What Is and What Could Be:
Listening to Student Perspectives to Reconceptualize Care in Correctional Education

by

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Table of Contents

Abstract

This research reconceptualizes care in correctional education. Based on experiences and ideas shared by formerly incarcerated students, the research defines a more detailed concept of care than what existing literature provides. Based on what men shared, relationships are the foundation of caring teaching experiences, which includes an awareness of students' past and current experiences, understanding their learning needs, providing persistent encouragement, and expanding their learning experiences beyond academics into personal exploration and growth. The research uses conceptual frameworks guided by anticolonial theories, Indigenous philosophies of learning, and the relationship between control and care. While traditionally, dominant attitudes in corrections view relationships with incarcerated people as dangerous liabilities, this research suggests actively building relationships with students is fundamental for educational growth. Ultimately, the research concludes that care in correctional education requires a comprehensive view and requires the teacher to find *the relational midpoint* where they can offer caring support while providing structure for students and maintaining professional boundaries.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge that the University of Manitoba, and the places I live and work exist on land that is covered under Treaty 1. In 1871, an agreement was made between the Canadian government and representatives of Anishinaabe and Ininew peoples who had traditionally lived in these areas and cared for these lands. The Métis people who also lived on and cared for these lands were not included in the agreement despite their connection to the land and their contributions to the growing communities of people in the prairies. The treaty was a promise, and many aspects of this promise have not been honoured by the Canadian government. A refusal to fully honour the agreement, along with intentionally discriminatory policies and laws has resulted in oppression of Indigenous people in Canada for more than 150 years.

I have learned that a land acknowledgement is problematic because it shows my recognition that I benefit from an oppressive system, but that without action, I am complicit. This thesis research does not return land to Indigenous people. This thesis research is a step in my journey to understand reconciliation.

Many people have supported and influenced this thesis research, but as I learned from the Elder, family comes first. It is not possible to thank my partner enough. I am a terrible estimator and a notorious optimist. The Master's experience took much more time and much more mental space than anticipated. Thank you so much for your patience with the process, and for your support and encouragement, even when I was a grump. I could not have done it without you.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the men I have worked with, the men I am working with, and the men I will work with in the future. It is my hope that my learning will improve your learning.

Definitions

At home: The student's cell on the range.

Barrier: The barrier is the barred gate that is at one end of the range and which controls movement on and off of the range. Sometimes staff will talk with people through the bars at the barrier with the staff on one side and the incarcerated person on the other.

CD: Commissioner's Directive. Commissioner's Directives are the rules/policies that govern roles, responsibilities, and actions of CSC employees.

CMT: Case Management Team; the group of people responsible for monitoring the incarcerated person's correctional progress. The team consists of the Institutional Parole Officer (IPO) the Correctional Officer 2 (CX2), and the Correctional Unit Manager (sometimes called the *4-bar*)

Correctional Plan: The correctional plan details what types of programming the incarcerated person should do to work towards rehabilitation. The R-N-R tool is used for evaluating the person's *criminogenic needs* resulting in a determination of required programming.

CSC: Correctional Service of Canada

ETA: Escorted Temporary Absence. This is an excursion where the incarcerated person is allowed to leave the prison under officer supervision. An event like this may occur for medical reasons, cultural experiences, or to take part in volunteering or employment experiences. They occur infrequently and only with considerable administrative deliberation.

Inside: Inside the prison; incarcerated.

Kiosk: The kiosk is the desk where officers sit on the unit. It is something of a command centre from which officers can lock/unlock individual cells and control the barrier.

On the street: This refers to being in the community, or outside of the prison. It may literally mean unhoused but more often is used in reference to living anywhere other than the prison.

Outside: Outside of the prison; in the community; not incarcerated.

Range: The smaller sub-section of the unit. Typically a long hallway with cells along one side. There is a barrier/gate at one end of the range that controls movement on and off of the range

R-N-R: Risk-Need-Responsivity model for offender assessment and rehabilitation. This is a theoretical model which uses a survey to calculate an incarcerated person's likelihood of being dangerous in prison and in the community. It is used to determine the security level they are placed at and the programs that will be added to their correctional plan.

Self-determination (in education): The student's freedom to choose their own direction or make choices about their own life, including decisions about their education.

The max: Maximum security correctional facility

The medium: Medium security correctional facility

The minimum (the min): Minimum security correctional facility

Unit: The unit is where the men live in the correctional facility. Typically an institution has multiple units, each of which has several ranges.

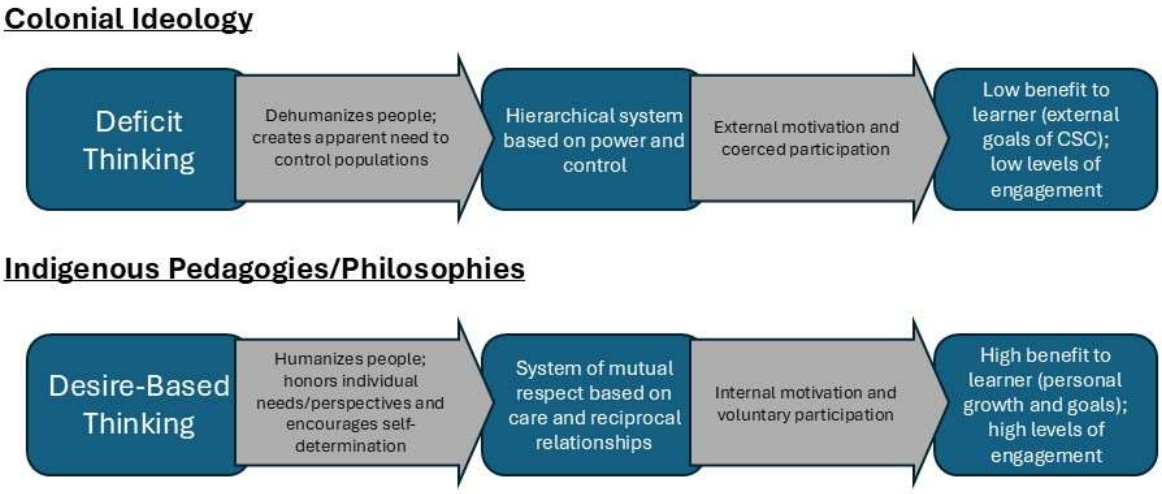
Introduction

It may seem obvious that teachers should express care for their students and build relationships with them. Nêhiyaw (Steinhauer, 2023) and Anishinaabe (Leon & Nadeau, 2018; Peltier, 2021; Twance, 2019) scholars describe that learning is relational and engages mind, body, heart, and spirit and since the 1980s, educational theorists have described the value of building relationships with learners to foster personal growth, academically, emotionally, and socially (Baier, 1995; Gregory, 2000; Moriggi et al., 2020; Noddings, 1995). Formerly incarcerated people and Indigenous instructors and Elders emphasize the need for, and benefits of, centering emotion and Indigenous ways of learning in correctional education (Alexander et al., 2023; Anderson et al., 2023) but excessive control, which is exerted ostensibly to maintain security and safety, limits student-teacher relationships and overshadows educational opportunities which in turn hinders both academic and personal growth of students (Elliott, 2007; Patrie, 2017; Weil Davis & Michaels, 2016; Wright, 2004b). In the prison environment, relationships are viewed as dangerous liabilities (Cornelius, 2001; Dodds, 2002; Elliott, 2007; Worley, 2005; Wright, 2004b).

This thesis argues that the concept of care in correctional education needs to be reconceptualized. Literature about care in correctional education has shortcomings because it either makes vague generalizations about care or offers a small number of very specific examples of care, focusing only on emotionally motivated acts (Elliott, 2007; Patrie, 2017; Wright, 2004b, 2004a). There is a need for a more comprehensive examination of what it means to apply care in correctional education for students working towards a grade 12 diploma. Through exploring the experiences and ideas that formerly incarcerated participants shared, I seek to develop a well-defined understanding of how teachers can express care in correctional education to support their students' needs and goals. More specifically, I assert that relationships in correctional education should be much more comprehensive - broader and deeper - than existing literature on care in correctional education suggests.

This research was not specifically focused on Indigenous students in prison, but due to statistics showing high numbers of Indigenous people incarcerated in Canada, and specifically in the prairie provinces, there is a need to be accountable to Indigenous students in prison. In 2020, 59% of people admitted to federal prison in Manitoba were Indigenous (PressProgress, 2021) and 33% of adults admitted to federal custody in 2022/2023 were Indigenous (Department of Justice, 2024). At the core of this research is the tension between colonial ideologies and Indigenous philosophies. As such, the study is guided by anticolonial methodology. Colonialism, based on Eurocentric values, revolves around power, control, economic interests, and prioritizing benefits to the individual over the needs of the many (Bonds & Inwood, 2016; Wolfe, 2006). Conversely, philosophies from Indigenous peoples across Canada and the world are focused on interconnectivity between nature and humans, relationships between people, and focus on decision making based on the needs of the community (Peltier, 2021; Steinhauer, 2023; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021; Twance, 2019). While mutual respect and reciprocal relationships are central to Anishinaabe and Nêhiyaw values (Leon & Nadeau, 2018; Peltier, 2021; Steinhauer, 2023), colonialism employs hierarchy and disconnected objectivity devoid of emotion (Andersen et al., 2023; Gallivan et al., 2023; Harris, 2018). The disparity between worldviews leads to tensions between control and care (Elliott, 2007; Philo, 2017; Wright, 2004a) and deficit and desire (Tuck,

2009). These tensions will be further discussed in the conceptual frameworks section. The image below demonstrates the disparity between these two ways of thinking and how the different pedagogical approaches influence education in prison. The following chapters elaborate on each concept and describe how they are interconnected.



This research asserts that a large-scale ideological struggle is borne out in the microcosm of the correctional institution and as Anderson et al. (2023) identify, “Indigenous pedagogies are crucial tools for Indigenous peoples to relearn their identities outside of stereotypical colonial narratives” (p.17). This shift in teaching is essential considering that extreme rates of Indigenous people in prison is a national concern that is well documented (Arbel, 2019; Clark, 2019; L. Guenther, 2021; Kitossa, 2012; Malakieh, 2020; OCI, 2022; Parker, 2023). Reasons for high levels of Indigenous incarceration are discussed throughout this thesis.

Within the controlling constraints of the prison system, the school can act as a space for building relationships, personal growth, and recognizing individual value, counteracting colonial narratives. Although school has historically been a site of colonial education (Leon & Nadeau, 2018; Steinhauer, 2023; Twance, 2019), it can be transformed to a site of anticolonialism. Comparing CSC education goals and policies with definitions of success shared by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people (Allen & Lloyd-Hazlett, 2021; T. S. Andersen et al., 2020; DeVries, 2022) shows that there are considerable opportunities to improve correctional education and the way it benefits people who go to school in prison. Rather than applying a deficit view and using education to meet external goals related to recidivism, public safety and economic growth (Richer et al., 2015), the focus must be on learner needs and desires, recognizing the potential that students have. This is challenging because it runs counter to messages men receive throughout their time in prison. A corrections system that creates dependence and complacency (Halsey, 2008) must be replaced by a system that promotes educational self-determination and success. What changes need to happen to make this possible? Only the men who have experienced living in prison and going to school in prison can answer these questions appropriately.

Problem

Although there is existing literature on the benefits of care in correctional education, it is vague about what it means to apply care, or how teachers in prison can do this successfully in the restrictive space of the prison school which is governed by correctional mandates. While research (Alexander et al., 2023; S. Andersen et al., 2023; Elliott, 2007; Gallivan et al., 2023; Patrie, 2017; Wright, 2004a, 2004c) shows that care in correctional education has positive impacts on learning, building relationships with incarcerated students is discouraged because of the oppressive correctional culture which generates the belief that men in prison will use relationships to manipulate staff. This view is based on colonial constructs and an inherent mistrust of incarcerated people. Keeping an intentional distance from incarcerated students hinders full understanding of students' needs, challenges and desires which compromises the teacher's ability to facilitate student growth. Because of this, care in correctional education needs to be reconceptualized. Rather than viewing relationships with students as a liability, teachers should embrace relationships as the foundation for growth and actively pursue purpose-driven relationships, seeking to understand incarcerated students in a holistic way.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to develop a more detailed understanding of practical ways that correctional educators can make prison education more responsive to men's needs and desires. The research uses experiences shared by formerly incarcerated men who attended school in prison to examine concrete examples of how teachers showed care in prison education and how this was beneficial for students. Through exploring these experiences, I seek to reconceptualize care in correctional education and identify more clearly defined ways for teachers to support learning by expressing care in prison schools.

The research takes a phenomenological approach and is guided by anticolonial methodology (Carlson, 2017). Data was gathered with a conversational method (Kovach, 2010, 2021) by engaging with formerly incarcerated men who participated in correctional education. Kovach's conversational method follows traditions of Indigenous research methods. The findings of this study expand on the existing literature on prison education from a valuable perspective. The majority of existing literature was produced by CSC, by independent researchers, or by correctional educators (AGC, 2022; Allen & Lloyd-Hazlett, 2021; Babchishin et al., 2021; Bonta & Andrews, 2007; Duguid et al., 1996; Elliott, 2007; Fox, 1991, 1998; Patrie, 2017; Richer et al., 2015; Wright, 2004b, 2004a). This proposed study includes voices of men who have participated in correctional education – the people who have the most insight into how school in prison can be improved to support students. This research is also pivotal because while most research that includes perspectives of incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people focuses on their past experiences, this study foregrounds men's input on how to improve education. The research further deepens the understanding of how teachers can apply care in correctional education, which was previously described in the literature using mostly generalities.

Positionality

Understanding the researcher's relationship to the content and participants is essential for ethical and relational transparency (Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008). I come from a family of settlers who came to Canada in the early 20th century. My family has benefited, and I continue to benefit from economic, political, and social policies instituted by past and present governments. I am a cisgender white male and I enjoy all the benefits of white privilege. I strive to be an ally to marginalized groups, particularly Indigenous people in Manitoba.

I am also a teacher. As of 2025, I have 12 years of teaching experience including four years working as a correctional educator. It is my ongoing work teaching in prison that has motivated me to research with participants who have experienced the correctional education process because I believe both personally and professionally that there is a need for change in prison schools. I believe it is the students themselves that can share the best insight into what types of changes need to be made and I feel a moral and ethical duty to continually improve education delivery for people who are incarcerated.

My position as a white settler correctional educator working in a prison where the majority of incarcerated people are Indigenous creates many complicated layers. It requires that I continually use a critical lens to assess colonial dynamics of the prison, of the school, and of the education curriculum. My own personal biases and assumptions combined with educational policies and institutional policies make it challenging to listen to and meet the needs of the Indigenous students I work with.This thesis project has prompted deep reflection about my position as a researcher and a correctional educator which is too lengthy to include in this introduction. A more detailed exploration of my positionality is available as an appendix of this thesis report.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter one presents the conceptual frameworks that informed the research design and data interpretation. It introduces concepts of colonialism, settler colonialism, and anticolonialism. The chapter describes philosophies from Anishinaabe and Nêhiyaw cultures, which are representative of the territory on which the study takes place, as well as how the colonial curriculum used in schools is at odds with Indigenous philosophies of learning. Finally, it introduces the tension between control and care which is a central concept for this research and develops a definition of care that is used throughout this research. Chapter two is the literature review which explores complications of care in prison including fear of manipulation and differing methods of retaining safety. It critiques current concepts of care in corrections and problematizes correctional education before identifying benefits of care in correctional education. Chapter three includes an explanation of the anticolonial methodology applied in the study and the research method that the study followed. Chapter four describes data collection and the analysis process. Data Analysis is chapter five where I describe the themes that developed in the conversational gathering. Chapter six is the Discussion which draws connections between participants' ideas, Indigenous philosophies, and the ethic of care (Noddings, 1995, 2005). It also explores how men's desires are impacted by the tension between control and care. The last chapter includes my own concluding thoughts and final words from the participants to teachers

working in prison. There are several appendices including discussion of CSC policies that support care in correctional education, a detailed personal reflection on positionality, reflection on anticolonialism as a journey, and data collection tools used in the conversational gathering

Conceptual Frameworks

The conceptual framework for this research is based on three main areas. First, concepts of colonialism, settler colonialism, and anticolonialism help to understand history and modern context of Indigenous-settler relations and as it relates to the dynamics of prisons and education systems; secondly an understanding of learning philosophies from Indigenous peoples compared to western learning theory; and finally, concepts of control and care which influence men's experiences in prison. This chapter describes these frameworks and provides a visual representation of how I conceptualize them and used the framework to interpret the stories that men shared in the conversational gathering.

Colonialism, Settler Colonialism, Anticolonialism

Considering the historical and current aspects of colonialism and settler colonialism provides a foundation to understand the correctional ethos, the security mindset (Schoenfeld & Everly, 2023) and how the current conceptualization of care in correctional education is grounded in a colonial view of students.

Colonialism is an unequal relationship of power, through which one group (Europeans) dominates another, and imposes their own values, norms, and ways of knowing and doing things - which is then marked as superior. A key difference between colonialism and settler colonialism is the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized people. Colonialism is about a relationship of subjugation, based on maintaining a power dynamic that dictates superiority of one group over another, usually to support economic gain (Veracini, 2011). On the other hand, settler colonialism is about erasing (or denying) the existence of a group of people, so that settler colonizers can reap economic benefits, typically related to land and natural resources (Wolfe, 2006). A foundational understanding in this research is that the prison is a tool of the state which is used to control populations seen as a threat to power (Chartrand, 2019; Haugaard, 2022; Nichols, 2017; Wolfe, 2006). The institution employs both colonial and settler colonial techniques and this is why I endeavoured to employ aspects of anticolonial methodology as a means to account for and challenge these oppressive powers. Throughout this discussion, an essential understanding is that settler colonialism in Canada is often, inaccurately, situated as a historical occurrence, when it is in fact, an ongoing influence in Canadian life (Chartrand, 2019; K. S. Montford & Moore, 2018; Monture-Angus, 1999).

Both colonialism and settler colonialism are motivated by economic interests (Bonds & Inwood, 2016; Veracini, 2011), mostly resources, and in settler colonialism control of land as a resource is the central focus (Wolfe, 2006). Based on this, "settler colonization is theorized not as an event or moment in history, but as an enduring structure requiring constant maintenance in an effort to disappear indigenous [sic] populations" (Wolfe, 2006). Settler colonialism is about erasing (or denying) the existence of a group of people, so that settler colonizers can reap economic benefits, typically related to land and natural resources. Settler colonialism seeks to completely eliminate Indigenous peoples and replace them with white settler society (Wolfe,

2006). This applies to the people themselves as well as culture, governance, and all other aspects of society. Erasure is essential to assert control over a land base (Wolfe, 2006).

The *Indian Act* of 1876 (which is still in place) is a settler colonial tool that set clear distinctions on where Indigenous people could live, what activities they could engage in, and even who was or was not Indigenous (Comack, 2012; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Over time the *Indian Act* was amended to control all aspects of Indigenous people's lives: political governance, economy, movement, culture, marriage and reproduction, identity and membership (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). In many cases, the punishment for violating the *Indian Act* was imprisonment (Jacobs et al., 2021)**.** This realization is central to understanding the historical perception of who is criminal and what constitutes criminal activity. Due to calculated settler colonial legislation, Indigenous people became criminalized for simply living the way their ancestors had. Attempts at erasure (Wolfe, 2006) take many forms. These range from being physically eliminated (murder/genocide), displaced (reserves, residential schools, 60s scoop, modern child and family services apprehensions), erasure of cultural practices (criminalization of ceremonies and spiritual artifacts), or being assimilated into the wider population (Veracini, 2011; Wolfe, 2006). Indigenous peoples in Canada have experienced all of these oppressions, with prison being a key form of displacement and control.

Many authors identify the harmful, racist, settler colonial philosophies which informed and continue to inform the institutions of residential schools, reserves, and prisons (Chartrand, 2019; K. S. Montford & Moore, 2018; Monture-Angus, 1999; Nichols, 2017; Wolfe, 2006; Woolford & Gacek, 2016). Prisons, residential schools, and reserves all employ a multifaceted attack on mind, body, and spirit (Chartrand, 2019). Each institution was/is based on forced removal and relocation, not only disrupting family and community ties but also disrupting spiritual and historical connections to the land (Chartrand, 2019; K. S. Montford & Moore, 2018; Woolford & Gacek, 2016). The strategy of control and containment on reserve "works to constitute Indigenous persons as dangerous and as challenging the legitimacy of colonial rule" and "ensures the ongoing subjugation of Indigenous people as biopolitical populations" (K. S. Montford & Moore, 2018, p.643). Imprisonment has the same effect.

The concepts of colonialism and settler colonialism are useful in this research because they help us to understand the dominant attitude in corrections of why people in prison should be objectified and kept at a distance. Dominant and oppressive cultural attitudes construct prisoners as dangerous, unintelligent, and a threat to society. It is the colonial us/them mentality which entrenches the divide between staff and incarcerated people, dehumanizing them and portraying them as unworthy of respect or relationships. Along with this, recognizing how settler colonialism has torn apart communities and relationships helps to understand the instability that incarcerated students have experienced throughout their lives and draws attention to precisely why building relationships is so valuable in correctional education. Lastly, understanding how laws were used as a settler colonial tool to criminalize and imprison Indigenous people is key to debunking racist stereotypes that position Indigenous people as inherently criminal. As scholars (Hannah-Moffat, 2016; Monture-Angus, 1999; Moore & Hannah-Moffat, 2005; Tuck, 2009) and the participants in this research describe, it is essential to recognize that context influences people's experiences and behaviours.

Anticolonialism acts as resistance to colonial control, thinking, and practices. The concept is discussed further in the methodology section, but here, I wish to address that an anticolonial view works against the othering practices in corrections that rationalize objectifying people in prison and keeping them at a distance. Dei (2006) emphasizes the importance of building identity and exploring sameness and differences between colonizer and colonized (self-other). This concept of sameness and difference is central to the argument of reconceptualizing care. By focusing on the shared humanity between staff and incarcerated individuals we can build an openness to supportive relationships. By understanding differences in personal experiences between staff, who often come from a place of privilege, and incarcerated people who have usually experienced oppression (both the individual, and their ancestors), we can better recognize how context has influenced thoughts and actions, rather than assuming that the person themselves is deficient in some way.

Indigenous Philosophies of Learning

Indigenous teaching methods are not all the same and philosophies vary between cultures and communities. The concepts I refer to in this research are from academics of Nêhiyaw and Anishinaabe descent. I refer to these authors becauseCreeand Ojibwaypeoples represent a large portion of Indigenous people in the Canadian prairies and many of the Indigenous men who are incarcerated in the CSC Prairie region identify as having Anishinaabe, Ininew, Nêhiyaw, Nîhithaw, or Anishinini backgrounds depending on where they are from.

Philosophies of Indigenous pedagogy stand in stark contrast to western approaches to learning. A notable similarity across Indigenous cultures is the holistic approach to learning which encompasses mind, body, heart, and spirit (Leon & Nadeau, 2018; Peltier, 2021; Steinhauer, 2023; Twance, 2019). Sharla Mskokii Peltier (Anishinaabe) describes the importance of "listening and thinking, intuitive reflecting and visioning, experiencing and doing, and relating and feeling" (2021, p. 4). Along with including emotion in learning, the relating aspect includes recognizing the many relationships that exist in a learning scenario: relationships between the learner and the teacher, the land, the community, the knowledge, and the ancestors who passed the knowledge through generations. In turn, the teacher also has a responsibility to the relationship with the student. Patricia Steinhauer (2023), a Nêhiyaw educator and researcher from the community of Oniskwapowina (Treaty 6, Alberta), describes how the Nêhiyawêwin (Cree language) word for teacher – okisinwahmâkek - has its roots in two concepts: *to remember* and *spiritual foot tracks* which come together to ask the question: What is the spiritual trail you are trying to follow? Through this example, Steinhauer shows how traditional languages hold deep meaning which cannot be conveyed in English and how education is more complex than a simple exchange of ideas.

Learning is not an individual experience. Melissa Twance (Anishinaabe) describes how learning is connected to history and personal identity. Knowledge is not objective and cannot be decontextualized but exists in relation to people and communities (Leon & Nadeau, 2018; Peltier, 2021; Twance, 2019). In this way, students build a sense of belonging (Steinhauer, 2023) and understand that knowledge should be used to support families and communities while at the same time, families and communities support and celebrate the student's learning (Peltier, 2021).

Anishinaabe teaching approaches recognize that learning is non-linear and that concepts are interconnected rather than compartmentalized (Peltier, 2021). Learning is a life-long pursuit rather than a means to an end, and it is enhanced by family and community members, not only

teachers (Peltier, 2021). Along with this is the emphasis on hands-on learning through experiences, which often take place in nature, in connection with the land. Learning in this context brings us back to the relationship with land and all living things (Steinhauer, 2023; Twance, 2019). Traditional Indigenous ways of knowing are inherently land-based (Simpson, 2004).

What becomes apparent from thinking about Indigenous pedagogical philosophies is that beliefs about learning, both methods of learning and the purpose of learning, are different than western views of education. Considering that more than half of federally incarcerated men in Manitoba are Indigenous (PressProgress, 2021), it makes sense to increase the use of Indigenous teaching philosophies, at least in Manitoba institutions. However, it is notable that non-Indigenous learners benefit from Indigenous pedagogical approaches as well (Milne, 2017). Indigenous pedagogies are also well suited to teaching adult education because they honour personal experiences and recognize individual truths or understandings (Twance, 2019) rather than focusing on empirical positivism. Twance (2019) offers that by recognizing connections between land and life, "education becomes a form of resistance to settler normativity" (p. 1321). With relationships as the basis for learning and growth, considering Indigenous pedagogies is an essential lens to understand the contrast between current approaches to correctional education and the desires that men shared about correctional education.

Control and Care

Literature on corrections presents control and care as opposing binaries (Elliott, 2007; Patrie, 2017; Wright, 2004b, 2004a) but they can also be conceptualized as a continuum where control and care are interconnected concepts, reinforcing each other (Auty & Liebling, 2020, 2024; Khahaifa, 2024; Liebling, 2011). The control/care continuum is a useful tool for this research because it helps to understand several factors that influence men's experiences in prison. These factors include: historical and ongoing colonialism and settler colonialism; control and oppression in modern prison life; and aspects of control and care in the prison classroom. Control is asserted in educational settings to manage students and it is also exerted in prisons ostensibly to maintain safety and security. The problem is that control is often oppressive and dominating, leaving little or no space for personal choice or independence. The ethic of care (Noddings, 1995, 2005) embraces emotions and relationships as a central part of learning and aligns in many ways with Indigenous philosophies.

Deficit and desire are concepts that are closely intertwined with control and care. They are two different lenses that influence how a person perceives and interacts with people around them. Deficit thinking is a term that is commonly used in education but can also apply to other contexts. Deficit thinking centres on dominant but inaccurate stereotypes about student abilities and dispositions towards school but ignores how structural issues like racism influence the student's experiences or opportunities in school (Q. Allen & White-Smith, 2014). For example, racialized students, perceived as less intelligent, are disproportionately streamed into special education and often experience harsher punishments for perceived misbehaviour (Gebhard, 2012, 2013; Noguera, 2003). The way deficit thinking is applied in prison, the imprisoned person is labeled as incapable without further consideration of problems that exist in the system in which

the person is living (both in the narrower context of the prison system, and the broader context of society) (Moore & Hannah-Moffat, 2005). Deficit thinking, which assumes the worst of people and necessitates control over individuals, is prevalent throughout the correctional system and can have direct impacts on how teachers work with students in prison classrooms. For this reason, it is essential that this research continually considers context and structural factors, a view aligned with desire-based research (Tuck 2009).

To address a colonial aspect of deficit thinking, this viewpoint is inherently comparative. When deficit thinking is used, students, citizens, or people in prison are compared to their white counterparts. In colonial societies, whiteness is the standard by which all others are measured, a sentiment which has been normalized in schools and in national thought (St. Denis, 2007; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). White supremacy has been used to rationalize state violence, displacement, and dispossession but is often viewed as historical, when it is still active in modern society and pervades public thought today (Bonds & Inwood, 2016). In Canadian society, marginalized people, particularly Indigenous people who are navigating the social, economic, and political inequalities produced by colonialism, are portrayed as unruly or dangerous people who must be controlled to maintain public safety (Avila & Bundy, 2021; Dowler et al., 2006; Jacobs et al., 2021; Nichols, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Most incarcerated people have received negative messages about their abilities or self-worth throughout their lives which in turn creates barriers to educational attainment (as confirmed by participants in the conversation). These messages come from media, and from authority figures like teachers, parents or foster parents, police and correctional staff, and often become internalized, influencing the individual's beliefs about his own capabilities. The prison school can be a place where men can cultivate a different self-perception if teachers encourage them to explore their identity. For that reason, correctional education practices must encourage caring professional relationships to support educational and personal growth for students in prison.

Desire-Based Research as the Opposite of Deficit

Eve Tuck (2009) describes how damage-based research focuses on historic harm, injury, pain, and loss that communities have experienced. While it is true that Indigenous communities have been severely oppressed and it is important to recognize how historical factors have influenced current scenarios, Tuck (2009) says this focus on the negative "is a pathologizing approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community," (p.413) which creates a view of "neighbourhoods and tribes as defeated and broken" (p.412). These tunnel-vision perspectives also typically ignore structural factors that marginalize people while desire-based research works to "expose ongoing structural inequity" (Tuck, 2009, p.417). Ignoring or denying structural inequity is a hallmark of settler-colonialism (Veracini, 2011).

Tuck (2009) describes that while historical context of racism and colonization is frequently recognized at the outset of research, it often becomes submerged leaving only the damage in view. This means that in contrast to deficit thinking where contextual factors are consistently ignored, it is essential to recognize that colonization and oppression are not only historical but persist in modern day and therefore must be continually recognized and analyzed. This research seeks to continually recognize and critique colonial and settler colonial practices,

and using a desire-based orientation, strives to recognize policies and practices that continue to reinforce inequity and oppression. This also creates space to see how men's desires for correctional education reject colonial and settler colonial influences in prison schooling.

The intervention for damage-based research is to shift perspective to focus on desire (Tuck, 2009). Desire-based research, according to Tuck, is "concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (2009, p.416). This view does not ignore painful social contexts but acknowledges them along with the aspirations that people hold despite hardships. Tuck states, "Desire is about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future" (2009, p.417). For that reason, this research asks questions about what people desire to see in correctional education. The research questions are framed with hope and aspiration in mind.

Defining Care

The Ethic of Care

The ethic of care is a philosophy that developed from the work of Carol Gilligan and several other feminist authors writing in the 1980s and the concept has since influenced a variety of areas of study including health care, social work, education, and environmentalism (Baier, 1995; Gregory, 2000; Moriggi et al., 2020; Noddings, 1995). Gilligan's theory responded to the work of Kohlberg who was studying ethics related to justice. Kohlberg's work positioned ethics as individualistic, objective, logical, and detached from relationships or emotion (Baier, 1995; Juujarvi, 2003). In contrast to the ethic of justice which frequently seeks punishment for wrongdoers, the ethic of care is based on compassion, emotion, and is more subjective, accounting for sensitivity to context and needs of the people involved (Baier, 1995; Juujarvi, 2003; Noddings, 1995). Interdependence is prioritized over individualism (Baier, 1995; Noddings, 1995) and exercising care requires a person to be mindful of how their actions impact the lives of people around them (Gregory, 2000). With an ethic of care, a solidarity is developed between people and an individual must "empathize with [others] sufficiently to suffer and celebrate with them" (Gregory, 2000, p.448). The ethic of care is closely aligned with Indigenous values of relationality and community (Kovach, 2021; Leon & Nadeau, 2018; Peltier, 2021; Steinhauer, 2023; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008) while the ethic of justice is aligned with the settler colonial ideology. An ethic of care seeks to build connections to family, community, identity, and land while a Eurocentric ethic of justice (as described by Kohlberg) severs these connections.

Operationalizing Care in the Context of This Study

The definition of care for this study is mainly influenced by the work of Nel Noddings (1995, 2005). Similar to academics who identify the contradictory purposes of prison as punishment and rehabilitation (Elliott, 2007; Khahaifa, 2024; Ricciardelli et al., 2018; Schoenfeld & Everly, 2023), Noddings highlights that the institution of school also has multiple purposes. Noddings (2005) points out that educational reforms in the second half of the 20th century focused on rigidly identified learning outcomes and resulted in structured curriculum.

She argues, however, that strict focus on learning outcomes and daily routine leads to student boredom and misbehavior. While academic growth is one task of the school, Noddings (2005) states that the central goal of schools should be to "promote the growth of students as healthy, competent, moral people" (p.10). To do this, teachers need to build relationships with students, showing that they care for them, and should seek to help students answer broad existential questions: *Who am I? How do others see me? Who will love me? How shall I make a living? What do I owe to nonhuman animals? What does it mean to be a parent, friend, or citizen in today's world?* Exploring these questions can create a foundation of personal understanding which is necessary for intellectual growth (Noddings, 2005). These existential questions bring to mind the words of the Honourable Murray Sinclair (Anishinaabe, Peguis First Nation) who identified four questions that can help Indigenous people to understand themselves and their identity: *Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why am I here? Who am I?* (Sinclair, 1997). These questions from Noddings and Sinclair bring to light the interconnected nature of learning. The learner exists in relation to things in a dynamic context. In this way, learning is at the same time both deeply personal (individual) and connected to land, community, and family (interdependent). The teacher is a part of this interdependent relationship.

Caring is relational. Noddings (2005) describes it as a relationship between one who is the carer and one who is cared-for. Caring is responsive, meaning that the carer must listen to the expressed needs of the cared-for and seek to meet these needs. This concept is contrary to the dominant view of keeping incarcerated people at a distance. At the same time, the cared-for must be receptive to a caring exchange and recognize the efforts of the carer to be supportive and genuine. In this way, care is necessarily reciprocal. Because of the responsive nature of caring, Noddings states that care is not universalizable. That is to say that each caring relationship is unique depending on the two people involved; "caring is a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviours" (Noddings, 2005, p.17). Through experiencing care in education, students can learn to extend caring beyond the human realm into caring for nature, animals, ideas, and knowledge, an experience which "defines genuine education" (Noddings, 2005, xiii).

In Noddings' (2005) opinion, it is a teacher's responsibility to help their students develop the capacity to care and we can do this through a cycle of modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Considering this, if we want incarcerated students to exercise compassion and care, teachers need to treat them with the same qualities. Patricia Steinhauer (2023) shares that as a Nêhiyaw teacher, she strives to guide her students to develop a strong Cree mind and centres her practice on "wahkohtowin, our sense of interconnection with and kinship to all living things, including our ancients and descendants*"* (p. 9). Sinclair (1997) also asserted that employees in the justice system have a responsibility to incarcerated people, "Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to find a way to help them find out who they are," (p. 12) but Sinclair says that an emphasis on statistics and efficiency often prevents this. At the same time, the numbers show that "where Aboriginal people are concerned, we are not doing the right thing" (Sinclair, 1997. p. 13). With modelling, a person cannot simply be told what care looks like but must see and experience being the cared-for to develop their own caring skills and they must have multiple, ongoing opportunities to practice applying care themselves. Dialogue about learning must be genuinely reciprocal, making space to arrive at an agreement together. If the teacher has a predetermined

here's how it's going to be attitude, the student's agency has been removed and this is not a caring exchange. A prison scenario typically contradicts these values where staff with a security mindset (Schoenfeld & Everly, 2023) do not model caring actions and conclusions are rigidly pre-determined.

Care in This Research

With these ideas in mind, I strive to define care for the purpose of this research. A foundational point is that expressing care includes actively building relationships with, rather than purposely maintaining a distance from students. Care requires recognizing that there are broader goals outside of control and punishment (prison environment) and academic achievement (correctional education). Recognizing people's human needs for connection and desires to pursue personal interests is central to an ethic of care. Stories that participants shared describe experiences of both distant disconnection, and personalized, relationship-based care in education. Specifically in the prison environment, care requires recognition that there are aspects of life that are out of the students' control which may affect his ability to complete work or attend class (threats of violence, lockdowns, late work release). Care also necessitates broadening the definition of learning to include personal exploration, identity building, and encouraging students to consider themselves in relation to other people, non-human animals, and other living things. These are embodiments of relationality. Recalling a previous point from Anishinaabe scholars: knowledge is not objective and cannot be decontextualized but exists in relation to people and communities (Leon & Nadeau, 2018; Peltier, 2021; Twance, 2019).

One barrier that can inhibit care is the question: how do we determine who is deserving of care? Noddings (2005) describes complications with human caring responses towards people who are different from ourselves. When corrections staff can see some sort of vulnerability or redeemable qualities in a person in prison, they are more likely to intervene in a supportive way (Khahaifa, 2024). Unfortunately, it seems the majority of people in prison are perceived as violent, dangerous, and deceptive - the "scaly, slimy, or spiny type of folks" (Noddings, 2005) who do not inspire a sympathetic reaction from staff. Staff who perceive inmates in this way most likely subscribe to Kohlberg's ethic of justice where wrongdoing is equated to ignorance (Noddings, 2005). These are the foundational ideas for views of control and care. These beliefs may be based on racism and settler-colonialism (i.e. Indigenous people are dangerous and inherently bad) or may be based in Eurocentric views of criminality (i.e. people in prison are undeserving of care because they are morally or cognitively deficient), or perhaps both.

Literature Review

Building care in a correctional setting is particularly challenging. As Noddings acknowledges, "The situation in which carer and cared-for meet may make it difficult to establish caring relations" (2005, p.xv). The literature review explores how the correctional atmosphere creates barriers to care in education and discusses and problematizes current concepts of care in prison and problematizes goals of correctional education.

Complications of Care in Prison

Relational dynamics in prison are complicated due to the contradicting dual purpose of prison: punishment/confinement and rehabilitation (Elliott, 2007; Khahaifa, 2024; Ricciardelli et al., 2018; Schoenfeld & Everly, 2023). According to CSC corporate information, "CSC's Mandate is to contribute to public safety by actively encouraging and assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens, while exercising reasonable, safe, secure and humane control" (Correctional Service Canada, 2025). Correctional programs and educational programming are intended to increase public safety and reduce recidivism rates (Correctional Service Canada, 2019). Programming intended to rehabilitate or reform incarcerated people is part of CSC's legal mandate (Correctional Service Canada, 2019) but, as many authors make clear, safety and security is typically the priority in institutions (Elliott, 2007; Khahaifa, 2024; Ricciardelli et al., 2018; Schoenfeld & Everly, 2023). Considering the coerced incapacitation of incarcerated men, violence becomes an inherent aspect of the correctional workplace/space (Auty & Liebling, 2024; Ricciardelli et al., 2018). Strict, controlling methods of retaining safety and security contradict the caring approach that is required for growth – both personal and academic (Auty & Liebling, 2020). CSC's values of respect, fairness, professionalism, inclusiveness, and accountability (Correctional Service Canada, 2025) seem to suggest that people in prison experience a social climate where they will feel safe, treated fairly and have relationships with competent and supportive staff (Auty & Liebling, 2020), but Moore and Hannah-Moffat (2005) point out that "penal policy is best thought of as consisting of two components, rhetoric and practice" (p.89).

Relational Safety – Care vs. Control or Care as Control

Researchers exploring quality of life in prison have determined three dimensions that influence life in prison: relationships, personal development, and order and organization(Auty & Liebling, 2020, 2024; Liebling, 2011; Liebling & Kant, 2018; Neubacher et al., 2023). Based on their research, they have identified four archetypes of officer conduct and institutional culture that characterize the *social climate* in a prison. Along with this, they identify two different approaches to maintaining safety and security in prisons. The basis of the two different social climates is how staff perceive people in prison, which influences they interact with people in prison.

In *professional-supportive* environments, officers are confident and engage positively with prisoners (Liebling & Kant, 2018). Staff view structure-as-support and are skilled

peacekeepers. The authors describe that these officers are welcoming, open, patient, and supportive of incarcerated people, only using force when necessary. They recognize the stresses of prison life and seek to find solutions that respect the needs of prisoners and staff. Perhaps most importantly, these staff "see offenders as people with futures, and themselves able to bring about a better future" (Liebling & Kant, 2018, p. 210). These staff have the calmness, verbal skills, and defined boundaries required to facilitate positive interactions with incarcerated people, even in tense situations. Liebling and Kant admit that this type of staff member is not typical but "can be found everywhere in prison systems, albeit in small numbers" (2018, p. 211).

Resistant-punitive environments have officers who are trapped in the past and operate based on past-oriented cultures where "containment of a different kind, linked to control, is prized above care and rehabilitation" (Liebling & Kant, 2018, p.211). The resistant-punitive staff culture is focused on discipline and is resistant to change or new ways of working with people in prison. The punitive, traditional-resistant officer believes that people are either good or bad, sees committing crime as an individual choice, and views prisoners as the other. Never trust an inmate, avoid relationships with inmates, and distance yourself from inmate goals are three themes that Schoenfeld and Everly (2023) found in US correctional officer culture. A key difference between the supportive officer and punitive office is the willingness to build relationships with people in prison.

Ultimately, Liebling and Kant (2018) determine that the dominant staff culture creates one of two social climates in the prison which seek to maintain safety and order in two different ways:

1. reassurance safety - based on maintaining distance and control, or;
2. relational safety - which uses dynamic, interactive, and confident authority and takes a positive view of prisoners as capable of change and positive action

Prisons with more positive social climates have fewer behavioral incidents, lower rates of violence, more engagement with treatments and better outcomes from treatments, better relationships with staff, and people who are incarcerated in a prison with a positive social climate have higher levels of motivation (Auty & Liebling, 2024). However, staff just saying they care does not automatically create a caring environment (Noddings, 2005), a point which becomes apparent when looking in detail at the current "empowering" approaches to correctional programming.

Khahaifa (2024) describes care in prison environments and identifies the concept of carceral kinship where staff "strategically breach the security mindset… to build kinship-like bonds with incarcerated individuals in support of their rehabilitation and re-entry" (p. 3). Officers who encourage engagement in school or programs, support family interactions, and express patience with inmates build trust and can become viewed as a respected aunty or uncle for people in prison. This is an example of staff conduct that aligns with relational safety.

People in prison perceive use of power to be either legitimate or illegitimate based on how order is maintained (Auty & Liebling, 2024; Ryan & Bergin, 2022). Where appropriate use of authority is mixed with a sense of humanity and moral support, people can "use the space

created by safety and legitimate order to work on themselves" (Auty & Liebling, 2020). Said another way, an atmosphere of order promotes care and personal growth. Based on the findings of numerous authors (Auty & Liebling, 2020, 2024; Khahaifa, 2024; Liebling, 2011) a self-sustaining cycle exists where a caring staff culture promotes stability, and stability creates opportunity for caring and supportive staff interactions. This confirms Philo's (2017) assertion that care and control are integrally connected. Liebling (2011) states that "what makes a prison feel safe – the most important determinant of distress – is responsive, approachable, and respectful staff" (p. 535).

A significant point brought forward by Khahaifa (2024) is that prison staff are more inclined to work with incarcerated people who show some sort of redemptive qualities or vulnerability. The author describes that in schools or family visiting spaces, people in prison "temporarily shed their prisoner status, taking on different identities, as student or son" (p. 13). This observation highlights the role that perception and identity play in prison relational dynamics and connects to Dei's (2006) observation about the importance of identities in anticolonial practice. From the other point of view, people in prison often struggle with their own identity (Auty & Liebling, 2020, 2024; Liebling, 2011) and can benefit from a stable, nurturing environment when they can cultivate self-esteem and a positive identity. Of course, this aligns with Noddings' (2005) and Sinclair's (1997) emphasis on how developing one's identity and understanding their place in the world leads to growth and stability. The obvious benefits of relational safety through building carceral kinship ties and respectful interactions raises the question of why correctional staff would keep an intentional distance between themselves and incarcerated people, particularly if caring interactions are shown to enhance stability and safety in the institution. The answer lies in the colonial othering which designates prisoners as dangerous people to be feared.

Fear of Manipulation

Relationships are the foundation for an ethic of care (Noddings, 2005), but the primary concern around care in correctional education is that building relationships with incarcerated students makes teachers vulnerable to manipulation (Elliott, 2007; Patrie, 2017; Wright, 2004a). This section will explore how a generalized fear of manipulation is based on a colonial perspective which dehumanizes people in prison and prevents building relationships with incarcerated students.

Existing literature describes vulnerabilities of interacting too closely with incarcerated people. The most commonly referenced risks are being forced to bring contraband into an institution, or being forced into sexual acts (Cornelius, 2001; Dodds, 2002; Elliott, 2007; Worley, 2005). The tone in articles that describe manipulation by prisoners is urgent and fearful. People in prison are portrayed as predators – always watching and listening, waiting for staff to expose any vulnerability (Cornelius, 2001; Dodds, 2002; Worley, 2005). The language used to describe people in prison has obvious connotations as well, describing prisoners as devious (Dodds, 2002), deceptive (Cornelius, 2001), cunning, crafty, and conniving (Worley, 2005) people who manipulate staff for "no other reason than the pleasure it provides them" (Dodds, p.2). Information is presented as though manipulative actions are the norm and there seems to be no

shortage of anecdotes about people in prison who have manipulated staff. However, none of these articles cite any statistics about how often these forms of manipulation actually happen. Cornelius (2001) shows a clear deficit view, describing how "inmates may 'warm up' to staff, trying to portray themselves as 'regular people'" (p.177). Cultivating a fear of people in prison as master manipulators serves the colonial agenda to dehumanize people and rationalize control and oppression.

When interrogating colonial situations, we must consider the broader context (Tuck, 2009) and exploring manipulative actions of people in prison is no exception. Literature from correctional educators (Wright, 2004a) and senior correctional officers (Cornelius, 2001; Dodds, 2002) recognizes that men in prison have learned that deception or manipulation is necessary for survival. These statements identify that use of manipulation is not a defect inherent to the person, but a learned behaviour to cope in a prison environment of scarcity and violence where an individual is most often powerless. The literature shows that the prison environment amplifies the urge for people to manipulate to meet their personal needs. This view is also problematic because it is a biased generalization that impacts the experiences of students in correctional education because teachers are instructed to keep students at a distance (Wright, 2004a). Cultivating fear of people in prison serves to prevent relationship building between staff and incarcerated people and when there is no relationship between these two parties, then there is no sense of moral obligation to act in a caring way (Noddings, 1995).

Literature that encourages implementing care in correctional education recognizes the contradiction between the need to build relationships with students to support their education and the overarching us/them attitude that is ingrained in employees through training and staff culture (Elliott, 2007; Patrie, 2017; Wright, 2004b, 2004a). Relationships are viewed as a threat to security based on the logic that staff who have bonded with prisoners could be exploited for drugs, money, or sex (Elliott, 2007). Aside from these generalized comments, correctional education literature does not delve into the specifics of how the fear of manipulation impacts student-teacher relationships in prison.

Looking to literature on manipulation in prison more generally, staff are instructed to view all prisoner actions with suspicion (Cornelius, 2001; Dodds, 2002). Building common ground through discussing shared interests is viewed as the incarcerated person looking to build trust as an entry point to manipulation (Dodds, 2002; Worley, 2005). Staff are taught to be wary of expressing empathy or sympathy for a prisoner and that a person in prison confidentially expressing a need for help to staff is an indication that they are trying to create a trap for the staff member (Dodds, 2002). Sincerity and kindness in prison is seen as dangerous and naïve (Liebling, 2011). These perceptions actively minimize the human needs of incarcerated people, dismissing them as clandestine actions to achieve nefarious outcomes. How then, is a person in prison supposed to seek help or experience human connections with the people with whom they live and work?

Are the relationships really the problem?

Perry (2001) says that insecure staff are likely to be manipulated, while Graham (2022) says that disgruntled employees are potential targets. However, even hard staff who stick to the

rules and exercise strict authority may be impacted by manipulation (Cornelius, 2001; Dodds, 2002; Worley, 2005). The fact that hard staff can experience manipulation too seems to show that objectifying incarcerated people and maintaining a distance is not an effective way of managing the perceived security threat of manipulation. Manipulation can happen regardless of the relationship between the staff and incarcerated person. Professional competence and ethical behaviour are essential in the prison environment (Perry, 2001), and Wright (2004a) shares that "as long as teachers are conscious of and alert to their developing relationship with a student, problems can be avoided" (p. 200).

It is notable that both manipulation literature (Dodds, 2002; Perry, 2001; Worley, 2005) and literature that supports care in correctional education (Elliott, 2007; Wright, 2004a) describe the need for clear boundaries and that staff must be self-aware. Care and building relationships in correctional education does not mean complacency, permissiveness, and sharing personal details with incarcerated students. In the same way that teachers in public school maintain appropriate boundaries with their students, teachers in prison must do the same. Similarly, teachers in public school should not be afraid of their students, nor should teachers in prison be fearful of the students they work with. The need for clear boundaries, and the need to be confident and comfortable with students are both themes that participants raised in the conversational gathering for this research. So, it is not relationships in correctional education that are problematic, rather the problem is when staff do not recognize how to maintain professional boundaries to do their work safely and effectively.

Current Conceptualization of Care in Corrections

Although modern correctional policies or programs seem to employ the language of empowerment, cultural responsivity, and care, the basis of correctional policy is still rooted in colonial attitudes which perpetuate the distrust of incarcerated people. Incarcerated people are offered independence only as long as their desires conform to CSC's predetermined expectations. By definition, care is based on supporting individuals to meet their own needs and desires (Noddings, 2005). Therefore, existing approaches which may be perceived as caring are contrary to an authentic caring approach to rehabilitation and education. Authentic care is limited by the colonial (coerced, controlling) nature of prison.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) which is widely used in CSC correctional programming is problematic because CBT assumes that an individual has free choice and is therefore responsible for their actions (Moore & Hannah-Moffat, 2005). This ignores ongoing structural impacts of settler colonialism. It is widely recognized that other systemic and structural factors also contribute to criminal behaviour (Bonta & Andrews, 2007; Committee on Evaluating Success Among People Released from Prison et al., 2022; McCausland & Baldry, 2023) so responsibilizing the incarcerated individual alone is faulty logic (Moore and Hannah-Moffat, 2005). This is particularly problematic in Canada where Indigenous people experience effects of historical and ongoing settler colonialism. The outcome is a twisted form of punitiveness where "individuals with varying histories of trauma, violence, and marginalization must attempt to heal themselves while in prison, a space which offers the antithesis of the support and empowerment

the Canadian penal systems imagine they provide" (Moore & Hannah-Moffat, 2005, p. 98). Anticolonial theories consider both sameness and differences (Dei, 2006), however, correctional programs purporting to *empower* people in prison acknowledge their common experiences of oppression generally but ignore the differences that influence individual experiences like race, class, sexual orientation and power (Hannah-Moffat, 2000). Again, this approach has disproportionate negative impacts on incarcerated Indigenous people who often experience oppression based on how these systems of power intersect (Monture-Angus, 1999).

Empowerment in corrections is designed to meet institutional goals rather than personal goals or needs because what qualifies as responsible or empowering actions is determined by judges, officers, and other authority figures (Hannah-Moffat, 2000). People in prison must engage in coerced identity work in a narrow blueprint (Liebling, 2011), a tension that is written about by academics (Hannah-Moffat, 2000, Moore and Hannah-Moffat, 2005), and confirmed by incarcerated people (Gallivan et al., 2023).

Coopting the concept of empowerment to serve the CSC agenda also expands to using Indigenous programming to control people in prison. Indigenous identity can be complicated in the prison system. Haudenosaunee (Six Nations, Grand River) lawyer, scholar, and activist, Patricia Monture-Angus (1999) explains that largely because of how colonialism has affected Indigenous communities, many Indigenous people will be classified as high risk on CSC's criminogenic needs assessment, an actuarial assessment which many authors agree is racially biased (Hannah-Moffat, 2016; K. S. Montford & Moore, 2018; Monture-Angus, 1999; Moore & Hannah-Moffat, 2005; O'Connell & Laniyonu, 2023).

The combination of the risk assessment and Indigenous cultural programming makes Indigeneity simultaneously risk-increasing and risk-reducing (K. S. Montford & Moore, 2018). There is incentive to conform to the CSC version of Pan-Indianism because it may reduce an individual's security score, allowing a person to cascade to a lower security facility and increase the potential to get parole (K. S. Montford & Moore, 2018). In this way, the authors state that although initiatives of cultural accommodation may appear to be empowering to Indigenous people, they are in fact the opposite: a way of recalibrating colonial power through the veil of benevolence and "initiatives justified as 'for their own good' that have been integral to the settler colonial project" (Montford & Moore, 2018, p.657).

This narrow view of empowerment impacts correctional education as well. Wright, (2004a) describes how when educational efforts are situated within a correctional logic based on power and control, the transformative potential of education is lost. He shares that educational programs which could have significant empowering impacts, "are eventually diluted and colonized by the correctional ethos" (Wright, 2004b, p.632).

Revisiting the concept of care for this research, what authors describe about supposedly empowering practices in prison does not align with an ethic of care. While a caring approach listens to the expressed needs of the cared-for and seeks to meet these needs, the goals of correctional programming are defined based on what CSC has deemed the person's needs to be, based on risk level and criminogenic factors (Hannah-Moffat, 2016; Monture-Angus, 1999). The

ultimate goal is to achieve public safety rather than supporting individuals to achieve personal success in their lives. Individual differences and unique histories are ignored in favour of focusing on generalized commonalities (Hannah-Moffat, 2000), and engagement with Indigenous culture is encouraged based on Pan-Indianism (K. S. Montford & Moore, 2018) regardless of the individual's ancestral background. While in a caring exchange, the cared-for is open and receptive to the learning experience, people in prison often participate in programming through coercion and because it is on their correctional plan, as described by participants in the conversation. Finally, while caring builds genuinely reciprocal dialogue, the person in prison who typically has little agency often experiences a situation where they must participate in predetermined programming or else face consequences of garnished wages (CSC, 2016) or negative impacts on parole opportunities (Moore & Hannah-Moffat, 2005).

Problematizing Correctional Education

Correctional programming is often contrary to a caring learning approach and correctional education has similar problems. One issue is the perception and purpose of education as defined by CSC and the other problem is the narrowly defined curriculum which is not a problem specific to correctional education, but western education in general.

CSC Perception and Purpose of Education

The purpose of correctional education as defined by CSC (Richer et al., 2015) is three-fold: reducing recidivism, increasing public safety, and supporting the Canadian economy. All of these goals are external to the student.

Several CSC documents spanning from 1992 to 2021 identify reduced recidivism as a favorable outcome of participation in correctional education (Babchishin et al., 2021; Porporino & Robinson, 1992; Power & Nolan, 2017; Richer et al., 2015). However, many authors recognize that using recidivism or employment as metrics to assess prison education is problematic because education is only a small factor in the complexity of release and reincarceration (Committee on Evaluating Success Among People Released from Prison et al., 2022; Duguid et al., 1996; Halsey, 2008; Hannah-Moffat, 2016; Parker, 2023). To further complicate matters, the statistics connecting education to lower recidivism that the 2015 CSC report identifies also describes that these benefits only apply to non-Indigenous people in the prison system (Richer et al., 2015). This 2015 report contains the latest publicly available data. Another goal of education CSC has highlighted is increased public safety. This goal reiterates the inherent deficit view of people in prison, assuming that they are a danger to society, seating criminality in the individual, rather than in a context of systems that create disadvantage. Considering statistics about reason for incarceration (Babchishin et al., 2021), it can be argued that many people in prison do not pose a threat to public safety and that crimes like theft are motivated by factors of poverty and scarcity which are exacerbated by systemic problems and political policies (see research on Social Determinants of Justice; McCausland & Baldry, 2023)

The final CSC goal for correctional education is boosting the economy. CSC literature identifies that, "It is important that offenders improve their education so they may increase their

opportunities of gaining and maintaining employment and contribute to the Canadian economy" (Richer et al., 2015, p. 18-9). These types of statements in the report seem to show the view of education as a means to an end, rather than a valuable accomplishment in itself, as a skill that could lead to independence, or a tool to develop identity, self-esteem, or personal growth.

These goals show a colonial mindset of objectifying people in prison as a commodity, and people as a problem that needs to be fixed (Steinhauer, 2023) rather than as individuals with needs and aspirations. This is an example of a Eurocentric ethic of justice rather than an ethic of care (Baier, 1995; Gregory, 2000; Juujarvi, 2003; Noddings, 1995). Learning with this focus does not attend to mind, body, heart, and spirit (Leon & Nadeau, 2018; Peltier, 2021; Steinhauer, 2023; Twance, 2019) and Noddings (2005) writes that caring education recognizes that learning has goals wider than academic attainment, extending into developing a sense of identity and ability to care for people and the world around us. It is striking to think that the three goals identified by CSC are external to the individual, so it begs the question: how is the incarcerated person himself benefitting from correctional education? Or perhaps a more poignant question: *is* the incarcerated person benefiting from correctional education?

Colonial Curriculum – A Problem Within a Problem

Exploring correctional education requires recognizing that there is a problem within a problem. Preceding discussion has identified the prison as a settler colonial tool used to remove Indigenous people from the land, separate families and communities, and coercively mold individual identities of people who are incarcerated. Correctional education, which follows the same Eurocentric curriculum as public schools, must be recognized as a system that applies both colonial and settler colonial techniques. It is colonial in that it prepares people to participate in a capitalist industrial society to support the economy. It is also colonial because it presents Eurocentric knowledge as the most important knowledge to be attained to replace Indigenous land-based economic systems. This has been explicitly imposed through violent means including the residential school system.

Patricia Steinhauer describes that "in education systems structured to conform to western education standards, our orientations in teaching and learning are informed by colonial logics and dominance" (2023, p. 4). In many cases Indigenous ways of learning are inherently at odds with the established western approach to schooling (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020) which do not meet the learning needs of Indigenous students (Steinhauer, 2023). J. Guenther and his colleagues (2021) write that "educational power is used to determine and perpetuate the dominant colonial narrative, in which teachers are often complicit, whether consciously or unconsciously" (pp.615-16). Privileging Eurocentric knowledge and ways of learning over all other forms of knowledge asserts the colonial dynamic of white superiority over other cultures.

Through the colonial lens, Indigenous students are viewed as a deficit (Peltier, 2021) or as a problem to be solved (Steinhauer, 2023). Marie Battiste (2017) describes the concept of *cognitive imperialism* where a traditional knowledge system is replaced with a Eurocentric knowledge system that is presented as superior, resulting in mental and emotional trauma for students. What is challenging is that often, teachers do not recognize that they are participating in cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2017). Other authors have also observed how curriculum puts students from non-dominant groups at a disadvantage because their ways of perceiving concepts or presenting their knowledge does not conform to western expectations (Gebhard, 2012, 2013; Peltier, 2021; Raible & Irizarry, 2010; Steinhauer, 2023; Vaandering, 2010). Part of the reason

why marginalized students do not participate in the social contract of school, as Noguera (2003) explains, is that they do not see themselves represented in the curriculum. Not only that, but frequently, curricular outcomes are narrowly defined in such a way that teachers regularly fail to recognize valuable skills or perspectives that marginalized students have. Refusing to participate in Eurocentric education is an act of resistance for Indigenous students rejecting settler colonialism. By undermining the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge and continuing to absorb Indigenous knowledge, ceremonies, and cultural practices, students are refusing to "go away" as the settler colonial project tries to make them disappear (Veracini, 2011). By using western curricular benchmarks, "schools use power to regulate children and standardize their behaviour, foreclosing alternate ways of being and understanding the world"(Janzen & Schwartz, 2018, p.111). Not only does curriculum need to change but schools require fundamental transformation in the way they teach to move meaningfully towards reconciliation (Steinhauer, 2023; Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). Steinhauer (2023) shares that provincial standards and curriculum do not foster meaningful learning for Indigenous students, but only create an atmosphere where students learn to mimic the white majority.

I acknowledge the colonial structure of Western education to show that incarcerated people who are attending school in prison are experiencing colonial manipulation of thought and identity on multiple levels. Using Eurocentric curriculum in prison education is problematic because it applies a narrow view of what constitutes learning and education. It perpetuates white supremacy through privileging colonial based knowledge over other forms of knowledge, especially over Indigenous oral knowledge (Steinhauer, 2023) and land-based knowledge (Peltier, 2021; Simpson, 2004; Twance, 2019). Not only that, but it stands to reason that if adults in prison do not have a grade 12 diploma, the education system they experienced in their youth clearly did not meet their learning needs (see literature on the school-to-prison pipeline). Not only this, but in many cases, the social, economic, and structural context in which they were learning impacted their lives. Applying Indigenous pedagogies in prison education can help students to recognize the value of holistic learning, building a well-rounded view of themselves which can then support not only academic learning but also encourage personal exploration and relationship building. This concept is also central to Noddings (2005) view that goals of caring education extend beyond academics to facilitate personal growth and teaching students about relating to people and things around them.

Related to control and care, people who described education experiences in prison highlighted the need for inmate input (Ahmed et al., 2019; Gamo, 2013; Kim et al., 2023) and choice in programming (Kakupa & Mulenga, 2021). Ahmed et al. (2019) highlight that oppression silences the voices of prisoners and that unless correctional educators take an interest in individualized needs of students, education will have minimal impact or no impact at all. The view that these formerly incarcerated authors (Ahmed et al., 2019) express aligns with Noddings (2005) emphasis that caring education must be responsive to student needs.

Care in Correctional Education

After considering the broader social climate of the prison, it is clear how staff beliefs and perceptions of incarcerated people influence how they treat people in prison. Literature

demonstrates that applying care in the correctional environment creates a stable and safe atmosphere that is essential to engagement with learning and personal growth. Literature about care in correctional education shows the direct benefits for students working in a caring school environment.

Self efficacy

Interview-based research with correctional educators shows the value of care in a student-teacher relationship. One teacher stated that care "helps the student rise to the teacher's expectations for him. It builds confidence and self-worth in students who generally have no self-esteem, who generally have had their worthlessness re-enforced in many areas of their lives" (Wright, 2004b, p.196) Notably, for many students, school in prison is the first positive education experience they have (Sachdev, 1996). Many respondents had negative experiences in public school and as a result, had a negative view of themselves, believing they could never succeed in school (Sachdev, 1996). Sachdev (1996) says, "Ironically, they had to be placed in the most physically controlled environment to have a good experience with education" (p.41). While this does not suggest that the extreme control in prison is beneficial to learning, the notion that prison may be the first place students have a positive education experience highlights the value of care in correctional education. This example provided by Sachdev validates Noddings' (2005) emphasis on the value of supporting students to explore existential questions about their identities and how they relate to the world around them.

Caring for others

Showing care for incarcerated students is essential to program goals of improving pro-social behaviours (Wright, 2004a). A safe and empathetic learning environment along with caring teachers can help students build values and become citizens who care for others (Elliott, 2007; Noddings, 2005; Wright, 2004b) and applying care in teaching supports positive behaviours which align with democratic ideals (Gregory, 2000). The ideas of relationality, caring for the community, and understanding one's self as connected to others align with concepts of Anishinaabe (Peltier, 2021; Twance, 2019) and Nêhiyaw (Steinhauer, 2023) aspects of learning . These authors' assertions about interconnection are significant because other research shows that both men and women who have been incarcerated identify helping others as one aspect of post-release success (Allen & Lloyd-Hazlett, 2021; Andersen et al., 2020; DeVries, 2022). A desire to help others shows that the students see a better purpose for education than education goals of CSC, which identify benefits of education being mainly to earn money and support the economy (Richer et al., 2015).

Goals expressed by formerly incarcerated people in those studies also confirms Noddings' (2005) assertions that responsivity and focusing on student priorities in education is beneficial to learning experiences and student engagement. Elliott (2007) explains that from Indigenous perspectives, building relationships is central to healing and restorative justice. However, "because of their very nature, their structural conditions, prisons are not ideal venues for fostering either caring or nurturing relationships, and thus can hardly be expected to be a place of healing" (p.196). Her quote reminds us that although the prison school may have an

ethos of nurturing individuals, it is located within a larger, more oppressive and colonial environment.

How Can Teachers Express Care?

While the benefits of care in correctional education are touted by academics, what it actually means to express care to students in a prison setting is poorly defined. Wright (2004a) provides examples of a teacher who advocated for a student to receive a temporary pass to go to his father's funeral, teachers bringing in baked goods and oranges at Christmas, and a group of teachers who decorated the chapel for an incarcerated student's wedding. These actions show thought and consideration from teachers, but none of them are directly related to education. It is true that Noddings (2005) describes that education extends outside of academics, and these examples align with Noddings' assertion that teachers should model care for students. These examples show actions that build relationships, but they do not necessarily work towards building a stable and encouraging learning environment through care (Elliott, 2007).

Correctional educators are likely to experience existential and philosophical difficulties created by the tensions of the controlling oppression of the prison and the self-determination and personal empowerment necessary for successful adult education (Patrie, 2017). Wright (2004a) describes that care for students in prison "is found in respectful actions on their behalf and by a general concern for their wellbeing" (p.201), but I wonder what types of actions are respectful and how does a teacher show a general concern for students' wellbeing? Further to this, how can a teacher pursue caring actions while navigating the tension between control and care? To answer these questions, I seek to explore what Wright (2004a) identifies as *the relational midpoint*, a balance of building relationships with students while maintaining professionalism and abiding by institutional guidelines. He states, "how teachers discover and sustain the delicate relational midpoint is part of their practical knowledge" (Wright, 2004a, p.201). Rather than dismissing this essential balance as practical knowledge, this research brings the relational midpoint into focus, through providing concrete examples of care from formerly incarcerated students. These examples are directly related to educational experiences in prison and show the complex nature of care in correctional education.

The Research Gap

Authors who have written about care in prison tend to focus on the dichotomy between control and care. The power dynamic in prison hinders education (Patrie, 2017; Sachdev, 1996; Wright, 2004b), the focus on punishment detracts from personal growth (Elliott, 2007; Patrie, 2017; Wright, 2004b), and authors acknowledge that teachers often feel a tension between their duty to maintain security while developing caring relationships with students (Elliott, 2007; Patrie, 2017; Weil Davis & Michaels, 2016; Wright, 2004a, 2004b). At the same time, the literature emphasizes that in a prison setting, strong teacher-student relationships and a feeling of humanity, dignity and connectedness are central to learning (Ahmed et al., 2019; Alexander et al., 2023; Anderson et al., 2023; Elliott, 2007; Harris, 2018; Kim et al., 2023; Wright, 2004a, 2004b). While both the obstacles to care in prison education and the benefits of care are well

documented, very little, if any, of the literature gives concrete examples of *how* teachers can care for students in prison education.

Literature about care in correctional education has shortcomings because it either makes vague generalizations about care or offers a small number of very specific examples of care, where care is solely relegated to the level of emotional expressions, but does not fundamentally inform the educational processes and practices (Elliott, 2007; Patrie, 2017; Wright, 2004a, 2004b). There is a need for a more comprehensive examination of what it means to apply care in correctional education for students working towards a grade 12 diploma.

Through exploring the experiences and ideas that participants shared, I seek to develop a well-defined understanding of how teachers can express care in correctional education to support their students' needs and goals. More specifically, I assert that relationships in correctional education should be much more comprehensive - broader and deeper - than existing literature on care in correctional education suggests.

Methodology and Methods

Methodology

The intention of this study is to reconceptualize care, understanding how teachers can apply care in correctional education and make learning more responsive to self-identified needs and goals of incarcerated people. This was done by exploring formerly incarcerated men's opinions of and experiences in prison education. Because personal experiences are central to this study, it falls under the designation of phenomenology. Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe that in phenomenology, "the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by the participants" (p.13). There is also a participatory aspect of the research since formerly incarcerated men shared suggestions about how to improve the education experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The perspective I take in this research is based on a transformative worldview in response to marginalization and social oppression (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and the belief that change in the correctional education system is required to support students to achieve success in the community. Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe the collaborative nature of transformative research and that participants often play an active role in questioning, collecting data, and benefitting from the research.

Anticolonial Methodology

Up to this point, discussion has identified the prison as a tool of settler colonialism and explored ways in which programs and cultural initiatives seek to control Indigenous identity (K. S. Montford & Moore, 2018) and responsibilize incarcerated people while ignoring structural factors which influence crime (Hannah-Moffat, 2016; K. S. Montford & Moore, 2018; Monture-Angus, 1999; Moore & Hannah-Moffat, 2005). The us/them mentality results in an attitude of objectification and keeping people in prison at a distance. Within the settler colonial prison, colonial education focuses on a narrow definition of what constitutes knowledge and how to learn those concepts. Because of these factors, this study is guided by anticolonial methodology.

Getachew and Mantena (2021) and Carlson (2017) describe that researchers with colonial heritage have a limited view of colonialism due to their positionality and Carlson states that this is why anticolonial research must be done with meaningful consultation with Indigenous knowledge keepers and draw on work from Indigenous scholars. I have developed my understanding of colonialism throughout my university career, but my experience in applying anticolonial methodologies is limited. The size and scope of a master's thesis also creates some limitations on the extent to which I can fully apply aspects of anticolonial methodology. Considering these factors, I acknowledge my limitations and choose to view anticolonialism as a journey. I provide further details on my journey in the appendix section. Despite my personal limitations, I believe that anticolonial methodology is suited to this research for several reasons: the colonial nature of prison, the high incarceration rates of Indigenous people in Canada, and the purpose of this research to lead to transformational change in correctional education, with an emphasis on increasing Indigenous ways of teaching and learning in prison schools.

The approach I take in this research is based on Carlson's (2017) principles of anticolonial research methodology for white settlers and the *Working in Good Ways* framework from the University of Manitoba (Ferland et al., 2021). Both texts emphasize the importance of cultural awareness, personal reflection, relationships, reciprocity, humility, and honoring protocols and epistemology.

Anticolonialism is based on resisting colonial, Western ways of doing and thinking by fostering a resurgence in Indigenous knowledges, traditions, and connections to land (Carlson, 2017). Recognizing the ongoing process of settler colonization and using relationships, knowledge, and research to subvert settler colonialism is central to anticolonial methodology (Simpson and Hart cited in Carlson, 2017). This research recognizes the prison as a tool of settler colonialism and identifies CSC policies and practices which are discriminatory and extend out of oppressive political structures including the *Indian Act* and the Canadian justice system. The discourse problematizes the current policies and practices of the correctional system generally, and more specifically in prison education. The goal of the research is to facilitate change in prison education to be responsive to the self-determined needs of people who have experienced classroom learning in a correctional setting. Positions of privilege have resulted in settler researchers not accurately representing Indigenous experiences, making it important to centre Indigenous voices. (Carlson, 2017). Settler scholars who engage with anticolonial methodologies are expected to meaningfully engage with Indigenous knowledges, theories, and perspectives, and work collaboratively through the research process. This is why I committed to an extensive process of (un)learning and worked with an Elder to guide the research. An anticolonial methodology requires considerable forethought about how the researcher will engage with people in a respectful way (Carlson, 2017, Ferland et al., 2021). For me this included personal and academic growth. The thesis proposal required extensive research and reading about Indigenous values and philosophies. Building these understandings is a part of the work before the work (Ferland et al., 2021) and has been valuable in my awareness of distinctions between Indigenous communities.

Another essential piece of preparation for the research has been building a relationship and seeking guidance from an Elder who agreed to support me with advising throughout this research, attending the recruitment presentation, and taking part in the conversational gathering. He preferred to remain anonymous but asked to be identified as a "cultural/spiritual advisor who carries teachings and songs of the Nîhithaw (Cree), Anishinaabeg (Ojibwe) and Lakota (Sioux)." Based on his request of anonymity, I will refer to him as *The Elder.* I followed appropriate protocols requesting his help and working with him throughout the process. His support has been invaluable for this research. We built a relationship during the proposal process, we used our relationship throughout the research to work with the participants, and it is my hope that we can both use our learning from the research to work together implementing changes that will improve student experiences in correctional education.

The research design accounts for non-linearity and relationality which are aspects of Indigenous epistemologies. Because my perspective as a settler researcher has an influence on how I interpret themes, the research design offered participants the opportunity to review and

clarify the discussion so their meaning would be accurately conveyed. This research seeks to honour the perspectives of participants (Carlson, 2017) by using direct quotes as much as possible and providing context for the ideas participants have shared. The opportunity for participants to engage in member checking validation is another way of honouring perspectives and respecting relationality. Giving gifts of tobacco to participants and giving financial compensation in the form of grocery gift cards is another way of respecting the relationship with participants. I also intend to offer the opportunity to take part in ceremony on the land after participating in the research. Holding a Sweat and feast (led by The Elder) once the research is complete is a way of celebrating and appreciating the knowledge participants have shared by engaging in the project.

As part of the research process, I have engaged in sincere reflection on who I am as a settler and how this influences my white privilege and perceptions (Carlson, 2017; Ferland et al., 2021). To add to the complexity of my positionality, my role as a correctional educator brings experience and knowledge that will influence assumptions and my perceptions of people and the ideas they share. The introduction chapter shared a brief reflection on my positionality and a more detailed examination of my positionality and considering anticolonialism as a journey are included as appendices.

Transparency with participants about my positionality as a white settler researcher and as a correctional educator is essential and I shared this verbally during recruitment and the conversational gathering. It was also written in the consent documents. It was necessary to continually interrogate my own personal biases while coding themes and interpreting data. Member checking with participants was a valuable aspect of data analysis.

Methods

The method for data collection used in this study is based on Kovach's conversational method of research (2021, p.167-8). Building from Kovach's method, I created a proposed method of data collection which I then shared with The Elder, who provided specific feedback about the setting and process for having the conversational gathering. These are the stages that the research followed:

Stage 1 - Recruitment presentation

I sought approval from a local community support organization to present the research opportunity to a group of formerly incarcerated men who meet on a weekly basis. The Elder took part in the recruitment presentation so that participants could meet him and decide if they were comfortable working with both of us in the conversational gathering. The 20 minute recruitment presentation happened one week before the conversational gathering and was a low pressure way to initiate relationships with potential participants. This stage of research is consistent with Kovach's (2021) conversational method where she describes a pre-interview cup of tea when the researcher shares about the project. As phenomenological studies typically use a sample size of three to ten people (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) the goal was to recruit approximately seven to

ten participants. On the day of the conversational gathering six men took part and shared their stories.

Stage 2 - Conversational Gathering

The research group (the Elder, participants, and I) gathered in the room where the group typically meets so they were in a familiar setting. Pizza and drinks were available for participants as they arrived and once all participants were there I reviewed an oral consent script with them and answered any clarifying questions participants had. I offered the participants tobacco, gave them each a $40 grocery gift card and 2 bus tickets. We then started audio and video recording and began with the Elder providing a smudge. We used guiding questions, but as Kovach notes, questions were not answered sequentially, and they were revisited when necessary. I actively participated in the conversation in a "dialogic, relational and reflective" manner (Kovach, 2021, p.168). We ended the conversation with a smudge. Altogether, the process lasted around 3 hours. Participants were given information for local support organizations if they experienced distress from the discussion, but throughout the conversation, participants did not appear to be uncomfortable or experiencing stress. They approached the conversation with a jovial, joking spirit, sharing in earnest, and supporting each other's ideas.

Stage 3 – Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through audio and video recording conversations, then transcribed and coded using qualitative analysis software (NVivo). I used thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). While I may have had assumptions about which themes would be apparent in the conversations, I was guided by an inductive approach which was data driven and not based on my own preconceived notions of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An inductive approach helped to centre the participants' ideas and experiences. Analyzing data in this way allowed themes or patterns to emerge from the data organically and create space for unanticipated themes.

Stage 4 - Validation

After analyzing data from the conversational gathering, I offered each participant the opportunity to meet with me to review my interpretation of what they shared. Participants had the opportunity to clarify their ideas or share further if needed. I also revisited ongoing consent with each participant. Recognizing logistical complications, these meetings took place one-on-one with participants at a time and place that was convenient for them.

Stage 5 – Discussion

The data analysis and discussion chapters are written based on the themes that emerged and using a desire-based approach. Men shared considerable criticism of correctional education, and while I include some of their criticisms in the discussion chapter, I have focused on the desires men shared for expressions of care in correctional education

Stage 6 – Dissemination

Following the final writing of the research and findings, an essential part of the research relationship is to share the work with the community and participants. Participants who

expressed interest in receiving my full thesis will be contacted by their preferred method (Facebook, text, or email). A one or two page summary of the document in plain language will be made available as well. I recognize that it may not be possible to maintain contact with participants due to different factors that may arise, including the possibility of reincarceration.

Another form of knowledge dissemination will be through transformation of my personal teaching practice and dialogue with my colleagues.

On a larger scale, I will apply to present this research at the Alberta Correctional Educators' Association conference which takes place annually and is attended by correctional educators across Canada and sometimes internationally. I believe this is the best way to reach a wide audience with a meaningful impact, and the most likely way of affecting change in correctional education in Canada. I intend to make the final research report and summary available to the community organization that supported the research through participant recruitment efforts. The forms of dissemination were indicated in the consent documents.

Data Collection

The Participants

The six participants varied in age and experience. During the introduction, before the conversation even started, one participant pointed out a potential flaw with the demographics of the sample, suggesting that it was mostly white guys talking about their experiences. I acknowledged that it was important to consider that the people gathered for the discussion did not necessarily represent the statistical prison population in Canada or in Manitoba.

Of the six participants, two identified as First Nations (33.3%). Statistically, this is consistent with the national Indigenous incarceration rates in federal prisons (Department of Justice, 2024), however, it does not reflect rates of Indigenous people federally incarcerated in Manitoba, which is approximately 59% (PressProgress, 2021). It is also significant that there were no participants who identified differently than Indigenous or white.

Regarding where people were incarcerated, due to consent and privacy agreements, this report does not share which institution people served their sentences at, however, participants did experience incarceration at all three security levels: maximum, medium, and minimum. Each person had been in federal prison once and the amount of time they had been living in the community ranged from half a month to one year. Each person attended school in prison, with the exception of the person who was incarcerated in a maximum security facility. He shared that he attempted to access education, but was not allowed to.

All but one participant chose to remain anonymous. The following table shows demographic information of the participants:

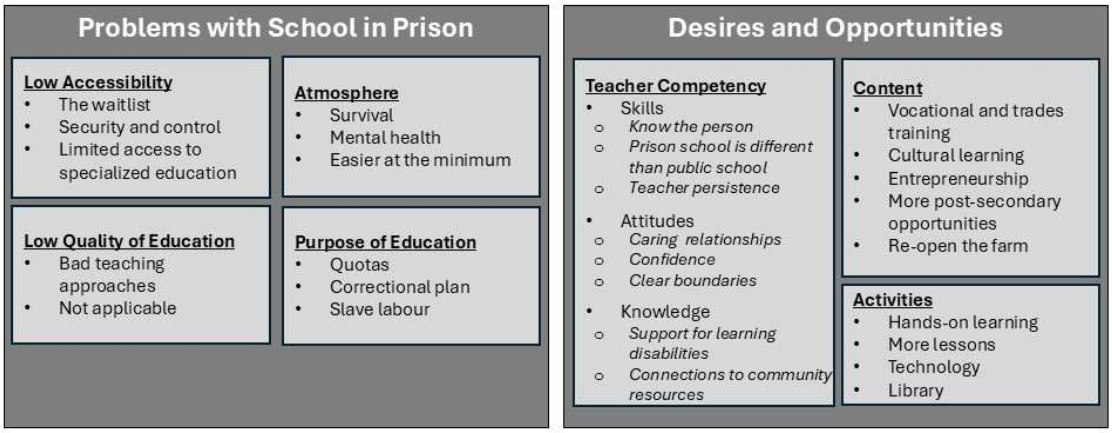
Person	Age	Self-Declared Identity	Number of Times in Federal Prison	Time served in Federal Prison	Length of time out of prison
Participant 1	Did not specify	Did not specify	1	Did not specify	1 year
Participant 2	27	First Nations	1	1 year, 9 months	Half a month
Participant 3	52	Irish Canadian	1	Did not specify	6 months
Participant 4	50	Did not specify	1	11 months	6 months
Monias	Did not specify	First Nations	1	2 years, 6 months	3 years
Participant 6	28	White	1	4 years	4 months

Exploring the data

Transcribing and Coding

Following the conversation, audio and video data were transferred to a password protected, encrypted hard drive and I transcribed the conversation manually to review the ideas

men shared. I flagged broad themes as I transcribed and then spent time coding the themes in more detail using NVivo. After coding, I took time to write, summarizing the themes which I classified into *problems with school in prison* and *desires and opportunities.* The image below shows the broad themes that emerged from men's stories.



Readers should note that to respect participants' privacy and confidentiality I have removed the names of the institutions where they were incarcerated from the transcript and quotations. Similarly, when participants were sharing about specific teachers they worked with, I have removed teachers' names and replaced gendered pronouns with *they/them/their.* I have included quotations from participants as completely and accurately as possible. I recognize that ellipsis (…) is often used to indicate that a quote has had some words removed from the quote to shorten it and make it more concise. I have not shortened quotations used in this research. Ellipsis in participant quotations shows that the participant trailed off or abruptly shifted their ideas. In some situations, I have used ellipsis to indicate that the speaker was interrupted by another participant and then continued their thoughts after the interruption.

Reflection and Validation

At this point in the data analysis, I had more than 60 pages of summary analysis of what the men shared, supplemented by many direct quotations and several extended excerpts of conversation which encompassed multiple themes. I scheduled validation meetings with the participants where I shared the image above and the written summary of themes. I directed their attention to the quotes I used from them, asked them about my interpretation of their words, and asked some questions to further clarify meaning of ideas they shared. At the validation meetings, each participant gave ongoing consent and approved of their quotations being used. I also gave each person another $40 gift card and two bus tickets as described in the participation and consent documents. Any further clarification the men shared at the validation stage is included in the discussion chapters.

I also spent time talking with the Elder about the conversation gathering. We talked on the phone the day after the gathering and discussed key themes that men talked about. After the time I took coding data and writing to summarize the themes, I met with the Elder at my house, we discussed the themes in more detail and he shared further thoughts about the themes. The Elder's thoughts are included throughout the discussion chapters.

Narrowing Focus

The focus of the research shifted throughout the data analysis stage. First, it was more heavily focused on improving correctional education practices by contrasting men's criticisms of correctional education with the desires that they expressed. Relationships and the need for teachers to have a deep understanding of their students was a theme that seemed to cut across many of the criticisms and desires that participants shared. After further analysis and discussion with my advisor, we narrowed the focus of my writing to centre on reconceptualizing care in correctional education.

Data Analysis

The conversational gathering was guided by questions about personal experiences and suggestions about learning content, learning activities and teacher actions. The conversation culminated with the question *How can a teacher show that they care about a student?* The participant responses to this question brought forward several themes that align with the ethic of care (Noddings, 1995, 2005) and are helpful for developing a deeper and broader conceptualization of care in correctional education. Four of the participants answered the question directly, and these answers helped to illuminate themes that ran throughout the entire conversation. Because the focus of the research is reconceptualizing care in correctional education, the data analysis frames participant ideas using Noddings' (1995, 2005) definition of care. The discussion chapter explores connections between participant contributions, Indigenous philosophies, and the ethic of care. For clarity and cohesion, I have organized quotations from the conversation based on theme, but I begin the data analysis with one excerpt that encompasses all four themes that developed in the conversation.

Through their descriptions of how a teacher can show care, participants identified these key themes:

- Relationships are central to caring education. This includes building relationships with a positive attitude and maintaining individual relationships through persistence and encouragement.
- Recognizing personal experiences and context is important. Teaching in prison is different than other learning contexts and poses considerable challenges for students and teachers.
- A caring teacher is attentive to the learning needs of students, which includes desires for content, delivery, and learning context.
- Caring teachers recognize that the purpose of education is not only academic, but to encourage personal growth through understanding identity.

This excerpt from the conversation covers several considerations about care in correctional education. Participant 2 shares that for him care is related to recognizing each student as an individual and suggests that the teacher should pay attention to subtle differences in student behaviour as a way of recognizing what they may need. Other participants supplement his ideas with their own thoughts:

> Tyson: Participant 2, what do you think? How… how can a teacher show they care about a student?
>
> Participant 2: Yeah, I guess, just paying attention. Little shit… just, you know. Paying attention to, like, what they have… what they actually got going on. The more you're with the person, right?...
>
> Tyson: Mmm. Yeah. Paying… like, what they got going on, what do you mean by that?
>
> Participant 2: I just mean, like, I get that it's for each individual student, someone's going to have something different, like, it was said before too, like, if some guy's got bullshit going on at home, or over the phones or stuff, like... That'll be something you get as you go, but just, like being able to read your students and kind of, like, you know… this person's not his normal self today.
>
> Tyson: Yeah.

Participant 2: Like, you know what I mean? As opposed to, just like, "Oh, you're here, get your work done, hurry up, get on it," and it's just like of like, get them in, get them out. Get them in, get them out.

Tyson: Yeah. K, I'm curious…

Participant 2: It's like, personable, I think the word is…

Tyson: Oh, the teacher should be personable?

Participant 2: Yeah, like, just, like being like a decent human being, like instead of just…

Participant 1: I think that's a two-way street though, too, right?

Participant 3: Everybody should be!

Participant 2: Yeah, but I mean like…

Participant 3: Just cause we're in prison you don't have to be a piece of shit.

Participant 2: I'm not saying you're being a piece of shit. Just, like, there's a lot of people that sometimes just go in to collect a cheque, right?

Participant 3: In prison? Wrong place.

The comments from Participant 2 emphasize that the student's experiences outside of school, in prison, impact his learning experience. This aligns with the view that education is directly linked to personal experience (Noddings, 1992 in Elliot, 2007). He shares about the importance of teachers being able to read their students, which he associates with the ability to support students in a more holistic way. By caring about what is going on in the student's personal life, the teacher can make better decisions about how to work with that student and what way to best meet their needs. Elsewhere in the conversation, participants shared how a teacher should support the student depends on the person and depends on the day.

Participant 2's comments show the need for teachers to slow down and get to know their students, not only learning about students' academic goals, but learning about their personal lives too. This concept connects with Noddings' (2005) foundational belief that learning is not just about academics, but about personal growth as well, teaching students how to be caring humans and introspective about who they are and what their place is in the world. This man's critique of the fast-paced, objective approach to education also relates to the fact that participants viewed the purpose of correctional education to be only to meet quotas, rather than to benefit the students themselves.

Being personable is another aspect that shows a teacher cares, according to Participant 2. This relates to the value of teachers building relationships and having confidence and a positive attitude which participants spoke about in the conversation. Being a decent human being is important and this man contrasts being personable and decent with just going in to collect a cheque; caring is more than just fulfilling the obligations of a job. Participant 1 notably adds that being a decent human being is a two-way street, suggesting that the student should also act in a personable or decent way, highlighting the reciprocal nature of a caring education relationship (Noddings 2005).

Participant 3 closes out the excerpt with the comment that if a teacher is just looking to collect a cheque, prison is the wrong place for them to be teaching. This connects to the ideas participants shared that teachers need to be aware that teaching in prison is vastly different than any other teaching assignment. It also alludes to the persistence that is essential to supporting students in prison, which the participants elaborated on in other parts of the conversation.

The fact that all these themes arose in about one minute of conversation shows that there is considerable overlap of the themes, but that they are all important. In the following sections, I explore each theme fully, based on quotes from throughout the conversational gathering.

Relationships: Genuine and Multifaceted

As Noddings (2005) describes, teaching with care is inherently relational. It is not possible to act with care individually because a caring relationship requires two parties: the carer and the cared-for (Noddings, 2005). Comments from participants show that the relational aspect of care in correctional education has many facets to it: relationships should attend to the student's personal life and school life; teachers should be confident, genuine and humanizing; and a supportive relationship requires encouragement and considerable persistence on the part of the teacher. At the same time, participants' comments also align with Noddings' assertion that a caring educational relationship is reciprocal and requires buy in from both the teacher and the student.

Reading the Student

Based on what participants shared, building a relationship with the student requires a high level of perception from the teacher. As Participant 2 shared, paying attention to what they have going on shows that a teacher is genuinely invested in the student. This awareness of students or "being able to read your students" (Participant 2), can allow teachers to understand student behaviours and support them more effectively. As Participant 6 shared:

> Participant 6: Another thing… guys… guys may not necessarily need to figure out the question, they might not necessarily need to be left alone. They might have who knows what going on on the phone, on road, on the range, in the… you know what I mean?
>
> Tyson: Yeah… a lot of different factors.
>
> Participant 6: A lot of… often times it's probably not about the work.

In addition to recognizing that a student's behaviours in class are likely related to stresses outside of class, participants shared that it is important for teachers to have an understanding of each individual student and how to work with them effectively:

> Participant 1: Well, like I said, in jail, you walk a fine fuckin line. You guys gotta figure that out. We can't write you a handbook on it. You gotta feel it out, cause it's different all the time.
>
> Participant 3: Mhm.
>
> Participant 6: Yeah.
>
> Participant 1: It's different with who you got in your class from time to time.
>
> Tyson: Mhm.

> Participant 6: And it's different with how you interact with them.
>
> Participant 3: Stop changing teachers continuously, right? Stick around.[1]
>
> Participant 1: Some people are gonna be like, "Why is this guy trying to be my fuckin buddy so much?"
>
> Tyson: Mhm. Yeah.
>
> Participant 1: … and other people are going to be like, "Why is this guy an asshole?" If you're not. You know? So, it's a fuckin fine line and that's up to you guys to have the people skills to do it.

The ideas men share in this excerpt connect to the ethic of care in several ways. Understanding who is in your class and how to work with them is dependent on a relationship and building an understanding of the student as a person while also negotiating the realities of prison life, which is often marked with interpersonal conflict and stress produced by the conditions of confinement. Recognizing students as people with a desire to be cared for (Noddings, 2005) and needs they seek to meet is an important aspect of humanizing students in a correctional classroom. The relationship is then the foundation for striving to meet the expressed needs of the student (Noddings, 2005). The fine line that Participant 1 describes is an essential aspect of care in correctional education which is the relational midpoint that will be discussed in more detail later. Having the people skills to do it is similar to Participant 2's comment about the need for teachers to be personable. This leads to participant comments about teacher attitudes and the way they interact with students.

Interactions with Students

In the same way that teachers should seek to humanize students in their classrooms, participants also describe that teachers themselves need to express their own humanity. Participants described that a personable teacher is one who is approachable, encouraging, and genuine. One participant contrasted this with an experience he had with a teacher who was "like an android," and who gave the front of being helpful, while not being helpful at all.

On the other hand, one participant spoke about how his teacher was consistently happy and outgoing, which made them approachable and easy to work with. He attributed the teacher's disposition to the level of confidence they had in their surroundings and working with incarcerated men. He contrasts this with another teacher who appeared to be scared of their workplace and the people there:

> Participant 3: And that's what I mean, like, [teacher 1] is… like, [they'll]… [they] run the fuckin place, like, around, you know, but [teacher 2] is like, very standoffish. Very… yeah… It's just cause [teacher 1], like, toured around too, right? Like [they] always just used to walk around. Go out to the gardens and shit. Like I said, [they weren't] scared of shit there.

Two other participants who had experience working with teacher 2 agreed that the teacher appeared to be scared of the students and that this impacted the teacher's efficacy in supporting students' learning. When I asked for more detail at validation meetings, one participant described that teacher 2 always seemed to have their hand near the panic button (a portable alarm which teachers carry, usually on their waist). The participant also described

[1] Participant 3's advice to stop changing teachers connects to Noddings' (2005) assertion that continuity of teaching staff is a valuable aspect of care in education, but this was not a recurring theme in the conversational gathering.

that this teacher was very "by the book" and didn't seem to care about students. Another participant explained that the way the teacher responds to students makes it seem like they don't want to be there, noting that the teacher never initiates conversations with the students.

Based on what these participants shared, teacher 2's apparent discomfort and apparent fear of his students impaired his ability to build genuine relationships with them. A teacher in prison must be confident to make an impact. The realization that a teacher's disposition influences how they can build relationships with students is important and relates to the concept of reciprocity in caring relationships.

Reciprocity - It's a two-way street

When describing caring relationships between teachers and students, participants described more than once that the relationships must be reciprocal. The relationship involves both the carer and the cared-for. In many relationships roles of carer and cared-for are fluid and change depending on circumstance, but in most educational scenarios, the teacher is carer and student is cared-for (Noddings, 2005). With this dynamic, the student must be receptive to a caring relationship with the teacher, otherwise, care cannot exist successfully.

In one part of the conversation, participants made connections between how the teacher perceives a student and how they interact with the student, which then influences the student's response to the teacher:

> Participant 2: It's like, personable, I think the word is…
>
> Tyson: Oh, the teacher should be personable?
>
> Participant 2: Yeah, like, just, like being like a decent human being, like instead of just…
>
> Participant 1: I think that's a two-way street though, too, right?
>
> Participant 3: Everybody should be!
>
> Participant 2: Yeah, but I mean like…
>
> Participant 3: Just cause we're in prison you don't have to be a piece of shit.

These comments relate to the potential struggle of deciding who is deserving of care (Khahaifa, 2024, Noddings, 2005) and Participant 3 makes it very simple: everybody should be! Everyone should act as a decent human being, and everyone deserves care. The men in the conversation advocate for men in prison to be viewed as humans, equally deserving of respect and show that interacting with incarcerated students in a non-judgmental, positive way is foundational to a reciprocal caring relationship.

These men acknowledge that they are also accountable and active agents within the learning relationship. While the men in the conversation recognize that a caring relationship is a two-way street, they share a valuable insight that a teacher's tenacity is the catalyst for the reciprocal relationship. Here, the participants discuss this dynamic. For context, Participant 1 described that a teacher should never give up on a student, visiting their student 20 times, even if the student seems to have given up:

Participant 1: Well I think it's just if you genuinely care about your job or about your student, then it's just like, you know? Just encouraging them and lettin them know that it is possible and helping him achieve his small goals, right?

Participant 3: I think it's hard for you to say that, if he cares about it though. You know… like, the student has to care a bit too.

Participant 1: No, no, for sure! Like…

Participant 3: Like you said, giving up 20 times… as a teacher? I don't know.

Participant 6: But it helps the student care.

Participant 1: But not as a jail teacher though. That's what I'm saying. Like, you wanna teach in a jail with inmates, it's not like getting a job at a high school.

This excerpt attends to multiple layers of the reciprocal caring relationship. First, Participant 1 identifies that a teacher should appear to be invested in their work. He associates apparent care for the job with care for the student, which he says is shown through encouraging the student and giving them hope that their goals are achievable. Participant 3 acknowledges that the student must also be invested in school and the relationship as well and implies that at a certain point, the teacher's efforts may feel futile which is consistent with Noddings' (2005) description that teachers may experience burnout after continually trying to work with students who are unreceptive to a relationship. Perhaps what is most poignant is what Participant 6 shares, that demonstrations of care and persistence on the teacher's part actually help the student to care about his education. In this way, care for incarcerated students is not only reciprocal, but cyclical.

To illustrate the point of how a correctional educator can show care to a student, Participant 3 gave the example of Robin Williams' character in the movie *Goodwill Hunting.* In the validation meeting, I asked him to explain this further. He described that in the film, the professor (Robin Williams) needed to open himself up before the student started to open up. The participant described that the professor was encouraging to the main character and helped him to understand that his difficulties or differences weren't his own fault but related to how he grew up and the challenges he had experienced in life. This participant's illustration shows the value in teachers recognizing situational and systemic factors in students' lives and reassuring students of their abilities to overcome obstacles.

Teacher Persistence

All six participants shared at different times throughout the conversation about the importance of teacher persistence. As Participant 1 described, because prison teaching is different than public school teaching, educators need to be especially persistent and encouraging to students. This is true even if students appear to be disinterested in learning. Participant 1 talked about the value of teacher persistence:

Tyson: How can a teacher show that they *care* about a student?

Participant 1: I don't know, not giving up when the student has probably given up 20 times.

Participant 4: Yeah.

Participant 1: You know, because that's, like… like I said, a lot of guys in jail never had support for fuck all. Never mind, you know… inside, so, you know?

Participant 6: Yep.

Tyson: Mhm.

Participant 1: So, I think it's just keep supporting them even when it's not going great for them, but it's like, not out of the ordinary for them because it's never gone great for them, you know?

Tyson: Yeah.

Participant 1: So, I think that's a huge thing is just supporting you.

The most apparent focus in this excerpt is that these men viewed persistence as an embodiment of care. It seems that for participants, refusing to give up on students is a way of showing deep investment compared to past relationships or learning situations where they may have felt uncared about or even discarded by teachers or authority figures. What is significant is the reasoning that Participant 1 provides for his statement – that teachers need to be persistent because of the fact that "a lot of guys in jail have never experienced support in their lives" and that it's "not out of the ordinary for things to not be going great." His wording about small goals is significant. As men shared, teachers need to remember that their incarcerated students have struggled in life and in previous school experiences, so celebrating small wins building towards a bigger accomplishment is important for continued motivation for a student.

Participant 1 shared that at the institution where he was incarcerated, teachers were extremely persistent which was integral to him completing his grade 12 diploma. At the medium, his teacher would consistently visit him at the range barrier to collect work and encourage him to come to school. At the minimum, his teacher put positive pressure on him to write the grade 12 English exam, even though the participant told the teacher he didn't care about it. The discussion about the value of persistence continued, showing that different people responded to visits on the range differently, but that all of the participants ultimately appreciatedvisits and benefited from them:

Tyson: So, not giving up on a student. Keep going to visit him on the range!

Participant 1: Hey man, like, hey… honestly, those visits…

Participant 6: That's a big thing.

Participant 1: Those visits used to piss me the fuck off. I'd be so fuckin mad, but even if I'd go back to bed, those days where [the teacher would] fuckin come because I hadn't been to school in, like, a week and a half… It's like yeah, I'd go back to bed and be like, "Oh, fuckin bitch," and when I got

back up at 12 and bitchin the whole time. But then I'd bitch my ass down the fuckin breezeway to the school at 1 o'clock. And even if I didn't go for the full class, I'd go down there and be like, "Yeah this is what I got done. Okay? Like, fuck. See you in a week."

Participant 3: It's good to see you've changed so much (sarcastically). (Group laughter).

Participant 6: He's always been a good sport!

Participant 3: Right?

Participant 1: But like I said, it just goes to show… she always showed up, even when I barely showed up so…

Tyson: Participant 6, what do you think?

Participant 3: That's the line, right there! "She always showed up."

Participant 1: There ya go. Trademarked. Trademarked!

Participant 6: I think, um… when, you know Participant 1, he didn't love when the teachers would come on the range and all that. I really did like that. I… the… those interactions, those visits, stuff like that. As somebody who had no community support, no visits or anything, it was like having a little visit. And… and that was nice.

The teacher always showing up is a significant concept. As Participant 1 explained, "it's never gone great" for most people in prison, so it can be challenging to continue with school when it is difficult or if motivation is low. The persistence of the teacher is a caring demonstration of believing in the student, even when he may not believe in himself. Noddings (2005) describes that it can be challenging for students to recognize care "if it comes in forms they have already assessed as not-caring" (p.108). That is to say, if students in prison have had negative experiences in public school, they are likely to assume that a teacher in prison will provide similarly negative experiences. For students who have these negative attachments to school, proving that the teacher is genuinely invested in their success or guiding them to learn how to receive care may be the most challenging task for teachers (Noddings, 2005). Persistence is one way for teachers to show their care to students.

Awareness of Personal Experiences and Prison Context

One fact that was made plain is that teaching in a prison is very different from teaching in any other context. There are several reasons for this. First, the prison atmosphere has violent and oppressive impacts on the people who are incarcerated there. To compound this issue, many of the people in prison had negative experiences in public school, which makes attending school in prison even more challenging. Noddings' conceptualization of care is based in concrete situations and relationships with the cared-for who is also concrete (Smeyers, 1999), so consideration of a student's life in prison is valuable. Understanding the context in which students are trying to learn is part of seeing the world through the student's eyes (Noddings, 2005) and can help the teacher develop a sense of empathy and understanding. Participant 1 emphasized several times

that correctional educators need to understand that teaching in prison is different than teaching in public schools. Correctional education poses challenges for both teachers and students:

> Participant 1: Like I said, I think dealing with inmates is different than dealing with normal people or dealing with that same person if they weren't in the same setting, or you know what I mean? So, like, it's not the easiest place to be a fuckin teacher, that's for sure. So I think it's… it's just as hard for you guys to put on a façade as it is for the guys that are coming to do it too, cause maybe some of those guys really want to fuckin be there and really want to learn and use it for the best and what it's there for but they can't because, you know… they're putting on their façade.

He later summed up his thoughts, saying, "It's not normal teaching." Perhaps this is the simplest takeaway for correctional educators reading this research. Prison teaching is not normal teaching and understanding how it is different for our students can help to support them in this setting that has so many obstacles to personal growth. The prison atmosphere affects mental health due to the struggle for survival, disconnection from family and friends, and forced relocation from the land (the person's home).

When one participant raised the issue of survival in prison, the conversation became lively and many participants agreed how violence impacts the prison experience. This quote explains the intersection of survival, focus, and prioritizing school:

> Participant 1: So, to care about whether or not you graduate is so miniscule in the… but that's why you go, like, and like what I seen a lot is people go through phases. Everyone would be like, "Oh everything is chill so you're going to school and then all of a sudden some shit would get crazy and you're like "K, now no one's going to school. No one's doin nothin." Ya know? You're doin fuckin time, so… I think… and then at the minimum it's so fuckin… it's like the fuckin Mousecapades, you know what I mean? You're just chillin, everyone's a big chill fest. So you're like "Fuck," you're way more easy to go and do shit like that than to… then in the medium it's just the atmosphere too. Atmosphere has a big thing to do with attendance and… If shit's tense in fuckin jail and the wrong guy goes to the fuckin wrong… like… so it's "Fuck that!" Ya know?
>
> Tyson: Yeah.
>
> Participant 1: Stay on fuckin the range man, we'll all go out at rec. Like… (Monias Laughs) and that's like everyone, goes for anybody, even if you're not involved with anyone or anything, like… it's just sometimes it's not safe to fuckin go out to school. It's not safe to… ya know?

Participant 1 also shared how the focus on survival in the prison atmosphere overrides consideration of anything else including "your loved ones on the street" and described how in this situation, it is difficult to focus on school. Not only this, but he described how when a person *is* able to attend school, the pressures on mental health make it difficult to retain knowledge:

> Participant 1: …jail time takes up a lot of your mental capacity and your mental health and learning is all to do with your brain and your… ya know? And I'm not very fuckin intelligent, but, like, I know that: it's pretty hard to learn if you're thinkin about everything else that's VERY serious. If that makes sense… it's hard to retain information in a setting like that too.

His comment gives valuable insight for educators, shedding light on why students may have other priorities that impact their education progress, and perhaps engenders some appreciation for students attending school regularly. As noted earlier, Participant 2 and Participant 6 also described how what is going on in a student's life outside of the school has impacts on his mood and ability to engage in school.

Applying care in correctional education requires not only acknowledging current contexts but also understanding student's past experiences in school. Noddings (2005) references Dewey's (1963) identification of continuity and the need for teachers to understand a student's past, current, and future experiences to make learning relevant. Participant 1 also shared, "Most of us are in jail because school wasn't exactly our strong suit." He described previous experiences and the need for men in prison to see benefits to their learning:

> Participant 1: And like I said, a lot of the guys are giving up on school because they've given up on school how many times before. School was just another, like, "Fuck this." You know? "Fuck, it's hard, it's hard, it's hard." Well yeah, it's hard, but these guys have never been told, "Yeah, it's hard, but you have to do it." Or "You should do it," or, "it's gonna benefit you to do it."

What Participant 1 shares here has important implications for several aspects of care in correctional education. First, the concept of "you should do it" or "it's gonna benefit you" relates to the fact that caring education expands beyond academics into personal growth and caring for others (Noddings, 2005). This could also be interpreted as students desiring knowledge that will benefit them financially through enhanced employability, a reflection of the pressure to be successful in a capitalist system. Second, caring teaching is responsive to the student needs (Noddings, 2005). Understanding that students struggled in school because it "wasn't their strong suit" reminds educators that patience is a valuable quality working with students in prison and that adaptations in content and delivery will likely be useful for many students. This understanding overlaps into the recognition that students in prison will benefit from high levels of encouragement because they perceive education to be difficult and have possibly given up on it multiple times before. These understandings directly connect to the relational aspect of care in education and the need for persistence that participants described in the conversation.

Responding to Learning Needs – Delivery and Context

For some participants, a teacher can show care through persistence or paying attention to little things, but for Participant 4, care was connected to providing him with an ideal learning context and the academic support he needed. At the end of the conversation, he shared this:

> Tyson: Participant 4, what are your thoughts? How can a teacher show they care about a student?
>
> Participant 4: I don't know. Like I said, [they] showed that [they] cared because [they] stayed later and helped me out when I needed on [their] own time, so…

At another point in the conversation, he described, "[they] would just sit there and explain stuff to me" which was helpful for him. This point echoes Participant 2's point that teachers should slow down and be more attentive to students' individual learning needs rather than having a "get them in, get them out" mentality. Relating to taking time with students, participants were critical of the teaching approach that they felt was distant and disconnected. They spoke about the downsides of booklet learning:

> Participant 2: I don't know… I didn't get anything. Mine was all SDL [self directed learning], so it was like, two minute conversations. Like, I never had anything more with [the teacher] than, "Here's my booklet. Do you have another one for me?" And then I would leave. Like, this is from my experience, I never got to know [the teacher] at all. There was no, like, "What did you struggle with?" or "Did you need any help with anything?" or "Did it make sense?"

It is worth noting that Participant 2 was working with "teacher 2," discussed previously, whom the participants described as "like an android" and the teacher's way of working with students gave them the impression that the teacher was not invested in their success. As a solution to the reportedly disconnected self-directed learning, Participant 1 provided this feedback:

> Tyson: Complete this thought here: "School would be better if teachers… blank."
>
> Participant 1: Taught.
>
> Tyson: Taught?
>
> Participant 1: Yeah, there wasn't a lot of, like, actual teaching in…
>
> Participant 3: Mhm.
>
> Participant 1: …In [the prison] school. There was a lot of fuckin, "Here's the book, here's the fuckin work, do it."
>
> Tyson: Okay.
>
> Participant 1: "You can do it in the school and you can ask me if you have questions," but there wasn't a lot of teaching.
>
> Tyson: Yeah. So, what does … what does teaching look like for you?
>
> Participant 1: Like, lessons. Like, especially for a bunch of guys that, like I said, didn't really do a bunch of school.
>
> Tyson: Yeah.
>
> Participant 1: And then you're expected to, like, do self-directed learning, which is, "holy fuck." You know, so…

Throughout the conversation, participants spoke about the benefit of hands-on learning and group lessons or activities. Participant 1's comment draws a connection between previous school experiences and how school in prison needs to be different, suiting the needs of students who struggled in school in their youth or because they "didn't really do a bunch of school," they may not have developed learning skills that teachers might take for granted. For several participants, tending to a students' learning needs through more engaging education delivery is a way of showing that a teacher cares.

In addition to more one-on-one support, Participant 4 also benefitted from a context where he was able to work at home rather than in the classroom. He shared that he advocated for himself, explaining to the teacher that he could not focus in class and wanted to do schoolwork at home. He said:

> Participant 4: Well, the first week I was in there, I handed in what I had done and it was only like a 58%. When I started doing stuff back at home, I was getting, like, anywhere between 87-95.

The other participants teased him that his marks improved because someone else was doing his work, but Participant 4 maintained he did it on his own. Noddings describes that "caring teachers listen and respond differentially to their students" (2005, p.19). In this way, adapting learning contexts to meet student needs is a way of showing care. In the validation talk, Participant 4 shared that he has ADHD, a factor that impacted his learning experience. Participant 2 expressed that ADHD impacted his learning experience and that because of this, teachers need to work with students to create an appropriate learning environment for each student:

> Participant 2: One: work… like I didn't… I was ADHD as hell too. Like, I couldn't do a full day's worth of work. So I would break it down and I would work in the mornings and then my afternoon to be my off. Or just being able to work with someone to, like, what works for you, or what are you capable of doing in a day?
>
> Tyson: Yeah, yeah. And that sounds also, the individual person. You know, "what works for you? What are you capable of doing?"
>
> Participant 2: Yeah, like, just making individual plans for the people. Like, getting… sitting them down either before you enrol or as you're enrolling so you know, like, this is what they need.

Participant 2's comment about talking with the student before they start school to get to know what they need is significant and is an aspect of education that was apparently overlooked for him, showing that perhaps correctional educators underestimate the value of this step in the educational journey. The Individual Education Plan is part of correctional education policy in CD-720, which I elaborate on in the appendix section *Policies Supporting Care in Correctional Education.*

Participant 4 worked an institutional job during the day and did schoolwork in the evening, on his own time. Participant 2 worked on school best in the morning then enjoyed the rest of the day off. At the validation meeting, I asked Participant 4 how he managed to have the energy and motivation to complete schoolwork after a full day of working at a job. He said that the routine is what was really helpful for him. This comment as well as Participant 2's comment about doing schoolwork in the morning and having the afternoon off show the value of routine for some students and also show that each student has different needs so an effective routine will be different for each student (as evidenced by the routines of Participant 2 and Participant 4 which are basically opposites).

Three participants in the conversation described that they have ADHD, which impacted their experiences working on school in prison. A fourth participant shared that he was diagnosed

as neurodivergent as a child. The other two participants did not indicate any learning disabilities (but this was not a specific question for participants). The rate of neurodivergence in this study sample (66%) is higher than the currently documented occurrence of "cognitive deficits" (including intellectual developmental disorder, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, autism spectrum disorder, traumatic brain injury, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder) in the broader prison population in Canada which was 17.2% in 2023, with 15% of people in the sample affected by ADHD (OCI, 2025).While these statistics were provided by CSC, the Office of the Correctional Investigator (OCI) suggests this number is likely an underestimate due to outdated policies or practices monitoring cognitive deficits. It would make sense that the prevalence of learning disabilities is higher in the prison school than the broader prison population because these educational challenges likely impacted the incarcerated person's ability to complete grade 12 in the community. Considering these numbers, many students would benefit from working with a teacher who has increased professional knowledge related to supporting learning disabilities or neurodivergent students. Whether or not a student is working with a learning disability, these participants' comments show the value of taking a student's learning needs into account. The needs participants shared were not only about where they were learning, but how they were learning. Context and delivery are not the only areas for caring teachers to consider. Content was also a factor in the discussion.

The Broader Purpose of Education

Throughout the conversation, participants were critical of the fact that it seemed the main motivation behind education delivery was to meet quotas set by CSC. They saw these as a way of CSC meeting legal responsibilities and felt that education was often rushed due to limited access, which resulted in students starting school close to the end of their prison sentence. Participant 3 was the most vocal about the issue of learning content. He spoke about the need for practical knowledge including more access to trades and post-secondary education. At one point he summed up his thoughts bluntly: "change the curriculum to actually shit that will really help people." While he and other participants perceived these forms of practical learning to be valuable for students, his later comments related to the value of personal identity and culture show that "what will really help people" goes deeper than skills that can lead to employment

For Participant 3, making learning more personal is how a teacher shows that they care. Actions like attending to cultural protocols and guiding students to explore their identities had a significant impact on students. Along with this, encouraging students to pursue education through their personal interests led to student engagement and building a sense of community in the classroom:

> Participant 3: Like, [the teacher would] go out of [their] way to do shit for us. Like, [they] showed that [they] cared cause, like, [they'd] bring smudge in. [They'd], like… I dunno, they were trying to get it like, we had a bead thing going or whatever. Remember?
>
> Participant 2: Yeah. And bring, like, snacks…
>
> Participant 3: And we were supposed to start making beads and we were gonna sell em, then part of the profits were gonna go and get us, like, be able have people come in and teach us fuckin proper languages and all that… Me and Participant 6, two white guys in this Indigenous thing, it was fuckin hilarious, by the way. But, um… Yeah, like, and then they shut [the teacher] down.

Tyson: Yeah.

Participant 3: So… and I don't know what happened. I hear stories, both sides, blah blah blah, like, I don't care, but… teachers like that care. You know what I mean? So…

Tyson: So… what [were they] doing that showed [they] cared?

Participant 3: [They were] trying to help people find their, like… [They were] blond and as white as you could get but [they were] out there trying to teach the Indigenous, you know. Cause [they] found out that [their] great grandpa or like, however it worked out and [they have] some Indigenous in [them], and [they] just started teachin it.

Participant 6: Really, whenever guys came to [the teacher] and they were like, "Yo, I wanna do this." [The teacher was] like, "Let's do it!"

Participant 3: Yep. I drew in [their] class, that's it.

Participant 2: Like, it was all supposed to be what, language? And then it turned into beading and star blankets, and then…

Participant 6: I was painting paintings for [them].

Participant 2: Yeah. And we did… I still have my medicine box actually, where I keep all my sage and stuff. We made that little box around Christmas time.

Tyson: So it sounds like there was, like…

Participant 3: And dream catchers, shit like that, right? So

Participant 6: Yeah, dream catchers.

Participant 2: Head dresses

Participant 4: We used to make, uh, medicine bags.

Participant 3: Yeah. Just stuff like that. That's the teachers that actually…

Elder: All the guys I talk to at [the prison] liked [that teacher].

Participant 2: Yeah, [that teacher] was really good. I see [them] at the lodge.

Participant 3: Cause you can sit there and teach somebody from the book and… Those ones still do influence you, I don't mean it that way. But it's the ones that actually do something more personal, you know.

Tyson: Something more personal? Yeah, I could see that.

The story shows the value of teacher flexibility and respecting student autonomy, supporting individual educational efforts. Noddings (2005) references Dewey (1963) who suggests that learning content should be connected to the student's past and future. This creates experiences that are relevant for the student. The teacher listened to students who shared about the skills they wanted to build and encouraged the students to pursue their passions, meeting their expressed needs (Noddings, 2005). The hands-on approach in the group created high levels of student engagement and the story ends with the comment that it was the personalized learning approach that had the most impact on the men.

Participant 3 elaborated in the validation meeting that he felt the teacher was trying to help Indigenous people find their path. He saw this as a way of this teacher showing that they cared for students. It is clear that having teachers who support cultural exploration is valuable for students. Murray Sinclair shares these key questions for Indigenous people to explore: Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why am I here? Who am I? (Sinclair, 1997) and they align with questions Noddings (2005) believes students are asking: Who am I? What kind of person will I be? Who will love me? How do others see me?

The examples in this excerpt related to cultural learning, entrepreneurship, and pursuing individual interests in the classroom all connect to the concept of extending the purpose of education beyond academics to include personal development, which is consistent with an ethic of care (Noddings, 2005). This expansion of education is an even richer example of care because the educational initiative was based on responding to the needs expressed by the individual students (Noddings, 2005). Teachers can show care for their students by recognizing that education has broader goals than academic achievement (or in the case of prison education, broader goals than reducing recidivism, increasing public safety, and enhancing the economy). Based on what several participants shared, for many men in prison, exploring Indigenous culture and history is a central part of building their identity, understanding themselves, and their place in the world.

Discussion

The argument of this research is that the current understanding of care in correctional education is superficial and therefore needs to be reconceptualized. Through exploring data from the conversational gathering, it is clear that care in correctional education is far more than thoughtful actions on a special occasion or creating a warm atmosphere in the classroom. Based on what men shared, care is connected to having a comprehensive understanding of who the student is as a person and as a learner. This understanding extends outside of the classroom to recognizing challenges of the prison context and challenges the student had in public school. Building from this relational foundation, a teacher can show care for the student by interacting with them in a confident and humanizing way, providing encouragement, and supporting the student with dogged persistence. Along with these actions that show investment in the teacher-student relationship, participants shared about the need to use teaching methods that work for the student. Hands-on learning and group lessons are more valuable than independent booklet learning for men if "school wasn't their strong suit" (Participant 1). Participants discussed the value of individualized schedules that accommodate the student's needs and "what they are capable of" (Participant 2, Participant 4). Finally, men in the conversation also saw care as teachers helping students to learn about their culture and build their identity (Participant 3).

The data analysis chapter highlighted these themes and connected them to Noddings' (1995, 2005) definition of the ethic of care. The discussion chapter considers these aspects of care further, using a desire-based lens to focus on the needs and hopes that participants expressed. Keeping in mind that a desire-based view does not ignore painful social contexts but acknowledges them along with the aspirations that people hold despite hardships (Tuck, 2009), the discussion extends to show how men's desires align with Indigenous philosophies and anticolonial thinking and how the dynamic of prioritizing control over care in the prison creates obstacles to meeting student desires expressed by participants.

The Desire for Relationships and Positive Interaction

Participants said that teachers can show care through building relationships with students. Many Indigenous authors describe that relationships are central to a learning experience (Leon & Nadeau, 2018; Peltier, 2021; Steinhauer, 2023; Twance, 2019) and Noddings' ethic of care (1995, 2005) is in alignment with this view. The relationship seems to be the foundation for the other expressions of care that men identified. A relationship is the basis for understanding a student's learning needs and how to work with him in an effective way. A relationship allows the teacher to know about a student's past experiences in school and challenges he is experiencing during his incarceration. A relationship leads to awareness of what a student wants to learn and how to create the most supportive learning context for him. A relationship is the basis for caring education, but the tension between control and care in a prison context inhibits relationships between staff and incarcerated people.

As is well established in the literature (Dodds, 2002; Elliott, 2007; Patrie, 2017; Worley, 2005; Wright, 2004a), relationships between staff and people in prison are discouraged because

of a fear that relationships can lead to manipulation. In this way, a need for control overrides care. However, fear of manipulation is based on two problematic assumptions: first, that all people in prison are malicious and will exploit staff; and second, that the relationship involves staff sharing private information which makes them vulnerable to manipulation. Understanding these two assumptions shows that it is possible for staff to have safe, professional relationships with students as long as they maintain appropriate boundaries. This is no different than the way a teacher in a public school would maintain boundaries. Remembering Khahaifa's (2024) concept of carceral kinship, the teacher can be viewed as an aunty, uncle, or other respected family member who can provide the right amount of softness or hardness at the right times (Cornelius, 2001). As Participant 1 described, teachers "have to walk a fine line between having the same personality as us versus really not."

Men shared that a student needs to feel supported, even if they don't appear to be engaged in education and that a teacher should not give up on a student because in many cases, so many other people in the student's lives have given up on them. This sheds light on why students may be hesitant to build a relationship with a teacher or commit fully to education. Due to previous letdowns from authority figures, it can be beneficial to remember Steinhauer's (2023) point that from a Nêhiyaw perspective, in the student-teacher relationship, the teacher has a distinct responsibility to the student that they must honour. Perhaps part of this responsibility includes the persistence that men described, not giving up on a student even if they appear to have given up.

Aside from how teachers support a student educationally, day-to-day interactions are important too. Behaving in a confident and comfortable way, chatting with students and showing interest in their lives is a way of respecting them as people and incorporates a sense of humanity in the teacher-student relationship. Building relationships with students through humanizing interactions is anticolonial because it works against othering practices in the prison and engages with students on a level as equals rather than subordinates.

The Desire to Be Productive

Ideas that participants shared show that students want to learn, but that they need the right conditions to do it. Men in the conversation shared that what people should learn depends on the person (content). They described the benefits of a schedule that is based on the student's needs and that some students may learn better in the classroom while others can focus better at home (context). Participants also shared that for most students in prison, hands-on learning would be more effective than self-directed booklets (delivery). Both the prison context and standardized curriculum pose obstacles to supporting students' desire to be productive.

First, the narrowly defined curriculum poses challenges to having students learn content that they want to focus on. This is a form of control not from the prison, but from the institution of education that is founded on colonial practices (Steinhauer, 2023). Participants described the need for education that will help them in the community and they did not see value in most of the content included in the standardized grade 12 curriculum. There is a tension here because men shared that learning content depends on the person, but they also shared that group lessons would

be valuable for students in the prison classroom. The theme of meeting student needs for learning content is closely related to showing care through acknowledging the broader goals of education, discussed in a following next section.

As Leanne Simpson (who identifies as Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) shares: “From the perspective of Indigenous Peoples, how you learn is as important or perhaps more important than what you learn…” (2004, p. 380). The correctional atmosphere has a significant impact on how students learn. In most correctional education classrooms, each student is working on something different. This is due to institutional guidelines on prisoner movement and class size (Patrie, 2017). Because the typical prison classroom is made up of students with varying levels of ability and who are working at different grade levels, learning is often individual as students work on self-directed booklets or assignments. This approach generally does not foster active discussion or build relationships between students through sharing ideas or working towards a common goal. Men in the conversational gathering identified these factors as drawbacks of correctional education. Peltier (2021) shares that Anishinaabe learning engages the mind and body, including “experiencing and doing” (p.4) and from a Nêhiyaw perspective, learning is not just cognitive, but inherently physical, emotional, and spiritual (Steinhauer, 2023). The need to incorporate hands-on learning in correctional education was a prevalent theme in the conversation. Class composition and ability to create hands-on learning opportunities is influenced by the controlling nature of prison.

Control in prison also limits the ability for students to have personalized schedules that meet their learning needs. Participant 2 shared that attending the classroom in the morning is what he was capable of and Participant 4 shared that working independently at home in the evenings is what worked best for him. Participant 1 preferred an arrangement where he came to school once every week or two depending on how much work he had completed. Creating a personalized schedule would be consistent with adapting to student learning needs (CD-720) but runs counter to the standardized routines that are common in the prison. The convenience and control that results from having all students follow the same schedule is an example of prioritizing control over care, putting the needs of mass population management over the needs of the student. Embracing the practice of offering personalized learning schedules for students is a factor in reconceptualizing care in correctional education.

The Desire for Meaningful Learning Opportunities (Broader view of education)

Based on what men in the conversation shared, they seek learning opportunities that relate to their personal interests, they seek to enhance skills that they already have, and they are hungry for learning that will be useful to them when they transition back into the community. This aligns with the concept of continuity and recognizing the value of how past and present learning experiences connect to a student’s future (Dewey in Noddings, 2005). In the conversation, participants also placed a high value on cultural learning opportunities.

Authors describe that Indigenous approaches to learning acknowledge the broader context of learning that includes emotion and personal awareness (Leon & Nadeau, 2018; Noddings, 1995, 2005; Peltier, 2021; Steinhauer, 2023; Twance, 2019). Patricia Steinhauer

(2023) shares that as a Nêhiyaw teacher, she strives to guide her students to develop a strong Cree mind and centres her practice on "wahkohtowin, our sense of interconnection with and kinship to all living things, including our ancients and descendants*"* (p. 9). These views are consistent with an ethic of care (Noddings, 1995, 2005) which asserts the need to broaden educational goals outside of academic learning to include personal development and how a student builds relationships with people and things around them.

This is another area where the control that impedes student desires is not due to the prison context, but educational standardization. The narrow curriculum focuses on academic content with little space for personal exploration. With the goal of correctional education being for students to earn a grade 12 diploma, from an institutional view, there is little value in expanding educational efforts to incorporate personal exploration. Murray Sinclair spoke about how this focus creates shortcomings. He stated that employees in the justice system have a responsibility to incarcerated people, "Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to find a way to help them find out who they are," (1997, p. 12) but that an emphasis on statistics and efficiency often prevents this. His words also bring to mind the concept that using Indigenous teaching approaches in schools can benefit both Indigenous and non-indigenous students (Milne, 2017). Expanding learning to include alternative ways of thinking is anticolonial because it disrupts the dominance of western knowledge over other forms of knowledge or ways of learning.

The compartmentalized view of education is also problematic because from Indigenous ways of thinking, knowledge is not objective and cannot be decontextualized but exists in relation to people and communities (Leon & Nadeau, 2018; Peltier, 2021; Twance, 2019). Education can help students build a sense of belonging (Steinhauer, 2023) and knowledge should be used to support families and communities while at the same time, families and communities support and celebrate the student's learning (Peltier, 2021). Participants' comments show that they understand these concepts already, but their desires were not met in correctional education. Men want education that will actually help them (Participant 3) and they have a desire to learn more about their personal backgrounds and identities (Participant 2 and Monias). These desires point to the need for more Indigenous teachers in prisons, or at least, teachers who have knowledge of Indigenous history and culture.

The Desire for Teachers to Recognize the Bigger Picture (Awareness of context)

This desire is different than the others because it is not a desire they have for themselves, but a desire for how teachers perceive them. Arguably, this desire could be nested within the desire for relationships, but in the conversation, it appeared distinctly from other concepts of the teacher-student relationship. Men said teachers need to recognize how a student's previous experiences in school and their current experiences in prison impact their ability to engage with school. This makes sense, because from an Anishinaabe view, learning is connected to history and personal identity (Twance, 2019).

Learning does not take place in a vacuum and a student's learning is impacted by many other factors outside of the school environment. The Anishinaabe and settler scholar team Leon and Nadeau (2018) describe that teachers should recognize that western education prioritizes individualism when in fact, each person is a part of a web of relations. Interconnectivity is

counter to the compartmentalized approach to learning in western education (Peltier, 2021). Education is connected to land (Leon & Nadeau, 2018; Steinhauer, 2023; Twance, 2019) and connected to family and community (Leon & Nadeau, 2018; Peltier, 2021; Twance, 2019). However, in the prison context, students are disconnected from land, family, and community. Incarceration interrupts these connections which creates personal instability and in turn, has negative effects on learning. In a broad sense, control, through incarceration, has inherent impacts on the student's ability to learn.

Once the person is in prison, the control, or lack of control in the institution impacts the student's ability to engage with education. A stable social climate in prison is conducive to learning and personal growth, but an atmosphere of uncertainty reduces the likelihood of positive engagement with programming (Auty & Liebling, 2020). Stories from participants showed that there is a difference between motivation and prioritization. The prison atmosphere affects mental health due to the struggle for survival, disconnection from family and friends, and forced relocation from home. Based on what participants shared, a student who is motivated to learn may have difficulty prioritizing education 1) if it seems irrelevant to his goals, 2) if he is experiencing personal issues in prison or with family or friends in the community, or 3) if he perceives it to be potentially unsafe to attend school. Building caring relationships with students can help teachers to recognize the difference between motivation and prioritization and then take steps to make personalized plans to support motivated students. Although the teacher may take steps to support the student as much as possible, the impact the teacher has will likely be inhibited by the negative effects the prison environment has on students.

Another aspect of the bigger picture is seeking to understand a student's previous school experiences and offering personalized support so that students don't encounter the same learning barriers that they did previously. Part of the reason why marginalized students do not participate in the social contract of school is that they do not see themselves represented in the curriculum (Noguera, 2003). Not only that, but frequently, curricular outcomes are narrowly defined in such a way that teachers regularly fail to recognize valuable skills or perspectives that marginalized students have. By using western curricular benchmarks, "schools use power to regulate children and standardize their behaviour, foreclosing alternate ways of being and understanding the world"(Janzen & Schwartz, 2018, p.111). Participants shared about negative experiences in school throughout their youth and described that school was challenging for a number of reasons.

Recognizing context is essential to working with students from a desire-based perspective and an anticolonial perspective because it creates the understanding that if students behave differently than we hope, the blame does not rest solely on the individual because the situation that the student is in can limit the person's choices and influence their actions. This view can help build a sense of empathy and patience, with a teacher seeking to understand a situation and work towards collaborative solutions rather than jumping to conclusions about student behaviours.

This section looking at the desires that participants shared highlights that students in correctional education may have a positive disposition towards education, but due to the controlling atmosphere of prison and the controlling curriculum, correctional education may be unable to meet their desires and goals. The discussion has also demonstrated that desires shared

in the conversational gathering align with Indigenous philosophies of learning, which have a long history, and with the more recently developed concept of the ethic of care. Expressing care in correctional education is anticolonial because building relationships with students is contrary to the correctional mindset. Recognizing how historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism influence students' experiences in the community, in prison, and in the prison school also follows anticolonial thought. Encouraging students to learn about their culture and history changes the dynamic of prioritizing Eurocentric thinking over other knowledges, and responding to students' expressed needs builds a sense of self-determination that can lead to independence.

Responding to Student Desires with Indigenous Pedagogies

The desires for learning that men shared have consistent alignment with Indigenous pedagogies. The Anishinaabe and Nêhiyaw authors cited in this research describe the relational, interactive, and holistic nature of learning experiences that men also described. In a debriefing discussion with the Elder, he shared that while land-based learning is central to Indigenous teaching, there were many challenges to land-based learning in the prison setting. He made some suggestions about how teachers could incorporate Indigenous teaching methods in the prison school and wrapped up by humbly suggesting that he didn't know what would be best because he's not a teacher.

The shift from western ways of teaching to Indigenous approaches is challenging because of the obstacles in the prison atmosphere, but also because most or all teachers have received teacher training based on western curriculum and teaching styles. Having more Indigenous teachers who are comfortable using Indigenous teaching methods would be beneficial for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Considering that the majority of teachers are non-Indigenous (St. Denis & Schick, 2003) there is a need for more professional development. Research on culturally responsive teaching shows the need for better teacher and administrative cultural education including increasing teacher awareness of their own settler-colonial histories (Csontos, 2019; Schick, 2014; Sleeter, 2012; St. Denis, 2007; St. Denis & Schick, 2003). Engaging in personal reflection and professional development is central to this shift. Milne (2017) found that non-Indigenous teachers are hesitant to teach Indigenous content because of limited knowledge but Indigenous educators in the study were supportive of non-Indigenous educators teaching cultural content. Teacher training helps to make teachers more confident in teaching about colonialism and Indigenous culture (Guenther et al., 2021). Although non-Indigenous teachers do not need to be cultural experts, authors highlight that it is essential to engage Elders and community members to support student learning and as a support for the teacher themselves to learn from (Csontos, 2019; Milne, 2017; Oskineegish, 2015).

Part of the problem is that teachers may not understand what it means use culturally responsive teaching approaches (Sleeter, 2012). Some aspects include allowing students to show their learning in multiple formats and recognizing the overlap of academic, cultural, and life skills (Hewitt & Lee, 2012), which aligns with Indigenous philosophies of learning and Noddings' (1995, 2005) ethic of care. These views reiterate that engaging Indigenous students is not necessarily about cultural content but the attitudes and teaching approaches that are applied (Oskinseegish, 2015); not *what* students are learning, but *how* they are learning (Simpson, 2004). As Simpson (2004) describes, shifting these understandings brings anticolonialism into

education. CD-720.20 makes specific provisions for attending to the unique needs of Indigenous students (CSC, 2025). While correctional educators already receive training about understanding how Indigenous Social History (ISH factors) related to settler colonialism may have impacted a student's education, this is only part of the equation. Participant comments and academic research shows that it would be beneficial for correctional educators to receive training about diversified teaching techniques that incorporate Indigenous pedagogies and how to apply these approaches with their students.

Policies Supporting Care in Correctional Education

With the recognition that the prison context poses so many barriers to meaningful education, teachers may feel disheartened and uncertain of how to support their students. I previously cited Moore and Hannah-Moffat (2005) who state that "penal policy is best thought of as consisting of two components, rhetoric and practice" (p.89). My first use of this quote was to emphasize that although correctional policy may appear to be supportive and beneficial for people in prison, the reality of correctional practice and the atmosphere it creates is to the contrary. However, this quote can also hold hope for teachers. As men in the conversation described, correctional education currently does not meet many of their desires, but perhaps that is because current practices do not always align with policies. While I used to look at policy as a hinderance, I recognize that policies can be used to support practices that will meet students' desires of building relationships, meeting student needs, and encouraging learning beyond academics. I have included a detailed description of policies that support care in correctional education as an appendix, but to summarize, CD-720, the policy which governs practice for correctional education, has several clauses that encourage teachers to make correctional education interactive and responsive to student needs. Knowing this, it falls to teachers to disrupt the status quo in prison education if current practices do not support student desires.

The Relational Midpoint

Recognizing that students in prison hold desires for learning that seem irreconcilable with the limitations of prison education puts teachers in a challenging position, which brings us back to the central question for this research: How can correctional education be more responsive to needs and desires of incarcerated men? The answer lies in the relational midpoint.

The relational midpoint is a concept suggested by Wright (2004a) where teachers have a balance of emotional closeness and professional distance from students. During the conversational gathering, Participant 1 described that incarcerated people perceive staff members differently depending on how they interact with prisoners. In this excerpt he starts to describe something similar to the relational midpoint and the challenge of maintaining a balanced relationship with students:

> Participant 1: It's all things with… it's all things with guards, staff here, Elders, fuckin P.O.s. Everyone you deal with you have to be… that's… that's why every one of those job titles, some of them have worse names than others, some of them have better names than others based on how they deal with the inmates or with the interaction of the people. So, it's like, you guys have to have that attitude where… yeah, you don't mind fuckin around, but you also don't mind fuckin being like, "Hey this is…" you have to… I don't know. I think you guys have a difficult role trying to deal with us. Cause unless

> you're one of us, it's hard to fuckin deal with us. You come out to the street and you're like an alien. We live different, we talk different. We… Everything's different in there, right?

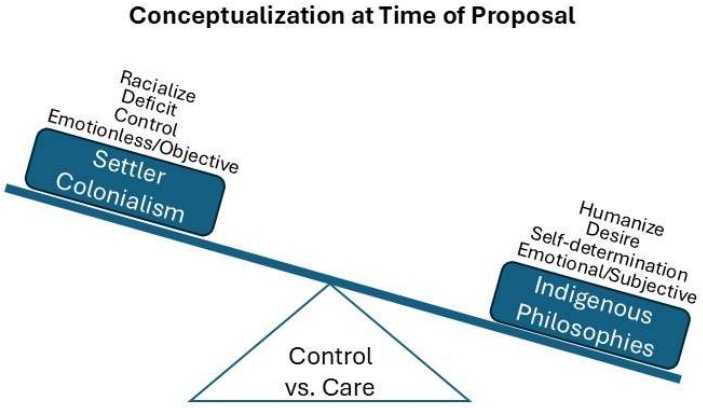
He appears to build the contrast that while teachers must be personable with students, they must also know where to draw the line. Later on, he elaborated that the teacher needs to figure out this balance for themselves and that it's different all the time. At another point in the conversation, he explained:

> Participant 1: I think you have to be very diverse with how you read people and emotions and, you know what I mean? I think, like, you have to walk a fine line between having the same personality as us versus really not. You know?

What Participant 1 is describing here is consistent with Khahaifa's (2024) description of carceral kinship where the staff member is caring but has clear boundaries, so they come to be viewed as an aunty, uncle, or other respected family member. While Khahaifa describes the concept of carceral kinship based on experiences of African American men in prison in the U.S.A., the Elder described that this phenomenon is common with Indigenous men in prison as well. The idea of walking a fine line also aligns with attributes of the *professional supportive* officer (Liebling & Kant, 2018) who builds relationships with incarcerated people as a means of maintaining control and safety, but is willing to use authority in a measured way, when necessary. Even literature about manipulation describes that a *mellow* attitude, which requires a balance of being *soft* or *hard* at appropriate times is the best way to maintain professional relationships with people in prison (Cornelius, 2001). Wright (2004a) says, of teachers in prison, how they "discover and sustain the delicate relational midpoint is part of their practical knowledge" (p.201).

After all of the considerations in this research, the relational midpoint appears to be the crux of the argument of reconceptualizing care in correctional education. "Having the same personality as men versus really not" is simultaneously simple and complex. Rather than superficially describing this balance of part of a correctional educator's practical knowledge (Wright, 2004a), I seek to make more explicit the factors in this balance and how a teacher can maintain it.

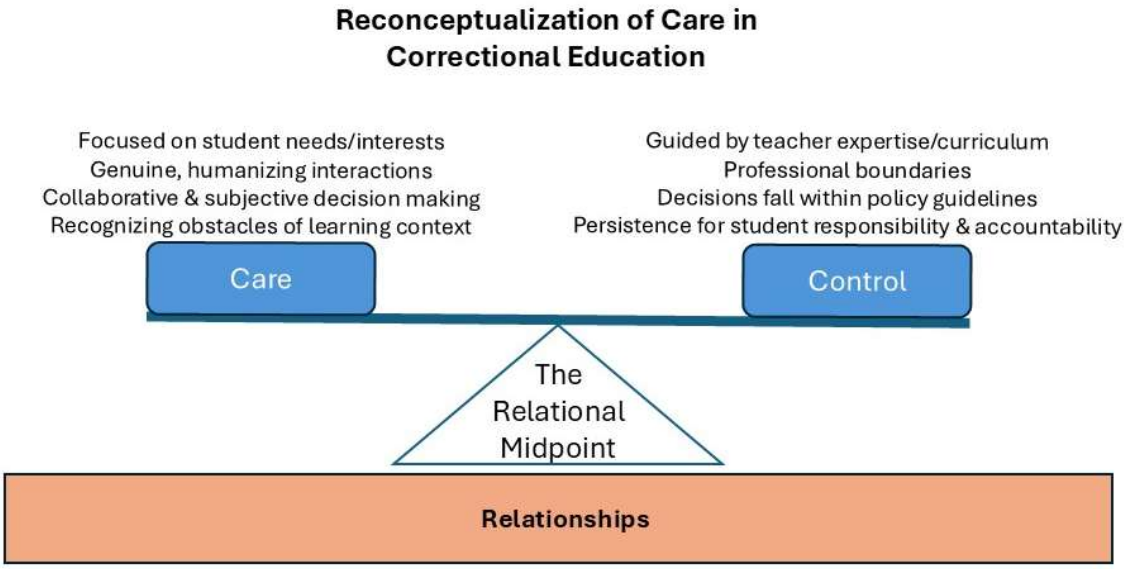
To understand the relational midpoint more thoroughly, we need to revisit my original conceptualization of control vs care scale in correctional education, which informed the proposal for this research.



I originally struggled against the relational midpoint because to find a balance between control and care as binaries as I understood them would mean that correctional education would require teachers to accept some level of deficit thinking, to engage in a degree of racialization, and ultimately to support values of settler colonialism. This, of course, does not align with an ethic of care.

Understanding control and care as a continuum is far more useful to reconceptualizing care in correctional education and the relational midpoint. As authors describe, caring actions in an institution can enhance the level of control which creates a sense of stability (Auty & Liebling, 2020; Khahaifa, 2024; Liebling, 2011; Liebling & Kant, 2018; Philo, 2017). This understanding then raises the question: which forms of control support growth and learning for people in prison? While the men in the conversation showed that students want a level of self-determination regarding their school schedule, their learning context, and the content they learn, comments from participants point out that students benefit from teachers applying positive pressure to make students complete what they've started – like writing a final exam, for example. Next, we must recognize that it is unrealistic at this time to dismiss the controlling aspect of standardized curriculum. Because of this, teachers can act as an intermediary between what students want to learn/what they see value in learning and what they need to learn to meet curricular outcomes and earn a grade 12 diploma. Due to the controlling nature of prison, both prison life and correctional education are governed by institutional policies. Similar to the previous point with curriculum, the teacher can act as an intermediary between controlling policies and the student's desires, finding ways to meet student needs while still aligning with prison policies. In addition to this, while care is situational and subjective, this does not mean that correctional education should be overly slack or have low expectations for students. As participants described, relationships in correctional education are a two-way street. It is still important for the teacher to encourage student accountability through persistence, particularly because as Participant 1 reminds us, "a lot of guys in jail never had support for fuck all. Never mind, you know… inside, so, you know?"

These understandings helped me to visualize a balance between control and care that embraces the relational midpoint without making concessions to deficit thinking and racialization. Thus, care in correctional education takes the form of focusing on student needs and interests, having genuine, humanizing interactions, making collaborative and subjective decisions, and recognizing that the prison context presents obstacles that are outside of the student's control. Control appears as the teacher using their expertise of content and curriculum to guide the student's learning, maintaining professional boundaries, making decisions that fall within policy guidelines, encouraging student accountability through applying positive pressure, and being persistent to make the student responsible for finishing what they started through pursuing their goals, even when they want to give up. Based on what participants in the conversation shared, relationships are the foundation for building this balance with students.



Small, Meaningful Changes

Developing the relational midpoint will vary for each teacher and it also depends on each student that the teacher is working with. To revisit positionality, an important factor in this research has been for me to continually revisit biases and assumptions that I may have. Having experience as a correctional educator, I came into this research expecting to hear men share radical changes needed in correctional education. Previous to this thesis work, I felt that the root of the problem was restrictive policies that prevented teachers from developing care in prison classrooms. I believed that the rules needed to be re-written and the system needed to be completely changed.

Yes, it is true that men were critical of the waitlist, which often prevented them from starting school until they were only a few months away from release. They were also critical of the curriculum that often seemed irrelevant to their needs and goals. Yes, I am still critical of the policy on inmate pay (CD-730) which I believe unethically forces students into education through threatening to decrease their wages if they do not participate in school. However, these aspects are disconnected from what men in the conversation shared about displays of care in correctional education. I had preconceived notions about what needed to happen to implement care in correctional education and my assumptions interfered with me understanding what men were actually saying. It may be tempting to blame the system for preventing care in correctional education, but based on the examples that men shared, this is simply not true. It is essential for readers to understand that teachers do not need to break or even bend rules to show care to their students in prison. Again, I refer readers to Appendix A detailing policies that support care in correctional education.

I want to reinforce the thought that teachers do not need to break rules to express care by citing an example from Wright (2004a). The author describes a teacher who developed a relationship with a student which resulted in her spending more and more time talking with the student about personal issues which then led to rumors about the relationship, raising security

concerns. Wright describes that although he counselled the teacher she was unwilling to change her behaviour, ultimately leading to her dismissal. In the story Participant 3 shared about a caring teacher he worked with, he said:

> Participant 3: So… and I don't know what happened. I hear stories, both sides, blah blah blah, like, I don't care, but… teachers like that care.

His words seem to suggest that perhaps his teacher met a fate similar to the teacher Wright describes. Stories like this reinforce the importance of maintaining professionalism in relationships with students, as well as outward appearances with other staff, and other students. Bending rules or breaking rules, even if it is done with good intentions can end a teacher's career. This is counterproductive to building care in prison, a setting where professional supportive staff are already in short supply (Liebling & Kant, 2018).

Rather than trying to unsettle colonial status quo in prison education by breaking rules, I suggest that working towards small, meaningful changes in practice is a more productive way of building care with students and resisting colonial influences in prison. The ways of demonstrating care described by men in the conversation can all be accomplished not only *within* existing CSC policies, but CD-720 actually *encourages* working with students in the way that research participants shared (see Appendix A – policies supporting care in correctional education).

The suggestion to follow rules rather than break or bend them may seem normative, but I assert that using existing rules to support students in a caring way is an act of using control to balance the relational midpoint with students. As previously stated, policies in prison not only prioritize control, but are based on simplicity and convenience for staff. Using existing CSC policies to work with the student to personalize his learning experience gives more control to the student, subverting colonial control.

Limitations

Like any research, this research has limitations. This section describes limitations specifically related to research methods and data. It also explores other limitations to implementing changes suggested by men in the conversational gathering, including limitations due to context and colonial policies and practice.

Limitations of the Research

Findings Cannot Be Generalized

First, readers should note that this research is not generalizable, which ultimately is not the goal of qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research makes meaning and uncovers themes in what participants share in conversation. The ideas shared by the participants in the group are based on their own experiences and, as men shared repeatedly in the conversation, every student has different needs and goals. This means that the content a person should learn and how a teacher should work with a student is different for every person. Stories that men shared, the suggestions they made, and the recommendations I have put forward in the discussion chapters should be approached as a starting point for strategies to adopt in a correctional classroom. As men shared, what a teacher should do depends not only on the person, but even with the same person, successful teaching strategies vary from day to day. In other words, this research offers a valuable guiding framework for corrections to begin adopting alternative, and more expansive, educational strategies, while avoiding "one size fits all" models. Going forward, this also may require a rethinking of current curriculum, how learning is done, and what constitutes education.

Along with the individualized nature of teaching and learning, this research is limited by the location and limited sample size. As previously mentioned, participants in the conversation had been incarcerated at all three security levels and men had done time at three institutions across Canada. However, a sample size of six people cannot be indicative of the needs and desires of men going to school in prison across Canada. In addition to this, two of the six participants were Indigenous, one identified as white, another as Irish Canadian, and the other two did not specify how they identify. Based on the makeup of the group, this research does not include experiences from other racialized people who make up the prison population. It is likely that people from different ethnic backgrounds will experience prison and correctional education differently. Participants' ages ranged from late 20s to early 50s. This is a reasonably representative age range, but men who are younger (18-25) and older (55+) may have different experiences and views than the men who took part in this study.

Personal Bias

My positionality as a correctional educator may limit my perspective. Having experience in a prison school gives me some insight into the learning scenarios that men described in the conversation, but I have only worked as a prison teacher at one institution, and at one security level. I expect that correctional education is different at each institution across Canada. Some of the recommendations that arise from this research may already be common practice at other prison schools. I also must acknowledge that along with my experience comes bias. I strived to write accurately about what the men shared and sought to analyze the data in an open-minded way, but it may be clear to the reader that my interpretation is inherently biased against practices

that I believe to be counterproductive to education and I am obviously in favor of incorporating more caring practices into correctional education.

While my experience as a prison teacher may limit my perspective and creates a bias, it is also an advantage because it is helpful in recognizing the limitations of what teachers are able to do in the correctional environment. I feel that my perspective has been helpful in working towards understanding changes that are both practical and realistic.

Limitations to Implementing Change - Correctional Context

As men in the conversational gathering described, the constant threat of violence and the survival mentality limits the effectiveness of education, both the ability to attend, and the ability to retain learning. They shared that threats of violence often prevent men in prison from making school a priority The prison has two purposes: *punishment/confinement* and *rehabilitation* (Elliott, 2007; Khahaifa, 2024; Ricciardelli et al., 2018; Schoenfeld & Everly, 2023) and in many cases, confinement takes priority over rehabilitation. Because men in prison are experiencing coerced confinement, violence is inherent. This includes inmate to inmate violence, inmate to staff violence, and staff to inmate violence (Ricciardelli et al., 2018; Schoenfeld & Everly, 2023). There is little, if anything that teachers can do to change this fact.

The contradiction between confinement and rehabilitation is contentious. In the best-case scenario, the school is a place that fosters relationships between teachers and students and relationships between the students themselves. Creating a feeling of community, safety, and support can lead students to feel a sense of agency in the school and this climate is conducive to personal growth (Auty & Liebling, 2024). In many cases, the school is the only place where people from different units can cross paths without arousing suspicion from officers. The problem is that the atmosphere of connectedness and interaction, and where people from all different units in the prison can feel welcome is also an atmosphere that creates opportunities for exchanging contraband like drugs or weapons. My assertion in this research is that teachers can show care to students while maintaining professional boundaries on an individual level. Offering care to students in a correctional education setting in the ways I have defined care in this research does not open teachers to security concerns, but care in the teacher-student relationship does not necessarily influence interactions between students. Teachers must still be aware of dynamics between students in the school, which brings up the tension of the teacher's role to build trusting, caring relationships while also performing a role in dynamic security, as discussed in the literature review. Regardless of the strength of individual student teacher relationships, students in the school may still seek to use the space in ways that compromise security; that is to say, drugs and weapons compromise the safety of incarcerated people and prison staff. It is this security mindset (Schoenfeld & Everly, 2023) that will always taint teacher-student relationships in correctional education. This is the biggest barrier to fully applying care in correctional education and I suggest that because of this, while teachers can adapt their practice to become more influenced by the ethic of care, the prison context makes it impossible to have an authentically caring relationship with students in the sense that Noddings (1995, 2005) defines it.

Finally, anticolonialism in prison education is limited by the inherent disconnection from land. Because Indigenous knowledge is fundamentally based on relationships with the land (Simpson, 2004), possibilities for implementing Indigenous ways of learning are severely limited in prison education. Developing teaching practices that build more opportunities for connection

to land-based learning in a prison setting would be valuable in advancing anticolonial education in prisons.

Limitations to Implementing Change - Colonial Policy and Practice

There are limits to applying anticolonialism in correctional education from a practical standpoint. Colonial factors like external motivations for education and coercive or punitive policies are factors that limit the degree to which correctional education can be anticolonial.

Multiple times in the conversational gathering, participants referenced the correctional plan as an externally imposed motivation to go to school. CD-720 (CSC, 2025) specifies that any person admitted to custody without a grade 12 diploma will have education added to their correctional plan. Participants perceived this stipulation to be CSC's responsibility to the justice system rather than to benefit the student. The participants are not wrong when they describe that correctional education is not intended to benefit the student. A 2015 CSC report on education and programming (Richer et al., 2015) describes the goals of correctional education as increasing public safety, supporting the economy, and reducing recidivism. These goals show the colonial mindset of CSC where men in prison are viewed as commodities to generate wealth or objectified as deficient others who must be controlled. The colonial view of education to shape a person in this way is counter to self-determination. Men in the conversation described that correctional education needs to work for the student and that they should see obvious benefits of their learning. As long as correctional education is externally motivated, it cannot be caring nor can it be anticolonial.

In Appendix A, I emphasize that teachers can use CSC policies to justify caring teaching approaches. At the same time, there are policies that work against building care in correctional education. To go along with the external motivation, punitive policies impact an incarcerated person's income if they refuse to participate in education. CD-730 (CSC, 2016) states that if a person refuses any programming on their correctional plan (which includes education), they can only earn a reduced pay rate until they agree to participate. This means that if a person is working as an institutional cleaner at B-level pay, earning $6.35 per day, they will get a 20% pay cut to $5.25 per day (D-level pay) for their cleaning job until they agree to attend school. This is a punitive policy that is used to force inmates into school whether they want to engage or not. Being coerced into education is obviously the opposite of a caring teaching approach. This puts a teacher in a difficult position where they must choose to enforce coercive, colonial policies that damage the relationship between the teacher and student (before the teaching relationship has even started). Where these limitations exist, teachers may be able to advocate for policy changes. CSC policies that entrench colonial practice are a delicate area because going against these policies is likely to result in reprimands or possibly dismissal.

Conclusion

This research reconceptualizes what it means for teachers to express care in correctional education. Where previous literature on care in correctional education provided vague generalities about what care looks like in the prison school, contributions from participants in this research show that care is complex and requires considerable investment from the teacher in both emotional, relational areas and professional, academic areas.

Care in prison is complicated by the settler colonial nature of prison and the coerced control which is the basis for incarceration. Along with this, prison employs the colonial practice of othering; othering based on racial hierarchies, and othering based on superiority of staff over incarcerated people. Colonial thought and practice in the prison extends into education where a Eurocentric curriculum narrowly defines what type of knowledge is valued. However, the school can be a site of anticolonialism where teachers express care and support educational self-determination. The controlling way of managing people aligns with an ethic of justice which is punitive, distant, objective, and devoid of emotion (Baier, 1995; Juujarvi, 2003; Noddings, 1995). The tension between control and care impacts people's experiences living in prison and going to school in prison

Indigenous philosophies stand in contrast to the detached ethic of justice, as does the ethic of care. From Nêhiyaw and Anishinaabe perspectives, learning is based on relationships and personal experiences incorporating both thinking and doing (Leon & Nadeau, 2018; Peltier, 2021; Steinhauer, 2023; Twance, 2019). Learning relationships are reciprocal with the student having responsibilities to the teacher and the teacher having responsibilities to the student (Steinhauer, 2023). Similarly, an ethic of care is grounded in relationships and responds to the student's expressed needs. Caring education and Indigenous views of learning recognize that learning is farther reaching than academic outcomes and includes building identity and connections to the community and the natural world.

Correctional programming has shifted focus over the years with programs that seek to empower people in prison. While these approaches use apparently caring language that frames programs as building independence and accountability, the premise is inherently flawed because participation in these programs is coerced and program content ignores systemic factors that influence crime, erroneously placing all the blame on the individual (Moore & Hannah-Moffat, 2005). Further to this, although perspectives in programming may have changed, the security mindset (Schoenfeld & Everly, 2023) which perpetuates a fear of people in prison as dangerous and manipulative still persists. This perception inhibits a caring environment in prisons. In contrast to this, research shows that a prison social climate where incarcerated people are treated with respect and where staff build supportive relationships can lead to stability that enhances personal growth and engagement with treatment programs (Auty & Liebling, 2020; Khahaifa, 2024; Liebling, 2011; Liebling & Kant, 2018).

In the conversational gathering, participants shared ideas that align with Indigenous philosophies and an ethic of care. Men were critical of current approaches to education which seem to be irrelevant to student needs, rushed, and motivated by external goals. The stories they

shared showed how teachers can show care in correctional education. These four themes developed:

- Relationships are central to caring education. This includes building relationships with a positive attitude and maintaining individual relationships through persistence and encouragement.
- Recognizing personal experiences and context is important. Teaching in prison is different than other learning contexts and poses considerable challenges for students and teachers.
- A caring teacher is attentive to the learning needs of students, which includes desires for content, delivery, and learning context.
- Caring teachers recognize that the purpose of education is not only academic, but to encourage personal growth through understanding identity.

These themes build on the previously documented understanding of care in correctional education, extending care from the emotional domain in to more concrete areas that relate directly to educational support for students. Further to this, existing literature on care in correctional education described concerns that expressing care in prison could make staff vulnerable to manipulation (Elliott, 2007; Patrie, 2017; Wright, 2004a). Reconceptualizing care is essential to dismissing the concern of manipulation resulting from care because none of the aspects of care that men described included revealing personal information or creating vulnerabilities that would open teachers to manipulation. In fact, the conversation with participants showed that students value teachers with the ability to maintain professional boundaries with students.

This research makes a valuable contribution to existing literature on correctional education because it deepens the understanding of how teachers can effectively support students in prison. As Noddings (2005) describes, care is not a specific set of rules, but a way of being in relation that is specific to the people in the relationship. However, we should not interpret this to mean that the concept of care should be completely undefined. Certainly, the specifics of a caring relationship will be different for each student, but the ideas that men in the conversation shared show that there are some key aspects of how teachers can engage with students to build caring relationships in the prison school context. The tension between control and care in correctional education may feel limiting to teachers, but the men who shared their stories show that it is possible to build supportive, caring relationships that can be responsive to the needs and desires of incarcerated men.

The Last Word

At the end of each validation meeting, I explained to the participants that it was important to me in this research to try to put their voices at the forefront so that the focus would be on their experiences and ideas. That is why I wanted to give them the last word in the report. I described that most of the people reading this research would be correctional educators and gave them this prompt: *If you imagine that you are looking into a video camera and could tell prison teachers across Canada anything you wanted, what would you say to them?* This is what they said:

Participant 2: “Where did you lose that part of you that wanted to teach? I get that it’s disheartening to see all these people failing, but where did you give up? Why did you give up? If you don’t have it in you to teach delinquent adults in a prison, don’t do it.”

Participant 3: “Don’t give up. Some people want to learn but don’t want to give that appearance. Humour and sarcasm are the ways to get a group of individuals with severe social discrepancies to participate together.”

Participant 4: “Let the person that wants to do the schooling do it. Put them before pressuring people who don’t want to be there.”

Monias: “Give everyone a chance.”

Participant 6: “Give a shit.”

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Appendix A - Policies Supporting Care in Correctional Education.

In this section, I synthesize my experience as a correctional educator with the ideas participants shared in the conversation. It is my opinion that correctional educators can interpret existing policies in a way that supports teaching approaches which challenge the current status quo to better meet the needs of students in prison. Below I explain my view of how policies can be used to the advantage of teachers and students.

Personalized Learning

It is essential for teachers to recognize that CSC policy encourages personalized learning experiences for students. It can be challenging to rationalize using prep time in a way that is different than the status quo, or to work with students in a way that is different than what is the typically accepted norm. However, using CSC policy to support their decisions could allow teachers to feel empowered to exercise their professional opinions in how they support their students. This section focuses on three main provisions in CD-720 that can be interpreted to support relationship building and teaching approaches that are more responsive to individual learning needs. These areas are the unique needs of students, Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and adapted education programs.

CD-720, section 10 specifies the responsibilities of a teacher. In addition to ongoing reporting, the main responsibilities are to:

a. develop lesson plans and deliver and/or facilitate education programs based on the provincial curriculum and the inmate's education assessments, needs and objectives, including the adaptation of learning materials as required

b. in consultation with the inmate, update the Individual Education Plan, as required

What is significant about these responsibilities is that the student's needs and objectives are central to lesson plans and delivery. This aligns with what participants shared in the conversational gathering about the need to know each individual student and to provide education that will be useful to students (and what is useful varies from student to student). Part b identifies that education planning should be a collaboration between the student and teacher – another point that was raised by a participant in the group. In addition to these clauses, CD-720.20 describes, "The unique needs of Indigenous offenders, including Indigenous social history, must be considered throughout the education process" (CSC, 2025).

The document clarifies the exact definition of an *Individual Education Plan* which specifies: "intended for the use of Teachers, Guidance Counsellors and inmates, an individual education plan identifies an inmate's unique education requirements to meet their learning needs and priorities" (CSC, 2025). The language in this definition acknowledges that each student has unique needs and priorities, as the men in the conversation described. In keeping with this policy, teachers can and *should* allocate time at the start of new education assignments to meet with students and have a meaningful conversation about the education process, student goals, and what options are available. This conversation should not be rushed or superficial, but taken on intentionally and with focus, in a scenario where the student and teacher can have time and space to think and respond. Considering potential vulnerabilities or embarrassment, it is advisable to have these conversations in a private space. The IEP should not be a one-time discussion but

revisited consistently with the student as indicated in the policy. Along with the IEP, consideration of *learning difficulties* can enhance students' education experiences.

The definition of *learning difficulties* creates an opportunity for teachers to reframe the learning experience in prison. In CD-720, a learning difficulty is defined as, "the presence of characteristics that influence the offender's ability to benefit from an education program, including but not limited to: learning disabilities, impaired cognitive functioning, physical disabilities, and/or mental health care needs" (CSC, 2025). Based on the sample of participants in the conversational gathering, more than half of the men in prison experience some form of learning disability or neurodivergence. In addition to this, participants described the survival mentality and stress of life in prison which impacts the ability to take part in school. With this in mind, arguably, *all* correctional education students experience learning difficulties.

The combination of Individual Education Plans and learning difficulties builds the foundation for teachers to take individual time with their students, personalize education, and give leeway for issues like varied attendance, or slow completion of schoolwork. Let me be clear that I am not suggesting that teachers simply excuse these concerns, rather that teachers should be attuned to individual student abilities and behaviours and have an ongoing dialogue with students to develop a learning plan that works for the individual, and that the teacher can hold the student accountable to.

With IEPs and learning difficulties in mind, teachers may want to consider assigning their students to *adapted* Adult Basic Education levels rather than the standard ABE assignments. *Guideline 720-1* specifies: "Adapted Programs, which correspond to each of the four Adult Basic Education levels, are education programs that have been adapted for inmates with specific education needs that cannot be accommodated in the traditional Adult Basic Education curriculum" (GL-720, CSC, 2015). Arguably, an adapted ABE assignment may be more fitting for students, considering the learning difficulties that are inherently present in prison education. CD-720 directs that adapted education programs may be offered to inmates on an as needed basis, and the adapted designation acknowledges that the teacher is required to take more time working with the student and that the student may progress through education more slowly than might otherwise be expected. If a teacher has learned about their student's abilities and learning objectives and is tailoring content and activities for each student, that teacher is, by definition, offering *adapted ABE programming* to each student.

Considering participants' perception that correctional education is rushed and superficial, and Murray Sinclair's (1997) encouragement that the justice system needs to slow down and take time to do things right, teachers need to slow down, build relationships, and provide quality learning experiences for the men they are working with.

Interactive Learning

CSC policies also encourage interactive learning experiences. Teachers may feel their creative teaching opportunities are restricted in the prison environment, so using established policy to justify taking the time to develop and deliver interactive learning experiences may be empowering for teachers.

There is considerable literature criticizing the risk-needs-responsivity (R-N-R) assessment (Bonta & Andrews, 2007) which is used to determine security classification for

people in prison (Hannah-Moffat, 2016; K. S. Montford & Moore, 2018; Monture-Angus, 1999; Moore & Hannah-Moffat, 2005). However, Bonta and Andrews explicitly describe the need for interactive learning and attending to the needs of individual learners. They describe that to maximize a student's learning experience "requires attention not only to whether the offender is a visual learner or an auditory learner but a whole range of personal-cognitive-social factors" (Bonta & Andrews, 2007, p.7)The authors further describe that hands-on learning is essential to effective learning, stating that educational delivery "must ensure that abstract concepts are kept to a minimum and there is more behavioural practice than talking" (p. 7).

CD-720 also makes provisions that support hands-on learning. One of the teacher's responsibilities is to "develop lesson plans and deliver and/or facilitate education programs based on the provincial curriculum and the inmate's education assessments, needs and objectives, including the adaptation of learning materials as required" (CSC, 2025). If the teacher believes that a student will benefit from hands-on learning experiences, then they should incorporate these experiences into the classroom. By extension, time to research and develop these interactive learning experiences is justified. CD-720 also indicates that teachers should account for "the unique needs of Indigenous offenders" (CSC, 2025) in the education process. Given the holistic approaches to learning described by Peltier (2021) and Steinhauer (2023), facilitating hands-on learning, or educational experiences that incorporate mind, body, heart, and spirit, is attending to the needs of Indigenous students.

Considering the value of responding to student needs, Bonta and Andrews (2007) also specify that it is essential to "consider personal strengths and socio-biological-personality factors. Treatment should then be tailored to these factors, as they have the potential to facilitate or hinder treatment" (p.7). This statement highlights the fact that teachers must have a deep understanding of the student to teach more effectively. This is significant, because even with the detached, statistic-based, objective R-N-R approach, the authors emphasize the need for humanizing, caring relationships that recognize individual strengths and needs. Recommendations in the R-N-R report and in CD-720 reference the need to understand the learner and their individual needs; in some cases it is implied, and in some cases it is very direct.

One obvious drawback of developing personalized work is the amount of time it can take to create these learning opportunities. Along with this, the teacher must be highly familiar with course outcomes. Allowing a student to choose what they want to work on in class requires the teacher to have expert knowledge of learning outcomes, awareness of cross-curricular connections, and the ability to manage ongoing assessment of the student's learning in a flexible way. In this situation, the teacher becomes an intermediary between the highly controlled Eurocentric curriculum and the non-linear, self-determined learning path set by the student. The teacher's job becomes recognizing the knowledge and skills the student is demonstrating and matching them to curricular outcomes and guiding the student to deeper learning opportunities to cover learning outcomes that may be unmet by personal exploration alone.

This idealized approach to teaching is challenging because of the limited preparation time that teachers have, and the variety of skill levels in a correctional education classroom. This is another scenario where teachers may benefit from a detailed awareness of policy, using it to justify taking time in their schedule to develop learning opportunities for students. It becomes a question of quality over quantity – creating quality learning experiences (emotional/subjective) versus seeking a high quantity of course completions (emotionless/objective). Participants in the

conversation were critical of what they perceived as the rushed, *quota based* approach to education and expressed desire for more meaningful, personalized learning experiences, where teachers are *actually teaching*.

Appendix B – Detailed Positionality: Locating Myself in the Research

In this section, I share the story of my personal history, experiences, and beliefs. Kovach (2018) notes that "through prologue, personal story is given value and recognized as integral to knowledge construction" (p.144). While it may be longer than a typical positionality statement, I feel the narrative and storytelling aspects of it algin with an Indigenous research paradigm and are appropriate to give a well-rounded view of who I am, my beliefs, and motivation.Sharing my story creates insight into how my research questions developed and how I engaged with the people who shared their stories for the research.

My Journey

My career has been an unexpectedly winding road that led me to my current employment as a correctional educator and graduate student. Having grown up with two parents involved in education, I felt the appeal of teaching early in my teenage years. After graduating with a teaching degree from the University of Winnipeg, I traveled to South Korea where I taught English for two years.

Following my time in Korea, I taught high school English for one year before getting a job as a teacher and education coordinator at an Indigenous-based adult education centre in the North End of Winnipeg. At this school, I had the opportunity to learn from Elder Stella Blackbird and Elder Audrey Bone who shared traditional teachings with the students and staff. This was also the first time I was able to take part in Sweats and Pipe Ceremonies. It was clear that bringing teachings and ceremonies into the school was both meaningful and motivating for our adult students. The cultural aspects of the school led me to personal growth as well. Through the process of interviewing people for the mature grade 12 program at the school, it became obvious that the public school system was not working for Indigenous students. This initiated my interest in exploring shortcomings of public education in supporting Indigenous students.

Currently, I teach in a federal prison in Canada, where I see the effects of the school-to-prison pipeline firsthand. None of my students have finished high school, and many of them did not attend school past grade 9. Listening to their stories, it is clear that leaving school was a result of a confluence of factors, but racist teachers and peers, harsh punishments, and negative assumptions about their intelligence certainly did nothing to motivate them to stay in school. It is now my job to work against these negative experiences, to create a supportive and engaging learning atmosphere, and to share knowledge in a way that is applicable to their lives and experiences and holds value, hopefully opening opportunities to a satisfying future.

Motivation for the Proposed Study

Eber Hampton (1995) explains the importance of recognizing the motivation behind the research. The motivation behind my proposed research is multifaceted: academic, professional, and based on personal beliefs and values. The most obvious motivation behind the research is to fulfill requirements to earn a graduate degree. I chose to pursue the thesis-based route rather than course-based route because I believed that I would have a deeper learning experience by engaging in my own research focused on a topic that interested me. My intention was to research a topic that is directly applicable to the work that I do. As a correctional educator, I recognize that education is an opportunity that can have a significant impact on the lives of the students that I work with, especially because for some students, school in prison is their first positive experience with formal education (Sachdev, 1996). My work gives me insight into what I

perceive as shortcomings and successes of correctional education. Experience also allows me to see the transformative potential of correctional education and opportunities to work towards social justice. Because of this potential, I also feel a moral obligation to support my students to the best of my ability. I feel that an important aspect of my position is the responsibility to build relationships with students and I strive to offer educational opportunities that fit the needs and personal goals that they express. This sense of responsibility and commitment informed my work as a researcher and provided a foundation for relationships with the study participants.

Although I see problems and strengths within the correctional education system, my perspective is significantly different than that of my students. While I strive to build relationships with my students, it is important to acknowledge that I learned my teaching techniques at university, a western institution, which teaches Eurocentric pedagogical approaches, based on a Eurocentric curriculum. I was educated to be a teacher in the public school system – the same public school system that did not adequately support any of the men I now work with as students. This raises significant questions: What should I be teaching men who are in prison? How should I be teaching them? It was my belief that engaging with men who have participated in correctional education would help to answer these questions. I wanted to improve my professional practice, but the reason I wanted to improve my practice was to benefit the men that I work with. The desire-based methodology required me to focus on the hopes and wants of the participants, so it was essential for me to shift the language of these questions. Therefore, I wonder: What do men in prison want to learn? How do men in prison want to learn?

Deconstructing Personal Colonial Biases

As an outsider, that is, a non-Indigenous person and a person who has never lived in prison, it was essential for me to consider my perceptions and how I am influenced by colonialism. Calderon (Calderon, 2016) suggests that dominant narratives and social norms make it "challenging to see how drenched we are in settler colonial habits, values, and notions of civic life" (p.6, emphasis in original). When I examined the way I think about my work as a correctional educator and as a graduate student, it occured to me that in my mind, the idea of inmate is virtually synonymous with Indigenous offender. This realization gave me pause and I considered the association between these two words or identities in my way of thinking. There are a number of factors that have influenced my perception. Working as a correctional educator, the majority of my students identify as Indigenous. This is not surprising, considering that in the prairie region of CSC between 55 to 65% of men who are federally incarcerated are Indigenous (OCI, 2022). This is a scenario where unfortunately, statistics confirm stereotypes (a matter deeply rooted in our colonial society). I also grew up seeing TV and newspaper reports of crime often directly related to Indigenous people. These images influenced the way I thought about Indigenous people and how my peers talked about Indigenous people. Racist jokes and rude comments were common among my peers. Dehumanizing language that de-valued Indigenous people made important problems that Indigenous people face seem abstracted, irrelevant, and trivial to white people. This is a benefit of white privilege when people are detached from the very real, very relevant challenges that Indigenous people and people from other marginalized groups experience. Considering messages and experiences at school, white teachers I had were unable or unwilling to engage in informed discussions related to Indigenous history in Canada or contemporary Indigenous issues, let alone describe the complexity of these factors in social, economic, and political dynamics in Canada. Unfortunately, as a young person, I did not interact

with many Indigenous people so I did not see the counter-narrative to these influences around me which were at best complicit, and at worst, harshly racist.

Self-Locating Through Current Understandings

Much of my education over the last few years has helped me to understand that dominant narratives serve to dehumanize Indigenous people to rationalize the status quo of inequality and oppression which perpetuates white privilege. At times I feel conflicted about my work as a correctional educator. How can I be a part of the solution if I am part of the problem? Bonds and Inwood (2016) describe that "well-intended scholarship and policies – produced through white settler subjectivities and embedded within settler institutions – often rely on gestures rather than structural change, which re-entrenches rather than destabilizes settler social formations" (p.728). This is why it is essential for my research to include voices of Indigenous people, sharing their own stories, and making recommendations for change in correctional education. I strive to be an Indigenous ally, and I know this includes educating myself, recognizing my own privilege, listening to Indigenous voices, and understanding that Indigenous people define their own needs. This thesis research is a part of my journey of allyship. Kovach (2021) states, "By anchoring ourselves in place, land, culture, and community, we show how personal experience and community connections are interwoven into our researching" (p.145). In the following paragraphs, I express my positionality through these areas.

Place

When I consider place, I understand it as both physical location as well as a mental and emotional aspect. In the same way that language and perception are interdependent, in my understanding places hold a meaning beyond their physical nature. For me, a pivotal aspect of place is that while I strive to build an understanding of the struggles people face as individuals, I can step out of that place, which is both physical and emotional. The option to leave suffering and oppression behind at work, if I choose, is an embodiment of my privilege. My students cannot step out of that place.

Engaging in research with formerly incarcerated people to build a better understanding of aspirations and educational desires of people in prison helps not only to improve experience in correctional education, but also to create more opportunity for people after they are released from prison and hopefully increase their likelihood of meeting their goals in the community, thus avoiding the oppressive prison environment.

Land

In the same way that place is not simply a location, land is not simply location either. According to local lore, the spot where Stony Mountain Institution is built was once a cavernous limestone area where garter snakes used to mate each season. The story goes that laborers tasked with building the prison refused to work when so many snakes slithering through the tall grass made it appear to wave in the wind although it was a calm day. At the foreman's orders, all of the mating dens, the entire area, was simply flooded with concrete. This, they felt, remedied the problem. What a metaphoric way for a prison to come into existence. This is how land is managed in the western way, and how people are managed too.

My ancestors were farmers in Ukraine and came to Canada during the 1920s. One side of my family lived in the city and the other side lived in the Interlake area of Manitoba. They

purchased farmland and a farmhouse and made a living through farming. The land they were living on, and farming, was historically used and cared for predominantly by Ojibway people until Treaty 1 in 1871. Government policies allowed my ancestors to buy and use this land to generate wealth and financial stability (McLean, 2018). My grandfather started a trucking company to ship goods throughout the Interlake and into Winnipeg and later he moved his family to Selkirk where he opened a tire shop which served the town and farmers in the area. Until 1907, the St. Peter's Indian Reservation was located on both sides of the Red River where the present day City of Selkirk is located (CBC, 2022). The relocation of St. Peter's to the current location of Peguis First Nation, west of Lake Winnipeg, has since been deemed illegal (CBC, 2022). My grandfather's business was based on economic growth in Selkirk which would not have occurred without forced relocation of the St. Peter's band. So, my family has directly benefited, not once, but twice from government land appropriation practices. While my family history of land is connected to colonial violence, I have also experienced the positive powers that the land holds.

During my time teaching at the adult education centre I had the opportunity to go medicine picking with Elder Stella and Elder Audrey. This was a learning experience for all of the students and teachers. Seeing the students happily forage through the bush looking for medicines the Elders had shown them was a wonderful example of the sense of belonging that grows from being on the land. Hearing excited shouts when someone found a patch of bearberry or rosehips was a reminder of the interconnection of land, community, and culture. Being on the land provided a natural gateway for students to connect to their history and live their culture while building bonds with each other. At the prison, I have experienced how gardening and bee keeping are activities that bring out the caring nature of my students and their desire to nurture, as they carefully tend plants and gently handle the bees while they go about the work of maintaining the hives. Connecting with nature in this way reminds us all about the place we have in the world and that we as humans are not at the top of a hierarchy, but a small point on an enormous, interconnected web.

Culture

When I think about culture, I recognize a few different cultural aspects that influence my positionality. I am influenced by Canadian culture, Indigenous culture, and prison culture.

The narrative of Canadian culture was the foundation for who I am as I grew through stages of my life. I have been influenced by narratives of Canadians as peacekeepers; a horde of respectful citizens, constantly offering apologies. However, this dominant culture reinforces white supremacy (Bonds & Inwood, 2016) and white privilege. As previously discussed, this aspect of my culture is something I am actively working to dismantle and is an ongoing journey.

Prison culture is another influence on me. As noted in the literature review, the prison is a place of overwhelming oppression and deficit thinking. It is impossible to overlook the attitudes that some staff have towards the men they work with. I am often greeted with the why bother attitude when going to the range to support students. I have had many students share with me that it is difficult to grow when all of the staff are focusing on your negative actions in the past and assuming the worst about you. This is why the school in the prison is an important place. The culture in the school in many ways runs counter to the rest of the prison culture. Teachers are supportive, encouraging and typically assume the best of our students. This is why values of Indigenous culture are so important in my teaching experience and in this research.

My experiences with Indigenous culture came first through my work at the adult ed centre, and now through my experiences working with Indigenous students and Elders at the prison. Contrary to some of the negative stereotypes about what constitutes Indigenous culture, I have seen positive, strong, and hopeful embodiments of culture. Based on my experiences, some important aspects of Indigenous culture include value and respect for history and tradition, caring for family and friends, protecting nature, sharing with the community and supporting other people, and valuing self and others. I worked to engage with participants in this study in caring and respectful ways that honor Indigenous values and protocols.

Community

I am a member of the prison community and the community of correctional educators across Canada. In this position, I am also a part of the community of students and teachers who work and learn in the school. My hope is that through this research, student experiences in the prison school will improve, which will in turn have positive effects on students' respective communities outside of prison. Because the goal of this research was to improve the prison learning environment through engaging with communities of formerly incarcerated people, it was imperative to build relationships with these communities. I shared this final thesis report with participants and I also hope to share the research with the correctional educator community through professional development presentations.

Positions of Power

There is no question that a power imbalance exists between my students and me. Waitlists to enter school or programming, correctional plans, curriculum, and paysheets are all examples that demonstrate an unequal power dynamic in correctional education.

Due to the high proportion of men in prison who do not have a grade 12 diploma and Commissioner's Directive-720, which mandates that inmates must pursue education if they do not have a diploma (CSC, 2025), there is regularly a waitlist to be assigned to school and attend classes. Teachers have a designated number of students in class and teachers approach students to attend school as they have room in their classes. Because of this scenario, ultimately, I have control over who participates in my classroom. In some cases I have chosen to exclude a student from class for safety or security reasons, or in other cases due to class size and available resources. This practice also means that if a person is motivated to attend school, they may not be allowed to. Conversely, it could also mean that a person who does not want to attend school is compelled to because of details on their correctional plan. Being aware of this dynamic, when there is space in my classroom, I present school as an opportunity to a potential student, if they want to participate. I have learned that there is no benefit for anyone in trying to make someone attend school if they do not want to. If an inmate comes to the school asking to get involved with my class, I will accept them as a new student. If I am unable to work with them in my classroom because of class size, I refer them to another teacher or encourage them to take part in other initiatives in the school. I believe that if a person is motivated, we should make a place for them in the school community.

A deeper problem with the waitlist is that not only does it prevent people from accessing education, but it may also affect parole opportunities and individual security classifications which can influence cascading from maximum, to medium, to minimum security facilities (OCI,

2022; O'Connell & Laniyonu, 2023). Participating in education is on many men's correctional plans and the waitlist can prevent people from addressing the specifications of their correctional plans (this is true of other correctional programs as well). This is another way I have influence over lives of the men in the facility where I work.

Teachers are also required to write student reports every six months. What I write in a student's report will be seen by the student, but will also be read by the parole board, a student's case management team, and other decision makers. I recognize that this is considerable power to influence how my student is perceived by others who make key decisions that impact his life. For this reason, while I write reports honestly, I work to highlight a student's successes and positive qualities which are often minimized or omitted in other scenarios or institutional reports. I have had many students describe to me that staff consistently focus on their crime and history rather than acknowledging positive actions and attitudes that men are working to develop.

Curriculum and learning content is another area where I exercise power over my students. Federal institutions in the prairie region use curriculum from the province of Alberta. Students must meet standards set by Alberta Education to earn a grade 12 diploma. There are mandatory courses that students must complete. Like Manitoba Education standards, English, Math, Science, and Social Studies are the core components. There is already considerable debate around Eurocentric curriculum and validity of what students learn in public school (Gebhard, 2012; Raible & Irizarry, 2010; Vaandering, 2010) and these concerns apply in correctional education as well. As the teacher, I control assessment and make decisions about when a student has adequately demonstrated competencies and can move on to the next level of education. These decisions are based on my professional opinion as a teacher. The students have control over how often they complete schoolwork which influences how quickly they progress, but as the teacher, I have the final say of when students have completed a grade and when they have satisfied conditions of graduation. In an effort to balance the concerns with curriculum, I try to learn more about my students' interests and work to create assignments and activities that are meaningful to them. I try to develop assignments in cooperation with students so they have input about the topics they will focus on and how they will demonstrate their learning. I have seen that giving students more control over their education helps to increase motivation and a sense of personal satisfaction.

Pay sheets and attendance are another area where students have limited agency. Inmates get paid to attend school in the same way they would be paid for other institutional jobs (kitchen, cleaning, carpentry, etc.). Students must attend school on a regular basis to get paid every two weeks. The problem with this is that a number of institutional interruptions could prevent students from coming to school. For example, work release is generally called at 9am and 1pm, however sometimes it is delayed by 15 to 45 minutes. Factors out of a student's control can inhibit his ability to demonstrate time management skills. It is important for me as the teacher to be aware of problems that may prevent a student from attending so that I can pay him accurately. Institutional pay is pivotal for men in prison because it allows them to buy things from the canteen. On the surface, this may seem trivial, but items from the canteen are used as currency for the underground prison economy, and if a person cannot pay debts they have, their safety may be in jeopardy. So, in a broad view, my decision to pay a student or not can influence their safety and well-being. Knowing this, I try to be flexible with students and their attendance. I provide them with a schedule of when I am in class and ask them to decide when they can come to school. I understand that life in prison is filled with stresses from both inside and outside the

walls and I talk with my students individually to acknowledge these other aspects of life that might interfere with school.

Being aware of these power dynamics, I do my best to create opportunities for agency in my classroom and in the relationships I have with students. Through my experiences, I have learned that having genuine conversations in earnest with the men that I teach is the best way to create a meaningful relationship as a foundation for our learning together. One-sided assumptions inhibit trust and often lead to misunderstandings. Talking first, making a decision together, then taking action is how I strive to build a better dynamic in the classroom. This approach has allowed me to see the best in the students I work with.

How do I view my students based on my experiences?

One benefit of working as a correctional educator is that I have the opportunity to see the best qualities in my students. The nature of teaching in prison is such that I do not have the adversarial dynamic that characterizes the interactions between correctional officers and inmates. This affords me the ability to cultivate relationships and build a sense of understanding of the lives and experiences of the students I work with.

Through my experiences teaching incarcerated men, I have come to know that many of them are filled with hope, despite their difficult circumstances. I know students who are extremely creative, talented, and resourceful. The people I work with are appreciative of the things they have and often show their resilience through finding the best in a situation and persevering toward their goals despite numerous obstacles that they may face.

I believe that traumatic experiences can lead to poor mental health. Many of my students have experienced multiple traumas on an ongoing basis. Kindness, understanding, and encouragement are all factors in helping people to see their own inherent value, and this is a central part of my work. I believe that all people want to do their best and to make positive choices and I strive to make the classroom a place where people feel confident in making decisions that will have good outcomes for them.

A downside of working in the position I am in is the need to be aware of potential manipulation. Perhaps a student would tell me that they were not able to come to school because an officer did not allow them to leave the unit. Maybe a student will ask for a scribbler for to use as a journal when in fact, they will sell it to another inmate. It is possible that one student might try to distract me while another student takes an item from the classroom that they should not have. While these situations are potential problems, it is significant to note that in many cases, it is the prison environment of scarcity and the need for survival that leads to deceitful behaviours. I have quickly learned not to leave items in my classroom that can't go missing and that in the big picture, there is no benefit in withholding something as trivial as a scribbler. If a student is dishonest about why he did not come to class, it is because of a need for self-preservation and a fear of punishment. Open conversation and expressing genuine care for a student's well-being typically helps to overcome these issues in the teacher-student relationship.

By minimizing potential for distrust in the classroom and focusing on the positive qualities of each individual I work with, the classroom becomes an environment of

encouragement, trust, kindness, and growth. I approached the participants in this study with the same open mindset.

Dynamic with Study Participants

My experience with the men I teach in prison influenced how I perceived the participants in this study and how they perceived and responded to me.

For my part, I recognize that although each participant was incarcerated in the past, their experiences before prison, in prison, and after prison all vary greatly. It was important for me not to make assumptions about each person's experiences and to recognize that each participant's view has validity. I believe that in the same way each of my students puts in their best effort that each participant contributed to the study to the best of their ability. Because of my familiarity with correctional education, it was possible for me to extrapolate, assume, or otherwise place unintended meaning on statements people are sharing. It was useful to ask for clarification about ideas participants shared so I could represent their ideas accurately. This is why the validation process was particularly important in this research.

The power dynamic which I described in correctional education did not apply the same way in this research setting. Participants were not compelled to participate in the study and there was no waitlist or curriculum to be followed. Instead, the research questions provided a framework for discussion and the participants' ideas determined the direction of the conversation.

To build trust and context, I was transparent about my positionality during the recruitment process. My employment as a correctional educator had pros and cons as a researcher. On one hand, I may have more credibility and participants may have been able to speak more freely, because I am familiar with the correctional education setting. On the other hand, participants may have been apprehensive to be critical of correctional education for fear of upsetting me. They may also have provided answers they believe I want to hear to appease me, or to make sure they receive compensation for participating. I was clear in the recruitment process and during the research discussion that we were exploring experiences with the goal of improving correctional education, and that it was okay to be critical of policies and practices and that compensation would be provided regardless of their attitudes towards correctional education. To avoid any undue influence, I gave participants their compensation before the conversation started.

Core Commitments and Actions Toward Relational Accountability

Wilson (2008) cites Hampton (1995) to describe the tension between relational accountability and objectivity. While western research typically values objectivity divorced from relationships, relationships and honoring each person's reality is central to Indigenous values and methodology. Because of this, it was essential to acknowledge from the outset that this research is subjective in nature. My experiences in correctional education influenced how I understood what participants shared, but "…the analysis must be true to the voices of all the participants and reflect an understanding of the topic that is shared by researcher and participants alike" (Wilson, 2008, p. 101). Because of the difference in experiences between participants and the difference in

experience between me and any one participant, none of us can judge another's conclusions, only make new connections to ideas (Wilson, 2008). To support relational accountability, I included direct quotations from participants heavily throughout the data section of the thesis, giving the opportunity for readers to understand participants' connections to ideas and experiences of correctional education. A separate discussion section shared my own subjective interpretations and conclusions based on how I understand and connect to the ideas participants shared.

Readers may also question power alignments in this research. How can one be sure that I did not reproduce the views of those in power, or skew data in favour of CSC? This is another reason why it was essential to include direct quotations from participants as the focus of the research and allow readers to draw their own conclusions. The work is inherently critical of current correctional education practices.

Conclusion

My personal beliefs and experiences influence how I conducted the research, how I interpreted data, and how I presented the findings. In this section, I have endeavored to explain how my views have been shaped through my life and how my values and experiences have shaped the research questions. My positionality as a settler and an employee of the Correctional Service of Canada creates a tension between my personal and professional location and my desire to disrupt the ongoing colonial structures of prison and prison education. It strived to conduct the research in a respectful and meaningful way that sheds light on people's stories to transform correctional education and enhance outcomes for people who have been in prison and are working towards personal success.

Appendix C- Anticolonialism as a Journey

At the proposal defense for this thesis, the advisory board moved to discussion exploring the anticolonial methodology for the research. Advisory members suggested challenges and limitations to applying anticolonialism in prison education and in this research. Advisory members also encouraged me to consider anticolonialism as a journey.

A central part of my anticolonial journey has been questioning. Students regularly question learning content and how things are done in the school. Over 4 years, I have also considered and questioned ways of doing things and content that students are presented with. Questioning the idea of progress, Getachew and Mantena explain, can "disrupt the internalization of the superiority of European civilization among the colonized" (2021, p.367). I have experienced a transition from first starting to work as a correctional educator and learning about policies and practices to recognizing policies I think are problematic and questioning how they influence learning and life experience for men in prison.

Numerous authors write about the tension prison teachers experience between maintaining security and applying care in their teaching relationships (Elliott, 2007; Patrie, 2017; Wright, 2004a, 2004c). A part of this tension is the pressure to follow and enforce policies that a teacher disagrees with while participating in a colonial institution. A part of my journey, which is likely experienced by other staff who work in the prison system, is the crisis of conscience between striving for small change working inside a prison or rejecting the prison system outright by refusing to be employed there. If I am working in a prison, can I *be part of the solution*, or is my work inherently *part of the problem* by virtue of being embedded in the colonial prison system? Tuck and Yang (2012) identify settler *moves to innocence* which are "strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (p.10). I benefit financially and professionally from working as a correctional educator, so are my efforts at improving correctional education a self-serving *move to innocence*, justifying my continued participation in an oppressive system? Certainly, it can be viewed this way.

Whether my efforts are viewed as a move to innocence is open for debate, but I believe that building relationships with students and Elders is an anticolonial action that has benefits for students. I have been fortunate to have opportunities to learn from Elders who work at the prison. They have always been generous with sharing their time and knowledge. Another aspect of my anticolonial journey is that through my interactions with the Elders, I have learned more about Indigenous culture, history, and particularly, protocols. I don't hesitate to say that more than once, I have embarrassed myself, making missteps with Elders or when being a part of ceremonies but these are important learning experiences for me. The Elders I learn from have always been kind and supportive, encouraging me to build my knowledge and experiences.

I have learned the value of starting my planning process with asking advice from the Elders first, rather than coming to them with an idea in mind and looking for confirmation. This is an example of unintentionally privileging my western perspective over Indigenous knowledge or ways of learning. I recognize that the Elders are busy, so I thought it would be helpful to bring ideas to them in an effort to minimize the time I needed to talk with them. This view ignores the

value of taking time, having conversations, and coming to a situation with an open mind. It begs the question: if I already know what I want to do, why am I asking the Elders? To this end, *tokenism* is a pitfall that teachers should be aware of when they are looking for guidance from Elders or want to involve Elders or cultural aspects in activities or events. *Why am I asking for this person's help*? *What is the purpose of an Elder being here?* Are important questions to ask. It is essential to engage with cultural teachers and learning genuinely and with thoughtful reflection beforehand. A colleague of mine has shared advice she received that educational initiatives should be *Elder led* and *TRC led* [Truth and Reconciliation Commission].

I write this section to share about my own journey and to openly admit that I still have lots to learn. I do this to acknowledge that I am not an expert, and that teachers should not be expected to be experts in any field including cultural competence, but we must make an effort to change problematic behaviours and perceptions. As a settler-colonizer, I see it as my duty to learn and grow in these ways. Many people with a settler-colonizer background may feel embarrassed or implicated (Tuck & Yang, 2012) with a sense of guilt. Yes, we must recognize problems of colonialism that are both historical and still ongoing today. This is the truth aspect of the TRC. However, it is more productive to move past guilt and shame and work to make things right. The reconciliation aspect of the TRC is connected to anticolonialism through colonizer accountability (Kempf, 2009), which we can embrace as teachers on an individual level. We can build relationships, open our minds, and learn to make change. This research and the relationships growing from it are part of my anticolonial journey.

Appendix D – Data Collection Tools

Demographic Questionnaire

Name: _____ Date: _____

Cell Phone Number:
Does this phone number receive text messages? Yes / No

E-mail:

Facebook messenger name:

Circle the way you prefer to be contacted:

Phone call (cell) Text message (cell) E-mail Facebook Messenger

I will try to contact you by your preferred form of communication. If I do not receive a response, I will try to contact you using the other forms of contact information you provided.

Your answers to this information will help me to see if there are patterns or similarities in people's experiences. Any information you share is protected by privacy and confidentiality policies. If I use any of this information for writing the report, it will identified in the same way you have chosen to be identified in the report: anonymous, by nickname, or by real name.

1. How would you like to be identified in the report? Choose 1.

	Unidentified

	Nickname/Pseudonym	Which name?
	Real Name	Which name?

2. What year were you born?

3. Do you identify as a racialized person?

   Yes No Prefer not to answer

   My race/ethnicity is _____.

4. Do you identify as Indigenous?

   Yes No Prefer not to answer

If yes, which of the following groups do you belong to? Circle all that apply.

First Nations Métis Inuit

Other: _____ Prefer not to answer

5. Would you like to be more specific about your Indigenous heritage? For example, if you identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, you may want to identify which Nation or communities you belong to.

6. How many times have you been in federal prison?

7. Of the times you were in federal prison, did you go to school each time?

8. How long have you been out of federal prison?

Focus Group Guiding Questions

Introduction Script to be read by the principal investigator at the start of the conversational gathering.

I'm asking our group to share about experiences we had related to attending school when we were in prison ("correctional education"). When I say "in school," I'm asking about your experiences in school there, once you were 18 or older. If you had experiences in other schools as a younger person, that might be connected, and you could share a bit about that, but I hope we can focus on your time going to school in prison. I also hope we can focus on positive stuff, but if you think it's connected to talk about any negative things, we should make space to share about that too. I hope we can focus our conversation on positive things, strengths, and hopes, desires, or goals you might have. This is what some folks call desire-based *thinking and sharing.*

I wonder what you learned at school in prison that has been useful for you.

- Tell me about a time you said, "Man, I'm glad I learned that in school"
- Share a story where you had to solve a problem and used something you learned in school.
- Was there a time when you earned money or saved money because of something you learned in school?
    - What kind of skills did you end up using?

I wonder what kinds of activities helped you learn and grow.

- What kinds of activities in school (in prison) stand out in your memory?
    - I wonder why that is something you remember well.
    - I wonder if there's anything the teacher did that made this stand out to you.
- Can you share a situation where you felt better because of something you did in school?
    - Smarter?
    - Safer?
    - Stronger?
    - Proud of yourself?
        - *Any other positive describing words?*

I wonder if there are things teachers did or said that support your education.

- What showed your teacher cared about you and your learning?
- Are there things your teacher did that motivated you?

If you earned a grade 12 diploma in prison, has the diploma been useful to you?

I wonder what skills or ideas would be useful for men to learn at school in prison.

- Tell me about a time you said, “Man, I wish I learned that in school!”
- School would be better if we learned about _____.
- Can you share any stories about what would make transitioning to the community easier?
    - What would give a sense of stability?
    - Any obstacles that learning skills in school could help?

I wonder what kinds of activities could help men learn and grow.

- School would be better if we did things like _____.
- Tell me about what people should be doing in school.
- What makes for a good learning experience?
- What should a welcoming classroom look like?

I wonder what teachers could do or say that would support men’s education

- School would be better if teachers _____.
- What does it look like to have a supportive teacher?
- How can a teacher show they care about a student?