadership. As a summary to my guiding light in this journey, Kovach (2010) identifies seven

attributes to remain cognizant and practice when researching within an Indigenous framework; namely that it: is situated within an Indigenous paradigm, is relational, is purposeful, involves protocols, involves informality and flexibility, is collaborative and dialogic, and is reflective. Nowhere more evident within me do these practices speak louder than what lies within my heart. I used these guidelines as well as my innate way of being, instilled within me by my ancestors to guide me throughout this research process in honouring the voices of Indigenous leaders in education.

This project provides insights into how the greater education system can better develop a knowledge base which reflects a working reciprocal relationship between Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledges while informing school leadership practices that better support the preparation of current and future school leaders in Manitoba. This research informs not only the "what" of school leadership preparation, but also the "how", as well as the "who" when it comes to Indigenous leadership in education. An investigation of how (if at all) Indigenous leadership "fits" or not within traditional leadership development theories, and to compare value systems within leadership knowledges will help to break down –and perhaps rethink—traditional European notions of what it means to be an educational leader.

Throughout this research process, the stories shared by Indigenous leaders in education were used to present some awareness into the current realities Indigenous leaders face, as well as seek to provide the emerging foundation of learning from Indigenous leaders and identifying specifically what knowledges they carry that work in providing effective and responsive leadership in schools. This was done by embracing Indigenous ways of being together and learning from one another in ways that we, as Indigenous people would naturally conduct ourselves in a learning and sharing environment. The strengths were then identified and

highlighted within the four themes from Madden's (2019) re-storying framework: *refusal*, *resistance*, *resilience*, and *resurgence*. In addition to this strength-based narrative, additional particulars that make them an effective educational leader were also identified as valuable knowledge sources. My goal of this research is that more of the identified and articulated strengths within Indigenous leaders as ways of being and doing are no longer explained and justified, but rather pursued and practiced.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

According to numerous researchers (for example, see Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008), school leadership can have a positive, direct correlation with a substantial impact on school-wide student achievement next to that of teacher effectiveness. In order to improve the educational opportunities for all students, especially those who have historically faced the greatest obstacles to success, more attention needs to be focused on the essential roles that school leaders play and the ways in which they are prepared for these roles (Leithwood et al., 2004). I argue that we are inadequately preparing leaders with applicable knowledges and skill sets to navigate school leadership effectively and efficiently in a way that is appropriate for servicing the diverse and changing needs of our students.

The fundamental influence school leaders have within a building can produce an environment that fosters positive change in school effectiveness, as corroborated by findings of decades worth of research (see Brookover et al., 1997; Creemers, 1994; Edmonds, 1979; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Mortimore et al., 1988; Rutter et al., 1979; Sammons, et al., 1995; Teddier & Stringfield, 1993 as cited in Huber & West, 2002). The increasing determinant of school leaders' importance in all stages of the school improvement process has also been shown (see Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Fullan, 1991; Hopkins et al., 1996; Leithwood, 1992; Serviovanni, 1994; Stego et al., 1987; van Velzen, et al., 1985; West & Ainscow, 1997 as cited in Huber & West, 2002). The important key figure of school leader can be the driving force or the concrete wall in promoting or inhibiting change within a school. With the numerous responsibilities principals carry, and the amount of human resources, such as teachers, educational assistants, support staff, and custodial staff they are directing, it is imperative to have a well-rounded leader with the requisite skills

required to lead people who serve the needs of the actual student body. Even more so, a reflection of Indigenous knowledges exemplifies the commitment to working towards prioritizing reconciliation from an educational standpoint.

With increasing pressures on school leaders, and the insurmountable demands of the job, comes more emphasis on the preparation for their roles. Various preparation programs, training, and professional development are widely varied in content and process, mainly reflecting traditional Eurocentric Westernized educational paradigms. Inevitably, cultural and educational contexts vary from school to school, thus such preparation must be well suited not only for the particular needs of their specific environment, but for school leaders to be knowledgeable about the ever-changing demographics, needs, and educational initiatives. Since learning should reflect the community, national education systems, and fit societal contexts, leaders must not only cope with and support developments that take place, but must embody the knowledge and specificities that are required to react to social, political, economic, and cultural changes that take place. The leader must not only be aware of their community culture, but learn how to service their people through knowing their people. In today's neoliberal systems, globalization is impacting our educational institutions at a pace much faster than previous decades. What we are doing is training our leaders of tomorrow's education using training, content, and methods from a system designed for Indigenous people to not succeed in. There is a significant deficit in effectively equipping our leaders to meet existing challenges through current preparation programs.

Many leadership development programs are focused on developing capacities in some combination of personnel and managerial knowledge and skills. There is no doubt that school leadership behaviour shapes the inner workings of a school, with a focus on the relationship between leaders and working groups (Huber & West, 2002). The focus of relationships between

organizational culture and leader behaviour is what Murphy (1991) suggests falls into a number of phases and theories that have historically guided school leader preparation. These theories, although they may have had an applicable time and place, often neglect the community and most importantly student voice and needs.

The dominant, hierarchical models of school leadership preparation controlled by colleges, universities, Ministries of Education and professional associations draw from a limited rather self-referent "expert" knowledge base that reflects hegemonic, Eurocentric values that are continually reinforced by colonial discourses and practices (Battiste, 2002; Kovach, 2009). What is needed now, perhaps more than ever before, is the active decolonization of the knowledge base of school leadership so that Indigenous ways of knowing, being and leading become equally important central tenets for practice and theory (Battiste, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2003).

The Status Quo of Leadership Theories: A Critical Analysis

When critically analyzing leadership development theories, no singular theory can address the numerous challenges a school leader must face, let alone provide a space for acknowledgement of the contributions of Indigenous knowledges in educational leadership. The existing leadership development theories are grounded and derived from Eurocentric, Westernized leadership values. Murphy (1991) explains the various theories that can broadly be classified as "personality" or "trait theories", "behavioural theories", "situational approaches", "transactional", or "transformational leadership". Personality or trait theories identify personal qualities and characteristics of so-called successful leaders, however the "traits" and/or "successes" are widely interpreted words with definitions that are traditionally Eurocentric based standards and values with no regard for the "other" that exists within the diversity of communities, schools, and students. The behavioural theory of leadership considers the "ins and

outs" of what principals' do that make them "successful". Again, an immeasurable entity where certain behavioural assets vary in effectiveness from community to community, school to school, and more specifically student to student. Understanding that behaviours vary from context to context, the situational theory emerges, adjusting behaviours in more of a reactive rather than proactive manner.

The most recent leadership theories move from transactional to transformational approaches, in which the focus is on utilizing the leadership skills to alter the cultural context of a school from how people work; moving from "direct and control" to "decentralization". Aside from the obvious flaws in transactional leadership, namely an emphasis on conformity rather than creativity, it also disregards any contributions from the collective, fails to focus on the people at hand, and overly situates organizational structure as the predominant force behind leadership. More congruent with cultural change and working with people, is transformational leadership, although this people-oriented approach is seen as more effective in producing school change, a lack of input from the collective, and most importantly from the people being served is still evident. Rather than benefitting from knowing the skills and assets people bring through feelings, attitudes, and beliefs, the leader works to *transform* such attitudes to "fit" what they believe will drive school improvement (Huber & West, 2002). This approach is evident in historical Canadian events that forced assimilation of common feelings, attitudes, and beliefs upon Indigenous people through education, forcing the dominant group's values upon the other, and valuing only a singular "fit" in what is believed to be "right".

The shift in educational leadership training appears to be moving from maintenance activities that support the function of schools towards those actions and knowledges that promote school improvement that explicitly raise standards of achievement (Huber & West, 2002). In

addition to this shift, personal development rather than "role training", with emphasis on the importance of individual values, and how to act upon these values in accordance with school culture remains a current norm in today's leadership preparation. There is little regard in this approach that addresses the details of how educational systems are completely disregarding the intimacy required to really know a group of people in order to create an education that is applicable, relevant, and appropriate. It is evident through many of these Eurocentric colonial practices that little emphasis is placed on identifying school leaders for training, collective leadership, development of leadership 'teams', and a reconceptualization of a leaders' role, as simply part of the whole. While these various leadership preparation approaches may have its flaws, leaders whom have participated in some form of training are still considered an asset to their role as school leader. Although many districts within Manitoba do not have "mandatory" preparation programs, training, qualifications or professional development, participating in some form of leadership training is still seen as the "standard" for most school leaders (Leithwood & Hallinger, 2002).

Manitoba Education's *School Leadership Certificate*

Although scholars of educational leadership have varying opinions on the precise number or exact typology, many seemingly agree that there are a set of requisite domains of knowledge that school leaders should develop to a level of proficiency and competency if they are to effectively lead schools and their communities (for examples see Beachum, 2011; Brown, 2011; Young & Lopez, 2011 among others). Manitoba Education's *School Leadership Certificate* is one such case of a jurisdiction that provides licensure or certification for school leaders. The *guidelines* for acquisition of this credential serve as the provincial policy that sets specific criteria for certification as a "school leader". The *School Leadership Certificate Guidelines*

specifies several prescribed avenues through which one may obtain the requisite credits to meet the qualification requirements. While the certificate is not a mandatory credential for a school-based administrator position, the Manitoba Education and Training unit promotes the certificate by suggesting that professional preparation is essential to supporting effective leadership in the province's schools.

When taking into consideration the specific demographics, needs, and historical context of the Canadian education system and its disastrous effect of colonization on the rapidly growing Indigenous population, it is easy to conclude that our current leadership theories and preparation programs are not meeting the needs of school leaders nor reflective of the systemic changes required to engage in reconciliation. In order to effectively lead in a way that is sensitive and inclusive, one must begin to know and understand the intergenerational impact of Residential schools on today's society and the implications this has on the future of Canadian education. Numerous studies have shown that leadership preparation programs fail to provide the essential knowledge and skills to be efficient leaders of learning (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007), let alone support the educational needs of the Indigenous population in Canada.

In order to better support the educational needs of a diverse population of students within Manitoba, a province with one of the highest Indigenous student population per capita (Statistics Canada, 2015), it is essential that those in positions of authority examine the Eurocentric hegemony engrained within the current model of school leadership preparation (Battiste, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2003). A perpetuation of colonial Eurocentric thinking within government policy is exemplified within Manitoba Education's (2014) *Certificate for School Leadership: Guidelines to Qualification.* Critically analyzing this document, we see how current practices may limit attempts to reframe contemporary understandings of the knowledge base of school leadership as

part of what Battiste (2005) posits as the new transdisciplinary quest to balance Eurocentric and Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing.

Truth and Reconciliation: A Pathway Forward

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (2015), the Government of Canada set out a course of action in the 19th century that continued until almost the end of the 20th century, to permanently transform Indigenous young people into Europeanized colonial subjects, almost annihilating Indigenous ways of being. The Government's solution to what it had positioned as the "Indian problem" was a system of education, the Indian Residential Schools, that would serve as a means for eliminating Indigenous communities as what the Government saw as obstacles to land acquisition, resource extraction, and nation building. As a component of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, at the time the largest class-action legal settlement in Canadian history, the TRC was created by Indian Residential Schools Survivors to serve as an independent body to guide a process to provide former students and anyone who had been affected by the Indian Residential Schools legacy with an opportunity to share their individual experiences in a safe and culturally appropriate manner (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

On June 10, 2009, the Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, Marie Wilson and Chief Wilton Littlechild were appointed as Commissioners to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). The TRC spent six years travelling to various communities throughout Canada and listened to more than 6,500 witnesses. In June 2015, the TRC held its closing event in Ottawa and presented the "Executive Summary" of the findings contained in its multi-volume "Final Report," which included 94 *Calls to Action*. At the final event of the TRC on December 15, 2015, the Honourable Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada, reiterated

the Government of Canada's commitment to work in partnership with Indigenous communities to fully implement the 94 *Calls to Action* of the TRC's Final Report (Prime Minister Office, 2015).

It is also worth noting that unlike recommendations, the *Calls to Action* were intended to provoke an immediate response from all Canadian citizens, but were predominantly targeted at policy makers, key stakeholders, and all levels of and branches of government to further reconciliation between non-Indigenous Canadians and Indigenous Peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). It is through these *Calls to Action* the root of disruption of colonial Eurocentric hegemony can begin to be displaced.

The Summary of the Final Report, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future* (2015), which provides a comprehensive review of the effects of the Indian Residential Schools, is over 400 pages long. While much of the entire *Final Report* is largely focused on education, what follows below are five specific *Calls to Action* that are directly related to education and the education system.

Calls to Action to Reform the Education System

Education reform

10. We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:

i. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.

ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates.

iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula.

iv. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.

v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.

vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.

vii. Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships.

Reconciliation

Canadian Governments and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

43. We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as the framework for reconciliation.

44. We call upon the Government of Canada to develop a national action plan, strategies, and other concrete measures to achieve the goals of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

Education for reconciliation

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a

mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students within one generation.

ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.

iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.

iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

63. We call on Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.

ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.

iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.

iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

The 94 *Calls to Action* identify clear components to education for reconciliation.

In Manitoba, where the Indigenous population is growing exponentially, the components listed above should be held in high regard and valued in school leadership preparation such as Manitoba’s *School Leadership Certificate* (2014). This certificate, (see figure 1) is arguably the

governing text that defines the standards and knowledge base of educational leadership in Manitoba. Within the five discrete domains of knowledge, we can identify the complete disregard for reconciliation as identified within the *Calls to Action* put forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The unmasking of hegemony addresses the oppressive forces that serve to suppress diverse understandings of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing. Such unmasking is important because, as Ball (2009) suggests, policy is not only a text, but also a power relation, wherein power is exercised through a production of truth and knowledge, as discourses that might enable or disable the preparation of school leaders and legitimate only some forms of knowledge.

Manitoba's School Leadership Certificate Guidelines

Domain 1: Cultural and educational context School leaders have an understanding of the social, political, socio-economic, legal and cultural contexts of education in Manitoba, and of their place within it. By understanding current contexts, they are better able to shape the future.
Domain 2. Educational leadership School leaders build, communicate and nurture a shared vision for their schools, within divisional and provincial frameworks, that reflects the needs of the community. They understand the role of leaders in setting direction; they possess the skills to build relationships within the school and with the wider community; and they build capacity to achieve successful outcomes for students.
Domain 3. Instructional leadership

Leading teaching and learning is an integral role of school leadership. School leaders possess and continue to develop, knowledge and skills related to effective teaching and learning to support the professional learning of teachers they work towards student success.
Domain 4. Personnel leadership A central aspect of school leadership is creating and nurturing an educational team and a school climate committed to the success and wellbeing of all students. School leaders possess knowledge and skills related to human resource management for professional and support staff.
Domain 5. School administration School leaders ensure the effective management of the organization and resources to build and maintain a safe, efficient, and effective school environment. School leaders have knowledge and skills related to everyday management, record keeping and reporting activities.

Figure 1. Domains of Knowledge for School Leaders (Manitoba Education, 2014)

The Manitoba's *School Leadership Certificate Guidelines* (2014) is only one such case of a policy that reveals and perpetuates the dominant discourse that centers concepts such as: "understanding…the social, political, socio-economic, legal and cultural contexts of education (p. 4). However, in choosing these pivotal concepts Manitoba Education has concomitantly chosen to make no reference in the policy, either explicitly or by way of referencing other supporting documents, to provide an understanding of the colonial history that Manitoba's First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples suffered and continue to suffer under, nor work with the Indigenous community to gain such knowledges. The failure to acknowledge the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, nor mention the *Calls to Action* questions the

authenticity of what it means to understand the "cultural contexts of education". Importantly, understanding the colonial past and its current reverberations is crucial for those who lead schools because as the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (2015) identified,

> Without truth, justice, and healing, there can be no genuine reconciliation. Reconciliation is not about "closing a sad chapter of Canada's past," but about opening new healing pathways of reconciliation that are forged in truth and justice. We are mindful that knowing the truth about what happened in Residential schools in and of itself does not necessarily lead to reconciliation. (p. 12)

The *School Leadership Certificate Guidelines* (2014, p. 4) do identify the important role that school leaders can play in leading schools that are responsive to their communities, but does so without recognizing the critically important work that must be done to heal the broken relationships between the Canadian Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. Although it is not referenced in the *School Leadership Certificate Guidelines,* the *Final Report* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) provides a pathway forward that can guide school leaders on how best to create and maintain relationships.

It bears repeating that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada defines reconciliation as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships. A critical part of this process involves repairing damaged trust by making apologies, providing individual and collective reparations, and following through with concrete actions that demonstrate real societal change. Establishing respectful relationships also requires the revitalization of Indigenous law and legal traditions. It is important that all Canadians understand

how traditional First Nations, Inuit, and Métis approaches to resolving conflict, repairing harm, and restoring relationships can inform the reconciliation process.

Under “Domain 2: Educational Leadership” (Manitoba Education, 2014, p. 5), the *School Leadership Certificate Guidelines* advocate that principals should facilitate processes to “develop shared values, mission, and build interdependence between schools, families and communities” but does so a-historically. The *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (2015) offers a historically sobering caution about what transpired regarding the sharing of values and beliefs when colonizers contacted those who they subsequently set out to colonize:

> Taken as a whole, the colonial process relied for its justification on the sheer presumption of taking a specific set of European beliefs and values and proclaiming them to be universal values that could be imposed upon the peoples of the world. This universalizing of European values — so central to the colonial project — that was extended to North America served as the prime justification and rationale for the imposition of a Residential school system on the Indigenous peoples of Canada. (p. 53-54)

As Woodside-Jiron (2004, p. 174) noted, public policy socializes its audiences by promoting “what is thinkable and unthinkable,” and represents “the authoritative allocations of value.” In this regard, the *School Leadership Certificate Guidelines* (Manitoba Education, 2014) acts an agenda that legitimizes the specific values, beliefs and assumptive worldviews of its authors, which in this case is, the Government of the Province of Manitoba. As of yet, valuing of Indigenous knowledges, worldviews, and ways of being in public policy is yet to be signified and endorsed by a government predominantly made up of non-Indigenous politicians.

Colonizing discourse, in the case of a provincial policy document that represents a governmental narrative of what constitutes the knowledge base of school leadership, enforces a

monoculture of thought that serves to maintain Eurocentric control over knowledge production, reproduction and validity (Shahjahan, 2011). The *School Leadership Certificate Guidelines* (2014) plays a substantial role in disciplining the minds and bodies of the colonized in order to legitimate a social hierarchy that favours non-Indigenous knowledges, ways of knowing and being, over Indigenous forms (Shahjahan, 2011). Neo-colonists present policy solutions as a tonic to heal whatever ails a society. In this specific case, what is significantly obvious is a policy prescription intended to shape the minds school leaders. The illusion of this public policy agenda is offered under the guise of promoting cross-cultural tolerance that does not legitimately seek to redress the power imbalance of the status quo. This propagation enables the social and political power of the dominant group to remain intact, and go unchallenged while supressing or in some instance oppressing minority epistemologies and ontologies (Betts, 2005). Approaching policy with such assimilationist agendas, whether intentional or not, allows the colonizers and their descendants to makeover the minority Indigenous population in its image (Betts, 2005). In many regards, educational policy has and continues to impose the standards of Eurocentric, Westernized supremacy on the racially and ethnically minoritized segments of many post-colonial societies (Gillborn, 2005).

The *School Leadership Certificate Guidelines* (Manitoba Education, 2014) frames leadership knowledge and skill through the Eurocentric illusion of benign translatability, which Battiste and Henderson (2000) suggest has a practical purpose insofar that it simultaneously maintains the legitimacy of the Eurocentric worldview and illegitimacy of Indigenous worldviews. It acts as an assimilationist tool to portray the illusion of a singular beneficent, normative worldview and reifies a particular discourse of school leadership that conceals the inequalities that are encoded in it (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). The danger within this discourse

is that the appearance of a "just" education is eluded to, without tangible action rooted in understanding an alternative worldview, let alone making space for a valuing of Indigenous knowledges.

The inclusion of the phrases "Aboriginal Education and Treaty Awareness" in the *School Leadership Certificate Guidelines* (2014, p. 4) as part of an itemized list of areas for school leaders to develop knowledge and understanding that also includes such concerns as "the impact of technology" denigrates what those words mean in spirit and substance. To reduce them in such a manner obscures the level of effort and commitment that is required to reconcile the relationships among the Indigenous – a more respectful term that can be used to refer to First Nations, Metis and Inuit Peoples - and non-Indigenous populations in Canada. In fact, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's *Calls to Action* (2015) specifically identified the important roles that the education system and educators needed to play if "Aboriginal Education" and "Honouring Treaty relationships" was to have meaning and be realized.

In addition, the need for school leaders to develop their knowledge and understanding of "strategies that support successful practices for Aboriginal students…" is followed by a comma and the terms, "…EAL learners, refugees, new Canadians" (Manitoba Education, 2014, p. 6). While understanding how best to meet the needs of all learners should be a critical area of leadership development, the textual representation in a policy of such a diverse range of social groups into a single list suggests an active attempt to essentialize the learning needs of Indigenous students into a homogenous group that shares some invisible essence; a deficit approach (Rothbart & Taylor, 1992). Perry (2008, p. 24) wrote, "In short, colonial practice and discourse were intended to deprive Native Americans of their status as independent people and reduce them to just another racialized group". It should also be noted that although the term

"Indigenous" is used to connect nations to their original land, that amongst such groups exists differences within language, culture, and teachings. Throughout Turtle Island, the landscape and that relationship with the land is as diverse as the original inhabitants – a diversity one cannot simply read about in books.

Leadership Preparation Suffocating Under the "Big Tent"

A review of existing literature and the discourses associated are important because they illustrate the need for Indigenous representation in educational leadership preparation and practice. It is clearly identified that the knowledge base of educational leadership programs and discourses are built upon traditionally conservative understandings of school leadership theory. Furthermore, the *Certificate in School Leadership Guidelines,* appear to be, incomplete and insufficient as they fail to properly acknowledge and include Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledges. In many regards, this solidifies the notion that current school leadership preparation programs reflect a Westernized, Eurocentric model of school leadership that perpetuates the limitations of a field of study and practice and that is constrained by an over-reliance on theories and practices developed by a relatively culturally homogeneous cadre of scholars from English-speaking backgrounds who they themselves been heavily influenced by Westernized philosophies and values (Hallinger & Hammond, 2017; Hallinger et al., 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016; Walker & Qian, 2015).

Policy makers have become increasingly interested in developing the competency and capacity of school leaders to make a difference in student outcomes by reducing "the persistent disparities in educational achievement between various social and ethnic groups" (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 636). In a Canadian context, and even more so a Manitoba context, nowhere are the disparities in educational outcomes more evident or acute than in the educational achievement

gap that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2011). It is in part of these disparities that we must reframe our educational construct and ground leadership practices in those beyond the norm of historical Westernized leadership practices. We cannot continue to lead an educational future with methods grounded in past theories and practices tailored to benefit only one demographic.

Culturally relevant educational contexts must be re-conceived and practiced at the forefront of school leadership if we are serious about rejecting the "status quo" of "closing the achievement gap" (among others see, Ahnee-Benham & Napier, 2002; Battiste, 2002, 2013; Fallon & Paquette, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2003; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016). In order to see this through in an authentic way, school leaders, as well as those in charge of leadership preparation programming (universities, colleges, higher education) must be specifically willing to "meaningfully contribute to the well-being of Indigenous peoples and their communities" (Archibald, Lundy, Reynolds & Williams, 2010, p. 2) for this to have any impact at all.

While scholars such as Hallinger and Hammond (2017), Hallinger, Walker and Trung (2015), and Walker and Qian (2015) have sought to generate contextualized descriptions of school leadership that go beyond the extant literature, a literature base that is largely based on a small set of Western societies' views of leadership, they have concluded that there is a paucity of scholarly work that actually expands the fixed boundaries of the extant knowledge base.

Such conclusions lend support to the assertions of scholars like Collard (2007) who contends that Australia Indigenous conceptions of school leadership have been relegated to the fringes of mainstream educational thought. Elsewhere Fallon and Paquette (2014) who within a Canadian context claim that the fact that the knowledge base of school leadership is located within a "Eurocentric epistemic and ontological field" (p. 149) has created insurmountable

hurdles for those committed to improving the educational opportunities for Indigenous students because in many ways dominant forms of conceptualizing and doing educational research shape and limit the prospects for action. The basis for this research going forth is to address not only the lack of Indigenous representation in educational leadership, but to also contribute to the lacking research and scholarly work that has valued the contributions of Indigenous leaders in education.

After conducting their review of the literature of school leadership, Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) concluded “the dominant hegemonic (often White, Westernized) ways of understanding and practicing school leadership have been detrimental for minoritized students” (p. 15). They argue that the pervasive influences of colonialism bind many scholars, policy-makers and, in some cases practitioners, to many of the culturally oppressive leadership practices and epistemologies that conserve the power and authority of the current knowledge base of school leadership. Effective school leadership, they argue, as enacted and conceived must be situated within a particular context and cannot be decontextualized or a-historical if educational leaders are committed to ending the “aberrant, deficit characterizations and treatment of minoritized students (Khalifa et al., p. 15).

The reflection of the dominance of a Westernized cultural context, anchored in Eurocentric concepts, theories and practices remains strong within Canada’s education system. Despite attempts to re-conceive the knowledge base of school leadership as either a “big tent” with room for numerous and, at times, contradictory theories (Donmoyer, 1999; Hallinger, 2005), or as a patched-together “quilt” of theories that correspond and cohere (Murphy, 2007), the evidence remains that explicit change with tangible results has yet to be given value (Ahnee-Benham & Napier, 2002; Battiste, 2002, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2003; Goodard & Foster, 2002;

Khalifa et al., 2016; Hallinger et al., 2015). In the rare instances in which Indigenous knowledges and value systems have been considered, they have been relegated to a rarely visited corner of the "big tent" or they have been forcefully sewn onto the "quilt" to represent little more than a decorative and quaint fringe to the dominant ideologies of school leadership (Byrne-Jimenez & Borden, 2015; Collard, 2007; Hallinger, 2005). Evidence of such quaint fringes can be seen and heard whenever an "important" public figure has politely paid lip service to a scripted Treaty Land Acknowledgement in heart of "reconciliation". It is time we put authentic Indigenous knowledges at the forefront of educational practices, and give them the value they deserve in leadership roles. Thus, more research and acceptance of Indigenous voice and contribution to educational leadership is timely and imperative.

After a review of the practices and theories used to prepare school leaders for Indigenous schools and communities, d' Arbon, Fasoli, Frawley and Ober (2009) conclude that the current domains of knowledge used to inform the professional development of principals and vice-principals "ignore, to a certain degree, the significance of culture on leadership development and continue to privilege a Western perspective" (p. 3). The fact that the majority of the published theory and empirical research on school administration and leadership continues to perpetuate an implicit assumption that leadership ought to be enacted in a Western cultural context (Hallinger & Hammond, 2017; Hallinger et al., 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016; Walker & Qian, 2015) is highly problematic. As Goddard and Foster (2002, p. 3) contest, the socio-historical and cultural realities of the Indigenous peoples in Canada are markedly different from those of the predominantly "White, Anglo-European majority" population. These vast differences are exemplified even amongst various tribes and language dialects. This places emphasis that race and ethnicity are not just relevant factors to be considered in discussions about school leadership,

but are, in fact, "integral" dimensions of what it means to effectively lead schools and their communities (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 17).

The socio-political history of Canada has resulted in both the systemic mistrust of schooling by Indigenous peoples and the devaluation and elimination of Indigenous worldviews, languages and cultures in schools (Battiste, 2013; Fallon & Paquette, 2014). In the Canadian context, even though the *Calls to Action* put forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) have identified the need for school leader preparation to reflect intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, it has been shown throughout this review that the systems in which school leaders are trained remain heavily influenced and structured in a Westernized, Eurocentric framework (see d'Arbon et al., 2009; Fallon & Paquette, 2014; Hallinger et al, 2015; Hallinger & Hammond, 2017; Khalifa et al., 2016; Walker & Qian, 2015).

Education in a Place Called "Canada": The Need to Move Forward Together

The Indigenous leaders who have evolved and have stories to complement their journeys remain an untouched asset to society, especially in education where change makers are made. Much can be learned if we listen to those who often "lead from behind", quietly observant, servicing the people, learning from the people, including the people. In order to serve the needs of Indigenous students and their families, Ahnee-Benham and Napier (2002) contend that school leadership should reflect a deep understanding of Indigenous peoples' historical struggle against colonialism and cultural assimilation. Thus, what is needed is a reconceptualization of the knowledge base of school leadership that positions Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledges on an equal footing with the dominant, Western, Eurocentric ones (Fitzgerald, 2003; Ma Rhea, 2015).

Using a conceptual lens for understanding Indigenous leadership and advocacy (Fitzgerald, 2003; Ma Rhea, 2015; Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), we can identify the oppressive impact of a dominant colonial cognitive framework on the knowledge base of school leadership preparation in one particular context, namely the province of Manitoba, Canada. This example, in which many preparation programs are mirrored in process and content, proves inadequate for the current and future demographics school leaders serve. With the 63 First Nations communities in Manitoba, and the growing urban Indigenous population, there is no doubt a presence of strong educational Indigenous leaders whose stories need to be told, and listened to, if we are serious at making an attempt at reconciliation through education. It is the hopes that we can use the words of Indigenous leaders to work towards decolonizing the knowledge base that remains firmly staked into the ground throughout our educational institutions.

In an attempt to decolonize the knowledge base of school leadership preparation, we must first understand what it means to become an Indigenous leader in this colonial world. As a research framework, decolonization critiques the effects of colonialism on Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Alfred, 2005; Smith, 1999). Smith (1999) defines decolonization as "a process, which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels" (p. 20). A decolonial framework invites members of both Indigenous and also non-Indigenous school communities to question and examine the impacts of colonialism on the knowledge base of school leadership as it "seeks to reimagine and rearticulate power, change and knowledge through a multiplicity of epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies" (Sium, Desai & Ritskes, 2012, p. iii). It is this task, which the collective of all educational stakeholders must embark upon

together to uproot existing biases, stereotypes, and injustices that work to suppress the work moving forward in the decolonization of education.

The Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), titled *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future* was used to disrupt the cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 1998) that serves to protect an impermeable core – in this instance the knowledge base of school leadership – that exerts a colonial “fortress mentality” through which those in power welcome the kinds of knowledges, values and concepts they believe are friendly but work hard to defend, discard and/or discredit the ones they fear (Betts, 2005; Buescher & Ono, 1996; Minnick, 1990). We must push the disruption forward and break through systemic barriers to properly acknowledge and make space for Indigenous ways of leading.

Essentialism perpetuates the convenient myth that minority social groups because of some inherent natural disadvantage need to be supported without acknowledging the role that the oppressive structures that maintain the privilege of the dominant groups is the very basis of the disadvantage they experience. Subsuming Indigenous students into a category that represents a range of non-dominant ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious or social groups (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010) denies the socio-historical, ethno-cultural and political reality that Indigenous peoples lived and thrived on Turtle Island pre-contact. The stories of Indigenous achievement are so sacred and deserve to be heard, acknowledged, learned from, and practiced. Current educational research and policy, and school leader preparation lack focus on reconciliation nor do they identify that effective leadership should be developed through a process grounded in mutually respectful, collaborative and consultative relationships with Indigenous communities. The university courses that are currently used to fulfil the “core” requirements do not reflect in their titles the need for school leaders to know and understand how to develop their leadership in

full participation with Indigenous peoples; a key point emphasized throughout the *Calls to Action* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

We must highlight not only the *Calls to Action,* but also give significance to the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007), which can also serve as a roadmap to navigate how education can lead to reconciliation. Emphasis must be placed on the knowledge or awareness of intercultural understanding, empathy and mutual respect among Indigenous people and non-Indigenous Canadians to move forward. Regrettably, this is yet another example of a missed opportunity by government as well as educational systems to reconcile a fractured relationship.

Decolonizing the knowledge base of school leadership is vital because "systemic racism is foundational to colonialism" and "it is so embedded in societal institutions" like school systems that it serves as both an explicit and also implicit barrier to equitable access to education and equal opportunities to find success (Toulouse, 2013, p. 5). It is perplexing that some school leadership preparation models advocate for "culturally responsive school leadership" (Khalifa et al., 2016) as essential for effective leadership, yet at the same time remain grounded in a solid foundation that conserves and promotes the hegemonic Eurocentric paradigms that have been informed by Western philosophies and sciences in the modern/colonial, capitalist/patriarchal social system (Grosfoguel 2007). Battiste (2013) challenges those committed to the educational enterprise by stating:

> For every educator, our responsibility is making a commitment to both unlearn and learn — to unlearn racism and superiority in all its manifestations, while examining our own social constructions in our judgements and learn new ways of knowing, valuing others, accepting diversity, and making equity and inclusion foundations for all learners. (p. 166)

If left unchallenged, Eurocentric concepts, theories, practices and frameworks of school leadership, which are embedded in Westernized epistemic philosophies and values – ones that impact the both lives of those who have been colonized and also the descendants of the colonizers - will continue to marginalize Indigenous knowledges and value-systems or worse obliterate them completely (Shah, 2006).

A review of the literature and the analysis of governing documents of the knowledge base of school leadership demonstrates that what is needed not only in Manitoba but nationwide, is school leader preparation that goes beyond politely suggesting that school leaders need to understand a ubiquitous set of perspectives. The findings illuminate the need to position Indigenous ways of knowing and leading at the centre of practice and theory (Fitzgerald, 2003) if school leaders are to truly focus their efforts on building powerful forms of teaching and learning, embracing strong communities in schools, expanding students' social capital, and nurturing the development of families' educational culture (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Echoing the 1972 "Indian Control of Indian Education" policy paper, educational needs of Indigenous children were clearly identified by the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations). Battiste (2000) stated that the 1996 Canadian Parliamentary Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples detailed how much of the existing educational policy is anchored firmly in "false assumptions of the cultural superiority of European worldviews," and "marginalizes or excludes Aboriginal cultures, voices, and ways of knowing" (p. 193).

If reconciliation is to be realized, then what is required is a commitment by ministries and departments of education through the power of the discourse encoded in policy text to Indigenist understandings of school leadership (Ma Rhea, 2015). Explicitly, what this means in practice is to utilize Indigenous voice to inform current and future policy to substantiate the important work

and knowledges of current Indigenous leaders in education. There is much to learn from Indigenous leaders, and their place in policy and stature has been pushed aside for far too long. Such an explicit commitment would serve to hold governments and its agents, which includes education policy makers and the colleges and faculties of education responsible for school leader preparation, to the obligation to create a more dynamic and robust knowledge base of school leadership. A knowledge base that allows non-Indigenous school leaders to "shift from a colonial deficit to an Indigenist, rights based mindset" and offers the opportunity to understand a "pro-Indigenous worldview" (Ma Rhea, 2015, p. 155).

Importantly, if the educational aspirations of Indigenous students and their caregivers are to be understood and met with programs and services predicated on educational opportunities for success, the contextual aspects of their lives and their histories cannot be ignored (Bash & Zezlina-Phillips, 2006). The policy frameworks used to legitimize school leadership need to create space, physical and temporal, for meaningful exchanges to occur. Leadership is not, as Kenny (2012, p. 1) stated a new concept in Indigenous communities because, "For thousands of years prior to colonization leadership in Indigenous communities was based on the character of the land and the needs of the people in their traditional territories." What Kenny suggests need to be built are structurally sound and well-maintained "bridges" that allow for the safe passage of ideas, philosophies and between different social worlds.

Collard (2007) states that school leaders:

> working in diverse cultural landscapes need sophisticated understandings of the concept of culture as a learned and adaptive response to contextual needs. They need to see that manifest levels such as roles, rituals, regulations and policies are frequently based on inheritances that may be explicit or assumptive. (p. 750)

School leaders also require opportunities to reflect on and respond to the diverse cultural forces at play in society if they are to construct new and deeper understandings of the historical traumatic effects of colonialism. Leadership must be prepared to face the diverse social contexts they will encounter in contemporary school settings.

The pathway forward requires scholars and practitioners of school leadership to avoid the tendency to search for essentialist solutions that invoke simplistic binary oppositions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies because such “either/or” approaches leave little space nor afford sufficient time for real dialogues to occur (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2014). It is clear, that school leaders need to be given formal opportunities to learn about epistemologies and ontologies quite different from the dominant ones they hold through a process that is designed as “both ways” of exchange and understanding, and fostered through relationships firmly set to allow for an “even understanding” of Indigenous and non-Indigenous assumptive worldviews and cultural values (d’Arbon et al., 2009).

The myth that school leaders can simply become cross-culturally or interculturally competent at will, without undertaking an intentional process of decolonization that surfaces their accumulated cultural baggage, in terms of power and privilege, is facile (Dean, 2001). Following the recommendation of Kincheloe and Steinberg (2014) we call the province of Manitoba and other governments to re-examine the knowledge base of school leadership through a decolonizing dialogic process where both intra- and intercultural knowledge traditions, namely Indigenous and non-Indigenous forms, can be interrogated and used to inform each other and to promote a balance where Indigenous knowledges are heard and accepted.

By acknowledging and responding to the different socio-political and ethno-cultural differences that exist in pluralistic societies and are part of the fabric of Indigenous and non-

Indigenous students' lives, school leaders can not only challenge power and privilege that advantages a few while oppressing many. However, they also have the opportunity to leverage their individual and collective agencies to further educational opportunities for students who - because of the continued effects of colonialism - deserve and need them the most (Dei & James, 2002).

Summary

In the wake of the final report of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling the Future* (2015), and in light of other national reports on the status of educational achievement of Canada's Indigenous populations (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2011), it is clear that in order to meet the needs of Indigenous students and their communities, there is a need to reform the training and professional development of principals. We must learn from the voices of the leaders who have driven strong resilient Indigenous communities for thousands of years, fighting to resist colonial oppressions and assimilation.

In Canada, the Indigenous population is growing at an exponential rate, faster than any other demographic group in Canada. It is imperative we give voice to those whom have remained silenced for far too long. We can honour and acknowledge their contributions to education, specifically school leadership preparation to better equip school leaders to provide effective direction and positive influence to promote academic success for not only the Indigenous population, but for the entire growing and developing population of youth in this ever-changing Canada where reconciliation should be regarded as a national commitment. Wilson and Yellow Bird (2012) contend that working toward decolonization requires all of us to begin with critically

assessing the structures of colonization and dismantling them, and this research aims to contribute, in part, to that critically important work.

A research study of Indigenous understandings of leadership is important and will open possibilities towards a new way of decolonizing current leadership preparation programs. From analyzing current research and identifying applicable proponents missing from current theory and programing, much can be learned from Indigenous leaders. Some questions raised upon this review of literature point toward a need to investigate not only accredited "school leadership preparation program" participation and completion, but delve more into their journeys that led Indigenous leaders to their current role. It would be a disservice to the research of Indigenous leadership without practicing decolonizing methods within a very colonial research framework. Understanding the life stories of Indigenous individuals in leadership may answer some questions such as what it means to be a leader, what led them to their role, when did they know they wanted to be a leader, and what did and did not prepare them for leadership. Specifically, we can use this information to inform school leadership preparation to be more dynamic and inclusive where Indigenous epistemology is a valued component to preparing school leaders.

Most importantly, when analyzing the literature in school leadership preparation programs, and identifying and critiquing the complete disregard for Indigenous knowledges in leadership, student achievement should be the core value of all programming. With the vast Indigenous population, the *Calls to Action*, and the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the time is now that we listen to Indigenous leaders; that we hear from them regarding how we can decolonize our work towards the advancement of education systems and educational leaders. This is no longer an "Indian problem", it is an "Everyone problem", and will take generations of education to start transforming where Indigenous knowledges are a valued,

core component to student success. The voices contained within this research are a contribution to the *Calls to Action* in hopes that change makers will listen and take charge.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

As we have seen thus far, the existing literature as well as an overview of existing practices and policy provide evidence that our current education system is failing to honour and reflect Indigenous knowledges. The gaps within current research do not fully encompass nor acknowledge the important role and knowledge base Indigenous leaders hold. In order to fully equip educational leaders of tomorrow, knowledges other than Eurocentric Westernized views, must be validated, valued, and utilized to inform present and future educational leadership preparation and practices. Up until now, the core value of educational programming has been rooted in Eurocentric hegemony, completely disregarding who our students are, and providing educational services and leadership grounded in foundational theories and knowledges that completely denigrate the need and value of Indigenous ways of knowing. In order to work towards decolonizing our practices, we must reconceive not only how we view educational preparation and protocols of our leaders, but also how we view the world. In a failing education system where the despairing academic achievement gaps between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population are evident, we must address systemic barriers, inequalities, and the disservice to Canada's future we are perpetuating through our colonial actions and views of educational leadership.

In a system where educational leaders hold the potential to be the driving forces behind systemic change, I looked to Indigenous leaders that have navigated the complex journey and found themselves in a leadership role. I admire, acknowledge, and seek more answers from these knowledge keepers and leaders in the educational world. I sought to know how their paths could inform a working movement towards an educational world where Indigenous knowledges are valued and used to inform educational leadership preparation and practices. Our Canada needs to

be ready to hear and honour the stories of Indigenous educational leaders and honour their voices, knowledge, and insight to inform future educational leaders in our ancestral ways that are so relevant and applicable in today's world. I connected with Indigenous leaders in education, presented them with an offering of tobacco, shared in story embracing reciprocity and respect, and documented their knowledge, presented in a strength-based fashion. Through relationships, stories, and time, I was able to connect with Indigenous leaders in education and document their path to leadership as well as identify their unique ways of being and doing that specifically adhere to their Indigeneity.

Methodology and Positionality

In honour of my Indigenous roots and its influence on my research, it was imperative that my methodology follow an Indigenous paradigm as I navigated and correlated my findings throughout. I found myself living the struggle to incorporate an Indigenous research paradigm that could inform decolonizing practices in an academic world so grounded in Eurocentric hegemony. This concept alone urged my drive forward in validating Indigenous ways of knowing in education, but also it is my hope to legitimize Indigenous voice, as well as validate its place in academic research. Although my research paradigm may differ from the standard Westernized framework, my anticipation is that through the Indigenous lens, I can verify my work and navigate in a way that I and others can relate to, walk in, practice, and use to substantiate Indigenous pedagogy in research. Decolonizing our theoretical perspective in research is also necessary to address the social inequities that exist and continue to exist amongst the Indigenous population (Kovach, 2010). Utilizing my own Indigenous knowledge and ways of being, makes sense not only for my research endeavors, but may also be a guide or inspiration for others to follow in as well.

Much like my research context of Indigenous leadership knowledges in education, there has been limited literature and practice in methodologies that are congruent with Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and seeking information about the world around us. Some notable trailblazers in Indigenous research methodologies such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith as well as Shawn Wilson, have been instrumental in substantiating my positionality within this research endeavor. Indigenous methodologies have been a relatively new concept within Western qualitative research (Kovach, 2005). As I investigate research methodologies and how various methods fit (or not fit) within my realm, I am drawn towards a relational conversation approach where researcher and participant share information through relationship building and conversation rather than through questions and answers (Kovach, 2010). This approach, although does not negate the power dynamic of researcher and participant, allows a more equal balance and flow throughout conversation that is much more natural than the interview process. This method encompasses decolonization through enforcing my beliefs in the importance of relationship that I inherently carry within me. Following my natural instinctual ways of gathering and analyzing knowledge, I know that my story was an important aspect that substantiated richness in the stories that evolved.

Following through on my responsibilities not only as an Indigenous educator and researcher, but also as a Canadian, I work to push against colonial practices that continue to oppress Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and leading. As an attempt to navigate the academic world and meld both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous knowledges and ways of researching, gathering information, and analyzing data, I work to find answers to my questions in a way that honours my ancestral ways of researching while fitting and working within the structural constraints I am faced with.

Existing within Indigenous Methodologies

In order to fully acknowledge my own values, beliefs, and upbringing, it would be a disservice not only to my research and the participants, but also to myself as an Indigenous person to not follow an Indigenous research paradigm. Other scholars, such as Smith (1999), contend that there is a need to decolonize research methods that perpetuate the dominant research paradigm in order to be of use to Indigenous peoples. I believe this to be true for non-Indigenous peoples as well. According to Wilson (2008), "studying Indigenous peoples requires the holistic use and transmission of information" (p. 32). Relationships are an important part of teaching and learning and help us situate ourselves in relation to the world around us. Without relationships, the context of the learning – in this case gathering stories, information, and data is meaningless. Whenever we as Indigenous people want to learn something (or gather data), we would get to know our community members and understand who had a specific knowledge or skill that was valuable to us as learners. This in itself involves relationship building. I cannot request, nor ask for anything without also committing to giving some of myself – meaning my story is just as important as the story others are sharing about themselves. Wilson (2008), words this form of relationship building through sharing and participating as an ethical component to Indigenous research. This axiology is also evident through our (Anishinaabe) tobacco teaching where presenting an offering first, prior to asking for something in return is natural custom. In Indigenous communities, relationships are at the heart of survival where each has an important role, individual strengths are valuable in helping the collective move forward as a society. In an ideal Indigenous pedagogical world, teaching and learning would mean getting to know each and every member of the community, knowing each other's skill set and strengths, and utilizing the collective to work together in an effective and efficient manner.

When building relationships, we share stories. Storytelling amongst Indigenous people sets the stage for building connections and relaying information in meaningful ways. Although the data gathered from participants is the focus, I understand that my story is a component that will accentuate and authenticate the richness of data collected from the participants. Data collection is not simply a scripted set of questions and answers, but rather is the sharing of stories which shape our life's experiences and allow the participants to understand how and why I am listening their story. "When listeners know where the storyteller is coming from and how the story fits into the storytellers life, it makes the absorption of knowledge that much easier" (Wilson, 2008, p. 32). I anticipated that this sharing of stories would also allow their story to meld within the contextual framework of this particular study. If the participants know my motivations and background as a researcher, I felt that collectively we could build rich data together that can inform the decolonization of leadership practices that acknowledge Indigenous ways of knowing.

The conversational method as a means of mobilizing Indigenous knowledge in research, corresponds with what many Indigenous researchers term as storytelling, yarning, talk story, re-storying, and re-membering (Thomas, 2005; Bishop, 1999; Kovach, 2010). This method also aligns with traditional oral sharing of knowledge congruent with an Indigenous paradigm. As Wilson (2001) points out, Indigenous epistemology is rooted in the paradigmatic approach to this method. This resonates within me, and explains the inherent force that has guided me towards a desire to "share stories" and "talk with", rather than just "interview". Wilson continues by emphasizing that Indigenous worldviews root the interplay and the relationship between method and paradigm.

Upon my realization that the conversational method is an academically accepted form of research that honours Indigenous ways, I had also come to the understanding that I held a deep responsibility within this research realm. Worby and Rigney (2002, pp. 27-28) refer to this ethical responsibility of informing research practices as the “Five R’s: Resources, Reputations, Relationships, Reconciliation and Research”. As an Indigenous woman that has grown up with teachings around “how we do things” or “protocols”, research in the academic world cannot negate respectful protocols and procedures. I must not deny nor forget the importance of Indigenous ontology that contributes to this research endeavor. Atleo (2004) states that the Indigenous perspective in research is very much relational in methodology, whereas from the Western perspective may be viewed as bias. This statement came at a time where I struggled with believing my “way of researching” had a place in academia. The works of scholars such as Atleo (2004), Smith (1999), Wilson (2001, 2008), and Kovach (2010) all reinforced my beliefs and comforted my embodied Indigenous ontological way of gathering knowledge within this research. This collectivist form of relational research which is grounded in oral history and storytelling is supported by the Indigenous construct that knowledge is co-created within that relational dynamic (Graveline, 1998). My story and relationship with participants was the foundation of the co-creation of information that resulted in deep learning (for both researcher and participant) through focused conversation.

Decolonizing Research Methods

As indicated earlier, the need to decolonize research methods is a result of current disparities and inequalities Indigenous people face, but also as a need to inform the non-Indigenous population of the validity and value of our voice (both in and out of the academic world). As a marginalized group of people, it makes sense to seek out ways of interrogating

oppressive colonial practices that enforce the power within Eurocentric hegemony. The social historical relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous has been very much a relationship of oppressed versus power, and colonized versus colonizer. Smith (1999) confirms that the necessity of this interrogation of the pre-existing relationship is imperative in order to form a praxis that represents Indigenous voice and represents the research from a marginalized group of peoples that have been silenced for far too long.

Through a conversational method in research not only have I situated myself through a decolonial lens, but I also held strong to a particular set of protocols consistent within my culture to guide this research. This “culturally organic means to gather knowledge” (Kovach, 2010, p. 42) rings true to who I am as a researcher and as an Indigenous scholar. The sharing of stories, and the reciprocal nature of conversation builds strong relationships between researcher and participant when both understand the context of the Indigenous paradigm and epistemologies (Wilson, 2001). Echoing Wilson in the strength and richness of oral storytelling, Thomas (2005) reiterates that sharing remembrances is what evokes the emergence of the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental. Emphasizing the relational component of “collaborative storying”, positions me not only as “researcher”, but also as “participant” (Bishop, 1999). As stories are shared and the conversation deepens, trust is built within the relationship which provides the space for Indigenous voice, vision, and worldview in academic research.

A decolonial perspective emphasizes not only the collaborative relational aspect, but also allows for flexibility within the focused conversational method. There are reasons stories go where they go, and that is to the discretion of the storyteller and is not up for interpretation or re-direction from elsewhere. We must distinguish and remain true to “researching with” versus “researching on” which historically has been the case with Indigenous peoples. Similar to a

narrative inquiry within the Western qualitative research world, story can be seen as a "mode of knowing" (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009). Conversely, within an Indigenous framework the conversational method is unique in certain aspects. Kovach (2010) identifies seven attributes to this method when used in an Indigenous framework, specifically that: it is situated within an Indigenous paradigm, it is relational, it is purposeful, it involves protocols, it involves informality and flexibility, it is collaborative and dialogic, and it is reflexive. All seven aspects of an Indigenous conversational method have been at the forefront of my intentions when planning how I would obtain storied information with Indigenous participants. I feel so strongly in this collaborative method that "participants" is not a word that brings significance to the relationships I have, and that were built, and that were created throughout this research process. Rather than use the term "participants", I consider the educational leaders with whom I engaged in collaborative storytelling as relatives, where we share a bond that is not consolidated by blood but rather that of an established kinship.

Gathering and Building Stories

As I approached this research endeavor through the Indigenous lens, I found myself cognizant of the complexity of balancing traditional protocols and methods with commonly accepted understandings around ethics and institutional demands. I understood that my role within this relationship building process of what it means to research with the Indigenous community involved a responsibility to a community of peoples that have historically been vulnerable to research and remain vulnerable in many ways. Whilst moving forward, I continued to live and work within my positionality as an Indigenous researcher, as a member of a colonized minority community living my way of knowing and relating to the world, and embracing Indigenous epistemologies throughout.

Although I already had relationships with many Indigenous colleagues that were leaders within the educational world, my goal was to build my collective and to incorporate varying voices of Indigenous leaders throughout Manitoba. Using criterion sampling, participants were invited based upon "community-identified" Indigenous leaders in education. Once participants were identified and presented with a tobacco offering, the relationship building process through sharing in story led to the development of our new found kinship. The criteria for selection were individuals whom others (including myself) identified as an esteemed educational leader. I had conversations with four Indigenous leaders whom all were currently employed in an urban setting, however three had experiences from a rural context. Following my own Indigenous protocols and teachings, approaching known leaders in education came with a responsibility that I would also share my story giving substance to the context for their stories. Sharing the generosity of their gift of knowledge and honouring their stories was a crucial component to this research. I honoured that gift with an offering of tobacco in which I clearly identified exactly what I was asking of them, as well as my role and responsibility to the publication of their words with meaning. In order to expand upon the people pool of stories, I planned to utilize the "moccasin telegraph", also known within the Western world as "word of mouth" to make connections with other Indigenous leaders in education. The message was passed on and initial conversations were had without any follow up and agreeance to continuing in this research study. Acknowledging the varying degrees of the established relationships (or those built upon) I had with my relatives, emphasized my commitment to gathering rich stories in order to make sense of the questions I sought answers to. The conversations were audio recorded such that the stories of impact and resonance would be extracted. Throughout this research journey, grounded in core

values of Indigenous research throughout the conversational method was that of respect, relevancy, reciprocity and responsibility.

It was my hope that throughout this journey a community of strong Indigenous educational leaders could come together to share and build upon their stories as a collective group, resembling that of a traditional Indigenous council. As a conclusion to the gathering component of stories, discussions, and conversation a whole group informal sharing amongst us seemed appropriate to build upon, celebrate, and conclude the journey for the purpose of this research. However, although I was able to create the beginning of lasting connections, empowered voices, and some rich information that can guide new learning in educational leadership preparation and programming, COVID-19 pandemic restrictions did not allow us to come together as a group.

Summary

Honouring Indigenous voice and life, and making space for alternative knowledges is ultimately what this research project was about. As an act of resistance to the status quo of what it means to gather and collect information in the Westernized framework of the academy, I honoured what I knew was right, and decolonized my own research methods to break ground for Indigenous ways to be seen as a valuable way of collecting and analyzing data. Just as Indigenous leadership knowledge can inform new ways of leading, contemporary research practices can be informed by Indigenous communities that possess ancient memories of alternative ways of knowing (Smith, 1999).

Research is synonymous with power and can be seen as a contentious point especially amongst the Indigenous population, which has historically been one of the most researched groups of people. When more Indigenous researchers work with the Indigenous community the

resistance to research can be alleviated through honouring Indigenous epistemologies, giving space for new knowledges, and thus evoking power to Indigenous people and their voice (Smith, 2008). More so, Rigney (1999) explains that recently, Indigenous researchers have been active in disrupting the "history of exploitation, suspicion, misunderstanding, and prejudice" of Indigenous peoples as they work to develop approaches and methodologies that privilege Indigenous knowledges, voices, experiences, reflections, and analysis of their "social, material, and spiritual conditions" (p.117). Wilson's book (2008), appropriately titled "Research is Ceremony" embodies the meaning of spiritual relationship within Indigenous epistemology in research methods that reflects Rigney's thoughts and provides explanation to my innate attraction to research within this realm.

In my own work of decolonizing educational leadership preparation and practices, it is fitting to also work towards decolonizing my research methods. Smith (2008) supports this task by explaining that it is not simply about challenging existing qualitative methods, but is deeper and broader than what resembles a simple skill. She continues to explain that this purposeful agenda is more about "transforming the institution of research, the deep underlying structures and taken-for granted ways of organizing, conducting, and disseminating research and knowledge" (p. 88). If my task throughout this research journey was to inform leadership practices so solidly engrained in Eurocentric hegemony, then the conversational method rooted in relationships, stemming from an Indigenous paradigm was the only way I knew to walk through this endeavor.

Privileging Indigenous pedagogies, practices, relationships, and methodologies is far overdue in the world of education and higher academia. Embedded within stories shared and how they are shared will provide the foundation for moving forward in education. This

transformative praxis will hopefully allow this research to work as a powerful agent for growth and change. I see this work as an active approach to building capacity within a research infrastructure to sustain a framework that works to support the Indigenous community. Withholding my stance and positionality, honouring my involvement of "researching with", and remaining grounded within my core beliefs that inform my actions will work to embrace the stories, honour the voices, and allow a sharing of their knowledge which is viewed as a valuable component to informing current and future practices in educational leadership.

As I walked through this research venture, not only did I follow the currently accepted protocols and procedures historically and currently followed within the academy, but I allowed my own ethical responsibilities to my Indigenous culture to guide the research in a way that privileges Indigenous ways of being. My recruitment, scripted in a letter with all details laid out was approved and provided, but not relied on. My letter of consent, signed but sealed with the acceptance of tobacco. My gathering of stories, had a framework of questions, but were rarely needed to be asked. And finally, my analysis of the stories were dependent on the trust and relationship whom I built and strengthened throughout this process. I would substantiate the importance of this process and methodology of "collecting data" through storying and sharing as a factor that also informs my research question of: what can we learn from Indigenous leaders in education? As Iseke (2013) noted, story-telling is a practice in Indigenous cultures that sustains communities, validates experiences and epistemologies, expresses experiences of Indigenous peoples, and nurtures relationships and the sharing of knowledge. Storytelling is a central focus of Indigenous epistemologies, pedagogies, and research approaches and does not exist separately from those elements of scholarly work. It is for this reason, that I bridge aspects of my methodology in the next chapter as I would not have gathered the stories in such richness and

beauty if I did not carry on with the process conducive to Indigenous ways of being throughout this research endeavor.

Chapter 4: The Stories

The process of this research has been just as important, if not more, than the findings themselves such that the way the stories were gathered was an explicit demonstration of Indigenous ways of working, being, and living. I hope to convey, through the stories I share of my relatives' contributions, the value of Indigenous ways and knowledge shared through life, through story, and through the land. It is my intention that we learn from Indigenous colleagues in leadership positions in education not only how they achieved their positions, but to gain insight as to how we can best prepare leaders in education for a better tomorrow that is inclusive, and privileges Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and leading. As I seek to break down colonial systems and barriers to honouring Indigenous ways of doing, I must be careful in practicing my beliefs in a fragile and sometimes conniving colonial world regardless of whether I agree with it or not. This world not only involves the work I do in education, arguably the most prominent evidence of colonization at its strongest, but also in the world of academia. As much as I want to commit fully to my Indigenous roots, tear down walls and rebuild them completely and entirely with what my ancestors would have wanted for their children, what I want for my children, and for the seven generations ahead of me would want, the reality is that if I want to make progress for the future of Indigenous education and Canadian society as a whole, I have to play by the rules that are written by power and privilege held by the dominant society. This chapter will take you through a taste of how I navigated colonial systems in education and give you the full story of how I found a way to honour Indigenous ways within my journey through academic systems that have historically, and continue to privilege the knowledge and ways of the dominant, Western society. It is through this work, I hope to open eyes, and make space for alternative

ways, Indigenous ways of leading and preparing educational leaders of tomorrow through the strength and knowledge of Indigenous leaders around us.

This story begins with my upbringing, my learning – what many would call "Indigenous teachings", but to me, it is just life, a way of living and being. This is important because it explains my being, my perspective, my worldview, and why I approached research in the way that I did. Rarely do non-Indigenous researchers have to explain why they do what they do, it is privileged and accepted as the norm of how research should be done. No one would call lived experience "European teachings", thus I refer to my "land-based education" as just living and growing embraced by community. Growing up on the Rez (which is a slang term for First Nations Reserve), despite what stereotypes, assessments, and academic achievement reports state about reserve schooling, I had the best education I could have asked for, and credit much of my success to the lived curriculum I encountered before I even stepped foot in the colonial classroom walls of Sandy Bay School.

As I described earlier, I was raised partially by my Koko (slang Anishinaabe word for Grandmother) and Nimishomis (Grandfather) with the support of my parents and many aunties, uncles, and relatives – both by blood and not. I was taught, not explicitly, but by being shown that we are kin with all those that surround us with connection and love. Where people lack, we as a community work to provide and support each other. We are stronger together, we share strengths and look after those around us. Within my family circle, we always had food on the table, clothing on our backs, and love in our hearts. We all had a role in the success of the collective. I have so many stories to give examples of this life, but it is so hard to choose just one, and I find it difficult to paint the full picture via written word. I am constantly battling a narrative within my mind of how much do I explain for those who want to understand, and the

notion of why should I have to explain myself in order for others, particularly those in the academy, to believe and feel my perspective. This is exactly the point I hope to highlight about navigating colonial systems in order to please those whom these systems are designed for, and who continue to benefit from them. I will leave it at that, and hopefully you will gather some insights by the end of this chapter through my process and collection of stories from Indigenous leaders in education whom I have built relationships with, come to admire, and cherish the stories and knowledge they were so willing and open to share, uncensored and raw.

Approaching the Research: Teachings of Reciprocity and Respect

Despite the impacts of colonization, the devastating effects of residential schools, and the everlasting cultural genocide, I still hold onto the teachings of reciprocity and respect in a traditional way. Perhaps the reason could be due to the strength and resilience of my people and their ability to hold onto much of their identity, culture, and language. I am lucky to be of this generation, and although I do not have the fluency in my language that I feel I should, I do my best to ensure that I can pass on as much of what I learned from my relatives growing up, especially the sacredness of the relationship to the land, so sacred we call her our Mother, Mother Earth. I am grateful for this important land connection. As far back as I could remember, we always harvested food from the land. I walked alongside hunting, fishing, trapping. I heard the stories upon my family members' return from their excursions as well. I watched the field dressing, skinning, filleting, and preparing. I observed the cooking methods. I remember the smells, the talk, the laughing, and the sharing. As I grew older, my responsibilities grew as well, until I too mastered my skills.

My father always took me hunting. I knew we would have to get up early in the morning, way before the sun came up. I can still remember the shine of the light in the hallway as he came

in to wake me. He would already have the sandwiches made, bags packed, and guns ready to go. There would be times I would even sleep in my hunting gear so that I just had to put on my outer layers in the cold morning. I always looked forward to it. One day, we headed out to a familiar location, I knew the road allowances, whose property we were on, where deer commonly crossed fields and where they hid. He would instruct me where to go, how fast to walk getting there, places to stop and listen and watch, and finally where to wait and position myself. Because I had been with him since I was a small girl, walking alongside – I was already well versed in the process, the land, the theory, and the knowledge of all things deer hunting – scents, winds, weather, breeding cycles, time of year, I could go on and on. I was working towards becoming fully literate in this land and this way of life.

I made my way to my spot, found a place raised up a bit on a ridge but covered by some long brush and grass. I could see the grown-in trail from the road allowance, an opening to a field with some bluffs and bush on each side. I made myself comfortable, and sat as still and as quietly as I could. I knew my dad would be walking around, through, and out, to try to "push" some deer out towards the opening of that field or towards the road allowance. When you are one with the land, meaning you are so comfortable you feel comfort in solitude, you appreciate the fresh cold morning air, the sounds of the birds, the squirrels, the wildlife, and the silence around you feels good within your being. When you are raised this way, you do not realize how foreign this could be to many that do not have the honour of growing up learning from the land. To think of a young girl, maybe twelve years old, alone in the bush with a high-powered rifle, sent in to sit and wait at a place where only rough directions with land descriptors are given may seem an oddity to some. But that is the way we did it, and I would not have chosen to be anywhere else.

I had learned how to read the land, how to identify a possible animal sight unseen based on the sounds it made in the bush. Did it sound like a big animal? A bird? Did it make big cracks in the sticks when it walked? Did the rustles sound fast or slow? When you hear those big cracks and snaps in the bush, your heart starts beating, your eyes become finely tuned instruments, and your hearing seems amplified. Behind me on that raised ridge was a thick wall of willows intertwined with a mixture of larger random trees and shrubs. Was it my dad messing with me? No, he could not physically be there that quick, and he would never come out from that direction or that thick bush. Was it a bear? No, too quick and light sounding through that bush. It had to be some deer coming out. I wait. I do not make any quick moves. I am patient. I try to breath slowly. I see them. The deer do not see me, but they stop and they know that I am there. They smell me, but they are confused by the masking "doe-in-heat" scent I applied earlier to the tree out in the clearing in front of me. I can tell all this by their behaviour, because I learned this all through experience and guidance. They come out of the bushes and abruptly stop. It would be irresponsible for me to quickly take one down without seeing the larger picture. I quickly analyze: how many are there? Has the big buck sent out the little ones first? Are there babies? Will they smell me and turn back? Which direction is my dad coming out from? They stop and blow a few times; they know something is up. Where the deer usually cross (right in front of me), they turn and decide to head down the trail away from me instead of exposing themselves to the open field to graze. As they come out and start heading away from me, I have a narrow opening of opportunity. They prance away single file. I bring my rifle up and find them in view of my scope. No bucks in view, a nice sized doe is the one I choose. Without hesitation, I place my crosshairs over her heart and I pull the trigger. I am happy and excited. I don't jump, I don't scream, I don't give myself any high fives. I take out the little container of tobacco that sits

within my hunting pack and I give thanks and place my offering on the land beside where I am sitting. I give the animal time. It runs a few steps and finds its resting place. I am thankful that this animal has given its life, and I make an offering of tobacco to give thanks, to show respect to this animal, and as a symbol of reciprocity, it is the most pitiful and humble act I can do for this being. I was taught that whenever you take, you must also offer something. Nothing is taken without giving something of yourself. In this case, I offered tobacco for the animal giving its life. I also knew that through that offering I would gain so much more from the harvesting of that deer.

In this research, I knew it would be imperative for me to give an offering of tobacco and let the work happen through the medicine. I felt often at times that I could not offer enough to really show the appreciation, the immense learning and stories, the gifts all my Indigenous relatives were willing to share with me. I underestimated the power of tobacco when I initially planned for this process within my research ethics application. I received so much more than what I could have asked for through the recruitment letter or the letter of consent. The passing of tobacco proved to be much more than simply handing over a prepackaged bag of loose tobacco and asking for someone to share their story with me. It was heartfelt, it was appreciated, it also changed the climate of the stories and ultimately the research. The tobacco brought ease to the process, it brought comfort that I saw within my friends, and allowed us to connect on a deeper level through the stories we shared. It involved reciprocity and respect for their stories and their lived experiences. The process, as long as it has taken, could not have been done in any other way.

Dynamics of Indigenous Research: Teachings of Relationship

I knew in my heart the stories of depth, passion and truth would come from those with whom I already had an established relationship. As cliché as it may sound, we hear this often in the education world – that relationships are everything. In Indigenous ways, it means something deeper – we become relatives. We build relationships through connection, through seeing the world in a shared way, through embodying each other's knowledge through trust and reciprocity. To me, this is what teachers should strive to do, but perhaps many find it difficult to remove the power dynamics that seek to maintain control of behavior, tasks, learning content, personality, everything. To us, we have learned to accept each as equal partners in teaching and learning.

One of my aunties always had a full house, we all had full houses, but hers always made room for more. She seemed to take in, and have multiple kids and friends living with her at many different times. Her boys, a generation older than me, raised with the same values and beliefs, I later learned in life were not all her biological kids, but rather adopted into her family. Because these cousins of mine where older, they were more like uncles to me. It is sometimes difficult explaining to non-Indigenous folks why we have so many non-biological brothers and sisters when we come from an already large family. We are community-based, we share strengths, and we look after each other as if we are all blood relatives. We would give anything, and do anything for each other. All members of our families are valued regardless of age, gender, and experiences.

My cousin Birch (I called him my uncle) was always a little different from the rest of the boys in his family. He was not always around. He was more connected to culture, traditions, and ceremonies than the rest of his siblings. He had a slightly different look and appearance, but a similar personality to the others in his family. His wife was so beautiful – long dark hair, tall with long lean legs and a gentle smile. I had seen them on the Pow Wow trail (a series of Pow

Wows that are hosted in various communities throughout the summer months), he always used to say, “let’s jazz up your outfit and come travel with us on the Pow Wow trail”. He used to say this because at that point in my life (late teens) I was only going to a few of the local Pow Wows and had a very basic outfit that my mom and I had made and would add a bit of enhancements to my regalia every season. I guess he was trying to encourage me. My outfit never seemed finished or complete. His family was always travelling across the country along the Pow Wow trail, entering competitions, camping in a different community every weekend. I looked up to them, they all danced, they were a well-known family on the Pow Wow trail. My aunt (Birch’s wife whom I called my aunt) had what seemed like new outfits with matching beadwork every season. Fully decked out, she was an amazing dancer, someone I looked up to. She always came to the competition looking flawless, perfect hair, make-up, and matching regalia that shone in the sun and glimmered in the evening spotlights around the arbor.

The community next to Sandy Bay was hosting their Pow Wow and my family and I were camped out at a nearby campground. Birch and his wife stopped in to visit, while sitting around the fire, my aunt was finishing sewing up a moccasin for Sunday competition to match her outfit. They asked me if I wanted to go to the Pow Wow that day. Although I was not competing, I jumped at the chance to catch a ride with them. On the way there, she said to me “how do you braid your hair like that? (referring to a different style of braid that lays along the outside of your head). She asked me if I would be able to do her hair for the Pow Wow. I remember thinking “really!?!, why me?” Her hair always looked so perfect, I did not know why she was asking me. In the truck along a bumpy gravel road to the Pow Wow, I braided her hair for Sunday competition. I remember doing her hair and feeling so proud. I also remember it being difficult and not ending up as I had hoped. Looking back, she probably took it out and had

it re-done, but for whatever reason, that memory stays in my mind and is significant to this thesis, I promise you. She gave me an opportunity to feel important. She did not hold herself above anyone else. She gave me an opportunity to be generous, to speak as though I was teaching her something. Whether I was successful or not in performing her hair at a level of mastery was unimportant. This memory has stuck with me, and for that I am grateful. She gave up power and control to someone else to allow me to grow as a learner and feel confident sharing that skill with her.

Let us fast forward to years later, this woman whom I call “Auntie” approached me at the University of Manitoba graduation Pow Wow and offered me a job at the school she was working at. I realize how this may seem like a conflict of interest however, I would argue that the practice of hiring people based on knowledge of their work ethic, skillset, educational philosophy, and ability to act on it is more effective than the interview process in which many colonial systems value the demonstration of Eurocentric protocols, knowledges and ability to spout educational tag lines and jargon. I may also mention that I was already offered a permanent contract by the school division and had already had an offer from another school by a white male principal which I had demonstrated my teaching abilities to.

In my first years as a teacher, we had some of the best learning experiences. I should say that *I* had some of the best learning experiences working alongside my Auntie. I admired her confidence, her leadership, her no-bullshit way of getting things done and advocating for students. She knew my story, and I thought I knew hers. She later went on to become a vice-principal at a few different schools, and now she is an esteemed leader in education and someone I look up to. We had shared some personal stories and experiences with each other throughout our years of knowing each other. When I first offered her tobacco to share her story with me, I

knew that she knew how important this was, and why I was doing it. Rather than jump into her story, I shared explicitly my story, who I am as an Indigenous educator, and why I feel this work of learning from Indigenous leaders in education is so important. I gave before I asked of anything in return, and I knew she would get it – my reasons why. I knew because we had established that relationship together. What I did not know was how raw, explicit, and uncensored her story would be. I learned, I listened, we laughed, we cried, we ate together, we shared. It was how research should be. It felt right, and true to my roots. I knew leaving her house that I had received such a gift I could not have received without that history we had together.

The Journey, The Stories, The Knowledge

Rather than use the term interview, I use the terms "talk with" my friends and relatives whom are highly regarded Indigenous leaders in education. I had the opportunity to sit with four Indigenous leaders in education and share in story. For the purpose of protecting their identity, I have chosen the alias names Thunder Cloud, Morning Sky, Evening Mist, and Rolling Water when sharing their stories. I had intentions of feasting and sharing the work and the process together and to celebrate their contributions to this work. My decision to forgo in communal sharing of story was sidelined by two separate and unrelated factors. The stories were so unveiling, so raw, so trauma-filled, that I did not feel it was my right to exploit, nor request that they share such intimate details in a sharing circle setting. The other factor that led to my decision was the influx of COVID-19, social distancing measures, and the consideration for the health and safety of my family and theirs. Although the communal celebration of their contributions did not include them, I still managed to feast and offer tobacco for this important

work of acknowledging their stories and contribution to this research of Indigenous leadership in education.

Understanding what it means to work within a strength-based culture, I want to change the narrative of what it means to be Indigenous in education, what it means to do research as an Indigenous woman, and what it means to carry the knowledge of leadership in an Indigenous way so that these knowledges are privileged or at least seen on equal footing as our non-Indigenous counterparts in the education system. I aligned my findings with Brooke Madden's framework (2019) on Indigenous counter-stories for Truth and Reconciliation Education. I believe as long as we see ourselves as victims and live within the constraints of the "trauma-box", we will always be seen as such from the non-Indigenous community as well. It is often stated that in order to reconcile, the truth of Canada's history and the resulting cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples must be known. I believe this is true, but we cannot stay in this stagnant place of pity and victimhood. Madden (2019) honours Indigenous strength and courage in arguing that we must be seen and viewed as powerful knowledge keepers within education to inform practices that better serve our diverse student population as well as for future generations. This is exactly what I hope this work leads to. The findings of the stories I heard can be easily categorized into a strength-based framework that clearly outlines how and why we can benefit from listening, honouring, valuing, and following the ways of Indigenous leaders in education.

The themes flowed within, across, and intertwined within Madden's (2019) counter-stories according to the narratives of: *refusal, resistance, resilience, and resurgence*. My understanding and interpretation of each narrative is that *refusal* is based upon actions that result in *refusing* to participate in colonial systems despite ongoing threats. In the case of Indigenous leadership, many are living, breathing, and navigating within a colonial system that is not made

for Indigenous people to succeed. Within the stories, I identify the strength within my relative's *refusal* in specific aspects not only in the work they do in education, but in their journey to leadership as well.

Resistance is also evident within their stories in the way that injustices are identified, named, and stood up to. Indigenous communities and collectives historically supported each other, and we continue to see that today in the lives of Indigenous people from the basics of everyday life, to protesting for clean drinking water or protection of land just to name a few. We are a community-based people, and act together to *resist* dispossession, disenfranchisement, and dismissal by colonial empires and to enforce and act upon our rights. I ensure to point out and accentuate when and how Indigenous leaders exemplify *resistance* within their stories.

I knew going into this work that Indigenous leaders would deem *resilience* as a necessity to getting them where they are today, but I had no idea the extent to which the extreme trauma they encountered and rose above to become a role model would be so prevalent in their lives. Their abilities to overcome individual as well as systemic assault, and the continuation of it in so many different ways was by far one of the most compelling sources of knowledge embedded within their stories. Alongside them, as they shared the details of trauma and assault, I felt as though I carried that burden with them, and together they helped me heal, they helped water the *resilience* seed I found within myself.

As I listened and learned from their stories, as traumatic and heartfelt these stories were, every single one of them *resurged*, mended, stronger than before. This *resurgence* emphasized the healing and reclamation of who they were as Indigenous people as well as who they are as Indigenous leaders in education. They identified how similar, different, and the extenuating circumstances they encountered because of who they were as people and as educators. As you

read the fragments of their stories below, please keep in mind and connect the four aspects of Madden's (2019) counter-stories as they unveil themselves throughout their stories: *refusal, resistance, resilience, and resurgence.*

Thunder Cloud

My first relative I spoke with was someone whom I had known for a number of years. He is a male principal in an elementary school with a complicated past but could "carry himself" well within the company of white power and privilege, namely the senior administration of the school division in which he is employed. For the context of this research and his story, we will call him "Thunder Cloud". He explained to me that his Kookum (slang Nehiyaw word for Grandmother) always said he could "walk in both worlds", which was evident in his presentation and ability to adapt to his surroundings (including his appearance, and demeanor). He prides himself in taking extra care of his appearance, his stature, and wealth. Throughout the years we have known each other, he always spoke about how growing up poor has influenced his purchases today such as finely tailored suits, ritzy sports cars, brand label hand bags, right down to the detail of his tattoos and his accessories. Although his appearance may seem quite fitting for the Eurocentric colonial male power figure, when you get to know him, you realize how he is actively participating in reclaiming his Indigenous roots, his life in ceremony, and how he demonstrates the attributes of *refusal, resistance, resilience, and resurgence.*

I cannot pinpoint the actual time I first asked Thunder Cloud to be part of this research journey. He knew I was a master's student, and we spoke many times about the colonial influence on education and the impacts this has specifically on Indigenous youth. When our paths crossed, we would pick up right where we left off, and he would say, "how's that masters coming along?" He knew my story, and I thought I knew his. I kept saying, "I'll be coming to

see you", referring to my anticipation of his participation in my research. When the time came, I phoned him up and revisited all the talks we had throughout the years about what it means to be an active participant in "playing the system" and "breaking it down". He always told me he would be superintendent one day. His arrogance never sat right with me. I would tell him that he needed to be humbled, and we would laugh together. He respected my opinions and I listened critically to what he would share with me whether I agreed with him or not. This process however, had taught me so much more of the value within his ways of being, a teaching of my own that perhaps that I need not be so judgemental. On the phone he instantly agreed, I made mention of a tobacco offering when we meet, and we set the time and location to discuss his journey more.

Surprisingly enough, he wanted to meet within an educational setting; a resource centre with meeting rooms. I booked the location, brought him a coffee and some snacks and met him on the date and time we agreed upon. His entry was that of any other, a smile and a hug followed by a "great to see you". It was a colder day, he had on a well fitted (likely custom) overcoat with a designer scarf, his hair styled flawlessly. I expected him to sit down, remove his coat, get comfortable and enjoy his coffee. This did not happen. As we casually made small talk and found our seats, although his tone and facial expressions were quite relaxed and cheery, he sat down at the head of the table, crossed his arms, and was ready to begin – coat and scarf on for the entirety of our time together. I revisited our previous conversations, and I shared how, why, and what the research would entail, and why it is so important that we honour the knowledge of Indigenous leaders in education. I then passed him tobacco and asked that he share his story, his wisdom, and his journey with me so that we can build upon the collective strengths of Indigenous educators and empower, inspire, and open the minds of educational leaders around us

both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. He accepted the tobacco, signed off on the consent form (with a giggle), and we began.

His early years were influenced heavily by his grandparent's involvement in his upbringing. That early influence was so great, that his first language was a mix of Cree and Michif. He went on to explain, that he eventually lost his connection to language and culture throughout his early years when his mother married a white man. Thunder Cloud comes from a family of ten, a mixture of siblings from two separate fathers. This relationship between his Cree mother and European man had many impacts on his life. One of many negative experiences he faced was that his parents (particularly, his father) wanted the children to attend a Catholic school. He told me of a time in grade four when he recalled being labelled a "Dirty Indian. This moment being the first of many times he had really experienced what it felt like to be discriminated against. This angered him, but drove him to be stronger, and not necessarily in positive ways. His early and teen years were filled with abuse of all sorts, a life on the run, and a stint with homelessness led him in the hands of child and family services by the age of twelve. Miraculously, he eventually ended up in a foster family where both his foster parents were educators and saw a drive within him beneath all that anger. He credits their influence to a large part of his success not only in education, but in instilling a light of hope for him. This couple supported him in football, where his natural talent earned him the nickname "Chief". He hated that nickname; he never wanted to identify as Indigenous. He would lie and claim he was Mexican or Italian because life was easier that way. This did not change his perception of education, that bad taste of discrimination stuck with him through school. He stated that he believed that he "didn't need a piece of paper to be smart". However, in addition to this statement he mentioned how he learned to "walk in both worlds," to appease both sides and

eventually gaining that piece of paper, namely his grade twelve diploma. His journey to grade twelve was overrun with discrimination, and he shared many stories with me of the physical fights he encountered in school, the struggles, the sexual abuse. So he eventually saw that piece of paper as a "ticket out".

After years of denying his Indigenous identity, he eventually went back to university in a post-secondary program for Indigenous educators. The first two years of the program, Thunder Cloud was immersed in Indigenous cultural practices and teachings. This immersion unveiled his anger once again. He explained to me how he became so angry at the injustices he faced because of who he was, and decided he had to become a change-maker, a leader. It was from this point on his connection to his cultural roots led him to decide he wanted and needed to be a visible role model for Indigenous youth. After his graduation from that program, armed with a Bachelor of Education, he travelled to New Zealand and Australia and was witness to the connection of colonization in these areas of the world as well. He noticed that in these parts of the world he travelled that "if you are different, it is seen as wrong", and "if your values don't align with mine, in a European context, it's much more complicated than that…" and "it shouldn't be that way". He continued to give examples both historically and in present day where we see the clashing of values and how individuals are judged based on those differences.

In the high school that Thunder Cloud attended, he was the only Indigenous person to graduate that year. This notion of being a "lost cause" or so he thought when he was younger, was something that he related with in his first job in education. He was hired in a specific program with a high Indigenous population for students that were also labelled a "lost cause". He indicated his connection and how he saw himself within each of those students. His role was to "build identity within these students" and empower them to feel as though they too were

worthy and deserving of what all students feel and experience in regard to their self-worth. It was there that he too was inspired for more within his own life. He made a decision early on in his career to apply for the vice-principal pool (a process in which educators apply to be included in a "pool" of eligible educators for vice-principal positions that become vacant within the school division) in order to inspire more Indigenous educators to stand up, advocate, and make change within education.

Although Thunder Cloud always had Indigenous roots within him, his ability to "walk in both worlds" was a tactic he used in becoming a vice-principal. He stated that he did not "check the box" and declare his Indigenous roots until just this past year after he took the role of Principal (although he presents as Indigenous). He says he did not want his achievements to be seen or given to him based on the need to fill the quota of Indigenous leaders in education, but he would rather play their game and walk the colonial walk and speak their talk. I am not sure, nor will anyone ever know if it was his Indigenous identity or his ability to "speak white" or some combination thereof that got him into his current position. In any case, it is a strategy that white educators never need to consider.

Because Thunder Cloud had experienced a life of cultural oppression, he explained that his desire to learn more and to continue his learning journey about his own identity is stronger than ever. I too have been witness to his changed persona from an almost arrogance of knowledge in leadership to a more humble, collective approach to learning from others. He even explained to me the difference between his learning path on Indigenous knowledge versus the learning path of a leader in education, outlining and explaining much of a similar learning path I spoke of through my hunting story. He spoke about increased responsibilities that ended up in his hands such as being asked to be a fire keeper for Women's ceremonies as well as being asked to

be the Skaabe (helper) for a Sweat lodge for a group of kids. He clearly identified the differences between how he was taught and was gaining leadership within this role as Skaabe, and how different the path has been for leadership in education. A clear difference, he explained, is that in education, you need to go through a series of linear steps, many involving additional workshops, professional development, and courses in order to gain specific knowledges that deem you a "fit" leader for an educational setting. Thunder Cloud identified and articulated specific differences between how Indigenous organizations recruit leaders and colonial organizations such as education, where Eurocentric values of organizational hierarchy and hiring practices privilege notions such as paper "credentials". He explained that having a Bachelor of Education does not make you a great teacher, and even having a doctorate in education does not equate to a masterful teacher but rather one's ability to work the system to your advantage. Both knowledges, Indigenous and Western are admirable, but specific skill sets are different in both worlds, namely the classroom and academia. He credited his multiple experiences as contributors to his success in his leadership role, even his negative experiences which have allowed him to change his perspective into asking how he can turn this into a positive outcome.

The conversation organically flowed which led Thunder Cloud into mentioning his "wish list" for leadership training for all educators. I was so internally moved by his transition to this topic because it was then that I truly knew, and felt that my intentions were clearly communicated to him through our ongoing sharing of story. His wish list included more Indigenous content in leadership training, embedded Journey's Training (a program for educators to learn about Indigenous cultural knowledge) with an ongoing cohort of educators, taking educators on the land and equipping them to be more culturally aware early on, as well as throughout their careers. He explained to me how he was very intentional with how and what he

exposes his school staff to in terms of professional development around Indigenous education. He is very clear that his intentions are not that they “teach our culture” but that they are “facilitators of knowledge” and to open doors for having these conversations with each other and with the students that walk into their classrooms each and every day, as well as with the greater community. His demeanor relaxed a bit at this point in our conversation as he smiled and said that he would love to be able to share this knowledge and experiences with other new administrators.

I asked him about his perception of leadership and how it has changed over time. He went on to tell me about all his learning from varying experiences and different leaders both positive and negative to shape his leadership ways and knowledge. He said now more than ever he tries to base his leadership style on traditional ways as well as the Seven Teachings. He had articulated to me the shift in his own leadership practices as he continues to learn about his own identity and culture. I have also observed this shift in his leadership style. When I think about him as a leader years ago to when he had his first vice-principal placement to now, it is evident in his attitude, his focus, and his demeanor in how he carries himself. He then explained to me how it was all about “prescription, policy, and structure”, to now his focus as a leader is to “build community, embrace the Seven Teachings, and work towards restorative practices”. He even used the word “rigid” to describe his early leadership style and credits learning about Indigenous knowledge to his shift in thinking and leading.

When I asked him about how we can use Indigenous knowledge to inform both Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders, his response without hesitation is to have “all leaders learn from Indigenous leaders about what an Indigenous leadership style is”. He paralleled the role of Knowledge Keepers and Elders with that of the role of principals and vice-principals

stating, “they go to you for advice, for guidance, to solve problems, it’s exactly what Indigenous people have been doing all along”. Thunder Cloud also made mention of how the “two worlds” were so similar: “our Indigenous way of life, is how a good human should be. Our Indigenous ways of leadership, is what a good leader should be. There are world renowned speakers on educational leadership, but there are leaders in our communities that have the same knowledge base in leadership as those that may have gone to Cambridge or U of T”. Really, what it comes down to is that being a good leader involves taking care of your community, which we have been doing forever. The parallels he described went on to emphasize how the advice he has sought over the years from well renowned and trusted leaders in education has been very similar to the advice he sought from Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders. He credits much of his success to “using more of *this* world (Indigenous knowledge) to survive in *this* world (Eurocentric education system)…and that’s why I mention walking in two worlds earlier, even my Kookum saw that in me”.

We ended our conversation talking about our own parallels of what we thought was valuable education in helping us both walk through the “education world”. He mentioned his love of learning and what he considers his first taste of “education” being the knowledge that was passed from his grandparents – learning the language, hearing the stories, and experiencing hands-on learning up in “Duck River” (name changed, but he was referring to his experiences in his home community with his grandparents). This experience is so similar to what I consider my first taste of education, that from my grandparents before I had even stepped foot in a school. We conversed about how our experiences were much the same as we could both recall when our “love for learning” was diminished, and it was that of the introduction into the colonial Eurocentric education system. He had numerous negative experiences to draw upon, which has

motivated him to do what he can to change the experiences of kids in school to a more positive one.

When he started talking about how it is unfortunate that we need to often times use non-Indigenous people to get what we want in this educational world, he made mention of a piece of advice his mom had given him when he started out as a vice-principal. She said “you have to keep your enemies close, and the whites closer…and we do, unfortunately we have to rely on non-Indigenous people at times to get what we want. It’s sad, but unfortunately if you look at the make-up of education, the majority of people in roles of authority are non-Indigenous people.”

He mentioned how he does not think he has a bad reputation, he thinks he is a good leader, but has never ever been asked by those in senior administrative positions, “hey what do you think Thunder Cloud?” He elaborated on how our school system lacks using the assets and knowledge within the division to build a better community, noting that the school division has an outstandingly high number of Indigenous students and community, so why are they not collaborating with Indigenous leaders in the division to share their strengths and knowledge with other leaders? I can only point to one conclusion, and that would be that our ways or knowledge are not valued in the way other non-Indigenous leaders’ knowledge and ways are valued. When I think about all the internal professional development seminars I have attended that were hosted by principals, the majority were white men in suits.

When we finished sharing stories, I felt like my story had so many parallels with his and that he also saw “the system” in similar ways that I did. I was not sure if it was just a coincidence that we both had similar experiences as Indigenous educators in a colonial education system, or if other Indigenous educators shared similarities as well. I was honoured at the entirety of knowledge that he had shared, but I also could not help but feel exhausted physically, mentally,

and emotionally afterwards. His shared his story of upbringing, his life's trauma, the good and the bad of what it was like to grow up in a complex racist world and then to live and work within an education system so engrained in Eurocentric hegemony. The realities of this work take its toll on Indigenous people daily, and I do not believe enough people even know, are aware, or even want to acknowledge what it is like to work as an Indigenous leader in a white educational world.

Morning Sky

I had known Morning Sky my whole life. I had no idea growing up what she did, who she really was, the struggles she encountered, or how significant her presence and leadership would be to me. It is difficult to share enough of her story, enough of our connection, and the significance of her impact without giving away her identity. In order to honour our relationship we have built over the years, for this context I will only be sharing the pieces that are significant to this research and sharing of knowledge. Our educational paths crossed early on in my career. We *got* each other, we understood our ways and the injustices within the system before I even knew the words to describe it. We could communicate with just a look. I looked up to her always, she was my friend and relative, and she referred to me as the same. We had trust, we had relationship, we had reciprocity. She was a well-regarded leader as seen and respected from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and the greater school community. She was a principal at a high school, but had vast experiences in the education system as a leader in various capacities.

As much as I thought I knew about her, I realized after talking with her that I knew nothing at all. Her story was held in silence, not only from me, but from everyone else in her life. What she appeared as was different from who she was inside, and it was now that she no longer

"gave a shit", and was ready to speak up. She knew it was important for her to share her story not only with me, but to advocate more and more for the acceptance of the experiences and traumas of Indigenous people. When I spoke to her on the phone to make arrangements to meet, she accepted and she stated "it's very raw, I'm still doing my own healing". She wanted to meet somewhere private and explained how emotional this experience would be for her. We agreed to order some take-out and sit and visit in her home after work hours.

When I arrived, we chatted briefly about life in general, I took a seat at her kitchen table, I offered her tobacco and she accepted. That tobacco sat out in front of us on the table for the entirety of our time together, and when words became tough, I kept that tobacco in mind to help her in her healing journey, and for her story to not be for nothing, but for her story to be honoured and shared in a respectful way within this research endeavor.

When I asked her to tell me about her journey to where she is today, we both knew how loaded that question was, so we both broke out in laughter. I explained to her that her story is important and that this was meant to be an open conversation and to share as much or as little as she feels comfortable with that would contribute to shifts in thinking around what educational leadership means and how we can better inform non-Indigenous leaders in education as well as prepare new leaders for a diverse and changing world. She says to me "how can you answer that without going back to the beginning…especially for our people…because systems aren't built for us to succeed, right?" Wow, she really hit the nail on the head with that statement. I understood her completely, as in our ways the whole story is important, not just the processes and procedure of attaining the role of educational leader, and she mentioned right from the beginning the incongruence of being Indigenous with being a leader in a system that has historically been designed to "kill the Indian in the child". She went on to say "it's so historical,

you can't just say well I graduated high school… and then I did this and that…because even to get to that point was a feat in itself".

She started with the history of her family, her mother being a Residential school survivor that battled mental health issues her entire life. Her mother did all she could to try keep her kids away from their home community having only negative experiences and knowing the negative outlook on reserve life at that time. When her mother had a mental breakdown, her siblings and herself were part of the Sixties Scoop where the children were apprehended and relocated without their mother's knowledge of where they were. For two years her and her siblings went without seeing their mother. After two years in the foster system, she recalled being ready to be "adopted out". At that time a social worker (whom she had met later in life) fought hard to have the children returned back to their mother. She said, "he fought hard to have my mother keep us". They relocated to a small urban centre in Manitoba because her mother still had a fear of returning to their home reserve in another province. Morning Sky's mother still held onto the traumatic experiences she encountered growing up on the reserve and the mass amount of abuse she experienced there. "Sexual abuse, physical abuse, mental abuse….she didn't want us around there". She went on to explain what it was like after two years in the foster system when her siblings and her were reunified, "we didn't know my mom. After living in a white home, when she got us back, she had a difficult time with us because we had grown…the structures we were given….we were, like ultra-polite…it was like…it was like…we were little white kids". It was also at this time in her life where her mother met her stepdad, "he was mean, and that's where our journey began".

Not five minutes into our conversation, she explained to me that at this point in her and her siblings lives, among six of them, the traumatic experiences they encountered has made

remembering past events difficult, as they have blocked out so many bad memories that collectively they piece together information when they reunite. The introduction of her stepdad was when her mom began the cycle of high mobility and moving them from place to place as a coping mechanism to her own trauma and mental illness compounded by the abuse instilled by their stepdad. Over the years, the siblings have attempted to create a "timeline of events" to document and remember their history and upbringing because it was so traumatic for them all. "When you think about trauma…you know that fight or flight reaction? Well that was my mother. As soon as you got to know her, or pushed her, or called her on anything, she'd leave. We'd live in towns where we were the only native people. We experienced a lot of abuse…both physically and sexually…just people seeing us as less than". She continued to mention that she and her sisters were all abused, she found out later in life, when she began her healing journey that it was her biological dad that had sexually abused her so bad she was in the hospital for quite a period of time growing up. Her mother's tumultuous relationships had devastating impacts on the family. She told me a story about how her mother eventually left her abusive stepdad and how they fled in the night, hiding, fearing for their lives, with the help of her mother's friend and the numerous places they lived in across the United States and Canada. She continued also noting that it is hard to remember how many places they lived and relocated.

There was a change in her world when she entered her teenage years. Morning Sky was going to school in the United States, she explained "we were so poor, my mother was always on social assistance". They moved to Winnipeg because her mother never wanted them to have any connection with their home reserve. Even to this day, she explained to me how she feels so far removed from all her family and relatives there, mentioning how "foreign" it seems when she goes there. She then told me a story about driving out to her home reserve for a funeral with her

mom and the questions she was starting to ask her and the healing journey she is on. As she finds out more and more about herself and her upbringing, she explains how she cannot even cry, she feels so disconnected. Additionally, she added “I’m mad at my mom, but that’s a whole other thing”. Her story continued with her sharing stories about how close her and her brother were, only two years apart. Amongst all the siblings, her older ones had already left home, not wanting anything to do with their mother, remaining was her brother and two younger sisters. Being fourteen years old and in a new place, she did all she could to stay away from her mother, they even stayed out on the streets trying to avoid her. When her mom went to register her and her brother at the local inner-city high school, the school had done an assessment on both of them. They said to her mother, “your daughter shouldn’t be attending this high school, you should send her to…(another high school in a different area that has a reputation for their academic excellence)”. She never went to that other school though because she wanted to be with her brother.

Her high school path that started out at the local inner-city high school was quickly changed after only a few months. She was transferred to an off-campus program where she earned her diploma early and began working at Rossbrook house, a local neighborhood drop-in centre that was established by a group of nuns. Her sister at that time started working the streets. Morning Sky explained to me how her mother could not handle her so she gave up her younger sister to child and family services. She then paused as she thought about her sister I presumed. She shifted her focus and continued on her story. She told me even more stories about how her brother and her became even closer at that time and she continued to work at Rossbrook house, repeating that they were “so poor”. She shared how she would buy her brother a winter jacket and boots so that he would “feel good about himself”. She told me a story about taking him

shopping. While laughing as she was telling me the story, she said to him, “pick out a jacket”, and he picked out the most expensive one, using up her entire pay cheque for that week, but she could not tell him no.

She told me more about her family dynamics as she was trying to find her place in the world. Her brother had been into a lot of drugs, her sister working the streets, in and out of group homes. Her sister was even one of the first girl leaders of a popular gang back then. All the while she credits her continued involvement with Rossbrook house that “saved her”. Through tears, she explained, “that’s why I’m still involved”. She names off all the nuns that she can remember and how they “never gave up”. She then told me a story about how she would go out drinking all night, and they would welcome her back into class the next day just “reeking like booze”. She said “they never gave up, never gave up”. She elaborated on her stories of Rossbrook house explaining how her siblings and her had stayed so many nights on those pews because they left the church doors open all hours of the night. Her sister has also begun her healing journey, but still struggles, she explained how she is done with her sister and shared some stories of all the damage her sister has caused to her life, even having a warrant out for her arrest caused by her sister claiming her identity after some charges in another province.

We shift to talking about trauma. She mentioned how this system and the people within it do not realize how difficult it is for Indigenous leaders in education to talk about, and live through this system that has instilled so much trauma, and how we see our families, our relatives go through this trauma daily. Things happen in the communities we work in, and we are not removed from it, these are our families. “We have a deeper historical piece to these traumatic events in our community, we are not removed from them” she states.

Connected to the trauma conversation, she shared with me how she met her first husband.

> It was during my time at Rossbrook house where I met my first husband. I think I was looking more for a saviour, maybe not a saviour, but I was definitely not ready for a relationship like that. Think about sixteen-year-old young girls, looking for an attachment. I just attached myself to him. I was sixteen when I got pregnant and graduated early. Out of all of the important events in my life, my graduation, my mom never attended any of them.

The significance of this statement is that she is now able to recognize herself following in similar patterns of avoidance. She mentioned that sometimes as uncomfortable as it might be, she makes herself be present, she resists the urge to withdraw and pull back. At that time, our food arrived and we shared more stories about her path.

She graduated pregnant, but she had a number of scholarships for post-secondary. She recalls the nuns connecting her with the university saying "you might not be able to go in the fall, but become familiar with the campus so that you can go the following year". She told me a story about the old basement she worked in that summer, seventeen and pregnant, she filed articles for a professor. One day as she was going into that basement, she met up with an older white guy at the top of the stairs, and he stops and says to her "Einstein would turn over in his grave if he knew an Indian was attending school here". This devastated her, she ended up quitting not long after that. Her story sped up at that point, and she explained how she had two children right away, but always knew she wanted to go to school for something. She laughed as she said "I took this stupid course at Red River", a clerical course that she said she hated and later quit anyway. She had two more children after that, but her relationship was so "turbulent", filled with drinking and drugs, and partying. She says to me "he had his history of trauma as well. Two broken people". So she left him, and did exactly what her mother used to do, she fled

to another province. But during her time away, she decided she had to do something, she did some deeper thinking about how she was self-sabotaging herself. She eventually moved back, reconnected with the sisters at Rossbrook house, and talked to them about how she was recognizing the cycle of self-sabotage in her life, how she would create crisis if everything was going well and seemed fine. She shared a story about one of the instances of self-sabotage, going through a program for the police force, completing all steps at the top of her class, and then eventually quitting right before her successful completion. She came to the conclusion that she realized she had to deal with everything before she could move forward in her life.

Her next story went back to describing the closeness of her brother in her life. In her story she talked about how he was still heavy into drugs but hid it very well. He had a job working for the city, he had bought a house, he appeared as though he was doing fine. She told me how he would come over every morning to have coffee, how he would be there to make sure her four boys had everything they needed, how he looked out for her and her family. One day he was complaining of a sore leg, and not even two weeks later, he had passed from a disease he contracted using dirty needles. She had no idea how bad his drug addiction was until it was too late to save him. She was twenty-eight at that time.

Not long after her brother had passed, she shared another story with me about how she became very ill with Hepatitis B. She shared how poor she was, and how she did not have any money to take a bus or a cab, so she had to walk all the way to see a doctor. She remembered how challenging that walk was and how far. She found out that she had Hepatitis B, and one of her boys had also contracted it. Her doctor told her it would attack her liver, and she cannot drink, that this was really serious. After staying in bed for a few weeks, completely helpless, she contemplated her life, how she lost her brother to drugs, how her health was deteriorating, her

sister had even just returned from a stay at a treatment centre. She had time to contemplate her life choices. It was then when she decided she too needed to go to treatment, she needed to change her life. But at that time, her relationship with the boys' father was still "all over the place". She did not trust him to keep their children during her time when she decided to go away for treatment, so she voluntarily put her boys in the care of child and family services on the promise that when she returns, she will have them back. Her eldest boy at that time was school age, so he had attended a Residential day school while she stayed six weeks in a treatment centre. She relocated them to another province because she had heard about how bad the child and family services (CFS) was in the city (Winnipeg). She was promised that she would have her house when she returned, and she would get her boys back. What she did not know was the abuse her boys would encounter during her stay in treatment. She told me about how her oldest son and her recently had a phone conversation about his experience during that time. He said "how long was I there for mom?", she said "six weeks my boy". "It seems longer than that" talking about the abuse he encountered there, she said they both cried together on the phone. She said the following weekend, she got in her vehicle and drove eight hours to the United States to go and give her son a hug. She said, "my adult son, my thirty-four-year-old man, I drove down there just so I could hug him". She said to her son "you need to take this, you can't use it as an excuse to not do well, you need to take this and you need to turn it around and use it to drive you to do good things for your kids." Her story continued with her explaining that after treatment, that was when she became sober and told the boys' father that he had to do something for himself too, that she could not make that decision for him or do it for him, he had to do it for himself. He eventually also went to addictions treatment himself.

She managed to stay on a stable path, getting work, doing well, she had the boys back, and she eventually rekindled her relationship with the boys' dad. As her success grew, her relationship with the boys' father suffered. He had his own life, his own issues, she would find out about him messing around with other women, and she would be devastated. All this was happening while she returned to school, staying up all night to finish assignments because she had to look after four boys during the day, she "never had time". She graduated with her Bachelor of Education, and started working at an Indigenous high school in the inner city.

In her story about her early career in education, she explained to me how she was upset that "they put me in an Indigenous school". She said, "I could've taught anywhere, but of course they put me in an Indigenous school". She remembers her frustration, she did not want to work at an Indigenous school just because she was Indigenous. She said, "I wrote the same papers, I did the same assignments as everyone else, why do I have to work here?" She continued telling me about her interview stating "I didn't interview well, I don't interview well. I think I'd do better today because I know how to play the game". We shared our common experiences with interviewing and how you have to master "seeing, watching, observing, how to play the game". "It's not your true authentic self. Every time I have to do that, it's like I have to come outside myself and be an actress". She has come to a point in her career where she is able to articulate this to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, specifically the staff that works at her school. She says to them "I'm a person of few words, I don't speak just to fill up the air. It has to be purposeful, I can't do small talk. It's difficult for me and I feel like it's a waste of my time. My staff get me now, and they're ok with that".

Today she is still involved with Rossbrook house, and her community connections have grown to include her involvement with various organizations. She strives to advocate and "give

people voice that don't have one". She explained to me how it is not even work, she just loves it. On the opposite end of the spectrum, she laughed as she mentioned how she likes "having that banter with people that have different views…like white people." She adds:

> It's fun because I'm giving them a different perspective of life and community. I have a different voice with these organizations than with the school division. There is fear to speak up because of what can happen to your career, but I'm at that point where I don't care and I have to start speaking up. And it's true, it will impede people if they do speak up, but I don't care anymore.

Jokingly she stated, "where are they going to send me,..." she mentions the name of a challenging inner-city school with extremely high needs and a challenging environment where she has been both vice-principal and acting principal. She explained since going into administration, she has a platform to advocate, but that you also hear the closed door conversations that make you realize how many people have biases, racist views. "It's shocking how many are out there and think they are joking." She said it is time to start calling people out on their views whether they use humour or not, it is their beliefs. She continued explaining that she now has those conversations with those people even more now than ever. She shared some stories about a well-intended staff member making a comment in front of staff and students that she was unaware would be hurtful to community members. She said so many things need to change before we even talk about infusing Indigenous perspectives, she says that it is just the surface level, referring to the ingrained racism within the education system.

Going back to her career path, she shared how she always wanted a voice. Now, she is asked to speak on resiliency and share her story. At that point, we entered into a philosophical

conversation about the “resiliency seed”. She said, “I don’t know that everyone has that innate resiliency within them”. She said she has had this conversation with many, including her siblings about how they can have shared experiences, and only one or two will flourish. This is striking to me, and almost defeating to think that some children will not blossom if they don’t have the “resiliency seed”. I never expected this outlook from her. She explained that she does not fully understand it yet either, but she is convinced that the reason so many people are still in trauma, crisis, and addictions, is that they do not have the seed. “It’s more than support they need”. I mention then how that outlook could “weigh heavy” on an educator. She acknowledged that heaviness, but continued on that she is so far into her healing that she can detach from that trauma and talk about it openly, or at least talk about it where it affects her differently.

So then what? If some Indigenous people are without the resilience seed, then what? We began sharing about healing and addressing historical past traumas and learning about where you come from in order to know where you are going. But not just physically where you are from, but the historical healing and know how to be reflective and develop an understanding of what happened and why it happened in order to pave a path forward. She stated, “not everyone can do that, especially our teenagers, they aren’t ready for that”. She said “once people do that, they can heal”.

We switched gears to talk more about her role and introduction into educational leadership. Within the system she works, the application process is complex and cumbersome with numerous hoops to jump through to even be considered as a vice-principal. When I asked her about that process, about when she knew it was time to apply. Her response was “I was already doing it anyway” (speaking of leadership within a school). She shared stories of when the principal was gone, the school would function just the same. Her process of recruitment into

vice-principalship, she remembers how different her communication style was from all the others (non-Indigenous) when tasked with the stage of recruitment that involves group work and problem solving. She said they (non-Indigenous candidates) all tried to talk over each other, they all tried to show each other up, they all threw out the tag words and referenced process and procedure. She said she sat back and let them all fight over a prospective resolution, and once the time was up, to wrap it up she put her two cents in and the mock meeting was completed. She said that is all it took and she was advanced to the next stage of recruitment.

We started talking about colonial systems and how they may have worked for or against her in her career path. She says the interview process does not work well for our people. She said "it's very linear, and that's often not how we work or communicate. It doesn't get to the heart of a person's skill set or what their strengths are". She explained how the interview process gets very difficult, there are no longer questions that lead to conversations or opportunities to get to know that person in a more authentic way. "You have to ask the same scripted questions, with no room for elaboration". When asked about preparation for leadership, she said she does not think she even had any preparation. She knew the community, she knew the families. She said jokingly, "preparation for me was learning who the families were and trying to remember if I beat them up as a kid". We both laughed. I asked her about any involvement with formal preparation or professional development workshops on leadership. She recalled the school division had a leadership development program, but she was already doing it, already knew about staffing, budgets, etc. She credits the principal she worked with that mentored her by giving her responsibility of those during her role at that school. She said it just flowed organically, "we had a shared leadership under their guidance". In her other placements, she said that style of "shared leadership" also followed her to another school where she was vice-

principal. She said it took trust in their partnership to create a dynamic that helped the school run smoothly, they knew they had each other's back. The trust was there, and she could use that to give constructive feedback to her co-leader. She went on to share some stories about the humour and trust that went into building that relationship with the principal at that school, and how it contributed to both their success. She stated, "at times it was like I was mentoring him, and he listened".

As we were wrapping up our sharing of stories, she was intentional about talking about how surprising it is the number of people in positions of power that have racist views. She shared some shocking stories about instances where she had heard first hand that lead her to "calling people on their perspectives" and often times "calling people into her office" to have some difficult conversations. It was evident that the prevalence of racism is still very strong within the education system. She continued on her work because "if we can change one experience for one student, it changes for the whole community". She claimed that many educators are in it for the wrong reasons, wanting to be saviours. We talked about what *enabling* versus *supporting* Indigenous students, and having high expectations looks like. She said "we need to get out of the poor them mentality, and still have high expectations for our youth, but also for our staff". She told me about the kinds of teachers that end up at high needs schools, often with high Indigenous student populations that come from poverty.

> You need to find high caliber staff, but they don't come to these schools, so you have to mold and train new and eager staff and take advantage of their time there because they will leave in five to six years. You always have to be building and creating high caliber teachers. We are always looking at trauma informed practices, how it affects the learner, and how behavior is a communication of what's going on.

The staff at her school are now able to relate trauma with behaviour and resist that notion of "they can't learn". They are understanding reasons behind behavior and how they can change their practice, how they can become more reflective in what practices need to change in order to best serve the students.

We ended with her saying she needs to slow down, that she is ready for a break, that this work is exhausting and wearing her down. She elaborated on her struggles as an Indigenous leader in education:

> Even though they say we want more Indigenous leaders, it's not often the community that wants that for their children…I've been called a drug dealer, a gangster, an alcoholic, I receive hate emails, the Facebook posts, they say they want more Indigenous leaders but we don't get the support from either side…I'm hoping the new educators are more knowledgeable. I come from a time where that was taken from us. I'm hoping that we have changed things enough for the next generation that they can talk about this openly, and that they have a sense of self, and the confidence in their voices. That's where I hope we are at now, but I don't know.

I left her place all sorts of empty and full at the same time. I felt her pain, her struggles, but yet laughed at her sense of humour through all she has faced throughout her life and career. My head spun at the thoughts of her journey and my heart was full with her knowledge and strength she shared with me through her stories. I was thankful for the long drive back to my place that evening. I continued to feel her pain and gain strength through her courage for the next few weeks and I reflected on how, and what her story could mean to inform others in finding their resilience seed, if we all even have one. I realized after this conversation, that I myself needed to take a break from gathering these trauma rich and strength filled stories to gather my own

thoughts, and remain in a healthy balance throughout this process. Although the stories had been about overcoming obstacles, the ability for these leaders to continue on the work they do has also been immensely powerful and healing.

Evening Mist

Evening Mist and I had known each other and previously worked together. She has the energy of a teenager and more positivity than anyone else I have known. She is recognized for her willingness to help anybody and would give the shirt off her back to help those in need. She genuinely goes above and beyond everyday not only in her role as an educational leader, but in her life as well. I was not surprised that she would accept my request to sit down with her and share her story and knowledge of educational leadership with me. The school she works in is labelled as a “high needs” school within the inner city, with a predominantly Indigenous student body. After rescheduling a few times due to unexpected crisis within the school, we were finally able to meet in her office while she requested from the other leader that she “not be interrupted”. Her office, a chaotic shamble of resources, gadgets, papers, clothing, even a desk pedal bike contraption appeared well used, practical, not formal at all but rather felt like a spare room in the office. She looked comfortable and eager to share her stories in her office of chaos. I was about to get set up and offer her tobacco which I sat out on the table beside me, but before we could even have any small talk, she jumped right into her story.

She started by telling me about her large family, and the complex family dynamics of what it meant to grow up Indigenous in the city. I listened to a story about one of her brothers and how he was the first to save every penny he had to buy a house in a good neighborhood. She elaborated on how people today are so surprised how successful her and her siblings are because of the extensive trauma and struggle they were exposed to in their younger years. She continued,

"people always said you guys were so poor, your mother was an alcoholic, people even said we were thieves, but what they didn't know was how our family was strong in values". They did not have a lot of food to eat, and they often went without. She spoke about her father's push for education, always telling the kids they have to go to school. Her mother, a recovering alcoholic, also went back to school as an adult and completed her degree in social work to help others with addiction. Evening Mist explained this experience as beneficial to her mother's work in helping others saying "you can't just read up on addiction and think you really know what it's all about. She used her experiences and knowledge to help others." She described how she remembers her mother. What she saw growing up was dirty, poor, soiled pants, overgrown toenails, matted hair, that is how she saw her mother. She followed that up with "you would've never known she was a homeowner". She told me a story about how they bought a house in 1966, and how they still have that home, but her mother would be seen on the streets while people would walk by and call her things like a dirty Indian.

When I asked her about the influence of culture and language growing up, she told me about how she always wanted to learn her language. She would listen in on her mother talking on the phone to her sisters and friends, just regular gossip. "Every time I'd ask her, she'd say "ahh, get out of here, don't worry about that"." She went on how her culture and language was so hidden. She recalled how her mother would put on white make-up to try and hide her brown skin. Not only was she hiding her skin colour, but also the food they would eat at home. Referring to the bannock her mom would make because it was so cheap and easy, "it was a treat to have store bought bread back in the day, and now it's the other way around". Evening Mist does credit her mother's knowledge and involvement in culture to what helped her mom overcome addiction. She shared stories with me about travelling to Saskatchewan and Alberta to

attend Sundances with all the kids. She added, “there’d be a braid of sweetgrass on her dresser, she would tell me “you burn it and you pray with it, and god will hear your prayers”. She then told me how she would smudge the house and burn the sweetgrass when she was younger and attended her first Sweat lodge at about ten or eleven years old with her mom. Although she has had some of her culture and language withheld from her, she considers herself a lifelong learner and a very spiritual person.

The racism her family faced came from all areas of her life and continued to follow them throughout their years. Her father was a “white man from the air force”. His family held resentment towards him saying “don’t marry an Indian”. Growing up, Evening Mist never knew that side of her family. She grew up “Aboriginal”, not knowing her white fathers’ roots. She said it was not until her and her siblings became successful that suddenly her father’s side of the family started reaching out to them (her and her siblings). She continued with a story about racism and also noted the stories in the news that reflect how prevalent racism still is today. She gave multiple examples of what racism is, and the judgements people place upon Indigenous people that are reflected negatively. She expressed how important it is to acknowledge people as individuals, and to hear everyone’s stories and to acknowledge the trauma that people go through. She segued into “even at this school, people need to acknowledge individual stories”.

To emphasize the power of acknowledging individuals and their stories, she shared with me an instance about a family at the school where the children had been apprehended and taken away from their mother for eight years. “Can you imagine, not parenting your children for eight years and then suddenly they are back in your care without any additional supports?” At Christmas time, the school had received donations for the children at that school to receive small gifts for their annual “Breakfast with Santa”. In her story, Evening Mist was meeting with this

mother, and she said, “are you ready for Christmas?” and the mom replied “I don’t have a tree, I don’t have presents”. She continued to explain that this mom did not receive child tax, she got almost no assistance, she had no money during the transition of obtaining full care for her children. So she said to the mother, “wait here, I’ll be right back, I’ll go get you some presents to give your kids”. She then referenced the comments the teacher organizing the gifts said to her, “well they just received child tax”. She then explained to this teacher that the mother does not get child tax yet. The teacher replied with “that isn’t our problem”. In response, she said, “you are absolutely right, it isn’t our problem… BUT! We make a difference when we go with our heart. Right?” She added, “so I say in our mind, it’s not our problem, but in our heart, we make a difference. That’s my quote.” This quote resonated over and over again in the stories she shared with me and made sense to her leadership style and all the protocols and “rules” she breaks when “leading from the heart”.

As an example of “leading from the heart” she shared another story of the impact she made on a student teacher, and how even today that teacher acknowledges Evening Mist for the difference she made and how it has impacted her work. The school was doing a food drive for donations of non-perishable foods, as Evening Mist was sharing this information with staff, the student teacher said to her “I’ll see what I have in the cupboard that I’m not using and bring it in”. Evening Mist responded with “Listen, if you’re going to give something that is crap, then don’t bother giving it. Because if you want to make a difference, you’ve got to give your best can, you’ve got to give what you would want.” Her story emphasized the concept of gift giving, and care in choosing the right gift, and what to think about when giving. Going back to the story about the mother with no money to get gifts for her children, she said, “if I was alone in that room of gifts, I would’ve picked the best gifts for her to give to her children”. Instead, the

teacher in charge of the gifts picked out the "crappiest, cheapest gifts she could find". I see the way Evening Mist works, through knowing the people and the families and the communities at a much deeper level so that she can advocate for them and fill their needs at various capacities. She truly takes the time and sees the beauty and potential in each and every child and their families that attends her school.

Another story she shared was about families that struggle day to day. She said, "they may have just got their children back and after being boxed up in a structured foster home, and without structures and routines and parenting skills, they let the kids have their freedom, they are all over the place with no boundaries and structure, but no one is supporting the mother either". She spoke how many families are just living to survive day to day, they do not care about making a scheduled meeting a week in advance. The families worry about what is happening today, so if you plan for the family to come in next week, she said:

> Someone will win at bingo, and suddenly they're gone shopping, they won't come to a meeting when their cupboards are empty, or they need some clothes or a winter jacket. They're gone to Walmart, maybe they need a ride and their ride is going right then and there. We can't judge them for not coming to the school for a stupid meeting…but I know it, because I lived it. But you can't tell someone that, that hasn't lived it.

As she shared stories about the school she leads and the trauma that exists in the community and all the societal issues, I realized that the stories she shared, although not directly her story, was also her story as well. She faced the same obstacles of poverty, addiction, abuse and trauma. She grew up in that neighborhood, she attended these schools, all the stories about children or families were stories of experiences she shared as well.

We branched into talking about lived experiences and how many people in power have never had these experiences to draw upon. We talked about how to empower and encourage more Indigenous people to obtain these positions of power or at least be valued and considered to have voices at the senior administration level in education. We began speaking about Indigenous knowledge and ways of being. Her perfect example of systemic racism in the education system was indicated through a story of an Indigenous student teacher that was "cause for concern" from their cooperating teacher. One day the cooperating teacher came into her office and said "I'm kind of concerned about one of the student teachers here." Evening Mist explained, "I knew right away who she was talking about, this young Indigenous man, fresh out of high school, off the reserve from a remote northern community". One of the concerns were about his quiet nature when working with the students claiming, "he just sits there". Evening Mist explained to the cooperating teacher about his demeanor, and how and why he is the way he is. She said, "do you think he's ever taught in a classroom before?" She went on to explain to them that this was likely his first ever experience in a classroom setting as a leader. Secondly, she said to them:

> Do you know where he comes from? He comes from up north where they are quiet, they don't show much expression. It doesn't mean he doesn't have knowledge, it doesn't mean he can't be a teacher. In fact, he'd likely go back home to his community to be a teacher and do really well there, where nobody else wants to go…he will be successful, but you've got to mold him, you've got to set him up for success, you've got to show him, you've got to take him by the hand and help him along the way. Because when he graduates, his community now has a certified teacher.

She explained to the cooperating teacher that he does not need to put on a full show entertaining the kids the entire time, and that there are likely kids in the classroom that are very similar to him

that need that quiet and calm demeanor. Later in the block, she was then approached by his supervisor when it was time for him to be evaluated, stating they had “one concern. I’m concerned that I asked him to create a unit plan, and he doesn’t do it”. Evening Mist replied with “has anyone given him an example? Has anyone walked him through your expectations for the unit plan? Does he know what one looks like? Has anyone shown him?” She explained to the supervisor that he needed to be supported and encouraged in ways that work for him. She says to the supervisor, there are many others that can google and research and find sample unit plans, but he needs to be shown. They called him into her office, and she said to him “Are you a leader?” after a bleak quiet response of shrugging shoulders, she said “you‘ve got to be a leader, you’ve got a bunch of little ones looking to you for guidance”. She could see the lacking confidence in his posture, so she sought out his areas of strength.

“If you were at home, up north, have you ever babysat?”

“Yes”.

“Those little ones are looking to you to be a leader. If there was danger in the house, could you make a decision to keep the kids safe and get out?”

“Yeah.”

“If the kids were hungry could you make a decision to find something in the house to make them to eat?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, it’s the same leadership in the classroom, only you are the leader in math and science or whatever you are teaching them.”

She offered up her resources, her books, her support in assisting him and to help him create his unit plans. She finally explained to the supervisor that by penalizing him, what she is doing is disempowering him by not supporting him.

We switched gears into her early experience as an educator, she told me about her experience teaching in her home community in Manitoba and how she had only lasted so long there. She explained how high the teacher turnover rate is there. When I asked her why she thinks that is, her reply was “it is so challenging”. She referred to the community trauma and high needs that exist because of dysfunction in families and communities that is so deeply rooted. She also explained what community jealousy looks like. She said, “you get the degrees, the jobs, and they hate you”. She said she was there once before too (jealous mindset, anger and hatred), she was living in poverty and carried that hate, that jealousy towards others that were successful, but she has grown now and learned from her experiences.

When I asked her about what helped her become a leader in education, she said she always had a role model, two of her sisters were also leaders in education. But even as she found herself in various leadership roles in education, she said “Even though we’re a professional, that we always carry that low self-esteem from our childhood. That we’re never good enough.” She explained that when she first became a leader, that she noticed that she had to do ten times more than others and work ten times harder just to prove herself and feel valued. “They don’t give you that value right off the hop”. I felt these words in so many ways, all the emotions inside, empathy, connection, anger, because I understood all too well what she was describing to me. We talked about how if there is opportunity for promotion, the knowledge and ways of a non-Indigenous educator would be highly considered before an Indigenous educator. On the other hand, we also talked about how doing an excellent job in your current position can often hinder

promotion and progression in your educational career. She explained how this happened to her in one of her previous roles and gave numerous examples of Indigenous people with specific skill sets being held back because they were “needed there”. She said, “in this system, you have to pick and choose your battles, and who to do that with”. We talked about the “game” of “playing white” and “convincing them” (power holders) that you are a worthy source of knowledge too. We shared multiple stories and examples of “not being valued” within the education system.

Her next story was about her experience as a vice-principal in a high school with a principal that truly did not value her. She describes, “this is how I know he didn’t value me”. She says she realized it when she was leaving that school for another position, he gave a speech and acknowledged almost every single thing she did during that time at that school. Included in this, was a side story about the struggles and hoops she had to jump through to get one of the major initiatives started at that school. It eventually came to fruition, but the story was lengthy and full of challenge and struggle to make it happen. We talked about how it should not have been so difficult, and we questioned if it would have been that difficult if she were not Indigenous, and if she would have been listened to from the very beginning. She told me how she was even able to save money and develop an entire off-campus program without adding additional dollars to fund the program. Growing up poor and becoming thrifty was something she learned from her lived experience. She said, “without that (experience), you never would’ve become creative in saving money to get programming for kids”. She then had to suffer the repercussions of “success” from the principal that did not agree with the need for the school to develop an off-campus program. Back to her story about the principal she worked with…he ended up acknowledging it all, all of her contributions to the school during her time there.

> But if he would've truly valued me, he would've truly acknowledged me and supported me during my time there. He has since become sour and refuses to even look my way. That's how I know he didn't truly value me. That's bullying. When you don't value people, you ignore their existence. I'll go to his table, but he will never come over to mine.

With all the struggles that I heard her share with me, I was reminded of the similar hurdles other Indigenous friends in leadership also faced. I asked her about what kept her going after all the hardships. It was evident that Evening Mist has repeatedly exemplified her ability to shift challenge into a positive learning experience. One instance of her positivity was crediting her experience working with that difficult principal as a time when she learned about process and protocols. She took that knowledge with her, to lead in a way that has balance. She also stated that she pays close "attention to behaviors". She told me a story about the behavior of her foster child and a ripped pair of jeans. I won't share that story, but the basis of that story was to demonstrate how Evening Mist seeks to fully understand behavior (both positive and negative) and the reasons people do what they do. She stated to me that she is very reflective. She observes, watches, listens, and learns about people to try understand them on a deeper level. This drive to get to know people on a deeper level is used to benefit her in the ability to help support people in useful ways. She claimed, "I try to figure it out". It was then, that she was reminded of something a previous colleague said to her, "you'll always have something I'll never have…that bond and connection with families and community". "It's about valuing people" she said to me. She explained that when she works with Elders or Knowledge Keepers, and if she has learned something valuable, she makes sure that she acknowledges them and makes sure that they know how they have contributed to her knowledge and learning. Referring to a lack of

acknowledgement, "if it doesn't happen, that's how you know they aren't working from here (points to her heart), they're too busy working from here (points to her head)". Although she has had her number of difficulties being in a leadership position and getting to that role, she carries all the knowledge she has gained from her experiences to move her forward in a positive way.

Throughout all the stories she told me, her true ambition to have people in her heart allows her to put those feelings of empathy into action. One instance of this is where her school had an opportunity to take kids to camp free of charge. When she excitedly announced this to the staff of the students who were selected to attend, the staff balked at the idea stating that this camp "wasn't a good fit for our kids". Completely devastated, she was not going to allow this to stop the students from taking part in this exciting opportunity. Because there were no teachers that volunteered, her and the principal made arrangements for alternate leadership at the school and took the students to camp themselves. She even went to buy thirty duffle bags so that they did not have to pack their clothes in garbage bags. "People that don't have that understanding would've never known that's what they needed. Give them that equal opportunity so that they feel good about themselves. She told me about how excited the kids were when they returned from camp that year and how they had so much fun. The following school year, they had more than enough teacher volunteers to chaperone and attend the camp with the next group of kids.

Evening Mist eagerly shared so many stories and was so excited to go on and on with sharing her journey. I ask her to share if there was anything she wished that she knew prior to her formal role as a vice-principal. She clearly outlined some differences between what it means to be Indigenous and a leader in education. "We have assumptions about how to manage. When you are an admin, you aren't just managing programs, you are managing students and families". This is even more so when working in a high needs school. She reflected on the schools she has

worked at and the various needs and experiences she had. She explained the difference from a school she worked at in an affluent neighborhood and how she infused Indigenous knowledge to teach the kids that live in their community "bubble". She said, "they always want to put us (Indigenous educators) in a high needs school. Just because we're Indigenous doesn't mean we have to work in (names a high needs school with a large Indigenous population)." I am reminded of how this feeling is similar to what Morning Sky had shared with me about her displeasure of being offered a job at an Indigenous high school. We chatted about how the system is designed for us to have to conform and to obey what is asked of us. We talked more about the inequities and how we have to be careful of how and what we say around the decision makers with positions in senior administration. Our mistakes are highlighted when they happen, and we have to be careful in how we work and carry ourselves. She gave multiple examples of Indigenous educators either being held back or reprimanded by being placed back in the classroom because of the ways they work or things they have said. A clear example we talked about was a previous Indigenous colleague of hers who relied on the opinions and support of others to make decisions. However, this community-based leadership style was not valued by the school division, thus she ended up leaving to work for an Indigenous organization. She also spoke about Indigenous ways being devalued stating "the most important thing is to start with a sharing circle, to get to know people." She presented an example of a non-Indigenous colleague that attended a workshop with her, afterwards the non-Indigenous teacher said to her, "they just did a sharing circle", emphasizing how the circle is a devalued method as a way to work with teams from non-Indigenous counterparts. She ended by saying "it doesn't matter how long and slow progress takes, we are strong people, we continue to fight no matter if we fight for 400 or 500 more years, we won't give up." This statement was no doubt a testament to her dedication to her role in

educational leadership, but also to her commitment as an Indigenous person to serve all students in a healthy, heartfelt way.

Rolling Water

My final friend that I spoke with is a principal in a school that she has worked almost her entire career in education. She started as a teacher, making her way through multiple roles at the classroom level, resource teacher, then being asked to be the vice-principal, and is now the principal of that school she knows so well. I had known of her for quite some time, and really thought she had no idea who I was until I started to notice that she would go out of her way to say “Hi Rina” whenever I was either in her school or she would see me at divisional meetings or professional development workshops. Our relationship grew from there, her smile was kind and inviting, and she reminded me a bit of my mom. I knew what her reputation was, and what people said about her. The messages were mixed with admiration of how she works and knows the community so well to condemning how she is always out of the building and never there for the staff. She spoke with a strong Indigenous accent, you could tell she did not grow up in the city. Her connection to culture and language was strong, but you would never know that from seeing her in her role as educational leader.

We met in her office after re-scheduling our meeting numerous times. I knew she was a busy lady, pulled in multiple directions constantly. I brought her some stew and bannock to have over lunch as I knew she rarely had time to even take a lunch break, let alone sit and talk with me for an hour. She explained to me earlier on the phone how we should meet at a local restaurant because “it’s so difficult to be uninterrupted”, I ended up just coming to her office to chat so we could fit our meeting in between her leadership obligations. We sat down, and immediately her phone rings. It is her daughter. She apologizes profusely and then explains to me how her

husband is in the hospital and the complications he was having from a surgery he recently had. In my head I was thinking about how she was able to cope with managing her husband's illness and leading a school. You could tell she loves the school she works at and is so dedicated to "showing up" for her staff and students, but also for the families that she supports.

Rolling Water's story began growing up in the reserve under the care of her grandparents. Her mother was somewhat part of her upbringing, but was a Residential school survivor. She told me how her mother lacked in the loving and nurturing side of parenting. She added, "don't get me wrong, she makes up for it now in the ways she loves and nurtures her grandchildren now". She credits her grandparents in making sure she went to school every day and pushed her to become the best she could be. She spoke about values such as going to sleep at a decent time, waking up early, having chores and routines. She added, "when I reflect back, if I didn't have them, I wouldn't be where I am today". Her grandparents did not go to Residential school, but her mom and dad were all forced to go. She said her grandparents spoke to them in the language (Anishinaabemowin) and taught them to garden, to can the food from the garden, and they always had animals to care for. She told me a story about how they did not have running water so they always had to get up early to go haul water and wood to make sure they had what they needed to survive. Her story reminded me of all the stories I heard growing up, her story was so similar to so many of those I heard from my older relatives. Speaking of how times have changed, she then told me about how recently her sister called her when the power went out on the reserve for a few days and how they were struggling. She said, "now a days, you can't even survive two nights without power because there are no woodstoves anymore". She reminisced about how her siblings would walk to the well and pump the water for them to use. She said, "now, our water isn't safe to drink anymore" (referring to the water in her home community).

Her story that led her to the education field started with identifying her leadership within the family. “I’m the oldest of a big family, I guess I was always the one assigned to oversee the kids, make sure they’re ok”. When she graduated from grade twelve, she went to Red River College to take a secretary course. She shared how her early career was not in education at all, but rather she worked for Manitoba Chiefs for years before going back to university in the fall of 1984. Rolling Water’s shift in education and career choice was based on how she thought she would be more effective in reaching our people by empowering them to go to school every day. Reflecting on her years in school, she states, “growing up, there was only five that graduated in my class but over thirty of us in grade nine”. She remembers being really sad that only five graduated out of the almost forty from grade nine. When I asked her what was different for her and the five that graduated, she replied “I think we were all pushed by our caregivers, and we had to be accountable. We weren’t allowed to stay out. It was the routine and the structure, and we knew what to expect”. She went on to explain how back then it was alcohol that plagued people and communities, and today it is drugs of all types. She mentioned how so many young people get caught up in that lifestyle. She shared multiple instances and examples of how her grandparents “kept her in line”.

Continuing with sharing her career path, I listened to her journey about the early years when she started at that school, a brief stint for one year back in her home reserve, then back to the city at a different school, and finally finding herself in the school she started her career where she is now the principal. Although her journey seemed so organic, so natural where she found herself in these various positions, she says she never went looking for these opportunities, but rather they just seemed to come to her. She segued into talking about additional qualifications and expanding her education, “I was going to continue my education, but I lost that drive. I

admire you if you can continue your education with kids and a fulltime job. It's so difficult, keep going". She also explained to me how the commute from her community was so tiring for her and the number of years she commuted from a community one hour north of the city after eventually getting a place in Winnipeg because she was "sick of driving". We shared stories about all the people that commute to their jobs as teachers and principals, but rather it is the opposite of her circumstance, namely the high number of educators that commute from the city to work in First Nations communities. I contribute her number of years of driving to loving her place and position in whatever role she found herself in. She demonstrates clear dedication and resiliency.

I asked her about if and when she knew she would be a principal. She told me a story about a time when she was working as a resource teacher and the current principal of that school went on a medical leave for surgery. She remembered them approaching her and asking her to be "acting vice-principal" while the principal was away. She said she finished that year as acting vice-principal, but the following year, the current vice-principal got a position in another school. It was then that she was approached again and asked if she would consider staying in the role of vice-principal at that school. That was twenty-one years ago. After multiple principals coming through that school during her time as vice-principal, she added, "two years ago I was asked if I would consider the principal position". Her response to them was "fine, but it won't be for too long…I told them I'd work with whoever is placed here and have them comfortable with the community so that I'd feel comfortable and ready to hang up my keys after thirty-one years." She said, "I don't know, I guess this is just where my path took me". We talked about how she was recruited, and how it was different from the system they use today for leadership recruitment. We discussed how today, the interview and assessment process is strict and rigid.

Rolling Water had something they saw within her, supported her, and the role tended to find her, she did not seek it out. I also wonder if this is because the former principal who first requested her to take on that acting vice-principal role was Indigenous. I wonder if she would have still been asked to step into that leadership role if the former principal was non-Indigenous. We talked more about the different approaches we see these days. I asked her if she thinks we would have more Indigenous leaders in education if we went back to the way she was recruited. In a roundabout way, she told me part of her personal experience was to take leadership courses at the recommendation of one of the former principals. She claims, “our people, we aren’t as aggressive or assertive as maybe we need to be. Like sometimes I need to remind myself that I need to speak up. I don’t like speaking for the sake of speaking”. I am reminded once again of the conversation I had with Morning Sky, and how she explained this same discomfort with filling up space with words. She continued with “don’t quote me on this but when white people get uncomfortable, they just talk talk talk talk talk”. She explained how she is the opposite, and how she is at peace with silence and solitude. “I think as Anishinaabe people, we’re taught that”. She says that with her teachings from her grandparents, she has had to re-teach herself to look at people because she remembers her grandparents saying “put your head down I’m speaking to you”. She told me how it is a deliberate conscious effort to remember to glance at people without staring when talking to people. She said a long time ago it was a sign of disrespect to stare at people when talking. I learned so much from this conversation about her path to leadership, today’s way of leadership recruitment, and the conscious efforts she puts in to conform to a Eurocentric way of what is deemed respectful communication.

I asked Rolling Water what helped her in her path towards leadership. She credits much of her success to always having strong mentors in her life, those that gently pushed her and made

suggestions or recommendations along the way, those that gave her opportunities as well. She named off multiple individuals whom she looked up to and what she learned from each one. She also spoke to how she likes to lead stating:

> I always put myself in the other persons shoes and try to feel what they feel before I make judgement. She says I want to talk to them in a way that I'd want to be talked to. I try to make people feel comfortable in any situation because in this school we deal with everything and anything. We need to make our families feel comfortable so that they trust us.

Her long career at this school has allowed her to now have relationships with parents that were students she taught from that same school. She said, "they can't fool you because you know them so well, you get to know the families". She explained to me how it is necessary to be prepared to understand the issues that are in the inner city and many people may not understand that fully with empathy. Her next story described a time where she had multiple parents come to see her about their struggles with not being able to have enough food to feed their family. She then disclosed "I don't tell anybody this…", because she finds herself routinely breaking rules about budgets and where to spend money. She continued with her story about how she deals with situations like this when it happens. She asks one of the staff members at the school to make some simple soups that would feed the families for a couple days. She said, "hamburger, macaroni, a few vegetables. I don't think I'm supposed to do that but I do it anyway to help out". She shared with me other instances when students come to school and tell her they did not eat all weekend. She explained to me how they have boxes of cereal and food and snacks to feed students in need. She said, "then they trust you", and she continued to explain how then the parents will come to her and tell her how they have a doctor's appointment but no transportation,

no bus fare to get to their appointment. “So again, I break the rules and I give them bus tokens or I give them a ride there, and tokens to take the bus back home”. When speaking of good leadership, she says, “it’s important to understand what it’s like to not have”. She shared multiple stories with me about some of the needs in the community and the ways she has helped even former students. Without it phasing her (she has dealt with it all throughout her years), she mentioned “just last week we had a student pass away, a former student…”. She told me about how she took bread, sandwich meat, and basic stuff for the Aboriginal funeral home. She says “they are so grateful and appreciative of the help they get from us, and they trust us to be there to help out”. She emphasized again how she tells her staff it is important to get to know this community and their needs and to always put yourself in their position and to try know what it is like to not have the means to provide the basic necessities. Her next story with a similar theme was unfortunately another common one she hears from the school staff. A teacher approached her about a student that had winter boots, but no indoor shoes, she says they were just falling apart and too small. To fulfill this child’s need, she instructed the teacher to go out and buy him the shoes he needs to feel good about himself. She proports that these instances build trust, and then they come to you for anything, whenever they are in need.

At this point, I was inquisitive about how we could inform others about her way of leading, also from the heart, just like Evening Mist. We talked about the differences in the way Indigenous leaders work and walk in this role. We discussed how we can use Indigenous ways and knowledge to better support all learners both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. She tells me how it is so difficult because they (referring to non-Indigenous leaders) are “by the book”. She explained to me how there is no budget line for the help and support that she provides at her school. As a side note, I had noticed throughout all my conversations with Rolling Water, and

the other Indigenous leaders that she had not, nor any of the others refer to the school they led as "their school", which I tend to hear so many non-Indigenous leaders use that terminology (my school). Continuing on, she said "you can get your hand slapped for some of the things I do". She was not sure how we could have senior administration and even the provincial education department come to an understanding of what she spends school funds on, and how to provide a budget line for some of the things she talked about. She explained that she cannot even take the money from the nutrition budget for things such as coffee and tea for a funeral. She resorted back to expressing the important part of her work which is empathy for the people she works for; the community, the students, and the families.

As we finished up our conversations and sharing of stories, I asked her about her perception of "leadership". Embracing much of an Indigenous worldview, she said to me, "I have never used the word leader. I've always felt we were all as powerful as…In terms of hierarchy, I've never viewed myself as higher or better than anyone else". She treats all staff with the highest respect and dignity, and value their contributions right from the custodians, the educational assistants, the teachers. "It doesn't matter your role in this school, I've always talked to everyone and felt they are as valuable as any of us" (referring to her and the vice-principal). She also indicated that the vice-principal also shares this equal value philosophy (also Indigenous). She named it as a "shared leadership". She did however add:

> But I also understand that the buck stops here, that I have to speak to staff when it's called for, the meetings…I guess I do have a greater responsibility and you have to understand that sometimes there's issues that you have to deal with whether you like it or not and as the person who always puts the other persons feelings first, you have to also understand what the role entails…because sometimes you might not like what you have

> to do. It's called for, but you have to do it. But I always try to work from that perspective, to be considerate and always asking how I would want that message relayed to me.

Although I knew our conversation was winding down, I could not help but ask about student learning and her influence on staff and students. She emphasized supporting staff and having expectations of accountability and engaged attendance in their professional learning communities, data review meetings, and also her role being visible in supporting them in the classroom. She says you have to make time for what is important, and she says there is a big difference now in how staff are more willing to try, more willing to share, and she says teachers are now taking the lead in their own learning and sharing it and supporting each other. She also emphasized that the success to working in a community like the inner city is making sure that the parents feel they are being heard and that we assist them with whatever they come to you with. "It's not a mandate, you need to help as much as you possibly can so that parents feel they are doing a good job. We can't be judgemental, they do the best they can with what they have".

We talked about carrying our lives into the way we work. I asked her about how we can better prepare educators and leaders. She says the bureaucracy comes into play and it is a struggle because they (non-Indigenous) are by the book and resistant to change. She suggested that maybe a program with people sharing their stories about how we lived "because we are losing that way of life". This brought up the notion of locked doors, how her and her friends used to go into her grandmother's house, make tea and something to eat, clean up and be on their way. She claimed, "you can't do that anymore, there's too much disfunction, too much drugs, alcohol, thieves, you have to lock your door now". To emphasize how times have changed, she shared one last story about a parent calling the cops on her own grade eight daughter on the weekend who was out drinking with another student. She spoke about how that parent is very comfortable

in sharing that information knowing she is not going to judge, that she is going to do whatever she can to help her. “They have to understand that we have that door open at all times, not calling CFS (child and family services) all the time, but instead trying to prevent and support them before it gets to that. If you call CFS, they have a fear, and they are reluctant to come to you because of that fear”. She always tells parents and makes sure they understand that CFS is her last resort, and that if they are not willing to work with her, then she will make that call if she needs to. She strives to encourage and provide the best possible care for their kids that attend that school.

Summary

I had found myself both excited, honoured, and drained from this process of collecting the stories from who I now call my friends. It took time to process how to fully capture their essence and do their stories justice without sharing too much or too little of who they are. I wanted to protect their identity as well as their stories and I hope my best attempt was good enough for them to feel that their contributions were honoured, and shared in a respectful way. Before writing their stories, I spent some time on the land and water reflecting on their journeys as well as my own. I took some tobacco and I offered it to the land in a remote location in order to ensure that this work was not all for nothing, and that their journeys would be respected and valued. I also asked through that tobacco to care for each and every one of them in their own healing journey and to protect them as they walk through their lives and careers as Indigenous leaders and to help them and support them and for all those ahead that follow in their path. I asked that this work be honoured respectfully, without exploitation of their stories, but to honour the learning and sharing we can do from what they were all so willing to share, explicit, raw, and uncensored.

At this point, questions may still remain in how and what we can learn from these stories shared to better inform educational leadership preparation. Throughout the next chapter, I will present what I gathered and learned from their stories and connect that to the strength-based framework of Brooke Madden's (2019) counter-stories as well as highlight their leadership qualities specific to their ways of knowing. The intention is to honour, value, and privilege the knowledge of these four leaders and to utilize their stories to inform, support, and prepare future leaders in education to walk in a way that is conducive to supporting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in walking together for a better future.

Chapter 5: The Knowledge – The Future of Educational Leadership

The current knowledge base in educational leadership does not reflect the unique and specific knowledges of Indigenous leaders in education (Cranston & Whitford, 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016). Systemic and individual racism is at the root of oppressing the voices of Indigenous people, not only in the field of education but throughout all aspects of this land we all walk on together (de Plevitz, 2007). The untold stories and unhonoured ways of knowing that have remained silenced and devalued for so long have been expressed to me through relationship and story in ways that can never be as effectively translated into text.

The thing about stories, author Thomas King (2008) reminds us, is that they shape who we are and how we understand and interact with other people. While King's declaration is true for Indigenous people, it is equally true for non-Indigenous people. In relation to this study and paraphrasing King: school leaders should not say in the years to come that they would have lead their schools and communities differently if only they had heard the stories of the courageous participants who offered me their stories as part of this research project. You've heard them now, and there is no unhearing them.

The words in these pages only begin to paint the picture of *refusal, resistance, resilience,* and *resurgence* amongst Indigenous leaders in education. There is so much to learn from their stories, and the stories of so many more that find themselves in an educational role. Stories, according to Adams, Wilson, Heavy Head, & Gordon (2015) are a way of conveying meaning to people in its own way, where it is not up to me as researcher to overtly state the story's meaning. Meaning must arise from the relationship between the story and the listener. Throughout this chapter, I seek to bring light to the meanings I gained from my context and relationship with the stories that were shared with me. I can only speak to my own learning throughout this process,

but it is my hopes that others will also see the value and knowledge within the journeys of these Indigenous leaders whom I sat with. These truths can inform, stabilize, and support not only the journeys of other Indigenous educators, but also pave a greater path to leadership for non-Indigenous educators as well.

The extant research on educational leadership neither encompasses nor includes the truth that my friends had expressed to me through their stories. Thus, the work by, and with Indigenous scholars, researchers, and educators as a valid source of knowledge and information is deemed necessary and an immediate need. The predominantly Eurocentric frameworks that dominate leadership theory neglect to open doors to alternative ways of being, knowing, and leading. Although there are scholars (for examples see: Ahnee-Benham & Napier 2002; Battiste 2002, 2013; Fallon & Paquette 2014; Fitzgerald 2003; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016) who present the need to re-conceive and practice school leadership within culturally-relevant educational contexts, such commitments have yet to be demonstrated in practice on a broad scale wherein non-Indigenous leaders learn from Indigenous leaders in addressing the educational disparities that beset Indigenous students.

It has been my life's work to understand more deeply the inequities amongst our society between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, more specifically, what this means for the education of our children and future generations. Fallon and Paquette (2014, p.194) contend that the knowledge base of school leadership is grounded within a 'Eurocentric epistemic and ontological field' which has resulted in overwhelmingly robust challenges for those committed to improving educational opportunities for Indigenous students. In addition, Khalifa et al. (2016) support the conclusion that "the dominant hegemonic (often White, Westernised) ways of understanding and practicing school leadership have been detrimental for minoritized students"

(p.15). I have learned that in order to fully reconcile the fragmented relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, that not only must the truth be known, but a shift in mindset is essential in order to create a space for the acceptance and valuing of Indigenous perspectives and worldview. This valuable knowledge can inform not only educational leadership practices, but in other areas where colonial hierarchical systems are so protected and put in place to benefit the dominant society, thus completely negating any Indigenous contributions. These current practices that seek to preserve this knowledge base of school leadership and strive to perpetuate the values and philosophy of the dominant group, is a form of epistemic injustice (Bhargava, 2013). Epistemic injustice occurs when the concepts and categories by which a people understand themselves, their world and develop their worldview is replaced or adversely affected by the concepts and categories of the colonizers (Bhargava). Thus, if we are to develop an education system that aims to develop the potential of Indigenous children and youth, we must both think and also speak critically about our current education system, and question the efficacy of current leadership practices to examine if they are aimed towards educating for the success of all students; both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

Through the research goal of seeking to find out what can be learned from Indigenous leaders in education, I have discovered that there is no “one size fits all” approach to decolonizing or shifting leadership practices to be more inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. What I have are presented are stories that are currently and historically suppressed and untold in the world of education that is so engrained within Eurocentric hegemony. I have learned that in order for Indigenous leaders to guide current and future leadership preparation and programming, that we first need to re-story the rhetoric of what it means to be a leader, and who we get this information from. Just as our history books have told

only one story of European saviours that discovered and established this country, we need to hear and value Indigenous voice and question why their knowledge is still silenced. In order to do this, we have to unpack our own stories, we all have a story that unveils our relationship to this land and to Indigenous peoples. We have to question our biases, identify our own values, and open our minds to an alternative perspective, an alternative way of being and doing educational leadership.

Madden's (2019) framework seeks to provide the platform for re-storying by inviting us to hear and value their stories in a strength-based manner rather than dwell on trauma, hardships, and victimhood. To see strength in Indigenous leadership is to unpack our own stories and open our minds to see stories of strength and knowledge within Indigenous leaders. We need to build relationship with Indigenous leaders and with their stories.

Wilson, Breen, and DuPré (2020) state that we learn most when we are open to seeing in new ways and there is nothing quite like a good story or conversation to help us. Thus, this research study is more than simply a series of interviews with Indigenous leaders in education. It represents the stories we shared that talked about life, education, and work. I learned that when working alongside Indigenous leaders, it takes time, relationships, and stories to begin to understand their ways more deeply. This process was as much about who we were than about what we do. We embraced our Indigeneity, our ways of being together. The protocol that embraces respect and reciprocity of offering tobacco shifted the dynamic of our conversations with each other. Our connection and communication was natural and it flowed. This brought a sense of ease and comfort that many Indigenous leaders are not often privy to. I tried to include some of the compelling points they made through story, which was difficult to put words on paper in a way that was as meaningful as it was to be able to sit with them and hear their voices,

see their body language, and feel their emotion through the experience. In order to make sense of it all, I will highlight their strengths that emerged throughout their stories and how Madden's (2019) re-storying framework can help us all understand and value their contributions to informing educational leadership from a strength-based perspective to work towards honouring the truth and doing the work needed for reconciliation. Although this framework seeks to re-story through a curriculum lens, the theory and ideas behind unveiling strength through truth applies to all areas of Indigenous livelihood; a life that has, and is seen and viewed as an entity not worthy of such a name. In addition to the re-storying framework (2019), it was also imperative to account for the commonalities of importance to informing the specifics of educational leadership that resonated throughout their stories. These ways of being, as identified by the Indigenous leaders whom I sat with, confirmed my anticipated presumptions that they are well aware of the value they bring to their leadership role, and have much to offer to those that want to listen and learn.

Refusal

Madden (2019) describes the acts of *refusal* as denying participation in colonial systems despite ongoing threats to safety and wellness. As I listen and learn from Indigenous leaders in education, I am aware and can explicitly name the instances where *refusal* was evident within their life journey. I cannot help but also be explicitly aware of how these instances of strong Indigenous men and women pushing back against colonial systems made them feel and continue to feel the repercussions of their actions because their *refusal* is often perceived as the "angry Indian" or the "troublemaker". This results in a fear amongst powerholders that they are somehow losing "control" of these individuals often stating they have gone "rogue". On the other hand, Indigenous leaders in education that express this *refusal* innately feel the oppression

that systems place upon them with an overhanging weight of looming fear that impacts their health and wellbeing. The essential learning within the stories is to identify these instances as strength both within the stories shared and when witness to this injustice in Canada's systems and society.

Thunder Cloud, is one that prides himself in being able to "walk in both worlds", however it was evident at a young age that he exhibited *refusal* as a source of strength. This strong young man was easily categorized into the stereotype of "troublemaker", expressing his *refusal* through what colonial perspectives would call "defiant". I was able to see how his strength, his "no bull shit ways" have allowed him to pursue and tackle the struggles of what it means to be an Indigenous leader in education. He expressed to me an instance in his teenage years experiencing homelessness at a young age due to his step-father's (non-Indigenous) influence on insisting he was to attend a Catholic school. It is saddening that an Indigenous youth would rather live on the streets than be subject to abuse and discrimination at school and at home. His distaste for schooling in which he states, "didn't need a piece of paper to be smart", expresses his early feelings towards the Eurocentric colonial system of credentials in which he *refused* to participate in. It is his reasoning today that he has overcome such struggle and challenge to be able to shape schooling for children so that they do not have to experience the injustices he faced in his own educational experience. He expressed forms of *refusal* by advocating and adopting his integration of his Indigeneity into his leadership ways in service of Indigenous students and families. If more people in leadership positions could view the perspective of children that demonstrate this behaviour as a source of strength, passions could be planned for and guided to a safer, healthier place of upbringing, education, and ultimately their career.

Morning Sky had lived a life engrained with *refusal* taught to her from her mother's experiences and challenges that she refers to as "fight or flight". Her mother had raised all the children constantly on the run, in fear of colonial systems taking over the family, namely that of Child and Family Services, and the Sixties Scoop. This led to a transient life which equipped Morning Sky with vast lived experiences that drive her current day *refusal* in her leadership role such that she is more apt to speak out and not tolerate when the education system is not adequately servicing the students within the schools she leads. She states, "There is fear to speak up because of what can happen to your career, but I'm at that point where I don't care and I have to start speaking up". Her influence is far greater now that she has overcome this fear that so many face within the system. It is a fear that should not be, and although those individuals in places of power, senior administration, and human resources may not even be aware of their implicit bias towards Indigenous educators, they continue to label Indigenous leaders' *refusal* as "outspoken", "too forceful", and ultimately "not the right fit".

Evening Mist demonstrates such positivity and inexhaustible motivation when working in and out of her leadership role. I feel that she exhibits leadership qualities in both her professional and personal life. Her instances of *refusal* are evident in how she *refuses* to accept the injustices towards Indigenous students and families inflicted upon them by colonial societal standards. She shared with me a story about the opportunity that was offered for Indigenous students at her school to go on a three-day camp, all expenses paid. When she proposed this to the staff, the idea was shut down completely, similar to a human resources response to hiring Indigenous personnel, the staff voiced their concern being that those students were "not the right fit" for this camp. She *refused* to accept their negative views on the Indigenous students they serve and made the trip happen for these students by taking them herself, purchasing them all duffle bags, and

allowing them equal opportunity to experience an adventure and a life beyond their neighborhood. She just made it happen.

Rolling Water, a principal at a high needs school, provided multiple instances where she too *refused* and continues to *refuse* colonial systems and protocols that are meant to service the needs of all children in the education system. She talked to me about the budget lines they are all to follow, and how strict the accountants are on what can and cannot be charged to specific budgets. She shared numerous stories of children and families with varying needs such as food, clothing, and proper footwear. This support also extended towards community needs, such as when a family loses a child. She tends to all those needs that do not have an explicit budget line and *refuses* to accept that she is "not allowed" to purchase food to feed children, purchase clothing to keep them warm, and shoes to allow them to attend school. She is resourceful and creative in her abilities to meet the needs of families, and because of this *refusal* to obey systematic rules, the families and the community see her as a person of trust. They come to her when they have problems, and without judgement she is there to support both in and out of the classroom, a wholistic way of caring for the community.

All the examples of *refusal* can be viewed from both a negative and positive light. However, when you look at the resulting consequences of their actions it always comes down to benefitting the students and families they work with and work for. The immense courage that it takes to go against rules put in place should not have to exist when it comes to benefitting students' needs, comfort, and safety. When sharing these stories, they were all aware of how "wrong" their actions were, but *refused* to live in fear any longer in their roles as educational leaders. If more leaders had the courage to stand up for what is right, and were more aware of the oppression our systems place upon Indigenous peoples, they could see how the actions and

decision making of these Indigenous leaders made an impact on so many of the students and families they serve.

Resistance

The counter stories of *resistance* demonstrate Indigenous communities gathering together to address the injustices placed upon them (Madden, 2019). When analyzing the stories for instances of *resistance* I found that many of the leaders may not have had a community to gather with, but rather were the individual voice of *resistance* against the injustices. Many even stated that they feel alone in their Indigenous voice amongst a sea of mainly white leaders in education. This goes to exemplify the gap between the sheer number of Indigenous leaders and Indigenous educators, to the numbers of non-Indigenous leaders (predominantly white), and non-Indigenous educators. The representation of the demographics of leaders and educators in schools in Manitoba lacks to reflect the diversity of the student body. This issue needs to be addressed by shifting systems so that more Indigenous educators are valued, honoured, and their voices seen as a strength and asset to educational systems for the good of all children.

Thunder Cloud has come a long way in his own learning and appreciation for where his identity and culture have an influence on education. As a school principal, he has the ability to make decisions and shape the way staff, students, and community view the issues that follow Indigenous students within his school. His act of *resistance* has been a point of growth for him where he states how his former leadership practices were all about "prescription, policy, and structure", to now his focus as an Indigenous leader is to "build community, embrace the Seven Teachings, and work towards restorative practices". Within his efforts, he has included community in revitalizing Indigenous representation within school content and pedagogy.

Through Morning Sky's stories, it seemed as though she walked her path often times alone with intermittent support through various individuals or organizations along the way. Her acts of *resistance* are evident through her current involvement in organizations she feels provide her a platform to instill change in mindsets that allow those in privileged positions to question their own thought process and decisions. She explains her advocacy to "give people voice that don't have one", as she remembers her days when she herself "didn't have a voice" just yet. Her lived experiences drive her towards questioning, pushing, and challenging peoples thinking. She proports, "It's time to start calling people out on their views whether they use humour or not, it's their beliefs". I feel she has stepped beyond "educational leader" and also can be perceived as "educational advocate" by *resisting* the norms of how we use language, humour, and ultimately how it is used to influence others.

It is hard to typically categorize Evening Mist as an individual that exemplifies *resistance*, as she has always found a way to act *for* versus *against*. Within her story of accompanying a non-Indigenous teacher to a workshop, you can see her strength in her firm roots by defending the format and pedagogy of that particular workshop, correcting her colleague at the statement "they just did a Sharing Circle". In response to that statement, she gives the rationale behind the Sharing Circle, and then follows up her story with the message "it doesn't matter how long and slow progress takes, we are strong people, we continue to fight for 400 or 500 more years, we won't give up." It was at that point in time, I witnessed the source of her positive spark unveil itself. Coming from a place of injustice and delayed progress, she is able to ignite her spark to inform others of the beauty and benefit of the ways of doing originating from her people, thus *resisting* to allow harmful mindsets to sink into the classroom.

Rolling Water expresses her act of *resistance* through the way she leads and the language she uses in her role. Not only does she claim to “break the rules” to support students and families in need, but she also demonstrates *resistance* through her way of leading by not conforming to traditional hierarchical models of leadership. She says “I’ve never used the word leader. I’ve always felt as we were all as powerful…”, she explains that she treats all staff, students, parents, and community with the utmost respect and dignity that she herself would want to feel. Although she may not be the loudest in the room, she uses her ways of being and leading to work *with* versus working *on* or *for*.

Resilience

It is difficult and near impossible to provide explicit instances where *resilience* was evident throughout the stories. It is not because it is not evident, but rather the opposite where I feel their entire being is an act of *resilience*, the fact that they are where they are today is an act of *resilience*. I often left these talks feeling almost defeated and speechless wondering how they had overcome such trauma, such obstacles and barriers to survive, let alone get to where they are today. Even more so, it is imperative to identify that they have not *overcome* trauma, they live it and breathe it every day. They are at various points in their healing journeys. The simple fact of these individuals being in educational leadership positions despite the systemic assault inherently and directly given to them is in itself an act of *resilience*. The fact that they are all alive and walking this earth is an act of *resilience*. Madden’s (2019) explanation of the demonstration of *resilience* in this context is “the incredible ability of Indigenous peoples and Nations to overcome systemic assault on ways-of-knowing and ways-of-being”. The education system as a whole is arguably one of the most influential systems of oppression enacting assault on Indigenous identity at the very least. These individuals, my friends have not “made it”, they are

living it, every single day both in and out of their professional role. These stories were not simply stories of empathy, strength, and struggle, but they are stories we can all learn from. People need to know this. Although they all have experiences of varying degrees in how their *resilience* is expressed, the important piece is that the stories they shared are not their complete journey, but rather a small part of the path they are on. They will have days of strength and days of struggle. It is important for us all to not deny the fact that these leaders will continue to navigate the colonial system in ways that non-Indigenous counterparts will not have to. They walk on with their journey, they are all aware that this work is never complete, that they are contributing to a better tomorrow for all students, for all Canadians.

Resurgence

The immense trauma filled stories that hung in the air and absorbed into my being often left me feeling defeated, unmotivated, and at times, angry. I carried that trauma shared with me, and it brought up my own lived experiences and struggles. These stories made me question why it has to be this way? Why should we have to fight? Why should we have to go through this (trauma)? Why does progress have to be so slow? From these questions, it was like I too had to live through their journey and pain to see and feel their healing journey to be where they are today; a task non-Indigenous leaders never have to think of or live through. This *resurgence* emphasizes the healing and reclamation of who they are as Indigenous people as well as who they are as Indigenous leaders in education. I gained my motivation, my own *resurgence* through vicariously sharing theirs, perhaps others can as well. If we do not support each other through this work, if we do not begin to build allies with non-Indigenous people, if we do not start valuing this important work and these voices of strength, our children will never be able to also feel this *resurgence*.

As easy as it is to share these stories as if it were the final path, we were merely gifted with a snapshot of their lives that brought them into the place they are today. This *resurgence* of their own healing means that what I was privileged to hearing is only the beginning of the impact they will make in their lifetime. Thunder Cloud, has begun reclaiming his Indigenous identity through ceremony and sharing that within the school he leads. Morning Sky, advocates and fights back against oppressive systems through voice. Evening Mist, uses her lived experiences to problem solve in today's education world. Rolling Water applies her Indigenous ways of being to service the needs of students and community. Through these stories, I can comprehend the value and continuation of the work they have done up until now, and continue to do. My hopes for this research are that more and more Indigenous voice is valued such that Indigenous knowledges can be brought into leadership practices and theory. In addition, that more educators and systems will make space for learning from Indigenous leaders in education.

Informing the Now, Preparing for the Future

While I can describe in words what I learned from this process, the research process, and my own journey throughout this endeavor, it is important to locate that the learning belongs to me in relation to the context within this research. I am not separate from the research process. It shaped my understanding of myself and of the others I spent time with and learned from as I and they mutually shaped our interactions in the form of a study (Berger & Luckman, 1966).

What I can share, and what I hope will be valued is that the entire system of education, as a whole, needs to make space for Indigenous knowledges within the way we all work and how we all understand our work as leaders if Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, families and staff are to all flourish as fully developed people. I will reiterate once again that we need to interrogate, revisit, and redesign the current models and practices of school leadership because

most are modelled on direct vestiges of colonial administrative practices, which were and still are intended to remove Indigenous epistemologies, languages, religions, and practices, and replace them with those of Western Europeans (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016). What is needed is a decolonized approach to school leader preparation that can better inform and equip school leaders with a sense of how they can meet the needs of the changing racialized demographics of Canada, and honour the promise made to the Indigenous peoples who have lived and learned on their lands before the colonial settlers made contact (Cranston & Whitford, 2018). The findings of this study offer insight how such a commitment to decolonized approaches to school leadership might be enacted.

Firstly, it means putting a microscope on the systemic barriers for Indigenous peoples so that educational leaders can critically examine such questions as: What contributing factors continue to oppress Indigenous peoples and how do our actions, decisions, and values perpetuate systemic and explicit racism? Instances unveiled themselves within the stories of these Indigenous leaders that exemplified clearly the need to change the narrative of what it means to be an Indigenous leader in education. Statements like “the system isn’t designed for us to succeed”, and variations of having to “walk in both worlds”, knowing how to “play the game”, “not being your authentic self”, lean towards Indigenous leaders having to conform to the dominant, Eurocentric value system in order to achieve “success”. We need a knowledge base where non-Indigenous school leaders ‘shift from a colonial deficit to an Indigenous, rights-based mindset’ (Ma Rhea 2015, p.155). The ongoing systemic assault on Indigenous leaders is exhausting. Identifying the sources of oppression both systemic and individually are only a first step in revisiting our existing leadership preparation and practices.

The second inference to reimaging an alternative leadership knowledge base is to connect school leaders and leadership preparation with Indigenous people and within Indigenous communities (Cranston & Whitford, 2018). Becoming cross-culturally or inter-culturally competent does not happen without leaders undertaking a reflexive process of decolonization that involves them unpacking the accumulated cultural baggage acquired via power and privilege (Dean, 2001). In order to educate ourselves on Indigenous ways of being, we have to be with Indigenous people and in relationship in Indigenous ways. Inviting Indigenous representation to non-Indigenous meetings, dinners, or outings defeats the purpose of “making space”, this would be an example of “inviting them into your space” without authentically reciprocating.

I can honestly say that with extensive lived experience of “being with” Indigenous peoples, growing up as an Indigenous person in an Indigenous community, I would have never learned what I learned if I did not sit with, attentively listen, and work to learn from their stories and them. To simply “be with” a person is not enough. The knowledges that Indigenous school leaders possess need to be valued and followed. In order to do this with respect, non-Indigenous educational leaders must work to understand their biases, deep-seated values, and acquired knowledge and once surfaced they must suspend them to create space to learn.

The leaders that I sat with spoke of acknowledging people as individuals with value and knowledge, where trust is built. Themes of connecting and collaborating as a community resonates throughout their stories. Learning through story by building trust and doing things together by laughing, talking, listening, learning emerged as an Indigenous way of being and leading. This work involves more than “action research”, it is a lived research that takes time, effort, and a questioning of one’s own practices, decisions, and ways of leading. DuPré (2020, p.3) proports that “if institutions rush to increase Indigenous presence through tokenism and

oversimplified, pan-Indigenous understandings of Indigeneity then the result will continue to be more colonial paternalism". This work of shifting the way we do leadership involves letting down guards, opening conversations, naming, and changing the current ways in which we prepare and demonstrate leadership in educational settings to privilege Indigenous ways of being.

Finally, real change designed to support Indigenous students requires educational leaders to tear down the colonial walls erected within the education system that continue to deny Indigenous children, youth and their families their inherent rights and their Treaty rights. It means rebuilding an education system that will benefit Indigenous children while it simultaneously benefits all children. The leaders who shared their learnings with me in this study mentioned instances where they went above and beyond to lead from their hearts and not from anything they read in a book. These Indigenous leaders see themselves in the community, in the trauma, the struggles and hardships of the families, and strive to meet their needs whether it is through advocating, bending the rules, and fulfilling needs that cannot be met from colonial leadership rules put in place. This is true reciprocity and respect in educational leadership. This looks like re-imagining what a school system can look like that makes shifts in decolonizing practices in ways that are applicable, relevant, and appropriate for tomorrow's education. As part of the expansive colonial enterprise, Eurocentric knowledge and ways of learning were imposed through oppressive institutions such as Indian Residential schools. In order to make way for this colonial genocide to occur, Indigenous ways of learning were diminished, negated and destroyed; as were Indigenous knowledges (Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada, 2015).

Considering the points I have mentioned above, some practicalities of what decolonizing preparation and programming for educational leadership could look like is multifaceted. It could involve bringing Indigenous educators together to "be Indigenous", to bond, build relationships, share strengths, making space for them to be their authentic selves within their professional roles. Both historically and currently, Indigenous peoples are a community-based people that rely on the strengths of the collective to flourish and succeed. Providing the time and space for this work would allow those with particular skill sets and strengths to be able to share and support their Indigenous colleagues, thus strengthening the group as a whole. In addition to a collective Indigenous space for professional development, recruitment and hiring policies need to change in order for human resources to implement practices that are conducive to Indigenous ways of knowing. Such policy changes should include some form of cultural competency training that educates human resources personnel of the unique history of Indigenous peoples, cultural knowledge, and how this informs who Indigenous people are today and the way they work. One final recommendation would be that professional development for the purposes of training educational leaders should be informed and led by Indigenous leaders in education. In order to increase Indigenous representation in leadership positions, as well as provide effective leadership that guides schools to providing a more inclusive and equitable learning space for children, these are the first steps towards decolonizing educational leadership preparation and practices.

Although Indigenous peoples are diverse and unique amongst specific groups and families, there are themes that unveiled themselves that were specific to how these Indigenous Leaders in education lived, worked, and walked. These specifics and nuances that were revealed through the stories can be seen in a summary list in the table below of what Indigenous leadership looks like:

Table 1

Summary of Indigenous Leadership

- Lead from the Heart, not by the Book
- Reciprocity and Respect
- Non-Hierarchical – Built on Trust
- Progressive Leadership
- Non-Assertive - Humble
- Community-Based - Shared Leadership
- Never Asked - Indigenous Leaders Need Opportunities to Feel Important and Share Their Ways of Leading
- Embeds Indigenous Cultural Knowledge

What this study aims to emphasize, is the need to draw on the current and historical forms of Indigenous educational leadership practices and theory to inform current day procedures and policies. This endeavor is an ongoing journey and will take bravery, courage, and confidence in Indigenous leaders, educators, peoples, and students for power holders to let down the patriarchal hierarchy of control and conformity the existing system has in place and demonstrate the asset Indigenous knowledges can bring to education. Indigenous leaders need opportunities to feel important and share their ways of leading. It is within Indigenous ways not to volunteer to put this knowledge at the forefront assertively, but will happily share and step forward when asked. These leaders all mentioned to some dynamic in their perception of leadership of “not holding yourself above anyone else”. Within the stories they speak of humility and holding their leadership ways on equal power and footing within all those that work with,

and alongside them. I feel the humble nature of many Indigenous leaders in education is notable as being an identifiable way of being and leading from an Indigenous perspective. Some even referenced a "shared leadership", but I feel they have the respect of those whom they work with in which their staff would still see them as respectful leaders they seek guidance from. By acknowledging the varying socio-political and ethno-cultural differences that are part of students' lives, school leaders can work together, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous to challenge power and privilege that advantages a few while oppressing many. Leaders can also leverage their individual and collective agencies to open doors to further educational opportunity for students who deserve and need them the most (Dei & James, 2002).

Lastly, it means looking at Indigenous peoples in a different way, beyond credentials and reputations. It is time to get out of the imploding deficit trauma box we tend to throw Indigenous stories into. As Fleming (2006, p. 213) states, "most non-Indians don't know a great deal about the first peoples of the Americas, but what's worse is that much of what they do 'know' is wrong." The greater colonial mindset needs to pass on inflicting the pity, guilt, and fragility that this topic exposes and begin to shift thinking towards believing that Indigenous peoples are smart, capable, competent, strong, resilient, and knowledgeable.

Many Indigenous peoples, as well as these leaders I spoke with, struggle with self-esteem and believing in themselves. Non-Indigenous counterparts need to support Indigenous strengths by honouring Indigenous voice in authentic ways, not just inviting them to sit at the table or to fit an Indigenous representation quota. Most importantly, we need to stop labelling Indigenous leaders in education as having "made-it". They are, as the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada rightly identified (2015, p. 207) "women and men who have resilience, courage, and vision," but are also Indigenous people who are living their healing

journey every single day. Of the Indigenous leaders I spoke with, they all have traumatic pasts and negative experiences in school. They all struggle, they are all in their own healing journey. Many even mention the cycle of self-sabotage, and the struggle to step into a role that others aspire to be in. They speak of the difficulties in their journey and how things just come harder for them and the slow rate of progress. These leaders are coping with the direct and the intergenerational trauma heaved upon them and fighting back against it as best they can. However, they are not removed from it.

The stories shared flowed so naturally that rarely were prompting questions required to seek information. Some reoccurring themes that did not fit within the re-storying framework of *refusal, resistance, resilience, and resurgence* , were instances that led to understanding how specific nuances within their Indigeneity could inform leadership preparation and also support the development of more Indigenous leadership representation. A commonality amongst the Indigenous leaders I spoke with was the embraced a sense of collective or community knowledge in either their path or their practice. Many of the leaders had a support person or system of some sort whether it be grandparents, caregivers, organizations, or colleagues. They spoke of shared leadership where they had someone to push them or learn from. This experiential learning, both positive and negative was indicated as an asset to their role in school leadership.

The stories were also embedded with notions of humility within seeking leadership roles whereas leadership comes to them rather than them seeking out these positions of power. Upon this realization, it is no surprise that all of the Indigenous leaders I spoke with did not attain the *Manitoba Certificate in School Leadership.* Thus, supporting their decision whether explicitly or not, was statements that inferred this credential as unnecessary in carrying on their role as an effective leader. Rather than follow a prescription of linear steps to leadership, the skillset and

experiences they held were deemed more valuable than a series of courses designed to equip and enforce much of a colonial Eurocentric framework of what it means to be an effective leader. I am left pondering how their contributions can inform a re-working of the *Manitoba Certificate in School Leadership*. Furthermore, I am also left questioning the value of this certificate, who it is for, and who benefits from attaining this credential. Is it imperative that Manitoba have this certificate, and does it indeed qualify and equip an educational leader for today's education system? I can conclude that any mention of certificates, formal professional development, and leadership preparation was not a highly valued consideration that led them to believe was a necessity within their path to leadership in education.

Amongst their humble way of leading, they also spoke of their distinctive communication style. The cohesion amongst their stories is that they do not strive to be the loudest in the room with the most knowledge. They state that they do not feel a need to fill the air with words. The examples they give point directly to the flaws within recruitment systems such as "not interviewing well" or "not as aggressive or assertive" nor do they feel a need to be in order to work effectively within their leadership role.

Their lessons to guide and inform leadership preparation brought a wealth of contribution as though they awaited their entire lives to be asked. In addition to the conclusions I drew upon from my relationship to their stories, they spoke explicitly of ongoing professional learning that embedded Indigenous cultural knowledge. This ranged from workshops on Indigenous history and perspectives to ongoing learning on the land alongside Indigenous leaders and Knowledge Keepers. They also mentioned the value of experiential learning equating a liner path to leadership as a very Eurocentric path versus learning by doing and connecting as an Indigenous way of learning. Thunder Cloud elaborated on his role as an administrator stating that he equates

his work with that of Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders in which you work to serve the community and as a person they seek guidance from. He says, “our people have been doing this all along”. He also comments on his own leadership transformation from that of “policy, prescription, and procedures, to that of building community, embracing the Seven Teachings, and restorative practices”. This lived experience Indigenous leaders draw upon not only brings an entirely different way of being and leading, but also informs their decision making and creative problem solving in being resourceful to service the needs of their students and families the best they can. The basis of this learning is that the education system and all that play a role within that system have much to learn from the experiences and knowledge that Indigenous leaders bring to the field of education.

Based upon the status of educational achievement of Indigenous peoples in Canada and in light of the final report of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), it is imperative that in order to meet the needs of Indigenous students, there is a need to reform the training and professional development of school leaders (Cranston & Whitford, 2018). We are more than tokens, check boxes, and quotas. We have voice, we have vision, we have ingrained & inherent leadership skills that walk and talk amongst this Eurocentric system in unique ways. It is time to look, listen, learn, and live with Indigenous leaders, beside Indigenous leaders, and to honour and value Indigenous leadership ways of being, doing, and living. Listen to the stories, learn from their being, and practice reflecting and acting upon alternative perspectives for the good of this diverse and changing Canada.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your journey of how you got to your current leadership role in education.
    - What was the involvement of family, culture and language, relationship to the land, and education (informal and formal)?
    - Did you always know you would be a leader, if not, when did you start to identify as a leader?
    - Are there any stories of significance that led to your leadership role in education?
2. What colonial systems worked and/or did not work for your development and attainment of a leadership role?
3. What did preparation look like for your leadership role in education?
    - What helped prepare you for your leadership role?
    - What did not prepare you for your leadership role?
    - Were there any individuals that were instrumental in being where are today as a leader? What role did they play?
4. What did you wish you knew prior to your leadership role in education?
    - Were their any surprises that came your way?
5. Have your perceptions of leadership changed over time?
    - How do you define a leader today vs. then (past tense, throughout life)
6. How can we use Indigenous leadership knowledges to inform other prospective leaders both Indigenous and non-Indigenous?
    - How do we use what you know today to drive student learning through leadership?

Appendix B: ENREB Ethics Approval

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PROTOCOL APPROVAL

TO: **Rina Whitford** **(Advisor: Jerome Cranston)**
Principal Investigator

FROM: **Zana Lutfiyya, Chair**
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: **Protocol #E2019:060 (HS23046)**
Honouring the Knowledges of Indigenous Leaders in Education

Effective: November 6, 2019 **Expiry:** November 6, 2020

Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) has reviewed and approved the above research. ENREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is granted for the research and purposes described in the application only.
2. Any modification to the research or research materials must be submitted to ENREB for approval before implementation.
3. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to ENREB as soon as possible.
4. This approval is valid for one year only and a Renewal Request must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.
5. A Study Closure form must be submitted to ENREB when the research is complete or terminated.
6. The University of Manitoba may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba *Ethics of Research Involving Humans*.

Funded Protocols:

- **Please e-mail a copy of this Approval, identifying the related UM Project Number, to the Research Grants Officer at researchgrants@umanitoba.ca**