

AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER'S JOURNEY TO CULTIVATE RECONCILIATION

By

Mary-Jo Hovorka-Seymour

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ABSTRACT

The ability of an educational leader to look beyond what one views as normal is the first step to beginning a reconciliatory journey. The second step is to see the potential in cultivating a school culture that encompasses Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With—An Indigenous Education Policy Framework*, developed in collaboration with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (2022) includes four action-based strategies outlining the foundations of an Indigenous-inclusive education system. The curiosity of how educational leaders are currently cultivating a culture of reconciliation through the acquisition of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives directly relates to the documents vision. The purpose of this research was to explore how educational leaders have adapted their practice by utilizing the four action-based strategies. With use of the four action-based strategies outlined in the *Mamàhtawisiwin* as the theoretical framework, the overall aim of the research was to develop a set of wisdoms that would assist and support an educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation.

A descriptive research study was the methodology utilized by conducting virtual interviews with non-Indigenous and Indigenous educational leaders. This descriptive research study design required listening to the stories, acquiring knowledge, acknowledging perspectives, and analyzing the dynamic relationships to identify attributes and strategies that could be utilized by other educational leaders to improve school cultures for the benefit of reconciliation. The objective of the descriptive research study was to explore how educational leaders nurtured school cultures by employing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My life began with the two people who brought me into the world, and I will start by acknowledging my parents as they have nurtured and supported my wild and free spirit with unconditional love. They role modelled a work ethic and a sense of community that gave me the confidence to believe in my chosen path and their daily actions continue to inspire me to be strong and proud as I pursue my lifelong educational journey. Along my journey, the choices I made led me to meet my forever, White Wolf, whose humility, and way of life has taught me patience, appreciation and how to be a better person every day. I want to acknowledge my husband, our four amazing children (Circling Wind Woman, Running Round Wolf, Blue Thunderbird Girl, and Eagle Boy), and our numerous pets and thank all of them for their unconditional love, support, patience, and understanding while I focused on my studies. Throughout my journey, I have been challenged and guided by a community of family and friends such as my siblings, my second family, my in-laws, and the countless special friends and colleagues who I consider family as each one has gifted me with their knowledge and perspective. I would also like to thank the continuous support, guidance, and wisdom of Dr. Frank Deer and his colleagues, Marti Ford & Lucy Delgado. We tend to cross paths with those who are meant to nurture our lives, and the trio helped me gain immense knowledge and perspectives on my learning journey. If it was not for the opportunities, interactions, and influences of all the above people who are forever imprinted on my heart and spirit, I would never be where I am at today and I want to acknowledge their impact on my educational journey and thank them for who I am today. I am Circling-Round Eagle, and I will always be giving back the love, knowledge and perspective received and will continue to watch over those in need, to unearth purpose so hope can soar.

Dedication

To my parents,

Doris (née Côté) & Marvin Hovorka

You loved me,

You made me wonder,

You believed in me,

You were always there for me.

I am your seed,

I am your hope,

I am your future,

Generations will sprout.

To my forever,

Cory, Destiny, Joshua, Skyla, and Talon Seymour

I will love you,

I will make you wonder,

I will believe in you,

I will always be there for you.

You are my seeds,

You are my hope,

You are my future,

Generations will flourish.

I thank you all for supporting me along my journey.

Enjoy the poems as I wrote them with you in mind.

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CHAPTER 1 TILING THE SOIL

I lay my hand on Mother Earth,
To show my appreciation,
For the gifts of rooted knowledge.

I feel the richness of the soils,
Between my fingers,
I feel the separation.

I do not feel prepared,
I have mixed feelings and emotions,
As I loosen the dirt beneath me,

I continue to till the soil with my hands.
To upheave and infuse,
A newfound perspective of togetherness.

I wonder...what I have to offer and share?
Besides Controlling the weeds,
And breaking down the barriers.

Tiling the soil takes much hard work,
To build a safe space
For all the seeds to grow...

Introduction (Tiling the Soil)

When I think back to my education growing up, I truly felt something was missing and a part of me was yet to be discovered. I was a curious child, and I asked a lot of questions and the answers that were given to me never seemed satisfactory. I was very inquisitive, observant, and challenging, and often asked my teachers why I needed to learn the concepts in front of me and the answers that were given patronized my wonder. I found many of the learning concepts boring, but I would do the work like any other student because I did not want to stand out as being different. I could not wait for the bell to ring at the end of the day as weekends, spring break, and summer break offered the freedom that I yearned for daily. The ability to hang out with my friends and go play outside from morning until dark was the discovery time that I needed so I rarely complained of boredom to my parents. I always felt a connection to the land, yet I did not have the opportunity to explore that within the school system.

The friends that I surrounded myself with were my next-door neighbours, who I always considered as family. We spent hours outside exploring the area and sometimes we found trouble with all our shenanigans and adventures. Growing up from a young age together, I never saw them as being different from me and others despite the differing shades of our skin. We were like family and that is all that mattered to us as children, as youth, and as adults. I do not recall anyone openly talking about being Indigenous in school nor did anyone want to be identified with being Indigenous in school during the early 80's. I also do not recall being taught about Indigenous knowledge or perspectives in school, but I do remember the stereotypical images and descriptions depicted in books and in the classroom materials when I was taught about the Indigenous peoples and the history of Indigenous peoples. However, I did not identify my friends nor my family with those stereotypes as the images felt like a piece of history lost in translation. The one childhood memory that I have in relation to feeling Indigenous for a moment was doing

the “rain dance” with my best friend/brother on a sunny day. We always had quite the imagination, heard about the dance and we really wanted it to rain that day to help our plants grow. We mimicked what we remembered from the dancers in the Pow Wow that we watched in our town and chanted a line from the drummers’ song. We were so proud after we did the dance as it rained, and we truly believed it was the spirit of our dance that brought the rain down on that hot day.

In reflection on my childhood public school experience, the approach was teacher focused and did not encourage the sharing of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives within the school; therefore, we would never have shared our “rain dance” story with our teachers. I had always felt a connection to the land and was curious about nature but was not able to explore and experience it within the school system. I always excelled in sewing but could only sew the projects put forth by the teacher as no other creativity was allowed and the teacher did not know how to sew regalia nor speak to the teachings. I also loved singing and stories but never heard the Indigenous voice echo within the school walls. The history that I learned regarding the Indigenous peoples came from a lens of colonial knowledge and perspectives. As students, we only learned about Indigenous knowledge and perspectives when it came out of a textbook and those books were not written by Indigenous peoples. The school culture was routine based, we stood for the Canadian anthem, we recited the Lord's Prayer, we moved to bells, we had subject based courses, and we even had a Nun that taught us about religion and the ways of the church. The expectation was to learn through memory, recitation, and product-based paperwork. I thrived in that school environment as I was able to conform to the normality of the culture that was created to gain the approval of others such as my mom who taught in the school. The knowledge and perspectives that I learned in my K-12 years did help me navigate the outside

world and post-secondary education as intended, so I am always grateful for those experiences. However, after I graduated and left the school, I was very uninformed and naive to the realities of the world around me in Manitoba, especially regarding Indigenous relations.

Embracing Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing

My journey of reconciliation began years ago without my realization. It was only when I graduated and left the comfort of my hometown to go to post-secondary school for Education that I began to learn about the world around me. I had a lot to learn about myself, my identity and about the new communities that I would be a part of in the upcoming years. In the early 90's Métis citizenship recruitment was active, and my mom explained to my siblings and I that we have Métis ancestry and roots on both sides of the family, so we joined the Métis community. My mixed ancestry and previous public-school education allowed me to navigate my surroundings and blend into mainstream society in Brandon and then in Winnipeg when attending university. Deep down inside, I always knew that I had Indigenous roots as I felt connected to the Indigenous community, but I grew up a colonial system that did not surround me with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, so I literally had to upturn the soil to find my roots. At that time in my life, I do not think that I understood what it meant being Métis besides the family values and traditions that my parents role modelled. Unfortunately, at the time, my university experience was much like my public-school experience regarding learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, as it was next to non-existent. Both school systems did not expose me to Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, but they prepared me for the colonized world.

After I graduated from the University with a Bachelor of Education, I started the next chapter in my life. Life really does have its mysterious ways of working itself out and the choices I made guided me onto my path of discovery and continued path of reconciliation. When I made the choice to work in rural Manitoba rather than in Winnipeg, my path led me to

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work in a public school surrounded by two reservations and a high Indigenous student population. I always felt like I was missing a part of my identity; I knew that I was Métis, I identified with Indigenous people, but I never had the opportunity in my schooling to learn about Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. I was very hopeful with my first teaching position that I would have many opportunities within the school and communities to learn about Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Unfortunately, I quickly learned that the school had a very similar school culture to the one that I experienced with very little opportunity to learn Indigenous knowledge and perspectives at the time. This was the point when my curiosity made me think about the minimal change in the public school system and my wonder made me imagine how to create a school culture that embraces Indigenous knowledge and perspectives for the benefit of all learners. I also started to self-reflect on why my parents could not teach my siblings and I, Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. After thinking about the reasons, historically it comes down to the fact that both sides of my family were either Settlers and/or were colonized and assimilation had wiped the knowledge and perspective from my great grandparents, grandparents, and parents as they too needed to conform to fit into the norms of the community they lived in at the time. Both sides of my family, never spoke much of being Indigenous as that way of knowing, being and doing was shunned by mainstream society, but they maintained traditional family values and were child centered. My mom referred to being Métis throughout the years and she always wore her hair long with her braid. There were many negative stereotypes and racism that existed in Canada and therefore, many Métis families hid their Indigenous heritage out of fear of social repercussions, including mine at the time. Washington (2021) discusses the treatment in schools and trauma imposed and how, “Stealing Indigenous children from their families and abuses inflicted on them in residential school and Indian day

schools, which were consequently felt by their parents and families, caused historical trauma in subsequent generations” (p.239) and this has led to generational culture and language loss. In my family, Indigenous language was lost with my great grandparents, and the French Michif language was lost in my grandparents and parents’ generation and now all my siblings speak only English. It was not until I completed university, moved to work in my present school and community, and met my spouse that I began to be exposed to the Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. My self-realization was that I needed to take the time to learn about my ancestral heritage and make it a priority and value the Indigenous knowledge and perspective, so I could be a role-model to my children and the students that I taught in school. Basically, I needed to open my mind to learn and value the knowledge so I could open my heart to learn and value Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. My hopes as an educational leader are that the research study will help other educational leaders by sharing stories, strategies and actions that are presently being used to cultivate school cultures that embrace Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing as an action towards Truth and Reconciliation.

Researcher Positionality

The reflection of Andriamanana (2020) gave some Indigenous perspective on positionality when he made the statement, “my truth is not necessarily your truth” (p.90). A researcher’s positionality comes from his or her own truth which stems from his or her life experiences and gives perspective to his or her way of knowing, being, and doing. The interpretation of the results of the descriptive research study that I conducted comes from my truth. My truth is not necessarily their truth, and I needed to be aware of my positionality as I described the experiences of the educational leaders who are working towards reconciliation.

Relationships have privileged my life experiences through influence, and I used that privilege as an educational leader to build more relationships to share the privilege that I have

received by others knowledge and perspectives. The privilege that I have experienced in my life has been gifted to me by both my parent's personal sacrifices and struggles along with the firm belief that the choices I made will gift me opportunities to build relationships with those who cross the same path along my life journey. I have explored the concept of relational leadership in a previous research study (2021) because I found it to be my core leadership strategy that defined my way of knowing, being and doing. According to Henry and Wolfgramm (2018), relational leadership is still a term that is open for interpretation (p.204). In search of the open interpretation, I came across Benham and Murakami-Ramalho (2010), two professors with diverse backgrounds, who wrote research about engaged leadership with generous spirits, who in my mind defined what relational leadership strategies would look like in Indigenous communities. The basic idea of the study was theorized on leadership focusing on the individual responsibility to be giving so that the community can reciprocate the gift of generosity. Andriamanana (2020) speaks about the "African saying that we need a whole village to raise a child" (p.87) and he discusses the concept of communal leadership that involves a collective responsibility of those who oversee children. I found this concept very interesting as the underlying key to communal leadership is building relationships and making connections to work together. I have learned through my life experiences that everything is connected in the world, and I see my privilege through those connections as it is the relationships that I built with the world around me that has gifted me with knowledge and perspective through community.

My passion is Indigenous education, and I believe that Indigenous knowledge and perspectives hold much value in our current education system for all students, staff, families, and community members as the teachings connect us all to each other and back to the land. I have worked in various teaching roles in the school system. I have worked with some of our most

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challenging and vulnerable students and families. I have demonstrated leadership in many different capacities within the school community and the surrounding communities. I have been an educator for over 25 years, a Vice Principal for five years, and I have just started a Principal role. As a new principal, my positionality comes from my own truth and my ways of knowing, being and doing while respecting other truths and other ways of knowing, being and doing. My positionality comes from building relationships and ensuring that I am connected to the people of the communities that I live, work, and volunteer within so I can learn and lead with them while working towards reconciliation.

The act of reconciliation for educational leaders and any stakeholder means having the courage to move towards making positive change within the community by inspiring others to follow a learning journey. An Indigenous student wrote me a letter in September 2023 and asked if we could start having a Pow Wow at school to honor our graduates and have the celebration at the end of the year. As an educational leader, I called a meeting and invited students, staff, some local Knowledge Keepers, and an Elder to discuss this idea that was voiced by the student. The meeting brought together a small group of visionaries that included me, an alternative education teacher, a handful of students, two Knowledge Keepers, and an Elder. By June of 2024, along with the support of our Elder, Knowledge Keepers, students, staff, and administration team we organized the 1st Annual Showcase Pow Wow, that taught the protocols of a pow wow, the different type of male and female pow wow dances, and the communal essence of a pow wow. The small committee accomplished a large task, but at the centre of the vision was the acknowledgement that it had to be ongoing learning of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives throughout the year to build up to the celebration at the end of the year. The goal of the Showcase Pow Wow was to teach our students, staff, families, and community members about

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the beauty of the cultural celebration and the protocols so they would feel confident to go participate in Pow Wows in the area as this will help to build capacity with our surrounding communities to strengthen our school community.

Reconciliation is a beautiful learning experience when you see the growth and progress within a school community. My spouse attended a federal school system in a reserve and his rival school in middle years and senior years for sports was the public school where I work today. In his experiences as a youth, the surrounding communities and the reserves in the area were divided and there was much racial tension due to the differing socio-economic circumstances as the Pulp Mill was flourishing during those times. My spouse does not attend too many school events, but he showed up to see the transformation, the Show Case Pow Wow. He stood there, watched, and he said to me, "I had to see it with my own eyes to believe it, this is good, this is really good. I didn't think I would ever see this day." I looked at my spouse as he stood there with a smile on his face while he listened to the beat of the drum and watched the school children smile and dance alongside his youngest daughter with pride. It was an overwhelming feeling, and I knew in that moment the power of reconciliation efforts and the meaning it holds for our community members as it meant a lot to my spouse as the voice of his people echoed with the beat of the drum throughout the community in a spirit to inspire. This year was our 2nd annual Showcase Pow Wow, and the teachings continue to grow and inspire our youth and communities through all the positive connections made when learning together.

To inspire others to follow a learning journey means being a role model so the learner can become the leader, to teach others how to live the good life, Mino-pimatisiwin. My children have truly inspired me on my journey of reconciliation to live a good life and to learn the Indigenous knowledge and perspectives that I needed to know to teach them alongside my spouse. A part of

our family ways of knowing, being, and doing is attending Pow Wows so the knowledge of regalia making was passed onto me by family Knowledge Keepers; my mother-in-law, Cecile, and sister-in-law, Jen, so every year I made my children's regalia if they chose to dance. Today as adults, our daughters Destiny and Skyla still dance, and Skyla now makes her own regalia and enjoys teaching youth the knowledge and perspectives she has learned throughout the years being a fancy Pow Wow dancer. A part of our family ways of knowing, being, and doing is living off the land by hunting, fishing, and trapping. Our son Joshua has been learning those ways with his dad since he was five years old and has gone on many outdoor adventures. Today as an adult, he continues to hunt, fish, and trap for sustenance with his dad and younger brother, Talon to help provide for the family and I am sure they will continue to do so in some manner for their own families in the future. These are two other examples of how reconciliation is a beautiful learning experience when you see the growth, progress, and how life comes full circle with role modeling ways of knowing, being, and doing.

The relationships that I have built with my children in our home is based on my truths and our ways of knowing, being and doing. These same values must be transferrable to the relationships that I build with our students in our school as they need to know my truths to trust me and they need to understand my way of knowing, being and doing so we can learn and lead together. Along my journey, I have learned that a student voice can be an empowering tool of reconciliation.

Background of the Study

Today as an educational leader, I feel something is missing in public education. Indigenous knowledge and perspectives are not embedded in school cultures to be fully understood, valued, and appreciated by the leaders, teachers, students, parents, caregivers, and communities. All educators have a responsibility to work to mitigate the harms of the past as the

former Senator and Chief Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Murray Sinclair (2014) wrote: “It is precisely because education was the primary tool of oppression of Aboriginal people, and miseducation of all Canadians, that ... education holds the key to reconciliation” (p.7). There needs to be re-education to understand what happened in the past and how it has impacted the present. If education holds the key to reconciliation, then every educator holds an individual responsibility to confront their own worldview with an open mind and heart prior to learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives to make the necessary steps towards change in the education system. Through research, Howell & Ng-A-Fook (2022) resolved that “we must first confront and unlearn the very worldviews that some of us who identify as Canadians have been “schooled” in prior to becoming professional public educators within a settler colonial provincial educational system” (p.17). As educators we all have a normalized lens that comes from our life experiences and through self-reflection we can acknowledge that our worldview may be obscured due to our own education.

The self-reflections on my past education experiences helped me to understand where my normalized lens has come from regarding not understanding and appreciating my own ancestral heritage. My commitment to starting a journey of reconciliation has opened a lifetime of potential opportunities to gain Indigenous knowledge and perspectives so I can be an agent of change for my school and the community. There is a learning gap across generations of Canadians that has been created through the public education system by government assimilation. Gebhard (2018) speaks to the low levels of educational attainment amongst Indigenous students in the Canadian Prairies, speaks to how racism affects achievement and explores ways to improve the gap. It is time to acknowledge why the gap is there and become aware of what can be done to fill the gap to create the change needed in the education system.

Washington (2021) explains the contemporary struggles that are rampant in Indigenous communities and how “The act of separating Indigenous children from their families and forbidding them from speaking their language and practicing their culture wounded hundreds of Indigenous children and their families” (p. 239). The act of separation created the gap, so to fill the gap the education system needs to help bring families together by allowing them to speak their language and practice their culture within the school community so our youth can see themselves and feel a sense a pride.

In considering the background history of government efforts to educate Indigenous peoples through assimilation and dehumanizing tactics, a question to ask is what government can do differently regarding reconciliation in education to ensure it is a successful endeavour that humanizes Indigenous peoples. There was much effort and organization put into the assimilation practices as Barnes, et al., (2006) note “Government policy mandated that aboriginal children be taught English or French languages, Euro-Canadian ways, and Christian religious practices; these policies were implemented in ways intended to eradicate aboriginal language, culture and religious practices” (p.20). Therefore, there needs to be a counter effort put into the reconciliation practices so Indigenous peoples can heal and reconnect with value(s), culture(s) and language(s) or as Czyzewski (2011) revealed through her research the same anti-Indigenous systemic racism will prevail in Canada as it did in Post-TRC South Africa as “real reconciliation would entail acknowledging the inherent racism necessary to devise institutions like the residential schools” (p.7). Howell and Ng-A-Fook’s (2022) research examines the anti-Indigenous systemic racism that exists in Canada’s past and present society due to settler Canadian colonialism and historical settler consciousness and calls on educators to be a part of the solution moving towards reconciliation (p.1). The lack of Indigenous knowledge and a

disconnect between non-Indigenous and Indigenous perspectives breeds Anti-Indigenous systemic racism. A re-education of all Canadians is needed to become aware of the histories and acknowledge the contributions of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the past and present. It is important to understand that Indigenous education and self-government existed prior to the signing of the treaties and the impact of education policies was devastating on Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

Impact of Education Policies

The idea that Indigenous education did not exist, and that Indigenous people needed to be saved and educated in a Eurocentric school culture is due to a lack of knowledge and perspective. Indigenous education is by no means a new concept to First Nation communities as Carr-Stewart (2009) points out that the self-determination of Indigenous peoples in the 16th century involved a self-governed system of Indigenous education through Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members passing on knowledge and traditions generationally. Cajete's (2016) research on Indigenous education and the development of Indigenous community leaders confirms the traditional form of education, the sense of community and the set of distinct cultural values that produced exceptional leaders (p.365).

The signing of the Treaties along with the implementation of the Indian Act changed the face of Indigenous education due to misleading intentions and a shift in colonial educational policy which Friedel (2010) and many historians have argued was "premised on the idea of assimilation" (p.172). Carr-Stewart (2001) discusses the original spirit of the Treaties regarding the Crown promising a formal education to compliment the traditional education provided by the First Nation community along with some Treaties also giving First Nation communities responsibility and control over education implementation. The Indian Act (1876) legislation

dismantled the original intent of the Treaties and supported the government initiative that Friedel (2010) refers to as the motto, “Kill the Indian, save the child”, because in the latter part of the 19th century the Indian culture was seen as the problem and the government solution was residential schooling policy as an assimilation practice. Residential schools were the beginning of racialized and oppressive educational institutions that dehumanized, demeaned, and stripped Indigenous peoples of their language, culture, and identity.

Barnes et al., (2006) researched the impacts of residential schools on Indigenous students' academic and cognitive development to discover harmful psychological damage due to encouraging these students to deny their identity by abandoning their culture and language. Even though residential schools do not exist today, the generational identity damage has been done, mistrust has been built at the core of educational relationships and institutionalized educational practices still exist today as Western policy and knowledge prevails in schools across Canada. Anti-Indigenous systemic racism is a reality around the world for Indigenous peoples in educational institutions. de Plevitz's (2007) research analyzes legislation prohibiting indirect racial discrimination and she discusses the hidden barriers such as poverty, poor health and racism in and out of the classroom, and inappropriate and incompatible programming that leads to the poor education and the underachievement of Australian Indigenous students. The consultation of Indigenous peoples is needed to approach anti-Indigenous systemic racism within educational policies to make an adverse effect on Indigenous students.

The horrific legacy of residential schools has now made the Canadian government in the need of a solution. Indigenous knowledge and perspectives have been oppressed in Canadian schools by anti-Indigenous systemic racism and the mistrust felt by students, parents, community members, teachers and leaders need repairing through reconciliation. Julien (2016) calls to

reform education for Canada's Indigenous youth as the education system has been a force of oppression (p.133). Over the years, the education system served the purpose of colonization and Wendy Mackey (2021) notes it is that foundation that upholds the dominant value system while oppressing other values. The education system needs to take the responsibility and learn from history to correct itself to move from the practice of assimilation to reconciliation. The education system is no more or less prepared to take this responsibility as educational leaders are still disconnected from Indigenous knowledge and perspectives more so than ever which is the reason that I chose to embark on this study. The focus of this research study is to look towards how an educational leader may nurture a school culture in a spirit of reconciliation by employing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

The Context of the Study

Indigenous knowledge and perspectives are shared through stories. I have two stories that bring context to the study as the Indigenous voices and phrases of knowledgeable wisdom echoes timeless Indigenous perspective. Each story shows the importance of educational leadership to see beyond themselves to learn and lead with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. The ability to see beyond yourself as an educational leader will give the capacity to start a personal journey of reconciliation that will initiate positive change into a school culture that is open to embrace and infuse Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

I have shared the personal story and conclusions below in a research preparation course final paper (December 7th, 2021) as the wisdom of the Elder has driven my current research regarding the role of educational leadership and how they can improve school cultures for the benefit of reconciliation:

A leader must be able to *see past his or her nose* to influence others to do the same.

What does it mean, to see past one's nose? I listened to a story told by an elder who

spoke about her father's statement when she as a youth did not listen to his guidance towards positive change. He pointed to her forehead and as he slid down his finger to her nose he said, "Your mind is here, but you can't see past your nose" (L. Sylvestre, personal communication, July 15, 2021). The elder spoke of the wisdom of her father, Louis Sylvestre, as years later she has never forgotten his words and soon understood the meaning when her life came full circle by becoming a mother and now a grandmother who offers guidance towards positive change. The story stuck in my mind as it made me realize that no one is ever willing to learn and change his or her perspective until he or she is ready *to see past his or her nose* as it all starts with the mindset. In many ways, the advice of the Indigenous father has sparked my research focus to begin with the individual leader who needs to be willing to shift his or her mindset to influence the collective through building relationships to build the capacity that will lead change.

The importance of an educational leader being able *to see past his or her nose* is relevant to the context of the study because to lead you must look beyond yourself and see other perspectives so you can support who they are as a person and a learner. Through recent research, the reflection of Joseph Abeyta who is now an educational leader (2020) reveals that his school experiences as an Indigenous youth did not reflect his home and life experiences making him feel confused about his values and uncomfortable with his own sense of being (p.70). Now as an adult, he thinks back on his dad's friendship with a man from Pueblo who his dad describes as a genius and who the school system made feel stupid. His dad's story and wisdom challenged his son as a principal by making him question the educational experiences of Indigenous students past and present by thinking about his friend from Pueblo and "how many kids, how many superior intellects, have gone through the system and were not accepted, because the system couldn't see

what was behind their eyes and didn't understand them?" (p.73). Joseph's dad explains the phrase,

"You don't know what's behind their eyes. Some of the children are blessed people. Some of them have got a role in their communities as significant leaders, but you can't see. Like this old man – his teachers couldn't see what he had behind his eyes, but his people did. And he was acknowledged by people from other communities because he was very, very smart. and he knew things, but people, other than Indian people, couldn't see that he had this. And he was pushed out" (p.73).

The importance of an educational leader being able *to see what is behind one's eyes* is relevant to the context of the study because to lead you must look beyond yourself and your own learning experiences to see others' perspectives of learning so you can support who they are as a learner and a potential leader. Everyone has a gift and has an ability to learn and lead. It is the job of an educational leader to cultivate a learner's ability to succeed in a school culture by nurturing both the strengths and weaknesses of the learner through building relationships and partnerships with all stakeholders. Gram-Hanssen (2021) shares insights from Indigenous leaders to discuss how transformative leadership is a communal effort that includes both the individual and the collective to encompass the whole by respecting diversity and working as one mind towards the greater good (p.525). Leadership is responsible for the well-being of the school community and needs to establish positive relationships to maintain a healthy school culture. A leader needs to be humble and look to be a learner first, so they can learn and lead as an individual in partnership with the collective to become a whole community of learners and leaders.

AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER'S JOURNEY TO CULTIVATE RECONCILIATION

Problem Statement and Research Question

What educators each see as normal can impact how they teach in the classroom and how they lead in the schools. Self-examination and reflection are needed to confront personal bias, histories, experiences, and racial insights, to unlearn and relearn new truths. In respect to educators attempting to deconstruct anti-Indigenous racism within schools, Howell & Ng-A-Fook, (2022) believe that:

Unlearning occurs through confronting settler colonialism, deconstructing and reconstructing our collective historical consciousness, and positioning ourselves in relation to both. It evolves as settler Canadians, including teacher candidates and educators, pause and look at things anew, realizing that we are implicated. (p. 24)

The lack of Indigenous knowledge and the disconnect between non-Indigenous & Indigenous perspectives within schools hinders non-Indigenous and Indigenous student learning due to cultural misalignment. Indigenous education in Manitoba public schools has become focused on infusing Indigenous cultural approaches to become the solution to the Indigenous youth problems and the changes needed within the system. Educational leaders can influence the much-needed change within the stagnant educational system by shifting mindsets, learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, and role modelling the necessary actions of reconciliation. Therefore, the descriptive research study addressed the following question: How have educational leaders nurtured school cultures in a spirit of reconciliation by employing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives?

Methodology

A descriptive research study is my chosen methodology of qualitative research because I wanted to capture the voice and the experience of each participant as I value truth and authenticity. Alasuutari (2010) spoke to the rise and relevance of qualitative research and stated,

“the aspiration to give voice to underprivileged groups and to convey their experiences is implicitly grounded on the assumption that the voices and the experiences are authentic” (p.147).

A descriptive research study would ensure that the voices of the participants were heard, and the descriptions would relay the authenticity of the experiences. The objective of the descriptive research study design was to explore how educational leaders nurtured school cultures by employing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. There is a need for educational leadership to gain Indigenous knowledge and perspectives to explore how they can positively influence teachers, students, parents, and the community towards collectively and collaboratively changing the school culture.

I utilized virtual interviews in my descriptive research study to acquire knowledge and perspectives from questions, stories, and the analysis of the dynamic relationships to identify attributes and strategies that could be utilized by educational leaders to improve school cultures for the benefit of reconciliation. There is a need for educational leadership to gain Indigenous knowledge and perspectives to explore how they can positively influence teachers, students, parents, and the community towards collectively and collaboratively cultivating a school culture that is inclusive to all learners, Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

“Descriptive research aims to generate what Clifford Geertz (1973) referred to as “thick descriptions” of social life (those that provide details, meaning, and context), typically from the perspective of the people living it” (Leavy, 2017, p.5). The study recruited three non-Indigenous and two Indigenous Manitoba public school educational leaders that were invested in Indigenous-inclusive education. The participation criteria were any Manitoba educational leader who took on an informal or formal leadership role and worked within a public education system as a community, school and/or divisional leader. The recruitment process started with a letter to

Superintendents of School Divisions so permission and recommendations of participants could be identified. Once permission was granted by the Superintendent to conduct the study a letter was given to the identified research participants of the school division so they could make an informed decision on whether to volunteer to be a participant in the study. I interviewed five different Manitoba educational leaders that are actively in the process of improving a school culture for the benefit of reconciliation by learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

Definitions

There are many key terms used throughout the research that will provide context and understanding of the study. The definitions provided for the terminology are used in the field of education and across the world and they were chosen specifically as each term describes the experience of being, knowing and/or doing.

1. Aboriginal: “is an all-encompassing or collective name for the first inhabitants of Canada and their descendants. It includes First Nations, Métis, Inuit peoples (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996), all of whom have unique histories, languages, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs” (Preston, 2016, p.15) This term is seen as outdated, but has been used in some research content shared and that is why it is included here.
2. Acknowledgment: Being able to look beyond oneself to acknowledge others for their knowledge, perspective, and contributions.
3. Anti-Racism: As defined in, *Creating racism-free schools through critical/courageous conversations on race*, “Strategies, theories, and actions concerned with identifying, challenging, preventing, eliminating, and changing the values, structures, policies, programs, practices, and behaviours that perpetuate individual, institutional, and systemic racism as well as the inequities in outcomes racism causes” (Manitoba Education, 2017, p. 56).

4. Assimilation: As defined in *Mamàhtawisiwin : the wonder we are born with — an Indigenous education policy framework*. “A process, usually in reference to cultural minorities, of surrendering distinctive characteristics and identity in order to become part of and accepted by the majority group” (Manitoba Education, 2022, p.31).
5. Awareness: The ability to make non-Indigenous and Indigenous people aware of the histories of Canada that give voice to the Indigenous Peoples past and present social, emotional, economical, and political state.
6. Decolonize: “used to describe the process of reforming the educational system from one that privileges Western beliefs, practices, and priorities into one that recognizes and respects the role of Indigenous ways of knowing and doing in the education system of Indigenous students” (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2013, p.484).
7. Educational Leader: an individual who takes on any informal and/or formal leadership roles and works within an education system as a community, school &/or divisional leader.
8. Humanizing: “to act in ways that honor human beings, upholds their dignity, promote equality, fosters a sense of responsibility, and promote well-being” (Khilji, 2022, p.443).
9. Indigeneity: is a concept that extends the significance and power of identifying oneself as an agent of continuity and change (according to Jacob, Cheng, Porter, 2015, p.2).
10. Indigenous: a word that is used in Canada when “referring to the first inhabitants of a country or region” (Preston, 2016, p.15). Indigenous is referred to what is local, original, or native to a geographic region (as cited in Jacob, Cheng, Porter, 2015, p.2).

11. Indigenous education: is defined as the path and process whereby individuals gain knowledge and meaning from their indigenous heritages according to Jacob, Cheng, & Porter (2015).
12. Indigenous perspective: a viewpoint and set of values that is built on a way of knowing, being and doing within the Indigenous cultural context.
13. Organizational Culture: “is a *system of shared orientations that hold the unit together and give it a distinct identity*” (Hoy & Miskel, 2013, p.180).
14. Partnerships: when two different parties take the initiative to build a foundation of trust and a belief that by working together, they can solve problems, create programs, and a positive impact on the focus of the collaboration (Clark & Clark, 2005, p.58).
15. Reconciliation: As defined in *Mamàhtawisiwin : the wonder we are born with — an Indigenous education policy framework*. “Reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. For that to happen, there must be awareness of the past, an acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Final Report 6–7). Reconciliation is an ongoing process through which Indigenous Peoples, the governments, and all Canadians work cooperatively to establish and maintain a mutually respectful framework for living together, with the intention of fostering strong, healthy, and sustainable Indigenous Nations within a just Canada” (Manitoba Education, 2022, p.36).
16. Relationality: a reciprocal relationship is a commitment to learning and the sharing of knowledge that involves caring, warmth, and understanding with responsibilities,

obligations, and respect where no one person is better than the other (Bishop, 2022, p.140).

17. Relational leadership: a leadership approach that focuses on building positive relationships to motivate and support those who are being led to lead in a communal partnership.
18. Values: a belief system that prioritizes what is held as important in a person's life as the set of beliefs has been instilled by family and community.
19. Way of knowing, being and doing- it is a way of life that is constituted as being normal to the individual who has been raised in the communal system of values, culture, &/or language.
20. Worldview – As defined by German philosopher Immanuel Kant, worldview is the lens through which a person perceives and interprets the world (Nagugle, 2002, as cited in Preston, 2016, p.15).

Delimitations

The descriptive research study used the four action-based strategies outlined in the Mamàhtawisiwin as the theoretical framework; the overall aim of the research was to develop a set of wisdoms that will assist and support an educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation. As I explored the underlying question that drove the research: How educational leaders have nurtured school cultures by employing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, it did not come without its delimitations. When reading through the study, keep in mind and consider the following points:

- 1) Sample Representation - the study could offer a Canadian, Manitoban, colonized perspective as the researcher did not exclude non-Indigenous educational leaders' knowledge and perspectives.

- 2) Sample Representation – the study was based on Manitoba public school leaders; therefore, the Federal school leader's knowledge and perspective was excluded.
- 3) Methodological - the interview questions were directly related to the four action-based strategies outlined in the Mamàhtawisiwin document so there could be influential knowledge and perspective provided within the policy framework that would lead answers and exclude an authentic voice provided by educational leaders.
- 4) The study focused on Indigenous-inclusive education which could exclude other cultural knowledge and perspectives that pertained to educational leadership.
- 5) The study focused on the acquisition of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, and it could exclude educational leader's experiences who were not in the accessible position to gain the knowledge and perspectives through the four action-based strategies.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was that it acknowledged the need for cultivating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives within schools to create a positive learning culture for all students. The study brings about awareness of the anti-Indigenous racism that exists within schools across Canada and acknowledges the responsibility of educational leaders to cultivate reconciliation through embracing community Indigenous knowledge and perspectives to build school culture.

The value of studying the topic was to improve the Manitoba Public School System by broadening the perspective of learners and leaders within the schools so Indigenous perspectives can be understood, and Indigenous knowledge can be valued so all learners and leaders can work together to build a school culture that is a conducive and an inclusive safe learning space.

I was compelled to study the topic as our public school system is still oppressive, continues to shame our Indigenous youth, and still has a lot to learn from Indigenous

perspectives if our leaders and educators take the time to *see past their noses* and *to see what is behind one's eyes* by listening and understanding through an Indigenous lens rather than a colonial lens. I am currently a school leader, I work in rural Manitoba at a K-12 French-Immersion school that has over an 80% Indigenous student population with diverse needs due to poverty, trauma, and social-emotional issues. Indigenous students are enrolled in either the English or French Immersion program depending on parental choice. Our staff makeup includes around 10% who identify as Indigenous. The Indigenous education programming is very hard to sustain as it is difficult to find Elders and Knowledge Keepers in the community that are willing to teach in schools. Our school population has attendance issues, behaviour issues, and mental health issues across the ages. Every day I witness students struggling and daily frustrations on behalf of staff and students. The frustrations come from a disconnect that is created by a misalignment of values infused by a lack of knowledge and perspectives which inhibits fear and mistrust amongst the learners and the leaders within the community. Deer (2013) speaks to the challenge of disconnect and the lack of knowledge:

Because of the cultural disconnect that may be felt by many non-Aboriginal teachers, these challenges may become so ominous that a piecemeal approach may be seen as the easier course of action – one that does not place the teacher in a vulnerable position in the classroom. If one accepts the cultural discontinuity issue that can be associated with these challenges of integrating Aboriginal perspectives in education, then, arguably, the prevalence of apprehension may be appreciated. (pp.179-180)

As an educational leader, I wonder how I can effectively meet the challenge to help educators make connections with Indigenous community members so they can feel at ease when learning and implementing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the classroom. I also wonder how

I can effectively cultivate reconciliation at the school level by incorporating Indigenous learning, knowledge, and perspectives to make the school culture a safe and inclusive learning environment where all learners feel visible and acknowledged for their perspective and knowledge contribution.

The good the research study will do is shed a light on the important role our school leaders have in making our Indigenous students feel visible in today's public education system. Washington (2020) discusses culturally responsive practices to engage community attendees and how educators need to view and value all members of student's family and community so they can affirm student identities within the school culture (pp.245-246). Lessard et al., (2015) have taken part in a narrative inquiry that explores the relationships between the multiple curriculum-making worlds of two Indigenous youth, and they stress what they learned:

This calls all of us, those in and out of schools, to trust that multiple educative worlds exist within each child and within families and communities. Honouring these educative worlds is important as children and youth, like Lane and Donovan, not only live in these worlds, but also these worlds will continue to shape who they are, and are becoming, in their multiplicity. These multiple worlds, as we learned, sustain their lives in the school curriculum-making world.... we also need to learn to honor the richness of multiple worlds of curriculum making, neither to erase or write over other worlds nor to privilege one world over another. (p.210)

Visibility will ensure that the voices of Indigenous learners and leaders are heard through past, present and future generational experiences. Rahman (2013), an Australian researcher, discusses the concept of the hidden curriculum and how Indigenous youth should not have to hide among

the masses or blend into mainstream society to feel a false sense of belonging as this can be very emotionally exhausting and stressful. Rahman concludes:

The students who succeed and do well in school have usually learnt to play the game well; they come to understand the discipline of school, the learning in all its manifestations, and the codes needed to succeed educationally. This knowledge is not specifically taught to students; it forms as part of the hidden curriculum and students learn it through their education. (p.670)

Indigenous students should not feel like they need to be someone they are not, they should not hide, play the game, nor camouflage themselves to blend into the mainstream value system to be defined as successful today. The research of Gunn et al. (2011) reveals what many other researchers have confirmed that the structure of classrooms, teaching strategies, and assessment methods are tailored to Western manners of practice versus Indigenous ways of knowing. Indigenous people will continue to feel marginalized in educational settings, until Indigenous knowledge and perspectives are acknowledged in the curriculum and the way instructions and assessment are provided reflects Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. In the same study, a participant stated that, “Our culture is important, but we send our kids to school to learn; we want a focus on education – our kids are fine; we’re fine, you fix your schools” (p. 338). To fix our schools we need strong leadership who are willing to build partnerships with the community, so their values are embedded within the school. It is our job as educators and educational leaders to create a school culture that holistically supports Indigenous learners and leaders to ensure all students feel valued and safe.

Layout of the Thesis

The layout of the thesis demonstrates the process of cultivation that includes Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. The five chapters that unfold are a beautiful reconciliatory process of growth and learning.

Chapter 1 – Introduction (Tilling the Soil)

The process of reconciliatory cultivation started with tilling the soil. The researcher discussed the significance of the study, where it took place, and why the research was required to take place. The introduction turned over the soil and unearthed the truth of anti-Indigenous systemic racism and the underlying reason for reconciliation. The positionality of the researcher was revealed in the depths of the mixed soil that gave reasoning to the study limitations. The chapter prepared the soil and highlighted where to plant the seeds by revealing the importance of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives when leading the way to cultivate reconciliation.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review (Planting the Seed)

The reconciliatory cultivation process then moved to planting the seeds of knowledge, the literature review, that rest within the soils foundation to explain how to build a school culture of strong roots exemplified by Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. When the seedlings grounded themselves and sprouted, the Indigenous seeds of knowledge were now ready to be transplanted to other soils that will provide additional nutrients of perspectives to the study.

Chapter 3 – Methodology and Method (Transplanting the Seedlings)

Transplanting the Indigenous seedlings of knowledge to gain additional nutrients of Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives was part of the reconciliatory cultivation process that required much preparation and accurate timing to ensure healthy transfers of knowledge and perspectives. The descriptive research study methodology process can be explained as a transplanting process of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge and perspectives through

following carefully planned and prepared methods: virtual interviews, ethical considerations, research participant recruitment, data collection and analysis. When a healthy transfer of knowledge and perspectives occurs so does growth which leads to harvesting the learning.

Chapter 4 – Summary of Data Collection (Harvesting the Crops)

The harvesting of the data was a momentous occasion as it collected the learning from the reconciliatory cultivation process. The analysis enables the ability to discuss the data that was gathered through the surveys and interviews which in turn cultivates feedback for Indigenous and Non-Indigenous learners and leaders. The data was analyzed through Colaizzi's seven-step framework and through this process significant information was acquired from the participant descriptions, the meaning was formulated and clustered into themes, and the findings were revealed through descriptive text that captured the essence of the shared knowledge and perspective.

Chapter 5 – Findings, Discussion and Recommendations (Fertilization & Plant Protection)

The reconciliatory cultivation process at its final stage requires constant fertilization of its soils. Indigenous perspective is needed to protect the future seeds of Indigenous knowledge planted to be unearthed. The fertilization involves the discussion of the dynamic relationships of the research findings to identify a set of attributes and strategies that can be utilized by other educational leaders to protect and improve school cultures for the benefit of reconciliation.

The chapter was built on a theory of a relational-community leadership approach for reconciliation as every community has different knowledge and histories, therefore, the connections between the community and the school must be approached differently to achieve student success. Kearney et al., (2014) researched the concept of learning at the cultural interface and building positive relationships with Indigenous children, families, and communities. The

research spoke to the relevance of when knowledge systems are different such as Indigenous and Western ways of knowing, than it is understandable that perspectives would also not be aligned, creating conflicting ideals and approaches, hence poor student achievement (p. 340). However, the cultural interface can be a safe space to position yourself as a learner and a leader and it can epitomize a school culture that encompasses relationship building and community. “Educators can become positive agents of social change when they are able to position themselves as learners in each new educational, geographical and cultural context in which they find themselves” (Kearney et al., 2014, p.349).

CHAPTER 2 PLANTING THE SEED

A safe space is Mother Earth,
To learn and grow,
Now I lay the seeds - row upon row.

I feel a connection to the soils,
As more confidence and perspective builds,
With each seed I place within her soft nature.

The uprooting has eased my awareness,
I now have a purpose and understanding,
As I lovingly sprinkle the soil over the seeds.

I gently acknowledge the soil with a pat of my hands.
To comfort and snuggle the seeds,
The potential of growth is limitless.

I wonder...what will come of each seed.
Will they uniquely blossom,
As they each breakthrough the soil and come to light?

Planting the seeds takes much nurturing,
To build an inclusive garden,
Flourishing with the rain of knowledge.

Literature Review Introduction (Planting the Seed)

In this chapter, the literature summary plants the seeds of knowledge with research that explores the four action-based strategies outlining the foundations of an Indigenous-inclusive education system within the *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With—An Indigenous Education Policy Framework*, developed in collaboration with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (2022). The research explores different journeys of reconciliation that educational leaders can take to shift mindsets and transform school cultures. Each section of the literature review will discuss reconciliatory actions that educational leaders can take in relation to the following four action-based strategies:

- 1.) **To create authentic involvement** there is a need to make a commitment to a personal journey of reconciliation by utilizing the Honorable Murray Sinclair's four guiding questions and connecting them to a balanced sense of self and wellness.
- 2.) **To put students at the centre** there is a need to build collective efficacy and that can be done by utilizing the Circle of Courage as a learning tool and guide.
- 3.) **To understand world views, values, identities, traditions and contemporary lifestyles** there is a need to build a collaborative school culture.
- 4.) **To build inclusive and culturally safe learning environments** there is a need to build relationships and use relational learning strategies.

Planting the seed is a purposeful experience. The purpose for an educational leader is to employ Indigenous knowledge and perspectives so he or she can grow through re-rooting partnerships with a community of learners and leaders. The value of studying the topic of an educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation is to look towards growth and improvement for the Manitoba public school system so safe and inclusive school cultures can be built on the foundation of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Broadening the perspective of

educational leaders within schools so Indigenous knowledge and perspectives can be understood will benefit all student learners due to the common connection to the land. The Indigenous knowledge must be heard with open minds, the Indigenous faces must be seen with prideful hearts, and the Indigenous perspectives must be spoken about with understanding to rid Canada of the racism and stereotypes that continue to exist in society today. It is time for all Manitoba public schools to take action towards Truth and Reconciliation.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being & Doing: Action Toward Truth & Reconciliation
Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (2022) has developed,

Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With—An Indigenous Education Policy

Framework, developed in collaboration with encouraging change initiatives in education that includes the following strategies and actions:

The foundations of an Indigenous-inclusive education system are articulated in the actions of the following four strategies and actions:

- authentic involvement
- putting students at the centre
- understanding world views, values, identities, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles
- inclusive and culturally safe learning environments

These strategies are mutually supportive and interconnected as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Foundation of an Indigenous-inclusive education system
(Manitoba Education & Early Childhood Learning, 2022, p.21)

Educational leadership across Canada have a responsibility to employ Indigenous knowledge and perspectives as ways of knowing, being, and doing to take action toward Truth and Reconciliation. The question is how have, educational leaders nurtured school cultures in a spirit of reconciliation by employing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives? The literature review will discuss reconciliatory actions for educational leadership in relation to the following four action-based strategies.

Authentic Involvement

To be authentically involved, educational leaders must make a personal commitment to reconciliation. Each educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation will look different and can be achieved by exploring the same interrelated wellness system and guiding questions that are laid out in the Indigenous-inclusive 'Education System' (see Figure 2). The Indigenous-inclusive Education System' draws on the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (2015) and reflects the Honorable Murry Sinclair's four fundamental questions as included in the *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With—An Indigenous Education Policy Framework*

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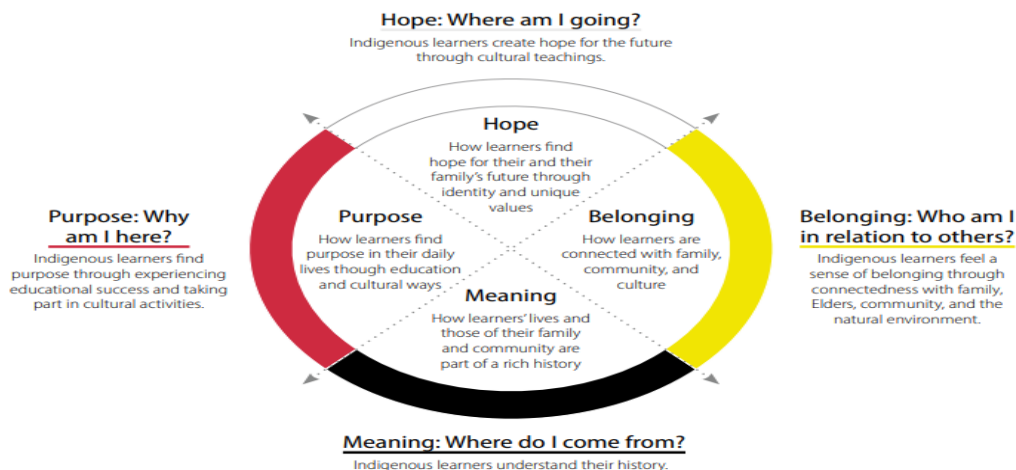


Figure 2: Indigenous-inclusive Education System'
(Manitoba Education & Early Childhood Learning, 2022, p.17)

The Indigenous-inclusive Education System' was designed from Indigenous perspectives to improve student wellness and achievement. I have included the Indigenous-inclusive Education System' because the tables have turned and now the educational leader is the student learner therefore, the framework can act as a guide for educational leaders to embark on a personal journey to cultivate reconciliation. Educational leaders must be willing to learn and lead with the students, teachers, and the Indigenous community and/or communities wherein the public school resides. The questions that are asked, require much self-reflection and a willingness *to see beyond one's nose and to see what is behind one's eyes*. The educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation is a life-long learning experience and the knowledge and perspectives are gained through relationships, so sustainability is reached by a school culture of collaboration and collective efficacy.

To see beyond one's nose, the educational leader must ask the question: Where do I come from? Asking the question requires the educational leader to see himself or herself in relation to others around them which gives meaning to his or her own ancestral history. The reflective

process of looking inward helps to identify positionality, worldview, values, traditions, and identity. Our belief system is based around our meaning of what is normal to each of us as individuals and it impacts our worldview, our bias, and our view of education.

To see what is behind one's eyes, the educational leader must ask the question: Why am I here? Being able to see into yourself can enable you to see into others which can give you the much-needed understanding and insight required to answer the question and to create a safe-inclusive school culture. An educational leader needs to ask why he or she is in the position that he or she holds over others as a leader in the educational system. Educational leaders have a purpose to ensure teacher and student wellness and achievement through promoting authentic, student-centered practices that allow students to demonstrate their gifts which in turn creates a sense of hope and belonging within a school culture for all learners. Educational leaders that role-model teaching the child gives us all hope for the future.

To see a vision of hope for the future of students and the public education system, the educational leader must ask the questions: Where am I going and where am I willing to take others? An educational leader must be hopeful for transformative change within the public education system so he or she can lead others with a newfound knowledge and perspective that is infused with Indigeneity. There are many valuable lessons to learn from Indigenous knowledge and perspectives that teach our students that they belong to the land and the nature that surrounds them. We have a lot to learn from land-based teachings, and the love of the outdoors creates life-long learners.

To see the potential of creating a school culture of belonging, the educational leader must ask the question: Who am I in relation to others? An educational leader needs to know and understand the community that the public school resides within to build a safe and inclusive

school culture for all learners. A school culture can be felt right when you walk into the door and a first impression lasts a lifetime. A school culture is built through collective efficacy and the collaboration efforts of the staff within the building and the community that is welcomed into the building. Therefore, the educational leaders within the building need to be advocates, influentials, and innovators when it comes to learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives to create a safe and inclusive school culture.

The journey of an educational leader to gain Indigenous knowledge and perspectives can be viewed as a cultivation process that creates sustainability within the school. To create sustainability, there needs to be actions of authenticity demonstrated from educational leadership. A leader needs to be willing to start a personal journey to gain Indigenous perspectives which means he/she/they need to be willing to listen to the voices of others and challenge his/her/their way of being, way of doing and approach learning as a way of becoming. Canadian researchers Cardinal and Fenichel (2017) discuss how stories can shape our practice as educators:

Through these narrative applications and methods, we come to see how *who we are* informs the ways in which we can contribute to broader communities and to the world itself. Novel studies, the reading of storybooks, the engagement with academic articles written by Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors, allow those voices to also become members of our classroom communities. They invite us to imagine ourselves into the worlds, stories, and thinking of others in ways that deepen our relationship to ourselves, to our practice as educators, and to the ways in which curriculum is always co-created by each member of a classroom community in his/her/their wholeness (p.269).”

Once a leader can gain Indigenous perspectives through listening and self-reflective practices that alter assumptions, he/she/they can influence staff towards positive school culture change. A commitment to a way of being, doing and becoming must be made by a leader's ability to respectfully role-model a different approach to learning. A different approach to learning and traditional school policy can be very threatening to a teacher's survival instincts within a school system and therefore, leaders can come upon many teachers who resist change because that is not what is normal to his or her teaching practices and/or life experiences.

To demonstrate authenticity, a leader must have a strong sense of self to influence teachers towards change as the journey will take much time and energy along with a commitment to learning Indigenous knowledge to demonstrate the positive benefits for students. Two researchers who focus on school leadership and the complexities of Canadian education, Osmond-Johnson, and Turner (2020), point out "it is arguable that the realization of the Calls to Action around education are much more likely if their implementation is supported by strong school leadership" (p. 55). Strong school leadership will challenge staff to re-evaluate their beliefs to gain perspectives and to develop vision and purpose for including Indigenous perspectives by developing school-community partnerships. Graeme et al., (2020) believe that "school leaders and teachers must openly embrace a commitment to develop a partnership with the Aboriginal community that is genuine, equal and reciprocal in all aspects (p.362). Strong school leadership is relational, and good leaders will make time for staff to gain perspectives, build relationships and support teachers' efforts by providing human and financial resources. In support Gram-Hanssen (2021) states, "The idea of the leader is in many Indigenous contexts closely linked to the idea of the servant, in that a leader is tasked with ensuring that the vision of the people come to fruition" (p.523). *To see past one's nose*, a leader must be self-less and open

to listening to all the stakeholder's needs, goals, and visions to create a unified holistic educational experience that is inclusive, equitable and sustainable for the future of non-Indigenous & Indigenous students. To see past one's nose, a leader must not think of the individual, but of the collective and it takes keen relational strategies to influence others towards gaining Indigenous perspectives. *To see what is behind one's eyes*, a leader must look for the strengths and gifts of others to put students at the centre of learning and leading the way.

Putting Students at the Centre

Putting students at the centre requires the collective courageous effort of a school team to make the necessary changes to the stagnant educational system. Educational leadership can empower change and impact student wellness and achievement through influencing, advocating, and innovating an inspirational commitment to collective efficacy. Educational leadership needs to build an environment and school culture through positive exposures that focus on building confidence through strengthening relationships, trust, communication, "academic optimism" (Donohoo, 2018, p.337) and in turn, the capacity to be a lifelong learner for students and staff. To learn Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, there must be a capacity to be a lifelong learner for students and staff, and it must be encouraged by educational leadership. Every school has challenges, and every school can improve collectively. Every educator has challenges, and every educator can improve professionally. Every student has challenges, and every student can improve academically. To improve collectively, professionally, and academically there needs to be a commitment to supportively embrace change with a positive mindset, a confident efficacy belief that every challenge can be overcome, and a collaborative willingness to prevail.

The Circle of Courage model (Figure 3) developed by Starr Commonwealth's 2nd President, Dr. Larry K. Brendro, and his colleagues as included in *Mamàhtawisiwin* is a model of empowerment designed for children and youth.



[Figure 3:](#) Circle of Courage (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022, p.15)

The model of empowerment has commonalities of building self-efficacy for educators as it focuses on similar parameters of “restoring a sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity” (p.15) to feel a sense of wellness and achievement in teaching practices. The purpose of including the Circle of Courage model is to encourage educational leaders to use the Indigenous model on their own personal journey of reconciliation. It is a “resilience-focused approach to working with children, families, and communities” (p.15) that shares Indigenous knowledge and perspective to help educators understand the learning process that it takes to make changes in teaching styles and practices, knowledge, and perspectives, so they can feel empowered by Indigenous education approaches, curricula, and community connections. Once again, the teacher learns alongside students, families, and communities to build self-efficacy and collective efficacy.

It takes courage to build self-efficacy as you are learning and growing outside your comfort zone and norm. Donohoo (2016) describes the courageous process as “Efficacy beliefs are very powerful because they guide educators’ actions and behaviors. Efficacy beliefs help determine what educators focus on, how they respond to challenges, and how they expend their efforts” (p.xv). Collective efficacy is a powerful leadership change strategy that can be structurally implemented by leadership through educationally influencing the staff, advocating for the betterment of student achievement, and offering innovative professional learning experiences that will inspire collaboration and inquiry. To empower staff with Indigenous knowledge, awareness, and inquiry to create a school culture that focuses on building on the strengths of others, to build up the confidence of others, to build up the morale of all around, is quite ingenious and commonsensical. Collective efficacy does not come at a financial cost, but rather a collective investment of time, energy, and emotions as change is not easy for an individual. Change calls for discomfort as there is an individual commitment to reflect, to refocus, and to be responsive to the needs of others along with a collective commitment to collaborate towards shared goals. Versland & Erickson (2017) confirm the importance “As teachers develop the collective belief that as a school, they can have a positive and lasting effect on the lives of students, they act more purposefully to enhance student learning” (p.4). Learning to teach with purpose will help limit teacher burnout and ensure a professional commitment to student achievement despite the socio-economic challenges that students may encounter.

The ability of educational leadership to be influential on educating staff on Indigenous knowledge and perspectives is the starting point that ensures collective commitment. In reviewing the literature, the consensus seems to be that leadership must lead by example and in turn, so do teachers. Educational leadership and teachers, therefore, must look at themselves and

examine their own self-efficacy to determine their personal beliefs to align them with the collective beliefs of staff that Indigenous education is important to infuse into the school culture. Versland & Erickson (2017) state, “While collective efficacy was developed through fidelity to instructional initiatives and relationship building among staff, the efficacy beliefs and actions of the principal influenced the school’s collective efficacy by creating a steadfast instructional focus, developing teacher leaders, and leading by example” (p.1). Teachers must understand what collective efficacy is and why it is important, so they can take ownership of their personal actions to make a positive contribution to collective change. Educational leadership must empower staff with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives to give purpose so that they are committed to making personal change for the betterment of the learning community. The learning community involves staff, students, and parents so staff must see the value in using the learning community as a support network for Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Empowerment is supported by Donohoo (2018) as, “Collective teacher efficacy refers to educators’ shared beliefs that through their combined efforts they can positively influence student outcomes, including those who are disengaged, unmotivated, and/or disadvantaged” (p.324). It is these shared beliefs towards the importance of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives that boosts confidence and morale as everyone is working towards a common goal, improving student wellness and achievement despite the barriers. In many schools, teachers feel defeated, especially those in communities who struggle with socio-economic circumstances. The feeling of defeat leads to isolation which contradicts working collectively together. Teachers need to realize that they must be the leaders in their own personal learning experiences by collaborating with their colleagues and working collectively together to find solutions to the challenges that face them.

Reconciliation requires authentic action and putting students at the centre. Donohoo & Katz (2017) explain “The theory of action is such that teachers’ beliefs influence their actions towards students, which, in turn, influence students’ beliefs about their own abilities. Low expectations for success become barriers for both teachers and students because, regardless of their accuracy, they become self-fulfilling prophecies. Expectations influence efforts, and efforts influence achievement” (p.21). Therefore, educational leadership must have high expectations of their staff and trust that they can empower them with a sense of autonomy to learn and lead with the community to gain Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. If the focus is to collectively improve student wellness and achievement, it is the role of leadership to support collaboration and inquiry to guide them on responding to the challenges within the school and deciding how to expend their collective efforts within the classroom. Providing staff with the time to have these pivotal conversations is essential along with providing opportunities for professional development that enriches and supports their staff goals towards learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Leadership plants the seeds of influence and then lets the staff collectively nurture and encourage growth as their roots are all planted in the same soil. The building of relationships amongst staff is important as they must see the connection of their collective efforts leading to the positive outcomes of improved student learning. Leadership must be willing to continually advocate for the needs of the learners and that may involve bringing certain factors to the attention of staff and making them self-aware.

The disconnect between Indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge and perspectives needs to be addressed by awareness and understanding. Understanding how efficacy beliefs are influenced is important for educational leaders as it brings about awareness of the factors that need nurturing and the natural consequences of collective teacher efficacy. Using metacognition

to bring about self-awareness for staff is an important leadership strategy that will help provide awareness and purpose for meaningful change. This awareness and purpose will come to light through conversation and collaboration when working together to improve student wellness and achievement. The ability to reflect on past practice for self-improvement in present and future practices has the promise of positive outcomes for student learning. Self-efficacy plays a role in how people believe their actions are influenced by their abilities, which in turn can determine how they act and/or behave situationally. “Bandura (1986, 1997) pointed out four major sources of self-efficacy beliefs: enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological reactions” (as cited in, E.M. Skaalvik & S. Skaalvik 2007, p. 612). It is important that educational leadership and staff are aware of these factors, so they can help nurture and regulate themselves and/or others. Setting up a supportive environment and promoting influential communication that builds up staff beliefs in their ability to learn and lead with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, will only help raise self-efficacy. By raising self-efficacy, the opportunity to improve collective efficacy amongst staff is a perceived possibility of hope. It is the educational leadership's role to advocate for improved student wellness and achievement, to make staff aware of their own potential and the impact they can have by working together as a cohesive group and believing that anything is possible. Supporting staff, believing in their abilities, and building up their confidence will help set the stage for the success of all learners and the consequences of collective efficacy.

Educational leadership need to communicate the consequences associated with collective efficacy to provide a purposeful approach to improving student wellness and achievement. Now that the staff is aware that their beliefs and behaviors are the determining factor in respect to implementing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, they also need to be aware that changes

in personal approaches to learning environments will involve more time, energy, and persistence with better results. The Pygmalion Effect is such a simple, yet powerful concept, as the more educators believe in and build up their students, the more their students will believe in their own abilities and reciprocate that positive behavior towards their teachers, therefore dealing with less classroom management. Donohoo (2016) supports educating staff around the concept of the Pygmalion Effect, “whereby high expectations lead to an increase in performance” (p.17) which will help them rethink their own mindset and practices. The consequences are only positive products of good teaching practices infused with Indigeneity. The hope for educational leaders is that these consequences are contagious and become a collective effort. Educational leadership must also have high expectations of their staff to collectively improve student wellness and achievement through teaching practices that are inclusive with Indigenous education. Leadership must also believe in and build up their staff to believe that they can individually and collectively make a difference in the lives of their students by a common connection to land-based education. When having high expectations at any level, it is expected that everyone functions at their optimal level. If teachers are expecting students to improve wellness and achievement, then the expectation is that teachers improve their classroom learning environment. If educational leadership expect teachers to improve their practices, then the expectation is that educational leaders improve their school environment. To continually improve, means there is an expectation to continually learn and lead together. Leadership inspires teachers to learn and lead, teachers inspire students to learn and lead, and students inspire peers to learn and lead. Educational leadership must commit to being a life-long learner who will influence others through advocating for collaborative professional learning opportunities that are inclusive with Indigenous knowledge and perspective.

Educational leadership need to build teacher confidence with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives to create sustainability by fostering collective efficacy. Fostering collective efficacy, involves believing in people's abilities and transforming how they see their value in contributing to the collective effort through promoting professional learning and leadership opportunities. Jenni Donohoo (2016) discusses *A Theory of Action for Fostering Collective Teacher Efficacy* (p.85), and it includes four leadership strategies. Leadership needs to support collaboration opportunities, needs to empower teachers through involvement in decision making, needs to set high expectations and achievable goals, and needs to track progress, collect data, and provide much needed feedback to create rich conversation on Indigenous knowledge and perspective. These leadership practices are necessary to establish trust, positive relationships, and a sense of collective efficacy. Loughland & Ryan (2020) support the idea that "Teacher leaders need to learn to listen to their team members so they can understand their current pedagogical challenges" (p.9). It is very important for leadership to recognize and respect the wealth of knowledge amongst staff and to provide opportunities of ownership over decision making especially when it comes to deciding what professional learning will enhance their teaching practices when it comes to gaining Indigenous knowledge and perspective.

Educational leadership need to create opportunities for the staff to gain Indigenous knowledge and perspectives within the school and the community. Enhancing professional learning opportunities can be accomplished through networking, collaborative teacher inquiry, and peer coaching. Educators have their own preferences and having the autonomy to choose the methods that match their learning styles will only enhance their learning experiences. The role of leadership is to innovatively support teachers in accessing professional learning opportunities while ensuring that it is ongoing, meaningful, and influential as Donohoo (2016), sets out in the

Seven Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning (p.52). Educational leadership also plays a pivotal role in being a life-long learner who shares knowledge with staff and encourages staff to do the same and that is why it is important for leadership to commit a personal journey of reconciliation. Professional learning will take away the fear of change and open minds of staff to all possibilities of improvement. We all need to continuously improve our practices and be willing to share our reflections of poor practice. Goddard et al., (2015) confirm “Both instructional leadership and teacher collaboration are positively and significantly related to student achievement through their effects on collective efficacy beliefs” (p. 527). That type of open communication and sharing comes from trusting colleagues as everyone must be willing to reveal vulnerable past failures. Educational leadership must build a school culture where staff feels safe to share, inquire and learn from one another without judgement. Educators ask that of their students every day, so they must be willing to experience their reality to learn and grow as professionals while learning how to create a safe and inclusive school culture infused with Indigeneity.

Reconciliation efforts should not involve judgement as learning is a process not a plan. Educational leadership must be open to living in the moment and learning from mistakes as it is a valuable life lesson that takes no planning. The best life lessons can be learned by making mistakes and having a willingness to be adaptable and flexible enough to find a solution even if it means changing an approach. However, we are all not willing to live in the moment nor are we all wanting to accept the mistakes we make because we all are conditioned to behave differently due to our own self-efficacy. Educational leadership must be influential and innovative with how change is approached within a school culture. Creating a sense of collective efficacy in a school means changing normal practice. Donohoo (2016) understands

Change takes time. Changing the fundamental beliefs held by educators is not an easy endeavor. Helping educators understand how their efficacy beliefs come to fruition through their actions will ensure reflective practice. Encourage constant reflection, call on the power of the collective, and stay the course. Given its effect on student achievement, the importance of strengthening collective efficacy must not be understated or overlooked (p.92).

Putting students first means building collective efficacy. Indigenous knowledge and perspectives cannot be implemented into a school culture without the collective willingness to be open to change. All educators need to understand differing worldviews, values, identities, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles to effectively create a safe and inclusive school culture infused with Indigeneity. A collaborative school culture will build the safe and inclusive environment needed for Indigenous knowledge and perspectives to grow as an educational foundation for learning and leading.

Understanding world views, values, identities, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles

A collaborative school culture involves understanding differing world views, values, identities, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles because it is created by a community of learners and leaders who want to see change. Educational leadership can lead learning and impact student wellness and achievement through influencing, advocating, and innovating an inspirational commitment to *Taking Radical Responsibility* and *Learning Through Curiosity* to build a foundation that supports a collaborative school culture that focuses on infusing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives by learning with the community. Before building a collaborative school culture, leadership needs to work on being *conscious* through self-reflection, taking responsibility and shifting one's mindset to *Enable Others to Act*. Being a conscious

leader means opening the mind to self-awareness and self-improvement while serving the best interests of others. Being a conscious leader is not an easy task as our human instincts are to survive and when in survival mode individuals tend to fall back on instinctual habits that can be portrayed as positive and/or negative when in a leadership role. Dethmer et al., (2014) believes “Leadership operates from one of two places: above the line or below the line. Above the line leadership is open, curious, and committed to learning. Below the line leadership is closed, defensive, and committed to being right” (p.43). Leaders who are open to being self-aware will be able to personally assess whether they are *above the line or below the line*. Leaders who are open to self-improvement will be able to personally acknowledge what actions need to be taken to work towards staying *above the line* when engaging in leadership practices.

Educational leaders need to be committed to learning and continuous self-reflection to become a conscious leader who is open to understanding differing world views, values, identities, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles. A conscious leader takes full responsibility and supports others in taking full responsibility which fosters collaboration and strengthens others. Dethmer et al., (2014) explains that “Conscious leaders are open to the possibility that instead of controlling and changing the world, perhaps the world is just right the way it is. This creates huge growth opportunities on a personal and organizational level” (p.43). The growth of mindsets that takes place through conscious leadership allows individuals and organizations to shift thinking and learn through curiosity which also fosters collaboration and strengthens others as wonder and taking risks is encouraged. Wondering and taking risks by oneself is not as exciting and rewarding as engaging with others in a team effort of inquiry. Kouzes & Posner (2003) believe “The work of leaders is making people feel strong, capable, informed, and connected. Exemplary leaders use their power in service of others; they enable others to act, not

by hoarding the power they have, but by giving it away” (p.6). A collaborative school culture is built by learning partnerships that trust and empower one another as leaders who are willing to take responsibility and to take ownership over learning. *Leaders Learn and Learners Lead* through influencing, advocating, and innovating to build a collaborative school culture that is committed to learning and supporting one another by understanding differing world views, values, identities, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles.

Building a collaborative culture that supports understanding differing world views, values, identities, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles is important as it creates a safe and inclusive school culture open to community partnerships. An educational leader needs to be an influential educator when developing working relationships that support and sustain learning partnerships that lead learning and impact student wellness and achievement. These learning partnerships will cultivate dialogue, sharing, and reflections around pedagogy and experiences to create a collegial culture of leaders who learn and learners who lead. Meredith et al., (2017) state a “collaborative culture can be defined as the shared values, norms and practices on the matter of teamwork and communication” (p.25) which is important because these qualities build relationships, job satisfaction and capacity within a school so educators are working together and not in isolation. Creating a safe and inclusive school culture that is infused with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives needs to be collaborative effort where all staff have a common understanding that the efforts will improve student wellness and achievement. A collaborative school culture is built over time, and leaders must use influence to mobilize the staff towards the shared purpose of improving student learning. Sharratt & Planche (2018) support these thoughts by adding that “The success of schools as learning organizations hinges on how well people can work together as they seek to build collective capacity and problem solve to improve student

learning” (p. 26). It is important to have a skilled leader that develops trust and builds confidence amongst staff as these efforts will improve job satisfaction and ensure the sustainability of collaboration that focuses on learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

To support and sustain a collaborative school culture that focuses on learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, it is necessary to have skilled collaborative leadership that accepts responsibility and embraces learning through a lens of genuine curiosity and wonder. It is the leader's responsibility to establish a shared purpose and vision, promote a professional learning community, role model positive partnerships, promote collaboration amongst staff, establish a culture of inquiry and dialogue, and continuously nurture a learning environment. The importance of sustaining this collaborative school culture ensures future learning partnerships that are supportive, progressive, and innovative in the efforts towards improving student learning which in turn builds collective capacity. Hans et al., (2020) confirm that a collaborative school culture, “CSC had a positive effect on job satisfaction” (p.435) and this is important as teacher wellness will improve and so will workplace behaviors. If teachers are attending school regularly and committing to the professional learning community long-term, these actions benefit improved student learning by reduced absenteeism and transiency of staff. These future learning partnerships are valued and will establish the momentum a school needs to move change forward towards a more collaborative school culture.

To move change forward that is focused on an Indigenous inclusive education system, a leader must be aware of the barriers of building a collaborative school culture and advocate for the needed changes. From my experiences in the school system, the first barrier for a leader would be the lack of interest from staff to change as they are used to and prefer working in isolation. The second barrier for a leader would be finding the time within a day to build in

community collaboration opportunities. The third barrier for a leader would be finding the financial resources to support community collaboration opportunities. The fourth barrier is the lack of administration education and support around collaboration. The final barrier is the ability of a leader to implement change effectively as there are so many moving parts to establishing a collaborative school culture. Waldron & McLeskey (2010) believe “These changes will require re-culturing schools to develop a collaborative culture, the delivery of high-quality professional development, and strong leadership within schools” (p. 70). Leadership must be very skilled and committed to advocating for change to develop a collaborative school culture.

Advocating for change needs to take place at a personal level, a school level, and a divisional level by leadership. As Fullan (2007) stated, “To change a school culture and create a more inclusive school, educators must question their beliefs about teaching and learning for students who struggle to learn and engage in a collaborative change process that results in new values, beliefs, norms, and preferred behaviors”. Advocating starts at a personal level because leaders must challenge themselves to be self-reflective and self-aware so that they can shift their own mindset before attempting to shift others’ thinking. A leader must truly believe that the change will improve student wellness and achievement and must be willing to work collaboratively with the staff and the community as partners in the change process to ensure coherence and build capacity. Advocating at a local school level will be more accepted if as Waldron & McLeskey (2010) say, “principals support the development of distributed leadership by being explicit regarding their willingness to share leadership responsibilities with others and by empowering others to share in decision making regarding substantive issues” (p. 66). A leader who is willing to give power will in turn gain power through developing a relationship built on trust that indorses buy-in from staff. The endorsement of staff to move forward with school change will

start the shift in mindsets and support the collaborative school culture which will promote advocating at a divisional level for the much-needed financial resources. The ability to gain financial resources will help foster the collaborative culture through opening high-quality professional learning opportunities within the school and the community.

For educational leadership to innovatively inspire and encourage teachers to take-risks together while learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, the leader must be willing to be vulnerable and a curious learning partner when embarking in professional learning opportunities. Fostering a collaborative school culture involves role-modelling professional behaviors that promote learning together with wonder and inquiry to improve student wellness and achievement. Dethmer et al., (2014) speak to how “Wonder is a very different experience. It is not about figuring anything out. It begins with a willingness to explore and step into the unknown, which involves taking a risk and letting go of control – not an easy commitment” (p.73). To lead with innovation and to inspire others to follow, an educational leader must be committed to learning through curiosity as a foundational building block of trust. Professional learning does not mean that there is no fun within the partnership and the process. Encouraging teachers to let go of their personal inhibitions and become the curious learner will ultimately help them lead in the classroom as a teacher with better motivational results. Learners need to be inspired, they need an invitation to learn in partnership and as Henwood (1999) states “collaboration requires freedom of choice to be most productive” (p.317). The freedom of choice is appreciated by the learner because their presence feels acknowledged and respected. The feeling of autonomy and empowerment will build confidence in their abilities as a learner and prepare them for future leadership opportunities. Supporting learners to become leaders will

foster a continuous collaborative school culture where collegiality becomes a norm in the school and the community.

Developing a collaborative school culture based on mutual respect and support can be very empowering for both the learner and the leader. Hargreaves (1994) and Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharatt (1998) indicated that cultures with characteristics expressed in terms of collegiality and collaboration generally are those types that promote feelings of professional involvement, efficacy, and satisfaction. Educational leadership can lead learning and impact student wellness and achievement through influencing, advocating, and innovating an inspirational commitment to *Taking Radical Responsibility* and *Learning Through Curiosity* to build a foundation that supports a collaborative school culture. The ability of leadership to influence learners' professional involvement through building school and community partnerships rather than working in isolation is a foundation that supports a collaborative school culture. The ability of leadership to advocate for change on a personal level, a school level and a divisional level with a shared vision and purpose is a foundation that supports a collaborative school culture. The ability of leadership to innovatively inspire and encourage teachers to take risks together through wonder and curiosity is a foundation that supports a collaborative school and community culture. It is essential that leadership who engage in developing a collaborative school culture take the time to personally examine their own values, norms and practices when communicating and working with others as a team. Kouzes & Posner (2003) point out that "When leadership is understood as a relationship founded on trust and confidence, people take risks, make changes, and keep programs, organizations, and movements alive" (p.5). Building relationships within the school and the community develops the trust and confidence needed to

create an inclusive and culturally safe learning environment to take risks and makes changes to improve student wellness and achievement.

Inclusive and culturally safe learning environments

Inclusive and culturally safe learning environments are built on the foundation of relationships. Educational leadership need to be influential by building relationships with staff, students, parents, and the community to foster Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Bishop et al. (2021), discuss how “there is a history of mistrusting formal schooling in many Aboriginal communities, though due to a lack of inclusion/silencing of Aboriginal perspectives in mainstream education” (p.196). It will take strong leadership to rebuild relationships to overcome the barriers of historical colonial oppression and to open the doors for the parents and the community to share their Indigenous perspective and their voice for the future partnership with the Manitoba public education system. A research duo on teacher education and educational leadership, Sally & Donald Clark (2005), studied the challenge of building relationships in Middle School and revealed that “understanding mutual expectations is critical to building strong relationships and partnerships. It is not, however, until these expectations are understood, acted upon by parents, community members, and educators that they will have a major impact on learning and school and community climate” (p. 58). Building is a collective process and within that process there must be clear communication, set goals, and commitment made by all stakeholders.

There are separate research studies that are based on Indigenous perspectives, building relationships, and professional learning but they do not entirely explore how leadership directly influences building capacity at a school level and how learning Indigenous perspectives directly relates to leaders' and teachers' ability to improve and impact non-Indigenous and Indigenous student wellness and achievement. Bishop et al., (2021) “encourages those involved with

education to reimagine what schooling could look like when Indigenous Knowledges are respectfully embraced". Cardinal & Fenichel (2017) put into action relational practices that included narrative inquiry and Indigenous approaches alongside students to discover the process to be highly self-reflective and a journey that questions regular practices. The current educational practices are not aligned with Indigenous relational practices and have proven to be stressful on students and hard work for teachers as they must consciously think prior to using assessment strategies that do not align with relational pedagogy. Despite the journey holding much value for both the students and the teachers as they are *learning as the process of becoming*, the disconnect between educational practices and perspectives can be discouraging and frustrating. Teachers must unpack many assumptions in relation to the content, the conversation, the students, the parents, the communities, the curriculum, and the worldviews to ensure the educational exchange is meaningful.

When a leader or teacher reflects on assumptions, the self-realization on individual perspective is what brings them closer to opening their mind to Indigenous knowledge and perspectives and being momentarily vulnerable enough to build relationships. In a further exploration around experiences of belonging, identity and relationships, S. Chung (2018) questions what might be considered ceremonies in public schooling versus ceremonies in student belonging and what ceremonies the teachers commonly practice and how looking within helped teachers build a stronger sense of self and connections to students. The teaching of Elder Francis Whiskeyjack (2011) really helped to put Education as Ceremony in perspective, but leaders and teachers need to hold these relational values close to heart and be willing to stay true to the teachings and not the colonial school policies that could be in direct contradiction. Students need to feel that they belong in schools and the only way to make a student feel like they belong is by

making human connections through building relationships and curricular connections through including Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Leadership needs to be able to influence teachers as change occurs through role modeling relationship building, utilizing inclusive practices, and embedding Indigenous perspectives and content into daily practice and pedagogy. When all teachers are on board with learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, they are each ready *to see past their noses and see behind their eyes*, only then can a leader engage teachers in collective professional learning with a common vision and purpose. When leaders have teachers on board, they can all work together to encourage active collective engagement with parents and community members in Manitoba public education.

Inclusive and culturally safe learning environments are built on the foundation of relational leadership strategies. Relational ethics, relational well-being and relational leadership are three concepts that hold importance to how leaders and teachers approach learning which impacts and influences Indigenous learners. Verbos and Humphries (2013) discuss how humans all have an ethical responsibility to live by the 7 Grandfather Teachings; Wisdom, Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, and Truth to live a good life, but the business world does not necessarily attend to these values. The public education system is very business orientated, and I challenge leadership to enact these missing values through consistent role-modelling to benefit Indigenous students and the concept of co-existence. Lessard, Caine & Clandinin (2015), three Western Canada researchers, explore two aboriginal youth's multiple worlds that are shaped by relationships that affect their well-being. These two students only attended school due to the relationships and a sense of belonging that they built with one another. Indigenous students are consistently struggling with identity, they are seen as under achievers by teachers, and have a longing to belong free of judgement, where their voices can be heard. A Washington

State University and University of Hawaii psychology study completed by L.McCubbin, H.McCubbin, Zhang, Kehl, & Strom (2013) defined well-being as relational in comparison to Indigenous worldview and found that the key elements are community connections, shared beliefs, and generational values. The two Indigenous boys from the previous study gravitated to a relational bond because they shared communal connections, beliefs and values that made sense to them, unlike the *school curriculum-making world*. Cajete (2018) points out the modern struggle of Indigenous peoples as being “characterized by an attempt to maintain the most cherished aspects of their ways of life, their relationship to the lands, and their consciousness of themselves as a distinct people” (p.13) Well being is related to a sense of freedom to be who you are and the two boys found that freedom within each other as their relationship made them feel like they belonged which made them feel safe. To build trusting relationships with students’ educators must challenge themselves to make efforts to let students explore and discover who they are by letting them reconnect with themselves, the land, and their people to gain Indigenous perspectives, knowledge and relational strategies. Thinking outside the box with curriculum outcomes in relation to Indigenous knowledge and connections can be highly beneficial for all students.

The need for educational leadership to build relationships is critical to approach learning as *a way of becoming*, but leaders need to have relational leadership strategies in his or her toolbox that align with Indigenous perspectives and *ways of being and doing*. What do relational leadership strategies entail? Well according to Henry & Wolfgramm (2018), relational leadership is still a term that is open for interpretation (p.204). An issue regarding relational leadership strategies would then be that there are no solidified defining approaches as there are differing Indigenous perspectives which can be confusing for leaders and teachers and culturally

sensitive for parents and community members. That confusion can be subsided through making community connections to determine the Indigenous perspectives within the school population. Benham & Murakami-Ramvalho (2010), two professors with diverse backgrounds, wrote research about engaged leadership with generous spirits, who in my mind defined what relational leadership strategies would look like in Indigenous communities. The basic idea of the study was theorized on leadership focusing on the individual responsibility to be giving so that the community can reciprocate the gift of generosity. A couple criticisms of the theory might challenge that leaders need to be both givers and takers to balance their own workload and mental health, and not all leaders have the character qualities to be the passionate and generous leader. The relational leadership strategy is based on a leader's integral ability to build relationships, build traditional values, build community, build respectfulness, and build bridges with non-Indigenous and Indigenous staff, students, parents, and community members. Building relationships can be seen as the first strategic move by leadership as it starts with a leader's ability to see past one's nose, to see the community and to see beyond one own's perspective to see behind one's eyes. The ability to see others can truly help to move others towards change through developing positive relationships and being influential which will help to create inclusive and culturally safe learning environments. The ability to see others comes from the ability to see oneself and that involves self-reflection and the start of an individual journey of building connections.

My Journey

We are all on a journey and each educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation will look different. My journey begins from not understanding my own truth and accepting values passed down to me by my parents that stressed the importance of family, community, hard work, and education. In our household, there was never any conversations about ethnicity

AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER'S JOURNEY TO CULTIVATE RECONCILIATION

and culture because my parents were both of mixed decent just trying to raise a family of five and survive in mainstream society by following the norms in a community where the value of a hard work ethic determined success. My grandparents and parents grew up in a time when education was provincially offered by the Church for the socially privileged, so most students only made it up to grade ten as they needed to work to survive and provide for the family. Both sets of grandparents of mixed decent had to work hard to stay afloat for the survival of their families and livelihoods. My parents were raised in humble and modest homes, and both have their own stories about why they valued education and carried that value when raising their family together. My parents value of education inspired me to become an educator and now an educational leader. Despite the differences in generational perspective, the values that they instilled in my siblings, and I have guided the paths that we each chose to pursue.

My dad valued education because he was raised on a farm in Whitemouth Lake, Manitoba with a family of five and had two choices; 1.) go to school or 2.) go to work, so he went to school so he could learn and play sports. My grandparents had a love for working off the land, but not necessarily a value for education, however since he was the eldest boy in his family, he was able to go to school. At the age of sixteen, my dad was offered a tuition scholarship to go finish his grade 11 and 12 and play baseball in Baudette, Minnesota so he took the opportunity. From that point on, my dad was responsible to work and pay his room and board to finish high school as his parents did not have a lot of money, but they passed on their value of work ethic. Through hard work and determination, my dad graduated from high school and went to post-secondary to achieve a Class 6 in education, which was rare in the times and became a principal. My dad was a principal for ten years and then went back to his grass roots to work off the land

with a logging business and farming. To this day, my dad has a love for reading, the land, and for learning from both along with a work ethic that has been passed to his children.

My mom valued education because her grandpa and mother were both educated and saw value in schooling. My grandma was the oldest in her family and went to a Catholic Residential School in La Broquerie, Manitoba where she graduated from high school and then completed her teaching certification in St. Boniface, Manitoba. She only taught for one year as she married my grandpa, had twenty-one children, and ended up doing his books for his lumber business where they resided in Vassar, Manitoba. My grandmother inspired my mother to be a teacher as she encouraged her to pursue her childhood goal. My mother also attended a Catholic Residential School in St. Anne, Manitoba with many other French, Métis students to complete her grade twelve and then she pursued her post-secondary degree in teaching. My mom was the first and only child in her family to get a post-secondary degree which demonstrates her value in education. I think from a young age, my mom watched my grandmother struggle to raise a large family with such strength, and she acknowledged the sacrifices that she made as a woman to put her own teaching career on hold to support her husband's business. My mother was determined to finish her education to honor her mother's sacrifices. The work ethic that she demonstrated to achieve her educational goal was inspirational because like my grandma, my mom did make sacrifices to raise her family, support my father's education and then finish her own educational goals years later. My mother was an educator and educational leader who always had an appreciation of local and cultural history and believes in the importance of sharing family stories and heritage to give a sense of identity. She was and still is a strong advocate for volunteerism within the community and took on the initiative to help develop a community museum to share knowledge and perspectives.

The earliest influences in my life journey were my parent's values and it was those values that were instilled in me that led me to being an educational leader. Both sides of my family have Indigenous roots that have been plucked out and replanted over the generations. My dad's family has Métis heritage on his mother's side of the family along with European, and Czech heritage on his dad's side of the family. My mom's family has French Métis heritage on both sides of the family. By today's standards, our family would be seen as colonized and colonizers as much of the Indigenous knowledge and perspective has been lost through Canada's anti-Indigenous systemic racism. The later influences in my life started the awareness process of decolonization and the acknowledgement of my own truth to my personal reconciliation journey.

My journey to reconciliation began with acknowledging and examining my own personal racial assumptions, values, and knowledge in relation to Indigenous culture, spirituality, and ways of knowing, being, and doing. Therefore, I needed to acknowledge and address the racism that exists within Canada and my own personal Indigenous feminist lens. I can admit that being Métis has opened two worlds that I can interchange and mask at my personal whim, the world of white privilege and the world of the oppressed Indigenous. I can also let you know that my great-grandmother suffered a greater racial oppression than my grandmother, my mother, and I did not have to bear and in shame or in shine she endured the suffering so that the next generation of females would not have to experience the same treatment through masked silence and the compromise of her cultural values.

Our Métis descent on both sides of our family was not something that anyone discussed until years later when the Métis Federation brought many families *out of the closet* to reclaim their Indigenous heritage. There was racism that existed in the community that I grew up in towards Indigenous peoples and other minorities, much like many other communities across

Manitoba. Both sides of my family, had strong family connections and ties to the land through working, harvesting, hunting, gardening etc. but the Indigenous spirituality, language and customs were lost in assimilation. I did not understand as a youth why I questioned much of what I knew to be normal around me such as going to church and being bound to Christian restrictions. As a youth, I was always drawn to the Indigenous culture, I was connected to my family, I was connected to the land, and I was connected to a silent spirituality of my ancestors that yearned inside of me. During my childhood, I spent much time with my neighbors, an Indigenous family, who struggled socio-economically so I learned from them to be humble and appreciative of family and what you have, along with my parent's family values as they also grew up knowing that hard work paid the bills and provided a good education to blend in society. I was taught to value family, community, hard work, and education because my mother engrained into my mind through positive role modelling that strong women passionately love, learn, and earn their way through life.

My personal racial assumptions growing up related to judging those who did not value family, hard work, community, and education which made me stereotypically profile many Indigenous peoples out of ignorance when I moved away from home, especially women who did not take care of their family, work hard, and embrace learning. I have only experienced strong role modelling by the Indigenous women who were colonized in my life because those women silently understood the struggle and showed me what I needed to do to be successful in today's world. Growing up, I could not understand the connection to the governmental oppression and assimilation as I was not educated on the historical reasons behind why Indigenous peoples struggled so much in mainstream society. The educational institutions within Manitoba did not teach those histories and the Indigenous voice was silenced in the curriculum. There are times

early in my teaching career that I know I racially judged the parents of the students that I taught because I could not understand why they did not share my values, and I often put the blame on the students and/or parents. I own that dehumanizing and unprofessional behavior, and I see how damaging, arrogant, and devaluing my cultural norm expectations were for student and family relationship building.

It was not until I met my husband with a First Nation descent and moved to his Reserve that I experienced and understood the struggles and racism that impacted Indigenous peoples, my peoples. For over half of my life, I never had opportunities to explore my Métis culture and spirituality as it was silenced and shunned by an oppressive government who shamed Indigenous peoples and taught them that it was better to value the English language, colonial spirituality, and ways of knowing, being, and doing to survive in today's world. My life experiences after the age of 24 opened my eyes and I learned so much knowledge in relation to Indigenous culture, spirituality, and ways of knowing, being, and doing because I started to question my world view and in turn gained knowledge about my culture and the aspects that had been lost through generational assimilation. In reading, AhNee-Benham (2003) I really connected to her Indigenous voice and ideas in relation to the "Go to the Source" (p.225) vision of a motherly feminist leadership model that encompasses an Indigenous epistemology for education leadership. I see much value as an Indigenous educational leader in taking opportunities to learn and lead in partnerships with community knowledge holders, students, parents, and teachers to acknowledge and address the existence of racism, to see the importance of counter-narratives and counter-stories, and to create an awareness of intersectionality.

The research topic is close to my roots as I am a Métis woman, my spouse and children are Status Indians and as a family unit we work hard to ensure that our children experience living

off the land through hunting, fishing, trapping and being in touch with the cultural aspects to maintain Indigenous knowledge and perspective. My parents have gifted my siblings and I with privilege and my husband and I have gifted our children with privilege with the expectation that we give back to those in need. My husband and I are raising our children with the values of family, hard work, community, education, and Indigenous culture. My husband has experienced racial profiling as an Indigenous male and the first-hand experiences that I have personally witnessed has given me much knowledge and perspective to the daily struggles of Indigenous peoples who cannot blend into societal norms. As parents, we have taken ownership to teach our children about the culture through a respect to the creator, to the land, to others and to oneself. Anti-Indigenous racism in Canada will continue to exist if we individually tolerate as a bystander and the only way to stand up against it is by being proud of Indigenous heritage and educating those who need to be enlightened in their ignorance. Being able to teach our children to be proud of their Indigenous culture and peoples is an amazing gesture of reconciliation as they are the future generation that can acknowledge and address the Anti-Indigenous racism through education.

Through my personal journey to cultivate reconciliation as an educational leader, I have learned that the importance of employing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives is to help build a sense of identity and belonging. The more Indigenous knowledge and perspectives that I gain, the more Indigenous knowledge and perspectives that I can help infuse into our school culture through collectively and collaboratively working in partnerships with teachers, students, parents, and the community so together we can build a sense of identity and belonging. To make a commitment to reconciliation, a leader must be intentional and invested in learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives for the betterment of the school culture. A leader must influence

others by role modelling and supporting others in their reconciliatory journey to gain Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. A leader must be willing to show vulnerability when learning and leading along with the staff, students, parents, and community to gain Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. A leader must be willing to admit that the process of learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives means challenging your own values and beliefs. A leader must be willing to open the door to partner with the parents and the community.

Summary of Literature – It is time to wonder...

There is a need for change and growth within the stagnant public education system. It is time to wonder what it would look like, feel like, smell like, taste like, sound like if our public schools were infused with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. It is time to wonder what a safe-inclusive school culture would mean to all our students, staff, and communities and how it would impact the wellness and achievement of all stakeholders. Manitoba public education needs to take action towards truth and reconciliation by embracing the Indigenous education policy framework, *Mamàhtawisiwin*, developed in collaboration with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (2022). The literature review discussed reconciliatory actions that any educational leadership can take in relation to the four action-based strategies. Educational leaders have a responsibility to take action towards reconciliation as those actions will benefit any school culture. Educational leadership across Manitoba have a responsibility to authentically be involved in building safe-inclusive school cultures by making a commitment to a personal journey of reconciliation so they can role-model the process of learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Educational leadership have a responsibility to put students at the centre of education by ensuring schools build collective efficacy to create sustainability for Indigenous education. Educational leadership have a responsibility to build a collaborative school culture of

learners and leaders that are understanding of world views, values, identities, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles. Educational leadership also have a responsibility to use relational leadership strategies to build relationships with students, teachers, and community members so an inclusive and culturally safe learning environment can be created through communal partnerships. It is time to wonder about the potential impact that Indigenous knowledge and perspectives can have on school cultures. It is time to wonder how have educational leaders cultivated a culture of reconciliation through the acquisition of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

CHAPTER 3 TRANSPLANTING THE SEEDLINGS

An offering from Mother Earth,
To respect and appreciate,
To delicately transfer her truthful creations.

I feel privileged and honored,
To share and be a part of the nutrient rich environment,
The seedlings are ready to expand their roots.

The transplanting has demonstrated growth,
I witness the progress and ready the water,
As I massage the roots with tender care.

Loosening the soil from the roots,
Ensures continued growth and absorption,
For a pot of successful expansion.

I wonder...will the nurturing continue,
As re-rooting occurs,
And knowledge transfers ownership?

Transferring the seedlings takes much water,
And soaking up of sunshine,
For a plentiful harvest.

Methodology and Methods (Transplanting the Seedlings)

The chapter uses the transplantation of seedlings process as a comparison to the methods and methodology outlined within the subsections. When deciding what research approach to take I needed to reflect on my cultural roots and heritage so I could stay true to my way of knowing, being, and doing. My knowledge and perspective come from my experiences of being a female, an educational leader, and a Métis, who is currently on a journey of reconciliation. As a female Indigenous researcher, I understand that for the research to be transformative within education it must describe and give voice to the individual experience so we can share and learn together. I will explain how my research ontology is based on multiple realities through my belief that socially we are all connected by the land and we each have the power of influence that can have an impact on what we learn and how we live our lives on the land. I will explain how my research epistemology is an interpretive paradigm and grounded in the assumption of cultural norms and worldviews which invites differing truths relative to how we understand knowledge and gain perspectives. After reflecting on my research philosophy, I decided to use a qualitative methodology and undertake a descriptive research study because I want the perspectives from the people living the experiences, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. To gain those perspectives I chose a virtual interview method and will describe the ethical considerations, the research participant recruitment, the data collection process, the interview process, and the data analysis. The transplantation method takes much organization and planning, prior to acquiring the descriptive insight from the methodology.

Research Ontology – Multiple Realities Guided by Connection to the Land

The acknowledgement that I have always lived in multiple realities has guided my connection to the land as that is what always gave me a sense belonging. I will discuss how multiple realities have guided my connection to the land. Moorman et al., (2021) explore and

recommend the concept of *Two-Eyed Seeing* to geography educators as it is based on a framework that calls for a weaving of perspectives to hold views of both Indigenous and Western knowledge simultaneously (p.201). The concept of a *Two-Eyed Seeing* was brought forward in 2004 by Elder Albert Marshall, and he describes it as “the gift of multiple perspective treasured by many aboriginal peoples... and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all” (Bartlett et al., 2012, p.335). In my opinion, *Two-Eyed Seeing* can also be seen as a reality for those Indigenous peoples who come from mixed descent and/or have been displaced from family because they have a weaved knowledge/perspective and ability to hold two worldviews. “Elder Albert additionally indicates that we need to learn to weave back and forth between our knowledges” (Bartlett et al., 2012, p.335) dependent on the strength of the knowledge and the circumstances so learning can be fluid as you want people to embrace their ways of knowing and seeing the world yet still learn along with others. I have always been a “work in progress” and on a learning journey to discover, who I am, where I come from, why am I here, and where am I going. Fitzgerald (2006) discusses “that gender and ethnicity do matter in educational leadership and management and that ‘walking between two worlds’ is complicated, contested and difficult terrain” (p.210) to navigate as an Indigenous woman in leadership. Being a female Métis educational leader who is currently on a journey of reconciliation clearly demonstrates that I am of mixed descent and I am open to learning and discovery despite the difficult terrain that I have to navigate. Therefore, the research ontology is grounded in the assumption of multiple realities because we are all on a learning journey, we all have different knowledge and perspective based on experiences, and we are all connected by the land in one way or another. Being of mixed descent and/or not understanding a sense of family, culture and/or heritage can be very confusing as everyone needs a sense of belonging and that feeling can come from land connection and

responsibility. Datta (2018) explores how land-based education might challenge Western knowledge and speaks to its relationality and argues that we are accountable and responsible to each other and the natural world (96). Every human being needs the land to survive and connects to it in one way or another and that is the one commonality that brings us all together despite our differences in reality because we have a responsibility to the land. Even though multiple realities exist, our realities are connected by the land and we each have the power of influence that can impact what we learn and how we live in today's world. The land relationally connects us and can be used as a foundation for learning. Oskineegish (2015) explores cultural relevant teaching practices and discusses the relevance of land-based learning and the benefits towards student learning (p.19). Educational leadership has the power of influence within a school system and therefore can directly have an impact on the transformation of a school culture through a connection and responsibility to the land through land-based learning.

Epistemology Guided by Indigenous Knowledge & Perspectives

To respect diversity, educational leadership has the responsibility to be guided by Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in addition to their own cultural norm and/or worldview. Cranston & Jean-Paul (2021) speak to braiding Indigenous and racialized knowledges within a Westernized education system to create racial justice. In that research, Martin (2012) reveals that braiding knowledges respect that there are diverse understandings of the world and acknowledge and respect a diversity of perspectives without perpetuating the dominance of one over another' (p.18). We all have our own truths, and they are created by the realities of our cultural norms that we live which becomes our worldviews. Worldviews are connected by the land and the commonality of our experiences and the realities that we live on that land. Therefore, the interpretive paradigm will guide the research approach as Indigenous knowledge and perspectives honor storytelling and narrative as we are all the experts of our own experiences.

Leavy (2017) points out that “this worldview suggests that we are actively engaged in constructing and reconstructing meanings through our daily interactions—often referred to as the *social construction of reality*” (p. 13). Giving voice and listening to the knowledge and experiences of other educational leaders’ reality when interacting with *Mamàhtawisiwin*, developed in collaboration with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (2022) and implementing the four strategies will give much insight and opportunity to learn from our diversity and lead together. Educational leadership need to understand the lived experiences of implementation across other Manitoba public schools and focus on understanding the similarities and differences of the social realities so they can create an inclusive school culture that is conducive to the land they live on. Interpretivism will help generate an understanding as it is grounded in the assumption of modern cultural norms and diverse worldviews which invites differing knowledge and perspectives to be shared while learning how to build a safe and inclusive school culture. Leavy (2017) supports by confirming that researchers who take this approach “value people’s subjective interpretation and understanding of their experiences and circumstances” (p.13). As an Indigenous researcher, I value others’ experiences and stories as I believe they can guide us to socially transform education. Educational leaders need to create a new reality within schools, a new cultural norm that is accepting of diversity, inclusive and collaborative so worldviews can coexist.

Qualitative Methodology: Descriptive Research Study

Qualitative Methodology can be seen as a humanistic approach to research and that is why I have chosen the method as I want to relay the authenticity of the implementation experience. With the new *Indigenous education policy framework* in place, educational leadership are in the position to provide their experiences and/or stories of how they are approaching the improvement of school cultures for the benefit of reconciliation by learning

Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Alasuutari (2010) found that “Qualitative methods produce different lenses on social reality, lenses that make society and its phenomena understandable” (p.147). To understand the experience, I chose a descriptive research study because I want the perspective from the people living the experience either, Indigenous and/or non-Indigenous educational leaders. “Descriptive research aims to generate what Clifford Geertz (1973) referred to as “thick descriptions” of social life (those that provide details, meaning and context), typically from the perspective of the people living it” (Leavy, 2017, p.5). The descriptions of what is currently happening in schools to build safe and inclusive school cultures will help other educational leadership understand how to approach reconciliation efforts that infuse Indigenous knowledge and perspectives by using the Indigenous education policy framework, *Mamàhtawisiwin*, developed in collaboration with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (2022). The interview questions are based around the four action-based strategies and how educational leaders have adapted their practice by utilizing them to build an inclusive school culture.

Method - Virtual Interviews

The virtual interviews offered a variety of non-Indigenous and Indigenous leadership perspectives that gave insight into the experiences of how leaders built safe, inclusive school cultures that embraced Indigenous knowledge and perspectives to benefit all learners. The overall aim of the research was to share initiatives and/or transformations educational leaders are employing to develop a set of wisdoms that will assist an educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation. The format of this descriptive study involved one-hour virtual interviews with educational leaders. Living and travelling in rural Manitoba has its disadvantages and having the ability to conduct interviews around participants lifestyles and schedules eased the process. I completed my data collection via a virtual interview on Microsoft 365 app Teams, a

videoconferencing communication platform that is utilized by many educational institutions and public-school divisions across Manitoba. The participants joined from the comfort of his/her/their home or workplace during the virtual interview. It is important to note that the audio in the interview was recorded to capture the story and the inflections of voice of the interviewee, but the video function was disabled to protect privacy and anonymity. At the beginning of the interview, the video was enabled and not recorded as it functioned to create a facial comfort between the interviewer and interviewee. I then used the dictate function on Microsoft 365 app Stream to transcribe the recorded conversation which helped give me insight through the words and allowed me to interpret the data.

Ethical Considerations

We all have our own truths, our own norms, and our own worldviews that need to be considered ethically in research. Qualitative research is known to take a relational approach as discussed by Leavy (2017) which means the researcher needs to attend to relational ethics (p.40; Adams et al., 2015; Ellis, 2007). Leavy (2017) includes a definition of relational ethics by Ellis as follows:

Relational ethics recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between the researcher and research, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work... Act from our hearts and minds, to acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others... (p.40; 2007, p.4)

Currently, I am amid my own journey of reconciliation, so I am finding myself and re-learning my own truths, my own norms, and my own worldview. In considering relational ethics, I needed to step back from my own truths, my own norms, and my own worldview to be respectful of the participant's truths, norms, and worldview. Ethically, I had to consider other truths, worldviews, and norms to ensure I did not hold bias nor make judgement. As stated earlier, my

mixed ancestry and previous public-school education allowed me to navigate my surroundings and blend into mainstream society. I admit that being Métis has opened two worlds and realities that I can interchange and mask at my personal whim, the worlds have differing values, culture, and privilege. I had an ethical obligation to give voice to the participant without interference of my own opinion, values, and/or privilege. I am an educational leader who is also working with the four action-based strategies in a community of learners, so I needed not to make judgments on other educational leader's choices of implementation and/or journey of reconciliation as everyone takes different approaches and paths. Each Indigenous community has different languages/dialects, cultural experiences and/or practices so I had to acknowledge that every educational leader's experiences of learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives would be different than my own. That is why it is important to be descriptive so that I accurately shared the stories of the participants to give an authentic depiction of each personal experience as they were unique.

The integrity of this study was ensured by honoring privacy and confidentiality for the participants and the information provided. The interview data was kept confidential using pseudonyms (participant A, B, C, D, & E) for the participants and the schools that were included in the stories (School # 1, School # 2....). An electronic database connecting the actual name to the pseudonym along with the virtual interview recordings was kept on the UM cloud storage One Drive in password protected folders using a password protected laptop that only I have access to. Signed consent forms and hard-copy transcripts are now stored in a fireproof and waterproof secured safe in my home. To maintain authenticity, I had an ethical obligation to give the participants an opportunity to review the interview transcripts along with the recommendations and to provide additional information/feedback if needed. I ensured to email

the participants the transcripts and recommendations and gave them sufficient time (12 days) to read and respond prior to moving forward with the data analysis as I valued the participant's voice and wanted their relayed experiences to authenticate the data collected. I requested permission from the Research Ethics Board to move forward with the research subject to conditions (Appendix E). The attached conditions ensured that I ethically abided by the research protocol.

Research Participants

The focus of the research is on educational leadership therefore to be eligible the participants needed to currently be active in a public-school role with the ability to influence change in school culture using Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. An educational leader is an individual who takes on any informal or formal leadership roles and works within an education system as a community, school &/or divisional leader. The educational leader could be either Indigenous or non-Indigenous, male or female, and had to be an adult (18 years or older). The recruitment process started with a letter to Superintendents of School Divisions (Refer to Appendix A) so permission and recommendations of participants could be identified. Once permission had been granted by the Superintendent to conduct the study a letter was given to the identified research participants of the school division (Refer to Appendix B) so they could make an informed decision on whether to volunteer to be a participant in the study. When those who were invited affirmed their participation, those participants contacted me via email to confirm so that I could send the consent form for participants (Refer to Appendix C) to be reviewed, signed, and returned. When I received the signed consent form, I emailed the interview guide for the research participants (Refer to Appendix D) and then conducted the independent virtual interviews. I was going to interview four different educational leaders that are actively in the process of improving a school culture for the benefit of reconciliation by learning Indigenous

knowledge and perspectives, however, I asked permission from the Research Ethics Board to interview five participants due to the high interest.

Data Collection

The method used for data collection was independent virtual interviews. The data collection process was all approved by the Research Ethics Board. I started the process by sending letter to multiple Superintendents of School Divisions and there were 3 divisions that participated. The set criterion helped guide the Superintendents of School Divisions identify ideal participants. Once permission was granted by the School Division/Superintendent to conduct the study a letter via email was sent to the identified research participants of the school division. When those who were invited affirmed their participation, those participants contacted me via email to confirm so that I could send the consent form for participants to be reviewed, signed, and returned. When I received the signed consent form, I emailed the interview guide for the research participants and then conducted the independent virtual interviews which was the method used for data collection. Two weeks prior to each interview, I sent out separate email invitations with the interview questions, a pdf document of the *Mamàhtawisiwin*, developed in collaboration with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (2022), and a link to connect to the videoconferencing communication platform. I ensured as the interviewer that I log into the meeting 15 minutes prior, so I was able to invite them into the interview meeting. I made sure that I was not recording video as it was disabled and I only recorded the audio on my password protected laptop. After each virtual interview was done, I transcribed the audio recording at my earliest convenience to ensure the integrity of the data and authenticity of the participants voice as time tends to limit memory and connection. I transcribed each interview audio recordings using the dictate function on Microsoft 365 app, Stream, and then I listened to the audio recording to ensure the transcript was word for word. Each participant received their

transcript to review and approve. If a participant needed changes to be made, they were done immediately and sent back for final approval. Each participant transcript was saved in a separate Microsoft word document under the pseudonym. All the data was protected and saved on UM cloud storage OneDrive in password protected folders and laptop. The information from the transcripts was then to be analyzed for the results and conclusions section of my thesis.

Conducting the Interviews

The interviews were conducted separately as I needed to zone in on the personal voices, experiences, stories, knowledge and/or perspectives. The purpose of this study was to explore how educational leaders adapted their practice by utilizing the four action-based strategies of the *Mamàhtawisiwin*, developed in collaboration with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (2022). I explored the participant's knowledge and perspective and asked him or her to share initiatives and/or transformations that he or she employed to cultivate a culture of reconciliation within the school. I gave the participant a reminder that at any time he or she was free to withdraw from the interview, refrain from answering any questions he or she preferred to omit, without prejudice or consequence, and asked for the recorder to be turned off and/or asked for a break from the interview process. The guided questions/points of discussion were:

Prompt: In a spirit of reconciliation, I want you to reflect on the Honourable Murray Sinclair, former Senator and Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), four guiding questions: Who are you? Where do you come from? Why are you here? Where are you going? "As a result of the need for dialogue in a time of reconciliation, we want students to be able to connect to self, family, community, place, the land, and animals by having them explore the Honourable Sinclair's four guiding questions" (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022, p.16) and I would like you to do the same.

- 1.) Please introduce yourself.
- 2.) What is your role as an educational leader and how have you used that role to cultivate reconciliation within the school culture?
- 3.) What are you presently doing to support authentic involvement of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives and what can you improve upon in reflection of what you have done?
- 4.) What are you presently doing to support putting students at the centre of the Indigenous-inclusive educational experience and what can you improve upon in reflection of what you have done?
- 5.) What are you presently doing to understand Indigenous worldviews, values, identities, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles and what can you improve upon in reflection of what you have done?
- 6.) What are you presently doing to create an inclusive and culturally safe learning environment and what can you improve upon in reflection of what you have done?
- 7.) What are the barriers that are preventing you from successfully implementing any of the four strategies?
- 8.) In reflection, what solutions do you suggest in overcoming the barriers?

After the interview, I thanked the participant for volunteering in the study and made aware important dates and deadlines that he or she would need to know to participate in the analyzation and approval of the transcripts to add comments and/or revisions for authenticity purposes. The audio recordings of the virtual interviews were kept on the UM cloud storage OneDrive to store and SharePoint to transfer data in password protected folders using a password protected laptop that only I had access to.

Data Analysis

Data analysis allowed me as the researcher to make meaning of the collected data. Leavy (2017) stated that the general phases of analysis and interpretation include (1) data preparation and organization, (2) initial immersion, (3) coding, (4) categorizing and theming, and (5) interpretation (p.150). I needed to find a data analysis method that worked for descriptive research; therefore, I decided to use Colaizzi's seven-step framework for analysis as it has been effective in research.

“Colaizzi's seven-step framework includes the following steps:

- 1.) read all participants' descriptions,
- 2.) extract significant statement that directly pertains to the phenomenon by returning to each protocol,
- 3.) formulate meaning for each significant statement,
- 4.) cluster the themes by categorizing the formulated meanings,
- 5.) integrate the findings into an exhaustive descriptive,
- 6.) formulate the exhaustive statements findings and
- 7.) return the identified themes to the participants to validate the articulated meaning of their description” (as cited in Hu et al., 2021, p.3).

This descriptive research study design required listening to the stories, acquiring knowledge, acknowledging perspectives, and analyzing the dynamic relationships to identify attributes and strategies that were utilized by other educational leaders to improve school cultures for the benefit of reconciliation. The data analysis for the interviews needed to be very structured to pull out themes that could be used to formulate meaning in context to the research.

Since the virtual interview audio recordings were already transcribed, authenticated, and approved by each participant I needed to start the data analysis by using the initial immersion and coding as suggested by Leavy (2017) to read, think, and sort through the data and use a coding system to make meaning (p.150-51). Taking the time to thoroughly read through each of the participant descriptions allowed me to start the *In-vivo* coding process to acquire significant words and/or phrases that directly pertained to the four action-based strategies of the

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Framework, developed in collaboration with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (2022). Strauss (1978) recommends the *In-vivo* coding strategy as it relies on using participants' exact language to generate codes (as cited in Leavy, 2017, p.151) and these codes will connect to the four action-based strategies. The purpose of this research was to explore how educational leaders have adapted their practice by utilizing the four action-based strategies. It was important to use such coding in this descriptive research study as it stayed true to the voice of the participants. I am a visual learner, so I used a colour-coded system to highlight the words and phrases that connected to the four-action based strategies. A second coding strategy used to capture the perspective of the participants was *Values coding* as "this strategy focuses on conflicts, struggles, and power issues" (Saldana, 2014, as cited in Leavy, 2017, p.151) which allowed me to categorize the educational leader's experiences. It was important to use such coding in this descriptive research study as it helped to identify what the participant's values, reflection for improvement and the barriers they had encountered along their journey. I used the codes: values (V), barriers (B), and reflection (R) to provide insight into the educational leader's journey. These codes helped to identify the actions wisdom, and I used the Microsoft Word comment box feature to record the code and write notes. With the extraction of the collected data, I was able to decipher meaning and patterns through deep thought, reflection, and extensive discussion with my advisor(s) so I could cluster the data into themes of educational leadership action wisdoms &/or recommendations. These themes helped me interpret the data so I could make sense of the information and what I had learned in the study.

Since the overall aim of the research was to develop a set of wisdoms that will assist and support an educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation, I needed to interpret meaning

and integrate the findings into an exhaustive description. Leavy (2017) stresses that the researcher must speak on behalf of the data as the data does not speak from themselves (p.150). The exhaustive description helped me formulate my statement of findings that explained the set of wisdoms and gave voice to how educational leaders have nurtured school cultures by employing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. The participants had the opportunity to review and contribute to the set of wisdoms as it comes directly from their knowledge and perspective. Each participant was given time to respond to the research findings to ensure that I had spoken for them accurately and authentically represented their voice and story.

Summary

The transplantation method took much organization and planning, prior to acquiring the descriptive insight from the methodology. By utilizing a qualitative methodology and undertaking a descriptive research study I gained the knowledge and the perspectives of the people living the experience, Indigenous and/or Non-Indigenous. Leavy (2017) confirms that qualitative research allows us to unpack the meanings people ascribe to activities, situations, events, people, or artifacts, build a depth of understanding about some dimension of social life (p.159). The goal was to hear and share the voice of the educational leaders who adapted their practice by utilizing the four action-based strategies of the *Mamàhtawisiwin*, developed in collaboration with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (2022). Having had the opportunity to listen and learn from the experiences of some educational leaders in Manitoba helped unpack knowledge and perspective in relation to the four action-based strategies. These shared experiences built a depth of understanding to develop a set of wisdoms that will assist and support an educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation. When a healthy transfer of knowledge and perspectives occurs so does growth which leads to harvesting the learning.

CHAPTER 4 HARVESTING THE CROPS

The fruits of Mother Earth,
To be grateful and giving of the harvest,
To gather the reflective knowledge from the moon.

I feel humbled and accomplished,
To offer the gained perspective of the land and water,
The harvest is ready to share and prosper.

The gathering of the fruits of knowledge,
Is an awakening of reconciliation,
As the crops of plentiful perspective are taken to store.

The harvester has broken the soils,
The trail of empathy fills the new path,
A natural cohesion of understanding occurs.

I wonder...will the harvester,
Become the ally or the owner that fertilizes,
And protects the growth?

Harvesting the crops takes much time,
And energy that reflects,
A journey of healing unrooted land.

Summary of data collection

Harvesting the data collection was an intentional learning process that involved reflecting, listening, interpreting, and learning knowledge and perspective. The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive research study was to explore how educational leaders have adapted their practice by utilizing the four action-based strategies in the *Mamàhtawisiwin*, developed in collaboration with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (2022). The research question that guided the work was: How have educational leaders nurtured school cultures in a spirit of reconciliation by employing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives? The overall aim of the research was to develop a set of wisdoms that will assist and support an educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation. In this chapter, I will share the set of wisdoms/recommendations of the participants, and I will also briefly summarize in the analysis conclusion the data collected from the descriptive narrative in respect to the participant's values, barriers, and reflections which all directly correlate to the thematic findings that will be shared in chapter five.

Harvesting the crops is a summary of the data collected through five interviews with participants who are considered either informal or formal educational leaders in the public education system in rural Manitoba. There were four female participants and one male, two were Indigenous and three were non-Indigenous, and their experience in education ranged from 8 to 30 plus years. Participant A is a non-Indigenous female, who has made close connections with various Indigenous peoples within a few different communities, including a northern community, throughout her 30 plus years experience in education working with K-4, 5-8, & 9-12 rural schools. Participant B is an Indigenous male, who has made close connections with his First Nation community and surrounding communities, including reserve communities, throughout his 25 years experience in education working with K-12 and K-9 rural schools as a teacher, resource

teacher, vice-principal, and principal. Participant C is a non-Indigenous female, who has made connections with a few different communities, including a northern community and a reserve community, throughout her 25 plus years experience in education working at K-12 rural schools with non-Indigenous and Indigenous students, staff, and families as a teacher, resource teacher, reading recovery teacher, literacy coach, and an administrator of student services. Participant D is an Indigenous female, who has close connections with her First Nation Community and surrounding First Nation and Métis communities, throughout her 8 years experience working as an early year's teacher, alternative education teacher and as a high school Indigenous academic achievement facilitator in rural Manitoba. Participant E is a non-Indigenous female, who has made close connections with various Indigenous peoples within a few different communities surrounded by reserve communities, including a northern community, throughout her 24 plus years experience working at K-12 rural schools as a teacher and teaching principal. It is interesting to note that the one female Indigenous participant and the two female non-Indigenous participants declared they were married to an Indigenous spouse which helped them learn Indigenous knowledge and perspectives and make valuable connections within the community.

The data collection process started with sending a letter via email to Superintendents of School Divisions to gain permission and recommendations for potential participants. Once permission was granted by the Superintendent to conduct the study a letter via email was sent to the identified research participants of the school division. When those who were invited affirmed their participation, those participants contacted me via email to confirm so that I could send the consent form for participants to be reviewed, signed, and returned. When I received the signed consent form, I emailed the interview guide for the research participants and then conducted the independent virtual interviews. After the virtual interviews, I transcribed the interview audio

recordings, so each participant received their transcript to review and approve. Once approval was granted, I started the data analysis by thoroughly reading through the transcripts and colour-coding the descriptive narrative that connected to each of the four action-based strategies. The descriptive narrative was then categorized by colour into the four action-based strategies on a word document. I discovered themes by identifying significant words or phrases that interconnected across the four action-based strategies in the Mamàhtawisiwin document. The themes that were revealed are: open mind, building relationships, sharing, collaboration, and connections.

After completing the initial data analysis of the descriptive narrative (Appendix G), I needed to dig deeper into the soils, so I used a secondary coding strategy, *Values coding*, to capture the perspective of the participants to categorize each educational leader's experiences. Using this type of coding in a descriptive research study helped me to identify the participant's values (Appendix J), the barriers each participant encountered along their journey (Appendix H) and reflection for improvement (Appendix I). I used the codes: values (V), barriers (B), and reflection (R) to provide insight into the educational leader's journey. Through analysis of these codes' descriptive narrative, what I found was an alignment of the same themes: open mind, building relationships, sharing, collaboration, and connections which confirmed clustering the data and making these terms the themes of the research. I also acquired descriptive narrative that revealed the shared wisdoms and recommendations of the participants from closely analyzing the values and reflection coding narrative. Through analyzing the descriptive narrative of the participants, I compiled a shared list of educational leader responsibilities (Appendix K) which I thought would be useful for educational leaders to have as an additional resource to support an

educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation and give voice to how educational leaders have nurtured school cultures by employing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

Harvesting the Crops is a gathering of all the data analyzed to reach the roots of my findings, the themes, which will be explained in chapter five. The key data that was gathered revealed the shared wisdoms and recommendations of the participants from closely analyzing the values and reflection coding narrative. The wisdoms and recommendations of the participants will be shared in this chapter as they summarize the data collected through the five interviews. Through the descriptive narrative, the five participants shared how they as educational leaders nurtured school cultures in a spirit of reconciliation by employing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. The participants' voices were heard through descriptive narrative that depicted their personal stories and experiences. Educational leaders play a pivotal role in nurturing school cultures, and each did so differently according to their school dynamics and experiences as a leader.

The participants all demonstrated a relational-community leadership approach for reconciliation as every community has different knowledge and histories, therefore, the connections between the community and the school need to be approached differently to achieve student success. In the AhNee-Benham (2003) study, Genevieve Gollnick supports that educational leadership use a community-based approach to schooling:

To make our schools successful we need to involved community elders, families, and cultural leaders. Our children need to know that the most important people in their lives are supportive. We must also involve community residents, businesses and their employees, and other social programs public and private. I believe that our children need to know that what they are doing in school is important not only to their families, but to

the community at large. Coordinated efforts can create schools that provide the very best learning experiences to build strong leadership, provide our youth with career and life choices, and in the end help to build viable (economic) communities in the 21st century. (p.227)

The participants have all positioned themselves in a cultural interface that allows them to be a learner and a leader in a school culture that embraces relationship building and community at its core. Nakata (2007) states that it is within these 'complex and changing terrains' of actual lived relationships where change can happen (as cited in Kearney, McIntosh, Perry, et al., 2014, p.341). Working towards change takes much time, energy, patience, and commitment. An educational leader's journey of reconciliation is one of choice and will need much guidance. Based on the research, the following set of wisdoms have sprouted:

Set of Wisdoms

1. Be open to role model learning Indigenous knowledge & perspectives.
2. Be willing to share your story and listen to others' stories to learn and lead together.
3. Have vulnerable conversations with an open heart and a good heart to develop a sense of purpose with staff, students, parents, and community members.
4. Devote time to collaboration and offer professional development that is meaningful and purposeful. The more opportunities the better.
5. Give students voice and choice when it comes to learning and leading.
6. Be an active community member. Get to know your school community to seek advice and build relational connections with potential parent councils, knowledge keepers &/or elders. It helps to find quality people and quality resources.
7. Have clear expectations and set goals with those who share their gifts, knowledge &/or perspectives.
8. Teach protocols to staff for asking others to share gifts and encourage them to take the time to wonder and ask questions when those opportunities arise.
9. Be responsive to student needs and family needs to build relational connections.

10. Be creative and think outside of the box when infusing Indigenous knowledge and perspective into the school culture.
11. Be a problem solver when barriers arise and work with all stakeholders to find solutions.
12. Be reflective, resilient, and relentless when learning and leading together.
13. Be intentional when hiring to support Indigenous education.

I have cultivated a set of wisdoms from the research study. The five participants have each shared their personal journey of reconciliation to give insight into how they have adapted their practice by utilizing the four action-based strategies. It is up to the individual educational leader to use the wisdoms to guide their own practice when infusing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the school culture. It is now time to discuss each set of wisdoms in more detail.

1. Being open to role model learning Indigenous knowledge and perspective is a personal choice that an educational leader must commit to in the hope of inspiring others to embark on a journey of reconciliation.

An educational leader needs to be a role model to the students, staff, families and community members. Participant C shares how they role model being a learner of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. If the educational leader did not take the time to learn from the Elder and the Professional development opportunities, they would not have had the confidence to share the wisdom from the Elder:

I feel like I demonstrate respect for Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, and I speak up when I need to speak up. Not worrying about trying something or asking about something and respectfully, in a respectful manner. I've heard some teachers say "Well, I don't want to be disrespectful, I don't want to do that because it's disrespectful, trying to teach Indigenous education when I'm not Indigenous" many Elders have said just go try it, it's OK, so nudging people.

It is important as an educational leader to encourage teachers to take the time to learn from Knowledge Keepers and Elders about Indigenous knowledge and to invite them into the classroom to gain perspectives so they can understand that learning from someone is the most respectful way to understand worldviews.

2. Being willing to share your story and listen to others' stories to learn and lead together is a positive way to make connections and build relationships.

All the educational leaders spoke about their experiences of sharing as a valuable way to learn in partnership with others and create trusting relationships. An educational leader needs to be vulnerable and willing to take the time to listen rather than to just be heard. In a spirit of reconciliation, some great starters for a conversation are answering the Honourable Murray Sinclair, former Senator and Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), four guiding questions: Who are you? Where do you come from? Why are you here? Where are you going? Participant E shares her story by answering the first question:

I'm a mom; I'm a wife and I'm a person who loves my job. I took my position here. I applied for the position here because we had in my first seven years we had, I guess we had, I'm trying to think of *****, 4 principals in seven years and my family was going to move here with my husband's job and I wanted some stability for, not just for my children, but for their friends, and that would not having a changing over in leadership and I found it stressful as a teacher and a thinking that I originally got the position I originally thought I'd be doing some training for, so maybe the next set of rounds two years after the next principal left, you know, but I jumped right in and I love it. I truly love my job. Yeah, that's who I am.

Listening to Participant E gives the reader knowledge and perspective of who the participant is and why they are in the leadership role. Sharing a story helps to make connections between people and the participant's story would help students, parents, caregivers, and families understand why they are working as a leader in the school and where the participant will potentially take them as school community.

3. Having vulnerable conversations with an open heart and a good heart to develop a sense of purpose with staff, students, parents, and community members is a positive approach to building a supportive school culture that embraces Indigenous knowledge and/or perspectives.

Educational leaders need to have a purpose if they expect to build traction for truthful conversations. Participant C explains the importance of having purposeful intentions:

Learning more about treaties and colonialism and learning more about the 94 Calls to Action, and really, being thoughtful about it when we plan for students and talking about it, talking more during meetings and having it become a part of the conversation because I feel like we don't always do that with purposeful intentions.

Participant D speaks the truth about the breakdown of relationships that Indigenous people have with the education system and how we must all work to repair it together through education:

Indigenous people have a bad relationship with educational settings and that carries down to their next generations, and so we still have to learn that sometimes school is not a bad thing and there's more to learning, not just teaching, reading, writing. We're also trying to implement stuff that is important, like cultural activities and language and people might

want to learn this too, right? And it's not just for the students, as we also, like to offer it for the families we have.

Participant E speaks the truth with young students about the mistakes that were made in our country and how we must learn from those mistakes to make a better country:

I always tell the kids how lucky we are to live in the country we are that we have free country free education, that children, boys and girls both get to school. But I often at the same time say, but you realize that Canada has made lots of mistakes, like we're learning from our past and that's what we do every day in our schools. We need to learn from our mistakes, cause Canada made lots of bad mistakes in our Country and we treated people poorly.

Each one of the participants has an understanding that they need to be vulnerable and speak truths to open heartfelt conversations that can help lead others with purpose and genuine intentions to learn from past mistakes to make proactive choices for the education of future generations.

4. Devoting time to collaboration and offering professional development that is meaningful and purposeful creates more opportunities to learn together.

An educational leader needs to help organize opportunities for all staff to learn and lead together with students, parents, caregivers, families, and community members by creating engaging and relevant learning experiences. Participant D explains how many educators do not possess the historical knowledge and perspectives needed to teach Indigenous education, but collaboration and PD gives hope:

They're really big on having Indigenous perspectives in culture, and so one of our PDs was like that and we had a big room full of all these seasoned teachers. At our table, we had a document on it, and it was about, I can't remember something about the Indian Act and how if you want to go to university then you have to give up your status. And like I knew that and so, then some of the teachers are like, wow, I didn't know that, and I was just like, holy cow and you've been a teacher for how many years? And like, I was really shocked to learn that and so that's why I'm really glad that we're finally telling the truth.

Participant E acknowledges the important role that is tasked to educational leadership to organize appropriate professional development, so all staff are trained and can train others when needed:

As well, part of my job is for professional development. One of the past things that I've done is that we reviewed the book when the calls to action book came out, or answering the calls, we reviewed that with staff, and it was left out for the first year. The first month, standing up on our staff room table so everyone could see it so, it's right and prominent with us. We've all had treaty education. Just finished and completed a treaty education. All EAs and teachers stayed the whole time, I made the decision for our custodian &/or secretary as well, if they were able to with their other jobs. So, they are also trained as well cause our secretaries are first line of defense coming into the school and I also have been trained.

The importance of educational leaders setting up collaboration and professional development for all staff strengthens the meaning of infusing Indigenous knowledge and perspective into the school culture and makes the learning purposeful as we are all on a learning journey together.

5. Giving students voice and choice when it comes to learning and leading is essential to discovering the interests and pathway to take when exploring Indigenous knowledge and perspectives with our youth.

Educational leadership need to empower students to let them lead their own learning journey so they can discover their own truths and explore their culture and language. Participant C reflects on taking a different approach to empower students:

I reflected on including Indigenous students and planning at high school, we need to include indigenous students in the planning process we have a Grade 9 to 12 high school It's a large campus of about, almost 2000 kids and we have students that are coming from (Community B), so they have never been in any schools in (Community C) and they're coming from (School B) in Grade 9, so they don't know the teachers, they don't know the community and everybody's always talking about what is best for them, but I don't think anybody has ever really sat down and had a conversation with them and said what would get you here? What would, what do you think is the best way to start your day or to start your year in this new place, without any real connections?

Asking our students thought provoking questions and getting their input will only empower the students to make the choice to attend school and be an active participant in their own learning journey. Educational leadership needs to tap into the most powerful human resource in our school, the students, as we need to acknowledge their spirited insight and appreciate their knowledge and perspectives, so they feel seen and heard.

6. Being an active community member and getting to know your school community to seek advice and build relational connections with potential parent council, knowledge keepers &/or elders helps to find quality people and quality resources.

Educational leadership need to make these essential connections by dedicating themselves to building relationships within the school community and out of the school community. Participant A shares how they make these types of essential connections:

We can talk to our students and our families, and we always try to invite all our families to do those events. So that our parents are seeing what we're trying to do as well. And I also seek advice from our First Nations people around here that I know have that background right. And like I said before, it's hard to find. It's always hard to find those people who you can trust enough that they have that knowledge and that they're guiding you the way that it should go right.

Participant D discusses how they are constantly searching for those who have gifts to share so they can make connections to increase their sharing circle:

I think that one of the things that I was like just thinking about is I always just see things on social media, whatever reading I'm like, oh, we could do this. I always feel like we should be all, like connected and have like I don't even know what you would call it? Like a database of people's gifts and things like that. I think that would be beneficial and like just having your connections to the communities and building them and making sure that we have and just carrying on those traditions and knowledge so that we can keep working and learning our culture and language.

Participant E expresses that educators do not need to look far as there are many parents with gifts that you need to lean in on as a powerful resource:

So that's one thing is we can lean in on our parents from the community, to give us what to teach basically. Yeah, I think the best thing is that we're trying. I know that we're trying, and I think that we are just listening and accepting of everybody.

Living in rural Manitoba can lend to living in the community that you teach, but it can also lend to travelling from outside of the community. Either way, the participants all see the value in being an active community member and participant in the learning journey as these connections are dependent on the relationships built through volunteerism and being present in the community.

7. Having clear expectations and setting goals with those who share their gifts, knowledge &/or perspectives reinforces authentic experiences.

Educational leadership needs to build relationships with Knowledge Keepers &/or Elders to ensure that they are genuine and willing to be a part of the school's learning journey. Participant D speak to authenticity and what it means:

When speaking on authenticity and purpose, I think we need to be aware that some of our culture was lost and there may be "Elders and Knowledge Carriers" who may not have the "permission" or gifts, or doing it for the wrong reasons, or even making things up. I think we need to be aware of that and make sure who we go to for knowledge is authentic. I also think a clearer understanding of expectations should also be brought up. I understand that these are Elders and Knowledge Carriers, but they also must be held to the same standards as educators because they are educating others. So, ensuring that it's

understood that we are all coming from an educational setting and not necessarily pushing one's beliefs and cultural ways. Just making sure that what they are doing is appropriate too. But at the same time, this can also expose the students to these ways and allow them to decide if that is what they want to pursue, and these Elders and Knowledge Carriers are available or can help guide them to others.

Participant E also shares his/her experience when looking for Knowledge Keepers and/or Elders as this may not always be an easy task:

One of the things is like finding someone who has the confidence, who's not, not they don't have to be qualified, but like we've had people who are not dependable. Cause we've had people in the past, who were even hired to be our Elder or to be our Knowledge Keeper and they cancelled four days out of the five. They cancelled three days. They showed up six days out of the month.

This once again reinforces the importance of having clear expectations and setting goals, so the educational leader ensures the Knowledge Keeper &/or Elder are invested into building the school culture with genuine intent. From personal experience, I believe it is important to remember that many Knowledge Keepers and/or Elders have other obligations in their lives to attend to and this role is not a permanent, full-time position so educational leaders must be patient, understanding, and flexible when it comes to the time commitment.

8. Teaching protocols to staff for asking others to share gifts and encouraging them to take the time to wonder and ask questions when those opportunities arise is an educational leader's priority.

An educational leader needs to create a school culture that encourages taking risks for both students and staff so that they can have the confidence to think outside the box and question the world around them. Participant C explains how fear can hold one's learning back:

I think sometimes people are afraid to ask questions or don't think it's appropriate to ask questions and so they just don't ask, they came and everybody could ask whatever they wanted and they had a beautiful presentation and we went out and we had a smudge after and so now every meeting that we start, we smudge and we talk about the things that we need to talk about.

Fear is a powerful agent of disablement when it comes to learning. Bishop et al., (2021) speak to decolonizing schooling practices through relationality and reciprocity and they comment on how fear of offending reflects that teachers are ill-equipped to implement new Indigenous policy requirements as "teachers are often protective of the formal curriculum which usually echoes their own schooling experiences and tends to result in Aboriginal perspectives becoming an 'add-on' (p.196). Educational leadership must give permission to our students and staff to be open to curiosity and willing to let go of their fears and/or misconceptions so they can be open learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives from Elders and Knowledge Keepers so the content can be embedded within the curriculum and be meaningful to students.

9. Being responsive to student needs and family needs to build relational connections is an educational leader's instinctive nature.

An educational leader needs to build relationships, to build trust, to build a safe and inclusive school culture. Participant B explains his/her beliefs and how they use the relationships they have built to inspire and give hope for personal best success:

My beliefs have always been my goal as an educator is to make good human beings, you know, and get them to reach their full potential, whatever that may be, as opposed to, you know, giving them exact direction what they should be doing. But just, you know, kind of leading in a direction of their interest and what makes them happy. I think a lot of time, you know, if I look back, say 25 years ago when you started an education. The idea of success in education was like, well, who's going to get the highest paying job? You know who's going to be a doctor? Who's going to be a lawyer? You still kind of hear those kinds of things framed in conversations nowadays, you know success based on people who are going into law or people who are going into a field like engineering or other places where you're going to make a lot of money, and a lot of times is that success? And to some people, that is success. And to other people, you know, success is being a good human being and treating others with respect and you know using your education to help other people. So, I mean, I think from when I started teaching 25 years ago to where I am now, a kind of change my direction. What I think success is and so how do we get students to kind of follow their dreams and what their beliefs and what makes them successful, and I know when we're talking about, you know Indigenous groups a lot of time. Their view of success is a lot different than you know our non-Indigenous populations of what success looks like. So, I think it's important working in a community or working in a school where you know 85% of our students are Indigenous. It's important to think about what success is to them and how can you lead them in a direction that they're going to be successful.

The definition of success can be interpreted differently amongst educational stakeholders. To put students first, the educator's visions of success must evolve for the betterment of the student.

Clark & Clark (2005) discuss the importance of educators building relationships with students and families so they can build an environment where students feel physically and emotionally safe, academically successful, and their needs are being met (p.55-56). Every student is different and cannot fit into the same box, Indigenous knowledge and perspectives value the differences and give permission to let a student's learning journey and vision of success be determined by their own personal values. Educators help to support those students by building the confidence needed to pursue their own journey.

10. Being creative and thinking outside of the box when infusing Indigenous knowledge and perspective into the school culture is essential for change making action.

An educational leader needs to be willing to challenge others thinking, even their own so they can enact change. Participant C speaks about the restraints of the system that needs change:

I often feel like we're trying to fit everything into this structure that was built a million years ago, a colonial system and kids and adults don't fit into that well in our changing world. As much as we like to schedule, sometimes we have to slow that down and just ask the person how they want to share their gifts with people. So, I've been fortunate that I have been able to connect to some really great people and that now they're connected with kids and families in our schools and communities. So, it just really worked out nicely.

Participant E shares how they creatively story tell around a firepit and want to make it a norm:

Just the beginning of storytelling. So, what we've done on that is we've discussed 'cause, there's rules and regulations of fire pits. Hopefully that we can do it as well that we thought about purchasing our own fire pit because it was one that was a Divisional one

and that's something that she could do more regularly as some storytelling with traditions. Once we're more established in like the norms, the routines of how to do what we expect of the children and what we expect, what it should look like inviting either some Elders or some other people from our community because we're fairly diverse for a rural community. To come and share their stories around the fire.

Participant E also discusses the vision for new curriculum as there are many possibilities to infuse Indigenous knowledge and perspectives:

The new science curriculum is coming out. Next year, it's not mandatory, but we're going to be doing it as a division, but maybe there's a way that we could look at the science curriculum that's coming out in early years and how can it be integrated and then that can be authentically that maybe that's something we can do as a group or maybe that's something to do that we should be lobbying, the province and saying look, it doesn't have to be like this is how you have to do it, but maybe they can make a link into it as well.

Change is possible if educational leadership are willing to be innovative thinkers who inspire and lead with purposeful intentions to infuse Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into school curriculums.

11. Being a problem solver when barriers arise and working with all stakeholders to find solutions creates a proactive and inspiring school culture.

An educational leader needs to be positive, resourceful, and inspirational to overcome barriers with the help of all stakeholders. Participant C speaks about problem solving attendance issues and how an empathetic approach is more effective than assumptions and judgement:

The outreach workers in our division work on attendance, so their primary role is to make a connection to home so the students that aren't attending will attend. We want to make a strong connection. We started talking about attendance at a meeting this year and sometimes you hear things that just aren't right and they don't sit right, when people talk about poverty or addictions and how they just assume they know what people are going through and we really don't know unless you've lived that life or you've walked in that person's shoes, you don't know.

Solving problems proactively in unity with all stakeholders is a step in the right direction. There is already a mistrust with parents, caregivers, and families with education and those who work within the education system. To break down barriers, educational leadership need to approach with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives so they can be empathetic and understanding to move others forward to finding solutions in partnership with all stakeholders.

12. Being reflective, resilient, and relentless when learning and leading together creates a sense of empowerment.

An educational leader needs to use personal reflection as a tool to move towards change. Change is not possible if you are not willing to take the time to learn from your own mistakes, never mind learning from a country's mistakes. Resiliency is a survival behaviour that becomes engrained in someone after being impacted from trauma and/or intense stress. Relentlessness is a willingness to not give up on oneself and/or others. If an educational leader encompasses all these qualities, they will surely create a sense of empowerment within oneself and hence in others. Participant D reflects about an incident and realizes that prevention will enable positive change:

There was a post going around that same time, I believe it was from a teacher that worked in Winnipeg saying that their parent or their child came home, and they felt bad or something. They were made to feel guilty or bad because of what happened. They weren't First Nations or Indigenous, and so they were asking...I don't remember what they were asking, but we discussed that and then one of the parents mentioned how their child came home who's Indigenous and they felt really sad and were affected by it because they were like hurt. So, we said, OK, well, next year we need to have things in place to prevent things like that, like we could have, like counseling and make sure that these things are properly addressed.

Participant B also explains the struggles that many Indigenous students face and how important it is to build relationships to positively connect with them and their families:

I do work with a lot of Indigenous students who struggles right now stem from being in care and coming out of care and transitioning back at home and kind of some of the struggles there, which you know isn't more like, more historically like cultural, but more of the culture that a lot of our Indigenous students face now. And that's, you know, being in care or being with caregivers that are grandparents, and they need support, and I think on a daily, you know, I'm working with students who are going through those struggles. That have had things happen that may have been negative when they were in care and you know it's caused a lot of issues for them and so I work a lot with those students, one-on-one and it's weird. I just try to make connections in any way I can.

Educational leadership need to be resilient and relentless by having strong self-efficacy as it takes much time and energy to guide and support our most vulnerable students and the educators who interact with them daily. Taking the time to build connections can lead to emotional

exhaustion and it can take a toll on any educator and the ability for our educational leadership to role model these qualities will give hope to those they lead.

13. Being intentional when hiring to support Indigenous education allows Indigenous students to see themselves within a school culture.

Educational leadership needs to acknowledge that diversity in the workplace creates a culturally safe and inclusive school. Participant C discusses the benefits to having Indigenous staff:

It would be hiring and working with Indigenous people to learn about Indigenous knowledge and, and perspectives. We have Indigenous support workers in our high school, I was involved in hiring Indigenous support workers and then also Elders, connecting with Elders and having Elders come into our community. We're doing some ribbon skirt making workshops, and again reading, uhm, reading books by Indigenous authors listening to stories about Indigenous culture from Indigenous people and just listening to them tell us their stories and listening to understand and not to respond, that was a big take away for me last year and I'm always making sure that I'm taking a course about Indigenous knowledge and perspective, the outdoor learning courses, last year they offered one on Treaties and now this year it's land based I've said to our Superintendent, I feel the courses would be beneficial for all our teachers, everybody should be taking those because a lot of us, older people in the division didn't have to take any Indigenous perspective courses while we were in high school or at university.

Participant E gives insight to needing the Indigenous language teacher to also teach staff so they too can learn and utilize the language with students in the classroom.

One of the other things I'd like to do, or we should be doing, more so is for our language teacher. I'd like for her as she teaches our students in small groups, Monday to Thursday and then this whole group on Fridays. But I want her to be able to share more with the teachers what she's doing on the Fridays. The teachers are in the classroom with her. The Monday to Thursday, that's not so. Sometimes it's a different activity or different learning that's going on because you have more adults and the whole group. So, I'd like that to be shared more, what she's doing.

Participant D is an Indigenous staff member who shares the pride felt in the position:

Yeah, and then I came here as an employee and learned about it and I was really like, wow, like this is really important that we're finally telling the real truths. And so, I was like, I'm really, really proud to be in this position and I really want to do a good job, and I really want to try and make a difference or some kind of impact.

Hiring Indigenous staff is critical to build capacity when infusing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the school culture. Having the human resources that can offer the teachings of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives breathes sustainability. The pride felt by Indigenous staff within a school building will role model pride to all the students and breakdown historical stereotypes to build a safe and inclusive school culture. Participant D looks towards positive change:

I think the Calls to Action and the Mamatawisiwin document are steps in the right direction. Finally, telling our stories, utilizing our languages, and exposing the real truths of Canadian History, are ways we will move forward in changing Canadian society's

view of Indigenous people. It will take time, but I am glad to be a part of taking steps to try to make that change.

Seasonal change is good and approved by Mother Nature. We as an educational system need to see the beauty of change as Indigenous knowledge and perspectives unfold.

Concluding Analysis

Welcoming others into the building takes a lot of time and energy as much planning needs to take place to create authentic learning experiences. To employ Indigenous knowledge and perspectives educational leaders need to have an open mind and be willing to build relationships, make connections, share, and collaborate. To do so, educational leadership must possess certain values, consider the barriers, and be reflective of their own actions and responsibilities. I will now summarize the data collected on those three areas and explain how they intertwine and connect to the emerging themes.

There were commonalities amongst the participant's values (Appendix J), and the participants demonstrated that an educational leader needs to have an open mind to learning and value the community he or she works and/or resides in, which means being community orientated and willing to volunteer time within the community to build relationships. An educational leader needs to have an open mind to value learning knowledge which means being a lifelong learner who is willing to listen, share, collaborate and gain perspective while learning Indigenous knowledge with others and looking for ways to improve implementation. An educational leader also needs to have an open mind to connect the simple value of kindness to the seven teachings: truth, love, respect, wisdom, humility, courage, and honesty to genuinely support the cultural growth of the learning community. Lastly, an educational leader needs to have an open mind to value authenticity which means being very purposeful and/or intentional

when making connections and offering cultural and language programming. Having strong core values will help educational leadership overcome the barriers they face daily.

There were many barriers that the participants acknowledged on their own journey of reconciliation. The barriers that the participants revealed (Appendix H) gives insight to the challenges that students, parents, caregivers, educators and educational leaders face, and it acknowledges that these barriers need to be addressed at the school, divisional and provincial level. Educational leaders are problem solvers, so it is important that they are categorized according to having the ability to come up with solutions to the barriers. Some of the barriers are in our control as educational leaders, and solutions can be brought forth through teamwork and proactive planning. However, there are some barriers that are not in our control, but they can be acknowledged, and educational leadership can advocate and ask for more support divisionally and provincially for our students, families, and educators. Participant A stresses:

Those barriers will never go away. They'll always be an issue. We just need to learn how to. We just need to be able to build on them and like time we never have enough time for everything, so that will always be there.

The barriers do offer some great opportunities for proactive discussions and solution-based leadership practices. Discussing barriers allows educational leadership to be reflective, selective and focussed on solving problems that directly impact the school's ability to infuse Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the school culture.

The research participants also had the opportunity to include their own personal reflections (Appendix I) from their experiences. As a part of the concluding analysis, I summarized and highlighted the insight from the participants so they can be discussed and prioritized at the school level. Reflecting on an educational leadership's past experiences and teachable moments

is critical for the implementation of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Participant E points out that we need to start from somewhere when making change:

Maybe we don't have the how, with The Calls to Action, but we've got the what needs to be done, but not the how we're going to do it. But maybe that's the next thing. Let's pick one. And how are we going to do this like we might? You know, they say like a little Pebble makes an impact. You know, little stone in the water.

Reflecting allows educational leaders to learn from the mistakes made and review what either worked or did not work so changes can be made, and adjustments can be utilized for the betterment of learning. It is ok if our educators are feeling uncomfortable, lost and unconfident when on their own journey of reconciliation as those feelings of vulnerability will build connections with the students they are teaching, the families they are working with to build relationships, and they will respect that open honesty and truth. Participant B shares that our students are feeling the same way:

I think a lot of students who I'm working with now in my role are students who kind of feel lost and not sure of who they are and where they're from and you know learning more about their own culture would give them more a sense of self and maybe build some self-esteem and kind of help them know where they want to go once they're able to realize who they are. Because I think a lot of our students don't know who they are. It's like they don't know a lot about their own history or themselves as people, and if you build on that and give them a base of knowing who they are, it kind of will lay some groundwork for their confidence going down a path of where the next thing maybe.

The description of the students provided by Participant B can honestly be said in the same respect about some of our educators, parents, and community members. We are all on our

journey to heal and find our purpose in the world. The role of educators is to help support and guide our youth and this cannot be done in isolation as it needs to be done in partnerships with the students, parents, caregivers, and community members. It is for this reason that the overall aim of the research was to develop a set of wisdoms that will assist and support an educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation.

CHAPTER 5 FERTILIZATION & PLANT PROTECTION

The fertility of Mother Earth,
To lend herself to be the classroom,
To offer herself to be the culture.

I feel inclusively protected and safe,
To have the ability to give back,
The knowledge that has been gifted to me.

The perspective gained through the healing,
Is a journey fertilized in partnerships,
As the roots are strengthened by earth's caress.

Mother Earth taught me to listen,
The land taught me to understand,
A generational view of reconnection.

I wonder...will the connection,
Be sustainable or leached in the soils,
And in great need of mainstream protection?

Fertilization and Plant Protection takes patience,
And commitment to ensure,
Reconciliation is authentically achieved.

Findings, Discussion and Recommendations

Fertilization involves discussing the dynamic relationships of the research findings to identify the themes that can be utilized by other educational leaders while embarking on a journey of reconciliation to improve school cultures.

The purpose of this research is to explore how educational leaders have adapted their practice by utilizing the four action-based strategies in the *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With – An Indigenous Education Policy Framework* (2022).

This provincial Indigenous Education Policy Framework is intended to support educators, by helping them deepen their understanding and progress along a path of truth and reconciliation in their schools, adult learning centres, postsecondary institutions, classrooms, and communities. It aims to empower Manitoba teachers to understand and meet the needs of Indigenous learners by embedding strategies and practices into their educational settings and classroom routines, so that they reflect Indigenous languages, cultures, and identities. Ultimately, the core goal is to enhance the educational achievement and well-being of Indigenous students, setting them up for success in school and beyond. (p.7)

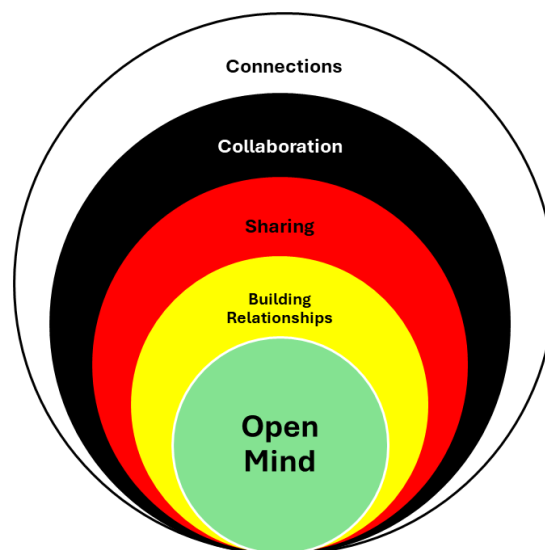
The study has been a part of my own personal journey of reconciliation, and it has shed a light on the important role our school leaders have in making our Indigenous students feel visible in today's public education system. Rahman (2013) supports the notion of visibility as he states, "Aboriginal students have the right (like all other students) to feel that they are valued and have a meaningful place within their school, and that the education they are provided with accommodates their cultural, personal and academic needs" (p.670). All the participants in the study have shared their own personal journey of reconciliation and have made inspiring growth

and improvement for the Manitoba public school system so safe and inclusive school cultures can be built on the foundation of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

After completing a data analysis of the descriptive narrative, I uncovered five themes: open mind, building relationships, sharing, collaboration, and connections within words or phrases that directly pertained to the four action-based strategies in the Mamàhtawisiwin document: (Manitoba Education, 2022, p.21).

- authentic involvement
- putting students at the centre
- understanding world views, values, identities, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles
- inclusive and culturally safe learning environments

Figure 4: A Visual Representation of Themes



I organized a visual representation of the five themes (Figure 4) so educational leaders can have a visual reference when embarking on a journey of reconciliation. The figure represents that the five emerging themes relationally overlap and demonstrate the growth achieved by taking a journey of reconciliation. The visual representation of the themes is purposely aligned with the four-strategies of the Mamàhtawisiwin document. Green represents the land and having

an open mind as an educational leader needs to start the journey by being open to learning so that growth can take place. Yellow represents building relationships, and those relations create a sense of belonging for authentic involvement within the school community. Red represents sharing to find purpose as that exchange needs to have taken place to create an understanding of worldviews, values, identities, traditions, & contemporary lifestyles. Black represents collaboration with others to find meaning and to inspire each other when working together to put students at the center of education. White represents connections as those relations drive an inclusive and culturally safe learning environment that helps bring about a feeling of safety and give a sense of hope for the future.

When organizing the visual representation of the themes (Figure 4) I also made connections to the generational teachings of my spouse, Cory Seymour, Knowledge Keeper White Wolf to the colours of the Ojibwe medicine wheel in relation to the journey of life and the connections that we make along the way. The educational leader's journey starts with having an open mind so he or she can learn and lead together by building relationships, sharing, collaborating, and making lifelong connections. The colour green signifies Mother Earth and the land we are all connected by to learn and lead along a journey of reconciliation. The colour yellow signifies new beginnings and infancy which involves planting the seed to start building relationships. The colour red signifies growth and adolescence which involves the establishment of trust to share knowledge and perspectives. The colour black signifies harvesting and adulthood which involves collaboration and working together towards a common goal. The colour white signifies regeneration and elder insight which involves resting to save energy as the connections and wisdoms were learned along the journey.

It is also important to note that the design of the visual representation of the themes (Figure 4) directly relates to the Circle of Courage as it is about a sense of empowerment which a journey of reconciliation moves towards when building self-efficacy and collective efficacy. The Circle of Courage “works as a framework for empowerment and education through restoring a sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity in children and youth” (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, p.15, 2022). All learners have the potential to achieve growth to empower themselves with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives when they pursue a journey of reconciliation.

In this chapter, the following five themes will be explained by using direct quotes from the participant's interview transcripts, adding my own personal experiences, and interconnecting those shared narratives with the acquired educational leader responsibilities (Appendix K) that I cultivated from the descriptive narrative of the participants:

- open mind
- building relationships
- sharing,
- collaboration
- connections

I will also provide recommendations for future research and my conclusion.

Open Mind

To have an open mind as an educational leader truly means being vulnerable and willing to learn and lead with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. We are all connected to the land and must use that shared connection to be a pathway of vulnerability to learn and lead along each other on a journey of reconciliation. An educational leader's journey of reconciliation starts with vulnerability and the ability to look past yourself and into the eyes of others, to embrace equality

and equity, to accept and acknowledge the past and present truths, and to commit to making impacting change. From my experiences as an educational leader, you need to have an open mind to lead with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives as it gives staff permission to have an open mind to prioritize teaching the child to teaching the curriculum. As discussed in my positionality, our school led a Showcase Pow Wow, and we wanted to ensure that the teachings were ongoing throughout the year to lead up to the celebration of the learning. Our committee arranged opportunities for Tipi and smudging protocols, drumming, ribbon skirt and regalia making, dancing workshops, sweats, and teachers were given information to pre-teach Pow Wow protocols in the classroom. All these opportunities were offered during class time during the school year, and even though there were connections made to the curriculum, the Indigenous programming still took time away from curriculum-based learning for K-12 students. Having an open mind as an educator and educational leader is critical, our administration team had to prepare staff for the mindset shift by preplanning meeting discussions with the mindset shift in relation to our student's best interest. No matter the preparation by administration and the holistic benefits for students, there will always be staff that will challenge, question, and be oppositional to the shift but it is your role as an administrator to role model and advocate to infuse Indigenous knowledge and perspectives within the school culture. Change can be uncomfortable for many staff as

Participant D points out:

I feel like some staff are hesitant to change, which I can understand because it's change and when you're a teacher, sometimes you just get into doing what you know and what has worked.

AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER'S JOURNEY TO CULTIVATE RECONCILIATION

The opposition to change can be oppressive and counterproductive so having an open mind allows educational leadership to shift mindsets to make influential change through role modelling vulnerability as a positive and productive way to build relationships, improve sharing, collaboration and connections with others on the same path. Participant D discusses opposition to change:

I find that educators who are opposed to change, aren't as empathetic to our students and where they come from, their backgrounds and homelife. I don't think teachers actually know where some students come from. One of our Principals has the staff participate in home visits and walking school bus, so they can go into those homes and neighborhoods to get a different perspective. We need to work on changing the stereotypes of Indigenous people and their history.

Educating staff is the root of change and it is the responsibility of the educational leader to help open the minds of the teaching staff which is not always an easy task. Participant A speaks to the mindset of some staff:

For some of my teaching staff who are completely Caucasian and don't have that background themselves and are further on in their teaching career, like, that's a lot of work, right? And in their time and their wanting to, but they also don't know what questions to ask. They don't know what to ask for, so it's building their strengths as we go, and it is like it's a lot of work. There's a lot of time involved, and that balancing act is always there no matter what it is you're trying to do.

An educational leader needs to be influential to inspire staff to overcome the balancing act by being student focused and empathetic with the difficult work educators have to do.

Participant A describes the teacher struggles:

It's difficult work to do and everything we do should be student focused first, no matter what it is we're focusing on when we're in education. But often it becomes curriculum focused, right? Like there's always that push that you cover the curriculum. "Oh my God, it's grade three and we have to get through all of these things. How am I supposed to do all this other right?" It's difficult work to do and everything we do should be student focused first, no matter what it is we're focusing on when we're in education. But often it becomes curriculum focused, right?

An educational leader needs to have an open mind and a willingness to be vulnerable with the students, staff and community members while learning and leading along with them. Letting staff know the struggles are real, but they can be worked through one student at a time with the support of the learning community. This simple message will help take the curriculum focus pressure off the teacher so they too can have an open mind to the potential possibilities and change in education.

Vulnerability is not something that an educational leader can fake as it involves opening invitations for others to join in on the journey of reconciliation, the journey of learning.

Participant B speaks to personal experience of attending ceremony:

I started my own journey into culture and started attending ceremonies. Like I say, probably about 10 years ago and you know, I'm starting to connect more with the people in the community.

It takes a lot of courage to be vulnerable and go learn from the community and then to bring those connections back to the school community. Participant B explains why they attended ceremony:

I felt it was important that students in our building who were from (Community B) it was important for them to learn more about their own culture, cause a lot of people, even though they, you know, they live on a First Nation, you know, they don't get a chance to practice some of their own culture.

All the five participants in the study, Indigenous or Non-Indigenous, did not have vast Indigenous knowledge and perspectives and nor did I which means that we all needed to have an open mind to invite in all the Knowledge Keepers and Elders to share the knowledge and perspectives with the school community. The educational leader is no longer the expert and that brings about vulnerability and a sense of fear that can be contagious amongst educators. The invitation might initially make the educational leader feel discomfort, but the invitation will eventually make others feel comfortable coming into the school and that too can be contagious and mind shifting. Participant C explains the contagious mind shifting:

But I feel like everyone is very open to always. How can we do this better? How can we make it more comfortable for people to come in and share their gifts, and then if they feel comfortable, share with other people? Hey, you know, we went to this school, and we did this, and you know, you do this, why don't you come and share that? And just making people feel comfortable coming into our schools, right, and keeping the door open, like that's a big part of it.

It is the responsibility of educational leaders to have an open mind and to role model by supporting authentic experiences for students, staff, and community members so they all receive the message that learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives is a valuable component of the school culture despite the difference in teaching styles. It is hard to create authentic experiences and to put students at the centre of learning if educational leaders do not promote Indigenous

knowledge and perspectives as a part of school culture and challenge educators' teaching styles.

Participant E challenges educator's way of teaching through reflective questioning:

It's not just what's best for you, but it's what's best for your kids we often talk about, ...

It's like so why are you teaching the way you're teaching? Like, why are you teaching math this way? ... You need to tell me what's the research behind teaching this way.

It is an educational leadership's responsibility to challenge educators to use student centered teaching practices to create inclusive and culturally safe learning environments. Barnes et al., (2006) discuss the impacts of residential schools on Indigenous academic achievement and they speak to how truancy and drop out are "commonly associated with a long process of student disengagement" (p.27) and poor experiences at school. Educators need to understand the history so they can have the lens to teach the child and not just the curriculum to help ease the generational impacts. It is also important for all educators to understand that authentic learning experiences do not only take place at school, as they are ongoing and can occur at home or in the community with their family and community members.

Participant A comments on staff gaining perspective:

It's difficult for some of my staff, but they're getting better at recognizing that some of our student's attendance is because they are doing those cultural events with their families at home. And yeah, sometimes it is frustrating because they've missed three days' worth of math lessons that they are supposed to be getting done, but we're getting kinder on ourselves and on them of recognizing that that's where they are and that's the learning that they're getting and they're still learning math while they're doing those things, like those curriculums are coming. But that's been a big shift for a lot of my staff, especially my older staff of recognizing and being OK with that and that's a spot that will continue to

build on too, right? Like it's what that good life is for everybody. And once we all have that, holy smokes, this world and society is going to go wonderfully well. But it's a long way to get there.

The ability to shift mindsets to gain knowledge and perspectives gives an understanding of Indigenous world views, values, identities, traditions & contemporary lifestyles. Every Indigenous family is different as their experiences and stories vary. It is the educational leadership's responsibility for opening opportunities to let others introduce themselves through their stories. Taking the time to listen and understand is being open as Participant E explains:

I think the listening and accepting and hearing their stories and being open like I don't think ten years ago that parent would have shared that with me? I don't think, I was in the place or was a person of the understanding and I don't think she felt that our school was that place, so I'd like to think that we have the change in that.

Creating an inclusive and safe learning environment at school takes an open mind from all stakeholders as there has been much trauma inflicted in education and that trust must be rebuilt. It is an educational leadership's responsibility to ensure it is an open-door for people to come into the school and they are made to feel comfortable and safe. Participant E speaks to a safe feeling:

So, I think that being in the diverse school, being able to listen, being safe to feel like a place that you can be that. The number one rule school, I always tell our students is SAFE, is what? SAFE, they tell me, it is safe because you have to be safe to learn, safe physically. If you hurt someone's feelings, they're not going to be wanting to learn. If you don't listen to them and believe them, they're not going to be concentrating on it. So, for that parent to feel safe and share that, horrific, horrific, thing and lighten her load and share with me so I could help carry her burden was amazing. Sounds a horrible thing to

say to carry a load and to carry her horrible things, but it gave me a better more of a better understanding because it's a personal experience and I can share that with our staff. Making others feel safe is connected to sharing stories. It is an educational leadership's responsibility to be vulnerable and open to sharing personal stories to mutually understand one another. Being open minded means having the ability to look past yourself and into the eyes of others, to embrace equality and equity, to accept and acknowledge the past and present truths, and to commit to making impacting change. Being open minded may be difficult for some as one needs to be aware and reflective of his/her/their own core values and bias. Being open minded may be difficult for some as one needs to be willing to give up power and control to embrace equality as learners and leaders. Being open minded may be difficult for some as one needs to be willing to relearn truths to accept and acknowledge the past and present truths which are skewed by stereotypes and racial profiling. Being open minded may be difficult for some as one needs to make a commitment to impacting change which takes much time and energy in a system that already has a heavy workload to balance. Oskineegish (2015) states that in any community, "Approaching teaching with open-mindedness, flexibility, and positivity will help shape a teacher's attitude and approach to being both the teacher and the learner" (p.20). Having an open mind may be difficult for some, but the rewards outweigh the risks, and it is an educational leadership's responsibility to be influential and to role model vulnerability which will help build relationships with students, staff and community.

Building Relationships

To build relationships as an educational leader truly means forming bonds of mutual rapport that instill trust with students, staff and community. An educational leader's journey of reconciliation is given capacity by building relationships as these bonds create opportunities to share, collaborate, and connect with all those within and outside the school community. To have

authentic involvement it is an educational leadership's responsibility to role model how to build relationships with students and families both inside and outside of school. From my experiences as an educational leader, it has taken me years and much volunteerism efforts within the surrounding communities to build the rapport with the students, parents, caregivers, community members, Knowledge Keepers and Elders. I must say that all my time and efforts were worth the relationships that I built along the way as those bonds are what help to support implementing the Indigenous initiatives within the school culture. My daughter attended school with another student in the Head Start program offered in the reserve, and the girl is a traditional dancer along with her mother, so I made sure to take the time to establish a relationship through volunteerism with the mother and the daughter over the years and they helped me learn much knowledge and perspective. Both my daughter and the girl are traditional dancers and graduates from our school, so our committee often invites them into the school to role model traditional dancing. The committee also invites in the mother who was a parent to students in our school to do ribbon skirt and regalia workshops with our students, parents, caregivers and community members. This is one of many examples that I can provide to demonstrate how building relationships helps to lead to authentic involvement within the community once trust is established so the cultural teachings can be naturally implemented as Participant E says, "authentic learning, authentic relationships, that's how we get the best." Participant B speaks to how relationships are built through extra-curricular activities and going above and beyond for students:

Through hockey and lacrosse, you know, just going to people's houses and pick them up and meeting families and I got to meet a lot of families because, I'm knocking on their door. For example, in town site on the Reserve a lot of our teachers probably wouldn't go, and it kind of makes people feel like you are just another person, you're like them. I

mean, a lot of times when I'm picking these kids up and I knock on the door, I get offered to come in and have breakfast and things like that. So I mean it, it just kind of let's like not so much you learn their culture right now, but kind of let them see you as a, just a regular human being, not just an educator or somebody who you know is often seen in the negative light because you know, often educators and teachers and police and those kind of things don't have the same connotation, you know, to those living in First Nations, as they do to other people.

It is clear that building relationships puts students at the centre as that is what creates the bond between the educators and the families, as they are both investing into the student's well-being. Participant B speaks to the importance of out of school relationships and how they transfer to in school relationships:

Non-educational relationships that you build just kind of strengthens families and students' relationships with you and them wanting to kind of be more in touch with the school cause' I know a lot of families, especially Indigenous families, aren't overly open to education. They're not overly open, you know, coming into the school and their past experiences have been negative. So, when you're going out of your way to, you know, do that extra little bit for those students and those families, you know it really goes a long way.

It is very important to know your community and families when building relationships as it helps educators to be able to understand world views, values, identities, traditions, & contemporary lifestyles. Authentic relationships built on a foundation of trust will lead to authentic learning for all who are investing their time and energy to get to know one another. Participant B speaks to staff being able to have that understanding through the relationships built:

My teaching staff know everybody. They know the families, they know the backgrounds, well, they know all those things, family issues that are going on. So, we try very hard to keep all of that in mind when we're teaching our children because sometimes, they are dealing with issues that no child should ever have to deal with and then you have to build on that, right? And that's no different with our First Nations kids as it is with our Non-First Nations. So, building that part and keeping that student and their day in their life and everything else in mind as we're trying to get through that curriculum.

The ability for educational leadership to know the community and build relationships within the community is critical to finding those Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are willing to share their gifts and come into the school to educate the youth. Participant C comments on the importance of trust and having that foundation already built to make these cultural connections.

But most of the connections that I've made honestly have been through people that I know in the community already. One of the newer Indigenous support workers that we're hiring, he's connected to other educators that we know, Indigenous educators that we know. I feel like that's how you learn about people's gifts and if they want to meet with you and talk about how they want to share their gifts and what would work best for them. Building relationships can lead to many positive exchanges that help to inspire students to attend school regularly. To make a space an inclusive and culturally safe learning environment, students need to see themselves in positive cultural mentorship. Participant C speaks to the relationships established through this type of mentorship:

There are a few students that have been struggling with some behaviour issues at school, so we asked one of the drummers to come and he made drums with the kids and share his

knowledge with the students as they make drums and learn how to drum and the kids learn to drum and now the kids share that gift when they go to schools to drum. It's given them purpose, it's made them feel confident about themselves performing in front of people and valued, so it's just changed their perspective about school. They want to come to school now and they're there more often than before, Indigenous mentors, the Indigenous support workers play a vital role in mentorship with Indigenous students.

When educational leadership focus on building relationships, the intention is to create a network of connections built on mutual respect that are intended to infuse Indigenous knowledge and perspective into the school culture by sharing and collaboration. After building a shared and collective understanding, these connections become personal and inspirational. In an interview by Schwartz (2019), the honorable Murray Sinclair, comments on his thoughts to relationship building within the process of reconciliation:

You cannot have a relationship of mutual respect until the Indigenous people are given the opportunity to develop their own sense of self-respect. My view is that any work that institutions do in the area of contributing to that relationship and mutual respect should also include an aspect of adding to the knowledge base that would give to Indigenous youth and Indigenous people and Canadian society, as well, an awareness of who Indigenous people are, what Indigenous people stand for, what they believe in, and what they practice and live. Failing to do that is to create an artificial relationship. It's like marrying somebody you only met for the first time and assuming that you will always have a good relationship going forward. You need to have that proper relationship of understanding. (p.307)

Sharing

Sharing as an educational leader starts with truly listening to others to see their gift and to be giving to others to acknowledge their gift. Through the connections and relationships built in the community, an educational leader is responsible for encouraging others to share their gifts with students and staff so they can infuse Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the school culture. From my experiences as an educational leader, it is important to listen to the people within your relationship circle to share their gifts. My brother-in-law and my husband's lifelong friend often came over and shared their stories with me about their experiences with the culture and the knowledge and perspectives they held with the traditional drum teachings. I already had an open mind, I had the relationship built with them both, I always listened to their stories and teachings, I often watched them in awe at ceremony and at local Pow Wow's as they each had a special gift so now I just had to ask them to share their traditional drumming knowledge and perspectives with the students at our school to build capacity for our Showcase Pow Wow. They both accepted and often join us in our assemblies and events we hold throughout the year. They provide the teachings of the drum and songs with our students and staff, and my husband's lifelong friend even agreed to come in weekly to drum with our students to create a school traditional drumming group for anyone interested in joining. Finding the right people to share traditional teachings is not an easy task, as I needed the open mind, the relationships, and the skill of listening to ask them to share their gifts and be a part of our vision for infusing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into our school culture. Participant A admits that finding the right people to share is not an easy task:

So, there's always the time, right? Like how do you find the time? And then it's finding the people. Like I said previously, it's finding those people who do actually have that knowledge and that understanding and who are willing to share that with others because

there are many people out there who have it. But because of their cultural background and because of how they were raised it's not something they just easily share, right? Like they need time and supports to be able to do that themselves.

When the right person is found to share his/her gift, it is an educational leader's responsibility to ensure that the proper protocols are followed. When asking one to share a gift, there needs to be an exchange offered such as tobacco to show respect and gratitude for the gift of knowledge and/or perspective to be shared. Participant C comments:

When they do come and share their gifts there is tobacco offered and shared and I try to ask before, what would you like as a gift to receive for sharing your time and gifts, even with the Knowledge Keepers and Elders, who I work with all the time. When they came to the board meeting and I had the opportunity to share their story, I asked them, what kind of gift can I give to you for taking time to share your story and knowledge with us. I don't know if that's the right thing to do all the time or not the right thing to do, but I just like to ask the question, and I always say too, if this is a question I'm not supposed to ask, then just tell me.

Authentic involvement looks differently based on the gifts that are being shared. Many of the gifts shared come through storytelling and hands on learning and land-based experiences.

Participant E speaks to some creative learning experiences around language:

Hands on learning with Knowledge Keeper, our language instructor. She's organized some outdoor experiences like she brought in a fire pit, and she made Bannock, and she did some storytelling about herself. And like when she made Bannock with her grandmother. Just the beginning of storytelling...Once we're more established in like the norms, the routines of how to do what we expect of the children and what we expect,

what it should look like inviting either some Elders or some other people from our community because we're fairly diverse for a rural community. To come and share their stories around the fire.

Participant E continues to comment on how the Knowledge Keeper also like to do,

The land-based stuff herself, so she's just was going by her own things and her own things that her children like to do on her own, like, stuff like that, we should be doing like, last Friday we had no school, but the plan was to go out to a park that we have and look at animal tracks because they were learning what animals and learning the words in a Ojibwe so that it made it more authentic.

Putting students at the centre of sharing is critical as their voice needs to be heard so they are engaged in the learning. Participant B speaks passionately about student voice:

The last piece of education that is important for Indigenous students is giving them a voice. Allowing students to voice what is important to them is key. Students must believe that they have control of their future. Giving students opportunities to guide their education as well as chances to interact in social and cultural extracurricular activities is important. Students input of what success is and opportunities to help them reach goals that they set for themselves is paramount.

Listening is a big part of sharing, and it helps educators understand world views, values, identities, traditions, & contemporary lifestyles. We all have our own sense of normal, and we need to be open to trying new and different things outside our comfort zone as that is how we learn. Participant C reveals some insight:

I think we don't know what we don't know. So, no one is telling us what we should do because that's not an Indigenous perspective, right? I feel like we're so

programmed in education at times, how you do it, this is what you do, go and do it, laying every move out step by step. It's not like that when you're speaking with Elders, they're very much sharing knowledge and listening to them to understand and then putting into practice some of their teachings. It's turned everything upside down for many educators, we have to embrace a different learning style, a different teaching style; slow down, reflect, understand. Teachers may want a lesson plan and then to check it off as done and including Indigenous perspectives and knowledge is not just a box to check, it's creating ways to include Indigenous perspectives and knowledge in everything we teach at school from K to 12. I think that's been a big barrier, and I had said that previously about some teachers feeling that they didn't want to do things because they didn't want to be disrespectful, or they didn't think they should be the ones doing it or teaching it.

Listening while sharing also offers educators opportunities to build stronger relationships and connections with parents to understand life circumstances. Often educators come from a position of privilege so being able to take the time to share stories and listen to perspective helps to provide clarity and direction. Participant E shares an experience:

I had a conversation with a parent who shared something with me. As her child, their child shared something with her and she was, like, really worried and it was a trigger. She was like, I know nothing was wrong and I know what happened, why my child did it, but I'm thinking back, and she broke down in my office, I was here for about an hour cause that was a trigger for me, so yeah. And she says, yeah, that's how it started with me when I was in Residential school. She was, I know nothing's happening here, but so she shared her knowledge with me, and I shared it, and I said, can I share this? With staff, she goes. Yeah, I think it's important too and I asked her if she wanted to share, she said I'm not

there yet, like I'm just dealing with my own healing right now. I said, I totally get it, but it's that kind of listening and hearing and understanding like. It's a generational where I think the younger, I believe the younger, I hope the younger generation has a better understanding of where children are coming from, from different homes and like maybe this child is acting this way, or maybe their mom's pulling from school for this way, or maybe they're coming late because of this way, and maybe they don't have a have a good understanding of bringing the children into school because they didn't have a happy schooling because of everything.

Being able to share and be heard gives our students and families an inclusive and culturally safe learning environment. Historically, the education system did a lot of damage and educational leaders need to work hard at making our school culture safe for our students and community members, so they feel welcome and comfortable. Participant E points out that “some of our parents don't feel safe enough or comfortable enough to share or like I'm not good enough.” It is an educational leader's responsibility to invite families into the school to see the progress and offer opportunities to be a part of the change making process. Having Indigenous knowledge and perspectives imbedded into the school culture along with Indigenous educators working in the school helps to create comfort connections. Participant D comments on sharing the same goals:

I feel we're all working towards the same goals of having our Indigenous students be successful in their educational careers. A lot of them come from band schools and they may not have had great experiences there or are behind in their appropriate grade levels, so to make sure that we support them academically is a goal of ours. I also believe that having representation in the schools will help because it is a way to connect with similar

people and learn about culture that they may not have had experience in. It all comes back to those 4 guiding questions which I find is the basis of our goals sometimes. Sharing the same goals opens opportunities for educational leadership to promote collaboration between students, staff and the community. Sharing is truly caring and the more that we start to share Indigenous knowledge and perspectives the more we will care about creating positive change in the education system for the betterment of the student learning.

Collaboration

To collaborate as an educational leader is to truly work together in unity. It is the responsibility of educational leadership to help set up collaboration opportunities to Indigenize curricular programming and content. The ability to make the connections to set up collaboration opportunities is the easy part, but that means that all stakeholders must be willing to take the time to work and learn together towards purposeful and common goals. There are different ways to achieve authentic involvement as it can involve Knowledge Keepers or Elders working with students, staff and community members. From my experiences as an educational leader, collaboration is a key component to learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Our assemblies/events, classroom teachings, and Showcase Pow Wow could not have happened without the collaboration efforts of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, students, staff and community members. The reason we have a Showcase Pow Wow rather than a Pow Wow is because we needed an Elder's blessing, and it was given as the Showcase Pow Wow is a teaching tool of reconciliation for our school community and surrounding communities. We have had our 2nd annual Showcase Pow Wow in June 2025, and it is continuously growing because of the collaboration efforts. It is essential that our staff works in partnership with our Elders and Knowledge Keepers so we can infuse Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the school

culture authentically. Participant D is a knowledge learner and gives an example of authentic collaboration:

I went into a school because they wanted to talk about Métis beadwork and so I had, like, my resources at our office and so I went in. It was only grade one students, so I had read a book about Métis beadwork, and I brought in some samples for them, from my own bead work and showed them like the differences and the similarities. And so, I really acknowledge that teacher for like reaching out and just making sure that what they're doing is appropriate. And I think that's a big thing that we pushed in our school division. Is that like making sure that what we're doing is authentic and just appropriate and things like that.

Putting students at the centre by collaborating with the students is a way to make them feel empowered and take ownership over their learning so they can one day become leaders. To teach students how to make regalia for themselves can one day lead to them making their own for future generations. Participant D explains how supporting voices can create opportunities to learn:

Our Ikwe and Wicasa groups that was one of the first things we did was like was ask them what they wanted to do and learn. We have kids come in and tell us. Like we had one student ask, do you know how or do you know like where I can learn to make regalia? Sure, we can. We can offer that, and we can do that, we can find the people like I'm a sewer, but not a good sewer I don't think but I, know kind of what I'm doing so I'm willing to share that. It's just a matter of like getting the resources together and all that.

AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER'S JOURNEY TO CULTIVATE RECONCILIATION

Collaboration can create learning opportunities to understand world views, values, identities, traditions, & contemporary lifestyles. Participant D speaks to how working together gave much insight into past practices that can be used currently when caring for a newborn:

We had one of the admins reach out to my partner and I to come in and see if we could collaborate on some of their guidance counsellor programs. They wanted Indigenous perspectives, so we met, and I gave my input into what I knew. For example, they wanted input on how they could infuse indigenized perspectives with their Roots of Empathy groups. So just off the top of my head I spoke on how we swaddle our newborns so they can feel as if they're comfortable back in the womb again, how we use moss bags and the teachings behind belly buttons. So that is just an example. So, I am glad they are taking that type of things into consideration.

Collaboration can create an inclusive & culturally safe learning environment for a school culture. Empowering parents with a voice and providing them with opportunities to learn can create positive relationships and a partnership for learning. Participant D shares an example:

We have an IAA parent council. So, we meet once a month and we just discuss things that they may have issues with, and we do activities like I believe we're meeting next week and we're going to make some rattles with them. Which was by their request. So that's really, really, really going to be exciting

Uniting in learning partnerships with students, parents, and community members will strengthen the school community when embarking on a journey of reconciliation. Participant A shares:

So, we're always collaborating, being respectful, building on others' ideas, team building amongst the staff and the students is extremely important. Events that we do, we do many events in our building that our whole school or it might be a small pocket of our school

going out into the Community and doing something, but we're known to be a very community-based building school. So, by doing that, that welcomes all of those cultures into our building.

Connections

Making connections as an educational leader truly means having the ability to inspire others to connect with themselves so they have the confidence to share their gifts and collaborate. An educational leader is responsible to help students and staff make connections with knowledgeable Indigenous human resources such as Knowledge Keepers and Elders from the community. In helping make these connections, the hope is to inspire students and staff to learn and lead together on a journey of reconciliation. To authentically involve students in making connections, it needs to come from community-based experiences that hold meaning and contribute to being a lifelong learner. From my experiences as an educational leader, making lifelong connections is the ultimate goal of reconciliation efforts because once a student, staff, or community member has made connections, they can continue to pursue their own journey to learn and lead with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. To see some of our students, staff, and community member growth due to pursuing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives throughout the year is exceptionally gratifying and humbling. In our 1st and 2nd annual Showcase Pow Wow, our Grade 7-12 boys school drumming group that practiced throughout the year was able to be a host drum called Thunder heart that proudly drummed and sang with the help of our Knowledge Keepers. In our 2nd annual Showcase Pow Wow, we had recognized that many of our students did not have the regalia to dance so our committee asked more parents and community members that we made connections with to come out to help make regalia for our K-4 students while our 5-12 students had the opportunity to make the regalia with their guidance. It was amazing to see the increased participation and pride on the Showcase Pow Wow Day and when I

went to the local Pow Wow this summer, I saw some of our students participating in the regalia made at school. These grass root connections are pivotal as they create lifelong bonds to the community Knowledge Keepers and Elders who can continue to inspire and empower their growth. Participant B speaks about making grass roots connections:

So, I know that I started a group, I don't know maybe eight years ago, we would go to sweats, we would do other things I know we went to Winnipeg and we handed out Winter clothes, with the Bear Clan in Winnipeg, we did different things that were geared towards Indigenous rights and kind of just broadening the perspective of our students who were Indigenous and from the neighboring reserve, but in our building and just kind of building on their own knowledge of what it means to be Indigenous and kind of working into doing some hands on activities in the present. And you know when it was Orange Shirt-day and, and when it was Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women's Day, we were doing a lot of stuff. And this was, you know eight years ago, before it was a big movement, like it is now. Now it's great to see that you know, there's orange shirts everywhere and there's hockey and football and everyone's wearing it. But, when we first started doing it, it wasn't as big of a movement. I was very happy that we were doing it that at the grassroots level and I thought that was important for our kids and I think it's still pushed hard in the building where I'm at, but I know it's a big thing right now.

Putting students at the centre involves making connections with the students personally as an educator. Those connections will pay off in the long run as it can help with student attendance and achievement. Participant D explains:

So, I'm just using my knowledge and my connections to my communities and bringing that into the school because I know that from my role as a teacher, that if you don't have a

relationship with the students and a connection that they're just not going to be engaged and sometimes not even come to school anymore.

Putting students at the centre to make connections means that there will be times when educators need to think outside the box and realize that every student does not fit into the same box. The ability to see that and have an understanding will enable better connections. Participant D works with at-risk Indigenous youth and describes this type of situation:

They didn't have that connection with their teachers and so they wouldn't go to class, or they were in classes with people that they weren't connected to as they didn't have their peers with them, so they were really hesitant to go to class. So, they fell behind and then when they didn't know the material because as you probably know, when you come from the reserve school to public school, you're behind. So that all those things are working against them and sometimes if you go to class and that teacher be like oh, now you wanna come to class like, no, you don't do that.

Making connections allow educators to understand world views, values, identities, traditions, & contemporary lifestyles. It is important to tap into the why, rather than making prejudgments which breaks down the relationship and connection. Participant E explains the mind shift needed:

Well, why? What happened to them? What happened to them that they're not coming to school? Why is it not important? So, something happened? So, I think that's my shift. So, like with relationship, it's like what happened to you and that actually kind of could be the whole thing with the Truth and Reconciliation and The Calls to Action. It's like we know what happened. We don't. We know globally kind of thing what happened. We don't know the individual story, so maybe if we start listening. Then we can make the

changes and if we listen. So, we hear the needs that they have and then we can give them, give the individuals what they need.

Making connections to understand also means that the learning needs to be ongoing so that it is impactful to the students and staff. Participant C discusses how year planning is important when tackling important issues so connections can be made throughout the year:

We talk about token activities and even when we talk about Orange Shirt Day. You don't just have one day and then that's it. As a literacy coach, when we were planning rich learning experiences that should be threaded throughout your whole year and include orange shirt day. Learning about orange shirt day or red dress and like it's not just like those one offs and so I was really happy when I talked about it with the Knowledge Keepers because they were both kind of feeling the same way too, it's OK, this is all really great on the surface, but now what do we do to continue that learning throughout the year?

Making positive connections through conversations helps to create an inclusive and culturally safe learning environment. When you have a school culture that is safe to share and collaborate then the infusion of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives will be open to all to learn.

Participant A shares what that environment feels like:

Everything needs to come down to those 3 aspects of being kind, respectful and supportive and I think if we have that, then everybody feels safe in the environment and everybody feels welcomed. And everybody feels that they have people that they can connect with to, to share issues if they need to or just to laugh with, right? It is extremely important in our building that we take time to listen and that we learn from each other. My students know that my families know that my staff knows that like this is the

expectation. If you don't learn what your math concepts are, that's fine. We'll deal with that later, but you need to know how to listen and work with them and be respectful of others. So, I think by building that into everything we do, will help us to encourage that leading a good life and being happy with who you are.

Connections are what brings us together to learn and lead in unity. The land is something that connects us all as the human race needs all the elements for survival. Indigenous Peoples are the caretakers of the land and show great respect towards Mother Earth. A journey of reconciliation is about us each learning to connect to ourselves, others and the land so we can share and collaborate to understand Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Through learning Indigenous knowledge and perspectives this research will also connect to future research.

Recommendations for Future Research:

- a. Further research should investigate proactive change with the education system that has been influenced and guided by Indigenous knowledge and perspective.
- b. Further research should examine the differences in approach of the provincial and federal school system and how they can work in collaboration to infuse Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into public school cultures.
- c. Future research should examine how each of the four action-based strategies in the Mamàhtawisiwin document, are influenced by connections.
- d. Further research should investigate whether the infusion of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives has improved or hindered the progress of students within the public education system.

Conclusion

My journey of reconciliation is a lifetime commitment to learning about Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. It is now time for me to answer the four guiding questions to share my story, so you understand where my knowledge and perspective comes from:

Who am I?

I am Circling Round Eagle, and I was gifted this name by two Elders, Noella and Morris, may they rest in peace, and it represents who I am as I always watch over others with love. My family name is Mary-Jo Hovorka-Seymour and many call me MJ as that represents who I am as daughter, a sister, a spouse, a mother, an aunty, and an educational leader. My family values have been engrained into my sense of self by nurturing love and will always be there to help me love and guide my family. I am female and my pronouns are she/her and I believe that we all have the right to freely be who we are in true felt spirit. I am a proud Métis with mixed ancestry and in my life, I have been able to walk between two worlds while I search for my own truths. I am considered a waabishkiiwe (white person) by the ancestors and many of the community members that I now live in as I come from mixed ancestry. I am a Colonizer who was raised Catholic, and I appreciate the knowledge and perspectives learned in my youth as those values guided me to be a good person along my journey. However, I do not practice that religion today as my family and I have a strong belief in the Creator and Mother Earth who I do my best to respect every day. I am an educator who is passionate about Indigenous Education and believes that we all need to learn and lead together so we can all find our purpose in life. I am a recent survivor of bladder cancer, and my health struggles have built strength and shown me how powerful hope can be to inspire living the good life, Mino-pimatisiwin. I am who I am because

of where I come from, the connections made, the relationships built along the way, and where my journey has taken me in life.

Where do I come from?

I come from a family who has overcome their own struggles, obstacles, and barriers by working together in unity with family and community. I come from a small rural Manitoban community that helped raise me as a child with fair and firm guidance and support. I come from a country that historically worked towards assimilation practices and did not value Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, so I was not raised to understand my true history. I now a humble and honored guest in my spouse's reservation community and other surrounding communities. I have been privileged to learn some of the knowledge and perspectives that have been influenced by the surrounding lands. Some of the community members, Knowledge Keepers and Elders in the area have influenced my sense of self and helped to broaden my knowledge and perspective by being introduced to Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. I have made many positive connections over the years to differing family and friendship circles within the surrounding communities and have been gifted with some Indigenous knowledge and perspective and have so much more to learn. Each person that has crossed my path from my youth to my adult life has in some way influenced my sense of self and I am grateful for their contribution to my knowing, being and doing as it has helped me to find purpose and hope in this world.

Why am I here?

So, what is my purpose and why am I here? I thought long and hard about this question as I was almost was not here due to bladder cancer, but thankfully I am alive and well. I am here much like the purpose of my spirit animal, the eagle, to help watch over to guide and support

those with love while they are on their own learning journey. At one point in life, I felt very lost and without purpose as I think we all feel that way at some point in our lives. I believe the search of ourselves is what truly brings us together to make connections along our life journey. The Canadian government assimilation tactics were not successful historically because they did not factor in the power of connections. On my learning journey, I have discovered that Indigenous knowledge and perspectives is all about the connections to family, culture, language, land, and sense of self as that is what fuels our purpose. Over the years, I have been working at learning Indigenous knowledge and perspective, and it has been achievable for me through family and friend connections and values. Now that we are working towards reconciliation there is a sense of hope for us all to regain what has been lost through connections. I am here to help reignite the connections as an educational leader so that our youth can find purpose and hope in their world.

Where am I going?

I am going to continue to nurture a sense of hope in our world through instilling family values and connections with our youth through working in partnership with students, parents, caregivers, staff, and community members by asking them to help infuse Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into our school culture. I am going to continue to guide and support those with love while they are on their own learning journey so I can glide along with them as they learn and lead so they can one day leave the nest and give back the Indigenous knowledge and perspective to the community they land in to build their own nest.

The questions that are asked, require much self-reflection and a willingness to see beyond one's nose and to see what is behind one's eyes. The educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation is a life-long learning experience and the knowledge and perspectives are gained through relationships, so sustainability is reached by a school culture of collaboration and

collective efficacy. Gram-Hanssen (2021) acknowledges the process of working together to create transformation, “Being aware of both individuals and the collective, the community works to enable a process where the individual and the collective can contribute positively toward each other’s becoming” (p.534). We are all working towards a destination of change and becoming in the name of reconciliation. The journey to get there will be determined by our willingness to have an open mind, to develop lasting relationships, to share and collaborate with others, and to the make connections with the world around us. The journey is yours to take...

THE JOURNEY IS YOURS TO TAKE

The snow has blanketed Mother Earth,
To rest over another long winter,
To rejuvenate for another life cycle.

I feel confident that growth will spring,
To have the ability to reseed,
The knowledge gifted to regenerate.

The perspective gained will blossom,
Is another harvest ready to bloom,
As the land embraces the connected roots.

Mother Earth will teach you to listen,
The land will teach you to understand,
Another generation will be reconnected.

I wonder...will the connections,
Become a part of your knowing, being & doing,
While your journey unearths...

Who you are?
Where do you come from?
Why are you here?
Where are you going?

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Appendices:

Recruitment Material

&

Data Analysis Material

LETTERHEAD

Appendix A – Letter to Superintendent of School Divisions

Insert Date, 2024

To: Insert Name, Superintendent, Insert School Division Name

From: Mary-Jo Hovorka-Seymour, Principal Investigator, Graduate Student at University of Manitoba

Re: Permission to Perform Study & Distribute Recruitment Material: An Educational Leader's Journey to Cultivate Reconciliation: Exploring how educational leaders have cultivated a culture of reconciliation through the acquisition of Indigenous knowledge and perspective.

Insert Name,

My name is Circling Round Eagle, Mary-Jo Hovorka-Seymour, and I am a graduate student currently working on my master's thesis in the Department of Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology at the University of Manitoba. I am inviting educational leaders to participate in a research student titled, *An Educational Leader's Journey to Cultivate Reconciliation*. I am asking your permission to perform the study within your school division, and I am asking for your help to distribute recruitment material based on the criteria below.

The purpose of this study is to explore how educational leaders have adapted their practice by utilizing the four action-based strategies of the *Mamàhtawisiwin: the wonder we are born with — an Indigenous education policy framework*, developed by Manitoba Education (2022). The journey of reconciliation involves building a foundation based on Indigenous inclusion to create a safe school culture that benefits all learners. The research question that guides the curiosity within this proposal directly relates to the documents vision: How have educational leaders nurtured school cultures in a spirit of reconciliation by employing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives?

The format of this descriptive study I will be conducting will involve one-hour virtual interviews with educational leaders. The overall aim of the research is to share initiatives and/or transformations educational leaders are employing to develop a set of wisdoms that will assist an educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation.

The following criteria details how participants will be chosen:

- The participants are defined as educational leaders which is an individual who takes on any informal and/or formal leadership roles and works within an education system as a community, school &/or divisional leader (Principal, Vice-Principal, Divisional Leader, Teacher Leader, Community Leader, Elder, Knowledge Keeper).
- The participants must be public school community leaders who have experience with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives within their professional practices.
- The participants must be adults (18 years or older).

AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER'S JOURNEY TO CULTIVATE RECONCILIATION

The four participants will be approached by myself, the principal investigator, via email and I will ensure that I build trust and equity into the recruitment process, consent process, & interview process. The educational leader can be Indigenous and/or Non-Indigenous, male, female, &/or two-spirited, as long as I have determined if they have the ability to influence change in school culture based on being in a leadership role.

The integrity of this study will be ensured by honoring privacy and confidentiality for the participants and the information provided. I, as a researcher, will ensure that all participant names and/or other identifiable information will be conserved via the use of pseudonyms and not appear in any report, publication, or other means of dissemination associated with this study. The appropriate processes will be taken to store and destroy data collection and research materials.

The approval of this study has been given by the University of Manitoba's Research Ethics Board. Please direct any concerns to:

Human Ethics Officer
Fort Garry
208-194 Dafoe Road
University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB. R3T 2N2
Ph: (204) 474-7122
humanethics@umanitoba.ca

If you have any additional questions &/or concerns, feel free to contact me &/or my advisor at:

Mary-Jo Hovorka-Seymour (204) xxx-xxxx or via email: Hovorkam@myumanitoba.ca
Dr. Frank Deer at frank.deer@umanitoba.ca

Thank you for considering supporting this descriptive research study and I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. Miigwetch!

Sincerely,

Mary-Jo Hovorka-Seymour/Circling Round Eagle
Graduate Student
University of Manitoba

LETTERHEAD

Appendix B – Letter to Identified Research Participants of School Division

(Permission has already been granted by the Superintendent to Conduct the Study)

Insert Date, 2024

To: Insert Name, Insert School Division Name

From: Mary-Jo Hovorka-Seymour, Principal Investigator, Graduate Student at University of Manitoba

Re: Invitation to Participate in the Study: An Educational Leader's Journey to Cultivate Reconciliation: Exploring how educational leaders have cultivated a culture of reconciliation through the acquisition of Indigenous knowledge and perspective.

Insert Name,

My name is Circling Round Eagle, Mary-Jo Hovorka-Seymour, and I am a graduate student currently working on my master's thesis in the Department of Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology at the University of Manitoba. I am inviting educational leaders to participate in a research student titled, *An Educational Leader's Journey to Cultivate Reconciliation*. I am inviting you to participate in the study and I am asking if you would consider being a participant based on the requirements of the criteria below.

The purpose of this study is to explore how educational leaders have adapted their practice by utilizing the four action-based strategies of the *Mamàhtawisiwin: the wonder we are born with — an Indigenous education policy framework*, developed by Manitoba Education (2022). The journey of reconciliation involves building a foundation based on Indigenous-inclusive to create a safe school culture that benefits all learners. The research question that guides the curiosity within this proposal directly relates to the documents vision: How have educational leaders nurtured school cultures in a spirit of reconciliation by employing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives?

The format of this descriptive study I will be conducting will involve **one-hour virtual interviews** with educational leaders. The overall aim of the research is to share initiatives and/or transformations educational leaders are employing to develop a set of wisdoms that will assist an educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation.

The following criteria details how you have been identified by me, the principal investigator:

- You, as the participant, are defined as an educational leader which is an individual who takes on any informal and/or formal leadership role and works within an education system as a community, school &/or divisional leader (Principal, Vice-Principal, Divisional Leader, Teacher Leader, Community Leader, Elder, Knowledge Keeper).
- You, as the participant, must be a public-school community leader who has experience with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives within your professional practices.
- You, as the participant, are an adult (18 years or older).

AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER'S JOURNEY TO CULTIVATE RECONCILIATION

The integrity of this study will be ensured by honoring privacy and confidentiality for you, the participant, and the information you provide. I, as a researcher, will ensure that all participant names and/or other identifiable information will be conserved via the use of pseudonyms and not appear in any report, publication, or other means of dissemination associated with this study. The appropriate processes will be taken to store and destroy data collection and research materials.

If you have any additional questions &/or concerns prior to participating, feel free to contact me at: Mary-Jo Hovorka-Seymour (204) xxx-xxxx or via email: Hovorkam@myumanitoba.ca

If you would like to participate in this study, please email me at: Hovorkam@myumanitoba.ca and I will send you the required consent form for your approval and submission.

If you would like to contact my advisor, email Dr. Frank Deer at frank.deer@umanitoba.ca

Thank you for considering supporting this descriptive research study and I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. Miigwetch!

Sincerely,

Mary-Jo Hovorka-Seymour/Circling Round Eagle
Graduate Student
University of Manitoba

LETTERHEAD

Appendix C – Consent Form for Participants

An Educational Leader's Journey to Cultivate Reconciliation: Exploring how educational leaders have cultivated a culture of reconciliation through the acquisition of Indigenous knowledge and perspective.

Principal Investigator: Master's Student, Mary-Jo Hovorka-Seymour,
204 xxx xxxx, Hovorkam@myumanitoba.ca

Research Supervisor: Associate Professor, Dr. Frank Deer, frank.deer@umanitoba.ca

Research Overview

My name is Circling Round Eagle, Mary-Jo Hovorka-Seymour, and I am a graduate student currently working on my master's thesis in the Department of Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology at the University of Manitoba. I am inviting educational leaders to participate in a research study titled, *An Educational Leader's Journey to Cultivate Reconciliation*.

The purpose of this study is to explore how educational leaders have adapted their practice by utilizing the four action-based strategies of the *Mamàhtawisiwin: the wonder we are born with — an Indigenous education policy framework*, developed by Manitoba Education (2022). The journey of reconciliation involves building a foundation based on Indigenous-inclusive to create a safe school culture that benefits all learners. The research question that guides the curiosity within this proposal directly relates to the documents vision: How have educational leaders nurtured school cultures in a spirit of reconciliation by employing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives?

Research Method

The format of this descriptive study I will be conducting will involve one-hour interviews with educational leaders. The overall aim of the research is to share initiatives and/or transformations educational leaders are employing to develop a set of wisdoms that will assist an educational leader's journey to cultivate reconciliation.

In consenting to be a participant, the virtual interview will last approximately one hour. Living and travelling in rural Manitoba has its disadvantages and having the ability to conduct interviews around participants lifestyles and schedules eases the process. I will be completing my data collection via Microsoft Teams: a videoconferencing communication platform that is utilized by many educational institutions and school divisions across Manitoba. As a participant, you can join from the comfort of your home and/or workplace during the virtual interviews. It is important to note that the audio in the interview will be recorded to capture your story, but the video function will not be recorded to protect your privacy and anonymity. However, the video function will be enabled without recording as it will create comfort between the interviewer and interviewee.

Research Benefits and Concerns

The benefits of participating in the study aligns with the guiding principles of the Circle of Courage as it takes much courage to give voice to the actions taken on the road to reconciliation. The value of self-reflection to build self-efficacy and collective efficacy is bound by a commitment to come full circle. Through self-reflection you can share your knowledge and perspective to help improve your own educational practices and the practices of others within the field of education. The ability to reflect on your ways of knowing, being, and doing and to share the thoughts of your journey will help others on their journey to cultivate reconciliation. The spirit of generosity gives purpose to your commitment, the spirit of independence gives power to the decisions you make, the spirit of belonging creates trust in the relationships you build, and the spirit of mastery exhumes confidence in the journey you have taken. We all have our own gifts and the potential to support the gifts of others in the process. Our educational leaders are the grassroots contributors to building a collective efficacy amongst educators who want to see positive change and Indigenous inclusion within our education system in Manitoba. My hope for the research study is that it provides implementation wisdoms around the four action-based strategies for educational leaders across Manitoba.

The concerns you may have for participating in the study may occur upon reflection when answering questions. An educational leader plays many roles within a school and there are many layers of accountability when attempting to be a change maker. Feelings of self-doubt, fear to speak truths, and face barriers can be very overwhelming and emotionally uncomfortable. If any of these feeling occur, you will be given the time needed and the opportunity to take a break and/or move on to the next question. You can make the choice to reschedule the interview at another time, suspend your participation in the interview and/or cancel your participation in the research study. If you choose to cancel your participation, all data collection will be deleted.

Research Confidentiality

The integrity of this study will be ensured by honoring privacy and confidentiality for the participants and the information provided. Your interview data will be kept confidential using pseudonyms (participant A, B, C & D) for yourself and the schools that you include in your stories (School # 1, School # 2....). A digital file will be kept connecting your actual name to your pseudonym along with the virtual interview recordings on the UM cloud storage OneDrive, in password protected folders that only I have access to. Signed consent forms that are returned electronically will be store on the UM cloud storage OneDrive, otherwise any hard copy signed consent forms and/or transcripts will be stored in a fireproof and waterproof secured safe in my home. My advisor, Dr. Frank Deer will have access to the interview transcripts to assist me with my analysis.

The information from this transcript will be used for the results and conclusions section of my thesis. It may also be presented at academic and public events and/or published in journals within the education community. There is a possibility that I will be using direct quotes from our interview however pseudonyms will be used to protect your anonymity. Even though I will do my best to protect all identities, I cannot guarantee that individuals will not be identified.

Participants may withdraw from the study without negative consequences prior to the incorporation of data and drafts of the thesis. If you choose to do this, please contact me at 204 xxx xxxx or email Hovorkam@myumanitoba.ca and your data will be immediately destroyed. **Once the data is incorporated into the analysis and drafting of the thesis has begun, you will no longer be able to withdraw from the study.**

Research Results and Analysis

The research results will be released in a written thesis document that will be submitted to my professors, Dr. Frank Deer, Marti Ford, and Lucy Fowler for evaluation.

There are a few items that you will need to analyze and approve for authenticity purposes:

- Interviews will take place in date 2024. Two weeks after the interview, I will email you the interview transcript only. You will have 12 days to respond from the date you received the transcript whether you want to add, delete, &/or modify the information and if I receive no response, I will presume your approval of the content and proceed with the research study.
- The results section will be completed and emailed in date 2024 for personal interest.
- The completion of the study in date 2025 opens an opportunity for you to request a brief summary of the wisdoms. Please make this request by checking the box below. To make revisions to the thesis document all confidential data will be kept for five years and then destroyed via electronic data deleted, digital files & folders deleted, and paper will be shredded in date 2030.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research study and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this study, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Officer at 204-474-7122 or HumanEthics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please consent to having your audio recorded on the Microsoft Teams call during the interview:

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please consent to having your Video displayed on the Microsoft Teams call during the interview:

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please consent to understanding that if any abuse of children or persons in care is revealed in the interview that I will be obligated to report it to the necessary authorities:

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please consent to understanding that you can no longer withdraw from the study once the data is incorporated in the analysis and drafting of the thesis has begun.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Check the box if you wish to receive a summary of the recommendations of the study.

☐ Yes

☐ No

If you check "yes" above, please provide an email address below where the recommendations can be sent:

LETTERHEAD

Appendix D – Interview Guide for the Research Participants

Introductory Script

I would like to start by thanking you for agreeing to take part in this interview. As you are aware the purpose of this study is to explore how educational leaders have adapted their practice by utilizing the four action-based strategies of the *Mamàhtawisiwin: the wonder we are born with — an Indigenous education policy framework*, developed by Manitoba Education (2022). I would like you to discuss your knowledge and perspective and share initiatives and/or transformations that you have employed to cultivate a culture of reconciliation within your school. I am giving you a reminder that at any time you are free to withdraw from the interview, refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence, and ask for the recorder to be turned off and/or for a break from the interview process.

Guiding Questions/Points of Discussion

Prompt: *In a spirit of reconciliation, I want you to reflect on the Honourable Murray Sinclair, former Senator and Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), four guiding questions: Who are you? Where do you come from? Why are you here? Where are you going? “As a result of the need for dialogue in a time of reconciliation, we want students to be able to connect to self, family, community, place, the land, and animals by having them explore the Honourable Sinclair’s four guiding questions” (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022, p.16) and I would like you to do the same.*

- 1.) Please introduce yourself.
- 2.) What is your role as an educational leader and in what ways have you used that role to cultivate reconciliation within the school culture?
- 3.) In what ways are you presently supporting authentic involvement of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives and what can you improve upon in reflection of what you have done?
- 4.) In what ways are you presently putting students at the centre of the Indigenous-inclusive educational experience and what can you do to improve supporting student-centered practices in reflection of what you have done?
- 5.) In what ways are you presently doing to understand Indigenous worldviews, values, identities, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles and what can you improve upon in reflection of what you have done?
- 6.) In what ways are you presently doing to create an inclusive and culturally safe learning environment and what can you improve upon in reflection of what you have done?
- 7.) What are the barriers that are preventing you from successfully implementing any of the four strategies?
- 8.) In reflection, what solutions do you suggest in overcoming the barriers?

I would like to thank you for your time, and I appreciate you volunteering to take part in the study. Miigwetch!

Appendix E – Ethics Approval Letter



Human Research Ethics - Fort Garry
66 Chancellors Circle
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
humanethics@umanitoba.ca

PROTOCOL APPROVAL

Effective: October 21, 2024

Expiry: October 20, 2025

Principal Investigator: MJ Hovorka-Seymour
Advisor(s): Frank Deer
Protocol Number: HE2024-0240
Protocol Title: *AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER'S JOURNEY TO CULTIVATE RECONCILIATION*

Martha Koch, Acting Chair, REB2

Research Ethics Board 2 has reviewed and approved the above research. The Office of Human Research Ethics (OHRE) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans- TCPS 2 (2022)*.

Please note the following important information about your protocol approval:

- i. Approval is granted for the research and purposes described in the protocol only.
- ii. Any changes to the protocol or research materials must be approved by the OHRE **before implementation**.
- iii. Any **deviations** to the research or **adverse events** must be reported to the OHRE immediately through an **REB Event**.
- iv. This approval is valid **for one year only**. A Renewal Request must be submitted and approved prior to the above expiry date.
- v. A **Protocol Closure** must be submitted to the OHRE when the research is complete or if the research is terminated.
- vi. The University of Manitoba may request to audit your research documentation to confirm compliance with this approved protocol, and with the UM [*Ethics of Research Involving Humans*](#) policies and procedures.

Appendix F – Ethics Amendment Approval



Human Research Ethics - Fort Garry
66 Chancellors Circle
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
humanethics@umanitoba.ca

AMENDMENT APPROVAL

January 9, 2025

Principal Investigator: MJ Hovorka-Seymour
Advisor(s): Frank Deer
Protocol Number: HE2024-0240
Protocol Title: *AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER'S JOURNEY TO CULTIVATE RECONCILIATION*

Office of Human Research Ethics as designated by REB2

Research Ethics Board 2 has reviewed and approved your Amendment Request submitted on **January 8, 2025** to the above-noted protocol. The Office of Human Research Ethics (OHRE) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans-TCPS 2 (2022)*.

Please note the following important information about your amendment approval:

- i. Approval is granted for **this amendment only**.
- ii. Any further changes to the protocol require subsequent amendment approvals from the OHRE before implementation.
- iii. Any **deviations** to the research or **adverse events** must be reported to the OHRE immediately through an **REB Event**.
- iv. Amendment Approvals do not change the protocol expiry date. Please refer to the original Protocol Approval or subsequent Renewal Approvals for the **protocol expiry date**.

Appendix G – Data Analysis Chart

Five Themes

Open Mind, Building Relationships, Sharing, Collaboration, & Connections.



Appendix H – Barriers

In Control Educational Leader Solution-based	Out of Control
• Transportation • Criminal Records & Child Abuse check process • Red Tape - Eating wild meat/Feasts, furs/skinning • Hiring Process • Staff attitudes towards race, poverty & addiction • Staff attitudes towards change & lack of buy in • One-offs rather than purposeful & ongoing • Treaty Education & Professional development • Designated Space • Defined roles • Indigenous people's distrust with education • Hesitancy of Indigenous community members to come into schools • Caregivers needing support • Accurate & truthful history • Lack of Language classes & Teachers • Purchasing local resources • Finding the right people • Finding Balance • Balancing how to speak truths to younger students • Balancing time to build relationships • Fear of being unintentionally disrespectful &/or offending others • Excuses not to try • Lack of time & money • Having the time to devote to learning • Lack of human support • Sustainability, time & energy • Teacher pressure to complete curriculum • Having purposeful intent when learning • Students showing disrespect • Making the right connections • Token activities & one offs • Spreading Indigenous human resources too thin across division. • Too much on Teachers plates – too busy • Educator fear of unknown	• Parent/family Fear of CFS • Human Judgement • Reliability of Knowledge Keepers/Elders • Children in Care • Mental Health • Poor attendance & absenteeism • Poverty • Addictions • Assumptions • Lack of Indigenous Elders to teach Language • Indigenous people's distrust with education • Students showing disrespect • Educator fear of unknown

Appendix I – Reflections

- Find people who give true, authentic knowledge.
- Find appropriate professional development that gives valuable information & activities to use.
- Hire Indigenous staff who can contribute knowledge & perspective.
- See differing views of success and what it means for each student.
- Build student confidence by giving them time to explore who they are.
- Meet the needs of all students for personal success
- Educate all Canadians, not just First Nations about the historical truths.
- Find a way to revive Indigenous language within the community.
- Help students address social inequities such as poverty, addictions, abuse etc. through offering support at school such as food programs, counsellors, addiction workers, and mental health workers.
- Give students voice and opportunities to guide their educational experience.
- Provide learning opportunities in your community that address current socio-economic issues.
- Respect and teach the history and culture of Indigenous Peoples.
- Provide teachers with the time needed to ask questions and learn by offering professional development opportunities.
- Be flexible with scheduling when Knowledge Keepers & Elders come to share gifts.
- Provide space within the school to show value for learning Indigenous knowledge & perspectives.
- Make small achievable goals in relation to the Calls to Action.
- Utilize the community and the connections you make to bring in authentic knowledge keepers & elders.

Appendix J – Values

- Responsible to know the community you work in.
- Responsible for being open-minded, kind, respectful, and supportive.
- Responsible for learning together and listening to one another.
- Responsible for offering language opportunities.
- Responsible to be a continuous learner and share knowledge.
- Responsible for volunteering your time.
- Responsible for always looking for ways to improve.
- Responsible to speak truths.
- Responsible to be purposeful and authentic.
- Responsible for genuinely caring for the growth of your community and students.
- Responsible for taking the time to build relationships.

AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER'S JOURNEY TO CULTIVATE RECONCILIATION

Appendix K – Educational Leadership Collective List

Authentic Involvement

- Responsible to help make the connections for staff with knowledgeable Indigenous human resources such as Knowledge Keepers &/or Elders.
- Responsible for applying for grants that directly relate to Indigenous infusion.
- Responsible to advocate for Indigenous Knowledge Keeper(s) &/or Elder(s) to be a part of school planning.
- Responsible to advocate for the inclusion of Indigenous language learning opportunities.
- Responsible for the inclusion of land-based learning opportunities.
- Responsible to create an Indigenous support network for all staff learning & leading.
- Responsible to role-model how to build relationships with students and families both inside and outside of school.
- Responsible to embark on a personal journey to explore the Indigenous culture.
- Responsible for finding &/or creating spaces to smudge at school.
- Responsible for opening opportunities to let others share their story.
- Responsible to support inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in programs and curriculum.
- Responsible to work with committees and school team to promote learning about Indigenous knowledge and perspective.
- Responsible to hire and work with Indigenous people to learn about Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.
- Responsible for supporting the Indigenization of the curriculum.
- Responsible to experience a Powwow and/or help organize one for the school community.
- Responsible to encourage others to share their gifts.
- Responsible to offer tobacco when asking one to share their gift.
- Responsible for ensuring that there is a school-year plan in place rather than “one-offs”.
- Responsible for ensuring there is an open-door policy for community members to come into the school, and they are made to feel comfortable.
- Responsible for offering collaboration time to share learning between staff members.
- Responsible for encouraging parents/guardians to get involved in school activities for example, IAA Parent committee.
- Responsible for supporting hands-on and outdoor learning programs.

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... Putting Students at the Centre

- Responsible for helping staff understand that it is difficult work and everything we do should be student focused, and student led.
- Responsible for listening to our student voices to understand the direction they want and need to take for personal journeys.
- Responsible for role modeling on how to build purposeful relationships.
- Responsible for being responsive with student planning to help build connections.
- Responsible to give students hands-on opportunities to learn Indigenous knowledge and perspective.
- Responsible for organizing orientations for students coming from feeder Reservation schools to build connections.
- Responsible to recognize your own values and acknowledge student family values.
- Responsible for challenging teachers to use student-centered teaching practices.

... Understanding World Views, Values, Identities, Traditions, & Contemporary Lifestyles

- Responsible to ensure teachers are continuously learning and wondering.
- Responsible for making community connections and network with staff to help build knowledge & perspective.
- Responsible to respect & celebrate diversity.
- Responsible to seek advice & confirm knowledge & perspective with trusting Indigenous connections.
- Responsible for attending cultural explorations with students to learn about ceremonies.
- Responsible to get involved with extracurriculars such as sports to make connections with families.
- Responsible for taking the time to see the person and gifts so a relationship can be formed.
- Responsible to read and encourage the use of Indigenous Literacy written by Indigenous authors.
- Responsible to take courses to understanding Indigenous knowledge and perspective.
- Responsible to embrace different learning and teaching styles.
- Responsible to support creating ways to include Indigenous perspectives and knowledge in everything we teach at school from K to 12.
- Responsible for keeping up with new information and seeking out gifts through community connections and/or social media outlets.
- Responsible for setting up collaboration opportunities to Indigenize curricular programming & content.

AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER'S JOURNEY TO CULTIVATE RECONCILIATION

- Responsible to keep the Mamàhtawisiwin document at the forefront to help guide teaching practices.
- Responsible to learn from one another despite differences.
- Responsible to be vulnerable and open to sharing personal stories to make connections to understand others.

... Inclusive & Culturally Safe Learning Environment

- Responsible to set school goals to build Indigenous knowledge & perspectives.
- Responsible to ensure that differing First Nations can see themselves through teachings. e.g.) Cree, Ojibwe, Dakota, Dene, Métis, etc.
- Responsible to seek advice from local Indigenous people(s).
- Responsible for inviting families into the schools to see progress and be a part of the change making.
- Responsible to listen to student voices so they can help educators know what works best for their learning to meet students where they are at.
- Responsible to build relationships to help build confidence and motivation.
- Responsible for giving permission to teachers so they can feel autonomy to incorporate change.
- Responsible for giving opportunities to learn about one's culture(s) through making connections to the curriculum and celebrating differences.
- Responsible for feeding the students when hungry & for cultural celebrations.
- Responsible to demonstrate respect for Indigenous Knowledge and Perspectives.
- Responsible to help with planning & organizing Treaty Training along with ensuring all staff attend.
- Responsible for being aware and sensitive toward gender when considering Indigenous language & culture.
- Responsible to communicate Indigenous initiatives and goals to parents/guardians for awareness.
- Responsible to listen to parents/guardians to acknowledge and to be aware of one's story.