

Grandmothers Raising Grandchildren:
Development of a School Based Grandmother Support Group

by
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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Winnipeg

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Abstract

Many grandmothers are raising their grandchildren who are attending school. In particular, many Aboriginal grandmothers are raising their grandchildren which is a phenomenon that is prevalent in many First Nations communities in Canada. The implementation of tools of Canadian colonialism such as the residential school system, the Sixties Scoop, and the *Indian Act*, deprived many Aboriginal people of their identities, culture, and traditions, resulting in a legacy of abuse, alienation and dysfunction (Dempsey, 2014; Ginn & Kulig, 2015; Spencer, 2016; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015). As many Aboriginal survivors and adoptees did not have positive role models and did not acquire critical parenting skills, it is grandmothers who have taken on the responsibility of raising their grandchildren. Aboriginal caregiving grandmothers are taking a lead role in dealing with the intergenerational effects of the Canadian residential school system and the Sixties Scoop. It is likely that many would benefit from supports and services to aid them in this role.

This research study gained knowledge about the work grandmothers have done to raise their grandchildren. The research method that was used for this study was autoethnography. As a school administrator I started a Grandmother Support Group for grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren. Most of these grandmothers were Aboriginal. The data for the study consisted of my diaries regarding the work that was done for the start and continuation of a Grandmother Support Group. This research study found that the work of caregiving grandmothers made them agents of positive change within their homes and communities, and led to the development of a formal registered charity that continues to support grandmothers across the world in their efforts to improve circumstances for themselves and their families. It also provided me with a greater understanding of my own role as an ally, in which I learned to use my own privilege to influence spaces for positive change and reconciliation.

Key words: Grandmothers raising grandchildren, post-colonialism, Indigenous feminism, Canadian residential schools, Sixties Scoop, autoethnography methodology

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Chapter One: Introduction

Grandmothers raising grandchildren is a growing trend in today's global society (Chang & Hayter, 2011; Edwards & Taub, 2009; Fuller-Thomson, 2005; Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2011; Kelley, Whitley, & Sipe, 2007; Kelley, Whitley, Sipe, & Yorker, 2000; Pruchno & McKenney, 2002; Rodgers-Farmer, 1999; Wane & Kvuma, 2001; Williamson, Softas-Nall, & Miller, 2003). For example, in a number of African countries, grandmothers bear the crippling effects of AIDS within their families as they work to provide financial and emotional support for their orphaned grandchildren in a post-colonial era (Wane & Kavuma, 2001). In the United States, research shows that in recent years there has been a dramatic rise in the number of neglected, abused, and abandoned children placed formally and informally in the care of mostly African American grandmothers (Kelley et al., 2000; Waldrop, 2004; Williamson et al., 2003). An increase in drug and alcohol problems among young adults, an increase in divorce rates, harsher prison sentences for criminal acts, parental abandonment, mental illness, child mistreatment, and an increase in the teen pregnancy rate are leaving many children without adequate parental care (Edwards, 2009; Goodman, Potts, & Pasztor, 2007; Kelley et al., 2011; Waldrop, 2004; Williamson et al., 2003). As a consequence, many grandmothers have consented to be the primary caregivers of these grandchildren.

In Canada, the phenomenon of grandmothers raising their grandchildren is a common practice within many First Nations communities (Fuller-Thomson, 2005; Ginn & Kulig, 2015). The effects of Canadian colonization efforts, spanning over hundreds of years, stripped Aboriginal peoples of their identities, culture and traditions leaving in its wake a legacy of alienation, dysfunction and destruction (Ginn & Kulig, 2015; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015). As a result, many Aboriginal survivors of Canadian colonization efforts did not have positive role models and did not acquire critical parenting skills.

Although childcare in First Nations communities has historically been a communal event, the absence of parenting skills as a result of Canadian colonization efforts has led to grandmothers assuming a lead role in the raising of their grandchildren. Some Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren may struggle with the negative intergenerational impacts of the Canadian residential school system and the Sixties Scoop, the effects of which may be exacerbated by large age gaps. The prevalence of this phenomenon raises questions about the design of programmatic services to help meet the needs of grandmothers who take over parenting responsibilities for their grandchildren, and how to promote agency in building strong homes and communities.

This dissertation explored my personal experience in the development of a school based Grandmother Support Group. In particular, this dissertation gained knowledge about the circumstances, both structural and individual, that have led to the phenomenon of grandmothers raising their grandchildren, and examined what services and supports would aid in their role as primary caregivers. I described how the Grandmother Support Group started, and how this group of grandmothers moved forward in many positive ways. In essence, this dissertation explored my understandings of the extent to which the grandmother's group supported the processes of healing and reconciliation for Aboriginal grandmothers and their grandchildren to help address the negative impacts of Canadian colonization efforts. Post-colonialism and Indigenous feminism provided the theoretical framework for this research study as most of the grandmothers are Aboriginal.

Background to the Study

It was during my career as a school administrator that I first encountered Aboriginal grandmothers raising their grandchildren. In September 2004, I started my tenure as Vice-

Principal at St. John's High School, a Manitoba high school located in Winnipeg's North End with a Grade 7-12 student population of approximately 1200 students. As an administrator at this school I was in charge of all the Grade 7 and 8 students. This was the start of my challenging albeit rewarding and fulfilling administration career.

At the end of my first year I was greatly concerned about the many social issues with which we were dealing at St. John's High School. I had handed out 266 out-of-school suspensions; suspensions that were all a result of students violating our bottom line behavioral expectations (weapons, drugs and alcohol, physical assaults, vandalism, theft, and extreme non-compliance). I understood clearly that our form of punitive discipline was not working. My approach to dealing with negative outcomes has always been that if what one is doing is not working, then a change is necessary. The expectation that suspended students would miraculously return to class to demonstrate positive change was unrealistic. After a presentation on out-of-school suspension data, there was consensus among staff that we needed to change our approach to better manage and minimize the many negative behaviors with which we were dealing. Our vision for change was focused on finding better ways to address the underlying issues and causes of misbehavior, and working on building positive relationships. A decision from these conversations was to implement a restitution program to help students restore the harm they had done to others and return them to class strengthened (Gossen, 2004). As a contribution to this process I decided to visit the homes of all the Grade 7 and 8 students. My vision for these home visits was to develop a stronger connection between the school and community, and to work collaboratively with parents/guardians to help students make better behavioral choices. In the summer of 2005, I went to Winnipeg's North End to visit all of my students and to have conversations with their parents/guardians in the comfortable atmosphere of

their own homes. I visited 459 homes and was overwhelmed by the number of grandmothers I encountered who were raising their grandchildren, most of whom were Aboriginal grandmothers.

In the fall of 2006 I continued these efforts and visited all the homes of incoming Grade 7 students and new students in Grade 8. By the second year of my continued home visits, I began noticing some positive changes. Once again I was overwhelmed by this phenomenon of grandmothers raising grandchildren. At one point I spoke to an Aboriginal grandmother in my office who was raising a very difficult grandchild. She looked lonely, frustrated, and utterly exhausted. I was overcome with compassion for her and asked if she would like to go for coffee sometime. She was quick to jump at this opportunity for support. I called two other grandmothers I had spoken with earlier in the week and invited them to join us. On our arranged day, I picked up the grandmothers and we went out for coffee and dessert. After initial introductions, they chatted like they were long lost friends. They talked about the many challenges of being primary caregivers of their grandchildren in an area rife with gangs, criminal activity, violence, drug and alcohol use, and poverty, while at an age of generally decreased health and energy. Invigorated by the conversation and the opportunity to connect with other grandmothers who were in the same situation, they asked if they could get together again. I readily agreed and picked them up again the following month. This was the origin of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group (Cowan, 2009; Penner, 2008).

The establishment of grandmother support groups has the potential to provide a valuable opportunity for grandmothers to connect, network, and provide emotional and social support to one another. The hope is that as these grandmothers continue to share challenges and successes, they will be empowered to promote sustainability within their homes and communities as agents of positive change both locally and globally.

Researcher Positionality

It is from a position of privilege that I came to know the grandmothers, particularly Aboriginal grandmothers, in Winnipeg's North End who were raising their grandchildren. In addition to developing a Grandmother Support Group, this positionality opened a space for me to learn and to establish strong, trusting, positive relationships with these grandmothers. I have gotten to know the grandmothers over the years and have worked on providing help and support. As a doctoral student, I wanted to share this incredible journey and conduct credible research on the established program for grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren, in particular Aboriginal grandmothers. As the researcher conducting autoethnography, I combed through my journals to determine what supports and services were established to support these grandmothers. I believe that the findings demonstrate that more programs and resources can help grandmothers build capacity within their homes and communities. The information based on the development of a school-based grandmother student support group, as well as my personal and professional contexts, were considered. I needed to situate myself within the context of this study to be transparent about how my positionality as a researcher impacted the findings of this study.

I grew up in a small rural town that was predominantly Caucasian, and in a family where there was much love and support for me and my three siblings. Both of my parents had a post-secondary education and worked within their chosen professions - my dad was a teacher and a school administrator, and my mom was a nurse. Our home was filled with many books that served to instill a desire to learn. My parents had an incredibly strong work ethic and a desire to make a difference in the world that they imprinted upon me. In addition to their professions, my mother and father were very committed to their community. They actively and continually sought out people in their community who were in need and did what they could to help. The

leadership roles that they pursued in our community provided us children with wonderful role models for giving back and standing up for what was right. In my childhood and teenage years I was always impressed with how well informed my parents were regarding world issues and world news. Dinner conversations often centered on world events and the poverty experienced within varying contexts and countries around the world. It was within this family context that I, at a young age, developed empathy for people whose circumstances were not as privileged as my own. I felt much love and compassion for others, and was very disheartened by the many inequities and injustices with which I saw people struggling. My parents' example and my childhood experiences instilled in me a great desire to be an agent for change in this world. One of the dangers of this positionality, of course, is that it becomes "missionizing work" that does not understand nor appreciate the agency and richness of the lived experiences of people whose life circumstances are not like my own. I constantly have to guard against adopting an attitude that my own way of life or understandings of the world are the ideal markers to which others need to strive. I have to acknowledge that my values are not necessarily ones to impress upon others, for fear that I too become the oppressor even if my actions are done in good faith (Freire, 1970).

Professionally, I was committed to post-secondary education and wanted to follow in my father's footsteps to become a teacher. After graduating from high school I had the privilege of attending university and graduated with two degrees – a Bachelor of Physical Education and a Bachelor of Education. Upon graduation I was fortunate to get a teaching job. Most of my years of teaching took place in Winnipeg's inner city and North End. Throughout my teaching years I coached many teams and implemented a plethora of programs and initiatives in an effort to give students a positive school experience, and to keep them in school. After 18 years of teaching in a

variety of school contexts, I was hired to be Vice-Principal at St. John's High School. At that time, over half of the students who attended St. John's High School lived below the poverty line, making it imperative for myself and my colleagues to work towards meeting their basic needs so that students could focus on learning. We implemented breakfast and lunch programs, and had a room full of clothes and winter apparel to help students survive our harsh Winnipeg winters. We also implemented programs for restitution, after school activities, and annual Winter Galas with parents/guardians and community members. In addition, I developed support groups for single moms, single dads, and grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren. As mentioned earlier, I did home visits every fall, and organized intake meetings within the homes of grandmothers and single mothers who found it difficult to find transportation to school because of limited budgets, health issues, and/or the presence of many small children at home.

After five years in this position, I successfully applied to be the Assistant Superintendent in the Interlake School Division, a school division just north of Winnipeg. My deep investment in the St. John's school community made it extremely difficult to leave the students, staff, and parents/guardians, all whom I had grown to love deeply. However, moving forward I embraced being in a position where I could make a difference in the lives of thousands of students and hundreds of staff rather than one school community. In my tenure as Assistant Superintendent I organized many social justice initiatives including Dressed for Grad, Brush Out Poverty, twinning schools in the Interlake School Division with schools in African countries that face extreme poverty, and early years, middle years, and senior years Student Voice workshops. As a result of the latter initiative, middle years students in the Interlake School Division raised money to build a school in Uganda.

After five years in a supporting role as Assistant Superintendent, I was hired as the Superintendent in this school division and continued my quest to help students and staff be ambassadors for positive change. We endeavored to promote diversity in our classrooms and schools to help students value and accept individual differences. In the 2015-2016 school year we implemented a division-wide restitution program, in part based on my Master's study (Penner, 2011), with the hope that students would be given the opportunity to own their behavior and repair harm in positive, respectful ways. Witnessing tangible progress and positive change as a result of these initiatives made me more passionate about the potential for a widespread rippling effect of local and global change.

With regard to my personal education, I was committed not only to post-secondary studies but also to graduate studies at the University of Manitoba. Throughout my educational career I pursued learning and received my Post Baccalaureate Diploma in Education and Master of Education degree. My Master's thesis was entitled *School Attachment Theory and Restitution Processes: Promoting Positive Behavior in Middle Years Schools* (Penner, 2011). After graduating with a Master's degree my faculty advisor suggested that I pursue my PhD. I took her suggestion. This dissertation is a result of that decision. I am keenly aware that my position of privilege in both my personal and professional life has allowed me to have access to basic human rights such as food, shelter, and clothing, as well as employment, health care, and education. It is from my privileged position (with much support from my husband, parents, family, and advisor) that I have had the opportunity to pursue my educational career and my educational learning goals. The initiatives I have supported are the offshoots of my value system that affirm equity, human rights, and personal agency. I do so knowing that I use my position of privilege to

support, but not direct, the ambitions and values of others. I work towards building positive relationships in order to co-create a hopeful future.

In the section above I have outlined my positionality as a researcher on a personal and professional level. However, it would be remiss of me not to mention some of the trips I have taken, and community initiatives in which I have been involved that have also had an impact in my life. My travel experiences have been instrumental in helping me formulate my worldview on poverty, and have propelled me into taking action to support equity and justice in a world filled with much hurt and pain. It has been with a heart of compassion that I have travelled internationally doing what was in my power to support those who lived in communities of poverty. When I started teaching I spent my summer holidays travelling the world on a shoestring budget and encountered first hand extreme poverty, many social inequities, and injustices. My travels through poverty stricken settings included: Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Venezuela, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Uganda, and Kenya. As a young teacher, it was my trip to India that was a turning point in my life. I travelled to Calcutta and worked with Mother Teresa's organization called Missionaries of Charity. While in Calcutta I worked in an orphanage and in a home for people who had lived in poverty and were dying. I also had the opportunity to travel through the City of Joy, home of the poorest of the poor. It was here that I was shaken to the core regarding the inequities and oppressed realities faced by many people. Another year I traveled to Kenya where I worked with Somali refugees in the capital of Nairobi. Again I was overwhelmed with the oppressed realities of such a large refugee population. Several trips to Uganda helping grandmothers develop sustainable livelihoods impressed on me the gender inequities that exist in many African communities. Holding to the belief that social justice work must not only take

place globally but also locally, I worked for many years at a soup kitchen in Winnipeg's North End. As an administrator at St. John's High School I poured my heart and soul into mitigating the symptoms of poverty that we faced daily within our classrooms. As an Assistant Superintendent and Superintendent in the ISD I worked hard with students and employees supporting local and global issues of poverty. As I reflect on all of my life experiences, I applaud my parents for providing me with a strong, stable, loving home environment in my impressionable childhood and teenage years. That upbringing laid the foundation for me to pursue social justice work with passion, courage and love.

My platform of privilege in both my personal and professional life is why I came to know and work with Winnipeg's North End Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal grandmothers. As a middle class non-Aboriginal woman, I am keenly aware of my privilege, and am grateful for the positive, trusting relationships I have built with these grandmothers over the years. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) argue that "...no matter how much you try, you cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe, and what you value" (p. 38). Indeed, I may not be able to fully separate my research and writing from my experiences of privileged perspectives. However, experiencing the strong relationships that I have with these grandmothers, and the many ways we have collaborated in the past to make this world a better place, we have successfully acknowledged and navigated our differing intersections of privilege and experience to work together. I stand in solidarity with the grandmothers and have become an ally with them. Thus, I was committed to expanding my awareness of my positionality as an educator, president of a non-profit organization, and researcher. My knowledge and life experiences have led me to this research. It is my hope that this research project will result in greater understanding of the value that the St. John's Grandmother Support Group provided to

the St. John's Grandmothers and to other grandmothers that this group intentionally and unintentionally effected; to document the development of a registered charitable organization that grew out of a local need to support women; and to glean insights into how this group served to function over time as an organization of empowerment, learning, and voice for women whose circumstances have often kept them silenced and/or marginalized.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to examine the development and progression of a Grandmother Support Group predominately based on Aboriginal grandmothers raising their grandchildren. As I was the founder and leader of this Grandmother Support Group within a school, and remained the leader as the Assistant Superintendent/Superintendent in another school division, my knowledge about the grandmother monthly meetings and additional activities were studied. This research study examined how the Grandmother Support Group started within a high school. It described the supports, resources, and initiatives that were helpful and unhelpful in supporting grandmothers, in particular Aboriginal grandmothers, in their role as primary caregivers of their grandchildren. In addition, the findings of this research study discuss supports, resources, and initiatives that are needed to promote these grandmothers as agents of positive change within their homes and communities. I examined these intentions by engaging in an auto-ethnography that reflects on my changing role as "leader" of the group over time, with attention to self-reflexivity in the areas of white privilege, leadership, and agency.

This research study contributes to the limited body of research on how Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren are dealing with the supports and resources needed to promote agency. In their lives, grandmothers work at building capacity and becoming positive change agents in their homes and communities.

Research Methods

Research questions anchor and direct research (Kovach, 2009). The following research questions provided the framework for this research study:

1. Within a Canadian high school, what was the development and progression of a group of grandmothers, in particular Aboriginal grandmothers, who were raising their grandchildren?
2. What supports, resources, and initiatives were helpful and unhelpful in supporting grandmothers, in particular Aboriginal grandmothers, in their role as primary caregivers of their grandchildren?
3. What supports, resources, and initiatives would help promote agency within grandmother's homes and communities?

These questions guided the literature review and supported the theoretical and conceptual framework for this research study. Methodologically, I utilized these questions to frame the autoethnography. Autoethnography was used to explore my experience as the founder and leader of the Grandmother Support Group within a high school. I used myself as the subject of study with the above questions as my focus in order to chronicle the ways in which my role as "leader" of the group changed over time, with attention to self-reflexivity in the areas of white privilege, leadership, and agency.

Definition of Terms

In this research study, the following definition of terms were used:

1. Grandmothers raising their grandchildren – This refers to grandmothers from any ethnic background who are raising their grandchildren.

2. Aboriginal/Indigenous grandmothers – This term refers grandmothers who are First Nations, Metis, or Inuit (Stewart-Harawira, 2007).
3. Post-colonialism – Post-colonialism analyzes, critiques, explains, and responds to the cultural legacy of colonialism. It explores ways of dismantling colonial structures, educating the public on the historic events of colonization, and establishing new ground rules for regulating their societies (Wane & Kavuma, 2001). Post-colonial theorists seek to understand the effects that exploitation and colonial rule have had on Indigenous people in order to combat the harmful consequences of colonial oppression.
4. Indigenous feminism - Indigenous feminism is the analysis of how gender injustices against Indigenous women emerged from colonial and patriarchal practices that inscribe gendered power dynamics to the detriment of Indigenous women (Suzack, 2015). Indigenous feminists seek to dismantle social ostracization, political disempowerment, and lack of human rights (Suzack, 2015) as racism, sexism and colonialism have combined to establish an environment that is hostile for the well-being of many Aboriginal women today.
5. Canadian residential school system - Residential schools were boarding schools for Aboriginal children. The Canadian government forcibly removed generations of Aboriginal children from their families and communities with the goal to assimilate them into the dominant culture under the guise of creating a stronger nation (Woolford, 2013).
6. Sixties Scoop - In the 1960s the Canadian government instituted policies for provincial child and family services to remove Aboriginal children from their families

to be adopted into non-Aboriginal homes or placed in foster homes without taking steps to preserve their culture or identity (Ginn & Kulig, 2015; TRC, 2015).

Delimitations of the Study

A number of delimitations helped frame the parameters of this research study. Firstly, the researcher focused data analysis on her diaries to gather information about the start of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group as they offered the available historic documentation of the efforts of this group. The diaries documented the ways in which the grandmothers decided to move forward with their efforts based on the conversations we had and the activities that took place. The focus of the review also focused on the supports, resources, and initiatives grandmothers needed to promote agency within their homes and communities.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations that should be considered regarding the research. Firstly, as this study examined the personal experiences of grandmothers who were primary caregivers of their grandchildren in Winnipeg's North End, there is no suggestion that data collected can be generalized and applied to varying ethnic, cultural, and geographic contexts. The intention was to report on the experiences of a group of grandmothers, mostly Aboriginal grandmothers, who were raising their grandchildren within one urban, Canadian context. The findings may resonate with Aboriginal grandmothers in other similar settings, and provide evidence for supports and strategies that promote agency more broadly in both a national and international context.

I have long standing, positive relationships with the the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal grandmothers in the St. John's Grandmother Support Group. If I came across the thoughts, opinions, and experiences that grandmothers have had, I ensured that I received affirmation for any use of personal experiences, and I used pseudonyms to protect identities.

A limitation is the personal biases that I might bring into this study, though I argue that this insider privilege also provides me with a depth of understanding that I would not have if I had not been so intimately connected with this group of women. I was a school administrator at St. John's High School when I started this Grandmother Support Group, and I continued to facilitate monthly meetings when I no longer worked at that school. As the grandmother group leader I worked at developing positive relationships with grandmothers who continued to join the support group. It was my intention that my passion for social justice and equity would serve to enhance my insight and ability to work with grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren, and impacted the analysis my findings.

Significance of the Study

This research study was significant in several ways. Firstly, this study was significant because there is limited research in Canada on how Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren are dealing with the intergenerational effects of Canadian colonialism, and what supports, resources, and services would be most effective in building capacity within their homes and communities. Findings from this study have the potential to add to the limited knowledge base on how to effectively engage Aboriginal grandmothers as positive leaders and agents of change both locally and globally.

Secondly, this study is significant because it collected data from my personal diaries about grandmothers who joined a grandmother support group at the grassroots level of implementation in Winnipeg's North End. Many of the grandmothers have been faithful in attending monthly support meetings. An in depth understanding of how the program has shifted over time, and initiatives that have been most welcomed and supportive, can support future possibilities that might support the needs of grandmothers raising grandchildren.

Thirdly, this piece adds to the body of literature that examines the positive contributions that can be made from autoethnographic study. Particularly in terms of Canada's colonial history, the self-deconstruction of my own ally settler status (Smith, Puckett & Simon, 2016) provided a particularly poignant learning experience for myself, and stands as testimony to the power of auto-ethnography as a research methodology.

Summary

Aboriginal grandmothers raising grandchildren is a common practice in today's Canadian society. This research study focused on the development of a Grandmother Support Group within a school system, and considered the supports that were needed to build capacity and promote agency within their homes and communities.

Chapter One outlined the background to this research study, researcher positionality, purpose of the study, research questions, definition of terms, delimitations and limitations of the study, and significance of the study. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature on the phenomenon of grandmothers raising grandchildren (in particular Aboriginal grandmothers raising grandchildren), the context and theoretical framework for this research study, Canadian colonization efforts, and the strategies and processes needed for healing and reconciliation. Chapter Three offers the methodology of the study. Chapter Four describes the development of the St. Johns Grandmothers' Support Group. Chapter Five outlines the findings of the analysis of my diaries. Chapter Six culminates with conclusions and recommendations for practice, research and theory.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter begins with a review of literature on the phenomenon of Aboriginal grandmothers raising grandchildren, as well as the urban context within which this research study took place. This is followed by a literature review on the theoretical framework for this study including post-colonial theory and Indigenous feminism. Research literature on the Canadian residential school system, the Sixties Scoop, and the intergenerational effects of these colonization efforts are presented. This chapter concludes with an overview of what the literature says about healing and reconciliation strategies, and processes that could be effective in helping Aboriginal grandmothers and their grandchildren affirm their identities, cultures and traditions. Of note, the terms Aboriginal and Indigenous will be used interchangeably to refer to First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people in North America (Stewart-Harawira, 2007; Tri-Council Policy Statement).

Aboriginal Grandmothers Raising Grandchildren

There is very little research literature on Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren. The small literature base that is available reveals an extremely high prevalence of grandparent caregiving among Aboriginal Canadians within a post-colonial context (Fuller-Thomson, 2005). Fuller-Thomson (2005) found that Canadian grandparents who are raising their grandchildren are disproportionately female, Aboriginal, and out of the work force.

Although many caregiving grandmothers are deeply committed to their grandchildren, the myriad of challenges they face may hinder their ability to provide a supportive home environment. For example, research on African American caregiving grandmothers reveals that they face many challenges themselves (Edwards & Taub, 2009; Kelley et al., 2007; Kelley et al., 2000), and often are in need of additional supports in order to be more effective in improving life

outcomes for their grandchildren. Psychological stressors experienced by African American grandmothers most often reported in research literature include lack of resources, lack of social support, and decreased health, all of which have a tendency to lead to depression (Edwards & Taub, 2009; Kelley et al., 2007; Kelley et al., 2000; Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2010; Murphy, 2008; Pruchno & McKenney, 2002; Rodgers-Farmer, 1999; Waldrop, 2004; Zauszniewski, Au, & Musil, 2012). Fuller-Thomson (2005) found that many Aboriginal grandparents have insufficient resources and/or bad health problems that make it difficult to fulfill the expectations that come with the caregiving role. This makes it even more challenging when a grandchild in need of care arrives on the scene. In addition to the challenges of raising grandchildren at an age where grandmothers experience reduced health and energy, Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren may have a unique set of needs and challenges as a result of Canada's residential school system and the Sixties Scoop. Factors such as a lack of parenting knowledge, high rates of incarceration, substance abuse, alcoholism, domestic violence, inadequate housing, food insecurity, and child mistreatment have been instrumental in Aboriginal grandmothers taking on parenting roles for their grandchildren (Fuller-Thomson, 2005; Goodman et al., 2007; Thompson, Cameron, & Fuller-Thomson, 2013; Waldrop, 2004). For a significant number of Aboriginal grandmothers, the oppressions they have experienced regarding race, gender, and class, and may continue to experience, are compounded with age (Dickson & Green, 2001). This makes it difficult to deal with grandchildren who also are experiencing intergenerational effects from Canadian colonization efforts.

Despite the myriad of difficulties that caregiving grandmothers may face, many also experience positive emotions and exhibit strong personal characteristics. According to Waldrop (2004), some of the positive feelings experienced by grandmothers included "...delight in their

grandchild's growth, a sense of accomplishment, and feelings of peace about making a difference in the previously turbulent life of a grandchild" (p. 214). In a study by Thompson et al. (2013), Aboriginal grandparents commented that the greatest reward of raising grandchildren was being able to make up to their children their perceived failings of the past. By taking on a caregiving role, many grandmothers have exhibited strong personal characteristics like the discovery of internal strength rather than feeling powerless (Waldrop, 2004). Ginn and Kulig (2015) argue that Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren have emerged through unimaginable circumstances with strength, resiliency, and wisdom.

Grandmothers who live with and are responsible for the care of their grandchildren provide society with a vital service (Pruchno & McKenney, 2002). If grandmothers would not take in their grandchildren, these children may be put into foster care and be at risk of growing up with strangers, further disrupting family, cultural, and community ties (Kelley et al., 2000). Currently, Aboriginal children are disproportionately represented in Canada's child welfare system (Fuchs, Burnside, Marchenski, & Mudry, 2010; Greene, O'Brien-Teengs, Whitebird, & Ion, 2014; Mignon & Holmes, 2013; TRC, 2015; Trocme, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004). This overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in care can be explained statistically by socioeconomic, child, parent, and maltreatment characteristics (Trocme et. al., 2004). Trocme et. al. (2004) found that the odds of Aboriginal children being placed in care were statistically significantly higher among cases with parent criminal activity, cognitive impairment, alcohol concerns, or parent history of maltreatment as a child. Although efforts have been made to recruit and retain Aboriginal foster parents, there are not enough Aboriginal foster homes to take in children in need of care (Brown, George, Sintzel, & St. Arnault, 2009). Aboriginal child welfare agencies are mandated to provide culturally relevant care, and as such, rely on

grandmothers and other relatives for foster care placements (Fuller-Thomson, 2005). In addition to child welfare agency placements, informal placements often result in Aboriginal children going to live with grandparents or other extended family members (Trocme et. al., 2004). Thus, Aboriginal grandmothers make an irreplaceable contribution to children whose parents can no longer raise them and to society in general (Williamson et al., 2003). This emerging role keeps family and cultural ties strong, and as such, grandmothers should be admired for their courage and commitment in striving to make life better for their grandchildren.

The research study contributes to a significant gap in literature on Aboriginal grandmothers who are primary caregivers of their grandchildren within a Canadian post-colonial context. The provision of resources and services has the potential to help these grandmothers build capacity and promote agency within their homes and communities. The urban context for this research study was Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Urban Context of Research Study

The effects of colonization continue to impact the lives of Aboriginal people living in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. More specifically, it is in Winnipeg's inner city and North End where the potential participants for this research study live. To better understand the post-colonial lived experiences of Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren in Winnipeg's inner city and North End, it is important to look at the history of Aboriginal urbanization and Winnipeg demographics.

Though Indigenous people lived in the Winnipeg area and used the Forks in the Assiniboine and Red Rivers since time immemorial, Canadian colonial efforts to move people onto reserves in order to introduce settlers into this incredible agricultural area dislocated many Indigenous peoples from the area. Though there has always been movement between reserve

communities and urban communities, significant migration to Winnipeg from rural reserves and communities began to occur in the 1960s (Comack & Silver, 2008). Though self-declaration of Indigenous ethnicity for Census purposes is fraught with under-representation, the 1951 Census noted that 210 Aboriginal people found residence in Winnipeg; in 1961 there were 1,082; and by 2006 (the most recent census) there were 68,380, the largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada (Silver, 2010b; Statistics Canada). Relatively cheap housing attracted many Aboriginal people to re-locate in Winnipeg's North End (Silver, 2010b) given struggles with poverty. Sadly, when people arrived, they were faced with a wall of racism and exclusion (Silver, 2010b). Silver (2010b) states that when Aboriginal people arrived in Winnipeg, they were "... ill-prepared for modern urban life, the result of a century of marginalization, colonization, and the damage inflicted by the residential schools" (p. 14). As a result, Winnipeg's North End became an area steeped with deep poverty, racism, crime, and segregation which continues to be a reality today (Silver, 2010b; Silver, 2016).

Of particular concern is the deep poverty experienced by children. Sadly, children are at the greatest risk of poverty; one in every three children in Manitoba have grown up in poverty (Frankel & Northcott, 2015). In 2013, Manitoba had the highest child poverty rate of any province in Canada at 29%, a full 10% above the national average (Frankel & Northcott, 2015). Alarming, 61.9% of children living in single parent families in Manitoba live in poverty, 15.9% above the national rate (Frankel & Northcott, 2015). The depth of poverty in Manitoba, in particular in Winnipeg's North End, is substantial and is cause for considerable concern.

A major consequence of deep poverty is food insecurity. Households that rely on food banks face food insecurity because their incomes are too low to cover the most basic cost of living (Food Banks Canada, 2015; Frankel & Northcott, 2015). The need to access food banks is

rampant in Winnipeg's inner city and North End. Winnipeg Harvest is a community-based, not for profit organization committed to sharing food with people not only in Winnipeg but throughout Manitoba who struggle to feed themselves and their families (Winnipeg Harvest). Winnipeg Harvest currently serves approximately 63,000 people per month across Manitoba with over 44% being children under 18 years of age (Winnipeg Harvest Statistics). In Manitoba, 2014 statistics report that 9.5% of children in Manitoba used food banks, more than double the Canadian rate of 4.5% (Frankel & Northcott, 2015). Manitoba has consistently been the number one province for food bank use across Canada (Winnipeg Harvest Statistics). Aboriginal grandmothers living in Winnipeg's North End have commented that they would not be able to survive without their monthly application for food from Winnipeg Harvest (Penner Diary, May 10, 2014). These statistics and comments provide evidence that Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren in Winnipeg's North End are experiencing a serious food security problem.

In addition to food insecurity, dilapidated housing and a severe shortage of low-income rental housing in Winnipeg's inner city and North End has resulted in over-crowded housing conditions (Silver, 2010b). Silver (2010a) spoke with Aboriginal elders who talked about their experiences with substandard and unaffordable housing in the private rental market, and the many barriers they have faced in securing safe and affordable housing. These elders include Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren.

Problematic in Winnipeg's North End are the high rates of unemployment and low rates of labour-force participation (Carter & Polevychuk, 2009; Silver, 2004). A high proportion of people living in poverty are the job-less poor with little or no experience of the paid labour force (Silver, 2010b). In Manitoba, Aboriginal people have much lower incomes than the population as

a whole. Compared to the non-Aboriginal population, Aboriginal people have lower levels of education and skill development, lower labour force participation rates, and less full-time and full-year work (Carter & Polevychuk, 2009). The unemployment rate among Aboriginal people is almost three times the rate of the overall provincial population resulting in higher rates of dependence on government transfer payments (Carter & Polevychuk, 2009). The daily struggle to meet the basic needs for food, shelter, and clothing often monopolizes their efforts pushing back hope of a future without poverty.

Deep poverty often results in a myriad of social pathologies. Social pathologies that are prevalent in Winnipeg's poverty stricken neighborhoods include drugs, gang activity, crime, violence, and prostitution (Carter & Polevychuk, 2009; Silver, 2004) that all correlate strongly with poverty and related conditions (Comack & Silver, 2008). Sadly, over 70% of the inmates in Manitoba jails are Aboriginal (Comack, Deane, Morissette, and Silver, 2010). Nationally, Winnipeg has a reputation as a major site for crime and violence, much of it concentrated in the inner city and North End (Comack & Silver, 2008). Silver (2010b) argues that "Street gangs, the illegal drug trade, and the wide availability of hand guns, accompanied by the damage done to families and cultures, and the almost complete disconnection of large numbers of young people from the labour market, have created a serious problem of crime and violence ..." (p. 15). The drug trade, including Crack cocaine, is a serious issue in Winnipeg's inner city and North End. Dobchuk-Land, Toews, and Silver (2010) interviewed inner city residents who talked about the prevalence of "crack houses" in their neighborhood, and gangs controlling entire streets making residents feel unsafe. Street gangs, a product of poverty and racism, stem from addictions, family disintegration, childhood neglect, and abuse (Comack et al., 2010). Inner city residents of Winnipeg identified the problems of street gangs, illegal drugs, and violence as their main safety

concerns (Silver, 2010a). For many residents in Winnipeg's North End, many of whom are Aboriginal grandmothers, violence has come to be understood as a regular feature of everyday life (Comack & Silver, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

Canadian colonization efforts have caused much harm and dysfunction for Aboriginal people, in particular, for Aboriginal grandmothers as they seek to raise grandchildren within a post-colonial era. Post-colonialism and Indigenous feminism provided the theoretical framework for this research study.

Post-Colonialism

There is much literature on the colonization of countries as a result of European expansion into the rest of the world. The target of global European colonization was Indigenous people and the lands they inhabited (TRC, 2015). Countries that were colonized due to European expansion were forced to live with Eurocentric thought, power structures and knowledge (Peden, 2011). Unfortunately, the colonization of countries has caused much harm for the Indigenous people who inhabited those lands.

The harmful effects caused by European colonization have set the stage for the emergence of post-colonial theory. A post-colonial theoretical framework lays the foundation for critiquing colonial systems and exploring ways of dismantling colonial structures, educating the public on the historic events of colonization, and establishing new ground rules for regulating colonized societies (Wane & Kavuma, 2001). Post-colonial theorists seek to understand the effects that exploitation and colonial rule have had on Indigenous people based upon a desire to combat the harmful consequences of colonial oppression. As a body of theory and a study of political and cultural change, post-colonialism typically goes through three broad stages. In the

first stage there is an awareness of the social, psychological and cultural inferiority that is enforced by being in a colonized state (Paquette, Beauregard, & Gunter, 2015). In the second stage there is engagement in the struggle for ethnic, cultural, and political autonomy; self-government is an important aspect of cultural regeneration (Paquette et. al., 2015). In the third stage there is a growing awareness of cultural overlap (Paquette et. al., 2015). Ultimately, post-colonialism looks at pathways to healing and reconciliation and at developing a society where all cultures and traditions are valued and accepted. Thus, post-colonial theory is a response to the cultural legacy of colonization and focuses on healing and reconciliation for all citizens with a heritage of colonization.

There is a growing literature base on Canada's long history of colonizing Aboriginal people, most often written by Aboriginal scholars. Over many years the Canadian government introduced systems that did not support Aboriginal culture, traditions, and values. In the 1800's, based upon the goal to govern, control, and assimilate Aboriginal people, the government established reserves and opened residential schools throughout Canada. The *Indian Act* of 1876 established the Canadian government as the 'guardian' of Aboriginal people (Menzies, 2008), and staked claim to the perspective that the federal government had responsibility for Aboriginal peoples and authority over the lands reserved for Aboriginal peoples (Blackstock, 2011). Settlements, known as reserves, were created by "segregating individuals into groups that were defined by authorities outside of existing community networks" (Menzies, 2008, p. 41). In essence, reserves were Crown lands set aside for the use of Aboriginal people which meant that Aboriginal people could live on reserves, but the Crown perceived itself to own the land and strictly governed the use thereof (Blackstock, 2011). The hierarchical structure within these settlements did not reflect Aboriginal traditional values and practices. This dramatically sped up

the decline in Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and organizing across Canada as the *Indian Act* gave authority to non-Aboriginal people to control the everyday life of Aboriginal people (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 2006; Woolford, 2013).

A further colonization attempt by the Canadian government to transform First Nations communities took place in the form of residential schools for Aboriginal children. The purpose of the development of residential schools was to remove children from the influence of their families and communities so as to assimilate them into the dominant European culture. This initiative was implemented because colonizers believed that civilization had to be brought to savage people who could never civilize themselves (TRC, 2015). The expectation was that Aboriginal people would cease to exist as distinct people with their own governments, cultures, and identities (TRC, 2015). The underlying assumption of the residential school system was that Aboriginal cultures and beliefs were inferior to that of the dominant non-Aboriginal culture. The history and destructive legacy of the residential school system is a powerful reminder of Canada's deliberate attempt at genocide.

The Sixties Scoop, another Canadian colonization effort, took place in the wake of the residential school system. In the 1960s the Canadian government instituted policies for provincial child and family services to remove Aboriginal children from their families to be adopted into non-Aboriginal homes or placed in foster homes (Ginn & Kulig, 2015). Like residential schools, the purpose of the Sixties Scoop was to extract and assimilate Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal society (Spencer, 2016). Colonizers simply transferred children from one form of institution, the residential school, to another, the child-welfare agency (TRC, 2015). These government initiatives have negated Aboriginal culture, have imposed values that are contradictory to their traditional ways (Menzies, 2008), and have resulted in many distrustful

and disrespectful relationships between Aboriginal peoples and those who have descended from the colonized.

Aspects of colonization and its effects persist throughout Canadian society (Ginn & Kulig, 2015). The inequities and injustices experienced by Aboriginal people in Canada due to initiatives promoting colonization and assimilation have caused much oppression and marginalization. As a result of Canada's history of colonization and its policies of cultural genocide and assimilation, deep scars have been left on the lives of many Aboriginal people, on Aboriginal communities, as well as on Canadian society (TRC, 2015). It is imperative that the colonizers and the colonized look jointly through a critical lens to address inequities and injustices, many of which continue to exist. Paulo Freire, a critical theorist, believed that the knowledge and wisdom of oppressed groups of people provide the most credible solutions to issues affecting their lives (Freire, 1970). He claimed that working with the people must be central in the movement towards radical, transformational social change. This also appears to be a primary consideration regarding what is needed within a post-colonial Canadian context. It is essential for Aboriginal people to find a voice, and to be heard so that they can share their lived experiences and resist current inequitable practices as steps forward in the emancipation from oppression. In this process by design there is a continual push towards challenging existing practices and structures, as well as unequal relationships of power (Boyd, 2012; Butte, 2010). Therefore, it is essential to look at Canada's post-colonial era through a critical lens and to work collaboratively with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to bring to light the realities of oppressed Aboriginal people. This collaboration process will aid in addressing the inequities and injustices still evident in Canadian society today, and in promoting the process of healing and reconciliation.

In an attempt to hear the stories of residential school survivors and to move towards healing and reconciliation in a post-colonial era, Canada, in 2008, established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC has been instrumental in bringing to light Canada's shameful history, as well as the Aboriginal inequities and power differentials that continue to exist in Canadian society. The TRC, a five year Canadian research project, was tasked with collecting the stories and experiences of Canadian residential school survivors. The overarching purposes of the TRC were to: 1) reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools in a manner that fully documented the individual and collective harms perpetrated against Aboriginal peoples, and honour the resilience and courage of former students, their families, and communities and; 2) guide and inspire a process of truth and healing, leading towards reconciliation within Aboriginal families, and between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal communities, churches, governments, and Canadians (TRC, 2015). The TRC final report came out in 2015 containing 94 calls to action to redress the legacy of the residential school system and to advance reconciliation in Canada. The TRC report provides a roadmap to strengthen families, eradicate child poverty, reduce systemic discrimination, and recognize the rights and autonomy of Aboriginal people and government (Campaign 2000; TRC, 2015).

Healing and reconciliation for colonizers and the colonized are focal points in post-colonial theory. The TRC defined reconciliation as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people throughout Canada (TRC, 2015). A critical part of this process involves repairing damaged trust by acknowledging the history of the residential school system, making apologies, providing individual and collective reparations, and following through with concrete actions that

demonstrate real societal change (TRC, 2015). Reconciliation requires that the paternalistic and racist foundations of the residential school system be rejected as the basis for an ongoing relationship, and that a new vision based on a commitment to mutual respect be developed (TRC, 2015). It also requires an understanding that the most harmful impacts of residential schools have been the loss of pride and self-respect of Aboriginal people, and the lack of respect that non-Aboriginal people have been raised to have for their Aboriginal neighbours (TRC, 2015). Too many Canadians know little or nothing about the deep historical roots of these conflicts. This lack of historical knowledge has serious consequences for Aboriginal people and for Canada as a whole. Without truth, justice, and healing, there can be no genuine reconciliation. As First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities access and revitalize their spirituality, cultures, languages, laws, and governance systems, and as non-Aboriginal Canadians increasingly come to understand Indigenous history within Canada, and to recognize and respect Indigenous approaches to establishing and maintaining respectful relationships, Canadians can work together to forge a new covenant of reconciliation (TRC, 2015). There are no easy shortcuts to reconciliation. Time is needed for truth, healing, and reconciliation. The truth needs to be told and healing needs to happen for reconciliation to be meaningful and successful. For Canadians from all walks of life, reconciliation regarding Indigenous rights and experiences offers a new way of living together (TRC, 2015). Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem, it is a Canadian one. Reconciliation must inspire Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to transform Canadian society so that our children and grandchildren can live together in dignity, peace, and prosperity on the land we now share (TRC, 2015). This is the hope for Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren. This is the larger aim that the St. Johns Grandmother Support Group attempted to fill.

Indigenous Feminism

Within a post-colonial context, it is Aboriginal women who suffer the greatest consequences of colonizing efforts. They face oppression based not only on gender, but also on race. Indigenous feminism expands on feminist views by questioning the centrality of the individual within human rights and gender relations (Bastian Duarte, 2012). Indigenous feminism can be defined as the analysis of how gender injustices against Indigenous women emerge from colonial and patriarchal practices that inscribe gendered power dynamics to the detriment of Indigenous women (Suzack, 2015). Indigenous feminism “focuses on the intersections between colonialism and patriarchy to examine how race and gender systems overlap to create conditions in which Indigenous women are subjected to forms of social disempowerment that arise out of historical and contemporary practices of colonialism, racism, sexism, and patriarchy leading to social patterns...that disproportionately affect Indigenous women” (Suzack, 2015, p. 261). The internalization and perpetuation of colonial practices within Aboriginal communities, especially male dominance over women and children, has been identified as a grave concern by Indigenous feminists (Green, 2007b). Knoblock and Kuokkanen (2015) argue that “Indigenous feminism is a theoretical intervention located at the intersection of Indigenous peoples’ political struggles for decolonization and self-determination, and Indigenous women’s engagement in issues of gender equality and social justice in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts” (p. 275). Thus, the objective of Indigenous feminism is to achieve gender justice for Aboriginal women in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal contexts by analyzing how they have been marginalized and oppressed by racism, sexism, and colonialism, and bringing to light the unpleasant synergy between these three violations of human rights (Green, 2007b; Kirkness, 1987). Green (2007b) concluded that this can best be

achieved through praxis - theoretically informed, politically self-conscious activism. This research study was in part based upon this perspective.

Indigenous feminists are emerging in search of equity and equality that once was enjoyed by women within Aboriginal society (Kirkness, 1987; LaRocque, 2007; Stewart-Harawira, 2007). Kirkness (1987) argues that contrary to popular belief, Aboriginal women were not treated as slaves, chattels, and beasts of burden in traditional Native society as the concept of equality and balance was central to all traditional teachings (Kirkness, 1987). Green (2007b) states that women in most Aboriginal cultures historically enjoyed far more autonomy, power and respect than did their European settler counterparts. Patriarchy was introduced by colonial contact (McIvor, 2007) which has given Aboriginal feminists reason to identify colonialism as the cause of their social, economic, and political inequality (Green, 2007c). Colonizing efforts by the Canadian government have stripped Aboriginal women of equitable processes and practices resulting not only in colonial oppression, but also oppression by Aboriginal men and Aboriginal governance practices (Green, 2007b). This struggle is continuing today as Aboriginal women are working towards genuine social, cultural, racial, economic, political, and sexual equality. Indigenous feminism provides a theoretical framework from which to examine the inequities, injustices, and most horrendous forms of oppression experienced by Aboriginal women (Stewart-Harawira, 2007). Racism and sexism within colonial and patriarchal systems have eroded Indigenous women's individual and collective status. Restoration is badly needed.

In their pursuit for equity and equality, Indigenous feminists are often faced with barriers that prevent the dialogue and action needed to move forward. Green (2007a) argues that "The lack of intellectual and political space for the vigorous and free exchange of ideas, including critical and oppositional ideas such as feminisms, suggests that Aboriginal feminists do not enjoy

enough security to participate routinely in the freedoms of speech, thought and association that are considered minimums for expression of citizenship in contemporary Canada” (p. 17). Even if those intellectual and political spaces are found, speaking out against human rights violations can cause Aboriginal women to be fearful as this can result in them being ostracized within their First Nations communities. Intolerance for feminist analysis within First Nations communities can be problematic, particularly when it takes the form of political intimidation of those who are oppressed and marginalized within those communities (Green, 2007b). By finding a voice and speaking up, Aboriginal feminists are often identified as political adversaries by male Indigenous elites whose power they challenge as well as colonial-based society (Green, 2007b). Many Aboriginal feminists have found themselves under attack for interrogating power structures and practices between and among Aboriginal and dominant institutions, for seeking to defend Aboriginal and treaty rights, and for defending fundamental human rights for Aboriginal women (Green, 2007b). Despite these barriers, Indigenous feminists continue to seek to dismantle social ostracization, political disempowerment, and lack of human rights for all Aboriginal women (Suzack, 2015).

There is a small body of literature and theory that can be identified as Indigenous feminism. This gap in literature points to the invisibility of contemporary Aboriginal women living in the context of colonial oppression (Green, 2007b). Conversely, the potential strength of this small body of feminist Indigenous scholarship is that it provides the tools and methodologies that can be used to deconstruct, analyze and re-construct those bureaucratic structures that have typically marginalized those people who do not represent the mainstream (Peden, 2011). Indigenous feminism provides a lens through which the discourse of traditional norms from a woman’s standpoint can be examined (Wane & Kavuma, 2001). Green (2007b) argues that

“Indigenous feminism is a valid and theoretically and politically powerful critique of the social, economic and political conditions of Aboriginal women’s lives” (p. 21). Indigenous feminists work at educating movements unfamiliar with issues of colonialism, racism and sexism, and work at building critical political consciousness and solidarity thereby contributing to citizenship and democratic development (Green, 2007b). Moving forward, Indigenous feminists may find that writing is their primary vehicle to positively move out of the “...global morass of despair and frustration, and to bring to birth a politics of hope that has specific and particularistic relevance within a broad global ontology of being” (Stewart-Harawira, 2007, p. 126). When the role of Indigenous women is examined, all women, regardless of race, could potentially benefit from models that are more equitable and valued in society (Peden, 2011).

In summary, the theoretical underpinnings of post-colonialism and Indigenous feminism are fluid and complement each other. Healing and reconciliation is needed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (the colonized and the colonizers) within a post-colonial context. In particular, much healing and reconciliation is needed for Aboriginal women, including grandmothers, as they experience a plethora of inequities and injustices based not only on gender but also on race. The following sections of this literature review outline the colonial settings in which many Aboriginal grandmothers grew up. The sections includes the implementation and intergenerational effects of the Canadian residential school system and the Sixties Scoop. As part of the literature review, consideration is given to related efforts regarding the primary cross-cultural healing and reconciliation processes critical to individual, community, and national identities.

Canadian Colonization Efforts

Residential Schools

The implementation of residential schools for Aboriginal youth is a part of Canadian history that has typically been silenced and continues to cause much shame. Canada, a nation that prides itself on a history of peaceful expansion and good governance, removed several generations of Aboriginal children from their families and subjected them to forced assimilation, severe negligence, and multiple abuses under the guise of creating a stronger nation (Woolford, 2013). In an attempt to govern, control, and assimilate Aboriginal people, the Canadian government of the 1800s established reserves and opened residential schools throughout Canada. A national effort to transform Aboriginal communities saw the Canadian government, in conjunction with the Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and United churches (Elias et al., 2012; Menzies, 2008), open 130 residential schools across Canada (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada [AANDC]). It is estimated that over 150,000 Aboriginal children were forcibly removed and separated from their families and communities and placed in residential schools for the purpose of assimilation, segregation, and integration into mainstream Canadian society under the guise of Christian education objectives (AANDC; Blackstock, 2011; Christian & Spittal, 2008; Elias et al., 2012; Menzies, 2008; Woolford, 2013). The underlying assumption of this initiative was that Aboriginal cultures and beliefs were inferior to that of the dominant non-Aboriginal culture.

An amendment to the *Indian Act* in 1886 made school attendance mandatory for Aboriginal children, and imposed fines and jail sentences on parents for failure to comply (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005; Chrisjohn et al., 2002). Assimilation and Christianization of the youngest generation of Aboriginal children took place in the absence of parents, grandparents,

and community leaders. Elias et al. (2012) stated, “By Christianizing, civilizing, and then re-socializing these children, the federal government hoped that these children, and subsequent generations, would contribute economically to a modernizing Canada” (p. 1561). Within one century, starting in 1874, the government of Canada exposed tens of thousands of Aboriginal children to a system fraught with structural and systemic problems, impacting their well-being and that of their families, communities and future generations (Elias et al., 2012). Although most residential schools ceased to operate by the mid-1970s, the last federally-run residential school did not close until the late 1990s (AANDC). The closure of residential schools did not contain the ongoing human destruction that resulted from the experience.

It is estimated that 80,000 former students of residential schools are still living today (TRC, 2015). To gain a better understanding of the impact of the residential school experience, it is imperative that the stories of residential school survivors are told and heard. The stories and narratives of survivors speak of the pain and suffering caused as the result of being removed from their families and homes and placed in settings that were unfamiliar and often unfriendly. Residential school survivors report that the residential school experience had an impact on them not only individually, but on their families and communities as well.

At the individual level, many residential school attendees experienced a negative impact on their overall well-being. Taken from their homes, stripped of their belongings, and separated from their siblings, residential school children lived in a world dominated by fear, loneliness, and lack of affection (TRC, 2015). Lack of adequate care and supervision resulted in the neglect and abuse of many vulnerable children. Children were subjected to a range of abuses including physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, and psychological abuse (Barton, Thommasen, Tallio, Zhang, & Michalos, 2005; Elias et al., 2012; TRC, 2015; Tupper, 2014). All too often children

were inadequately fed, clothed, and housed. The food they were fed failed to meet basic nutritional standards, and overcrowded conditions caused the spread of diseases resulting in a mortality rate as high as 50% in some schools (Woolford, 2013). As the entire residential school project was balanced on the proposition that the gate to assimilation was unlocked by the progressive destruction of Aboriginal languages, cruel beatings often took place when Aboriginal children spoke their Indigenous languages (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP]; Shantz, 2010). Strict discipline, regimented behavior, and the use of corporal punishment taught children to be ashamed of their Aboriginal identity. In addition to physical abuse, many residential school attendees were also abused sexually and have spoken out about their horrifying experiences (TRC, 2015).

The residential school experience took a huge toll on children's emotional health. Children suffered intense loneliness, felt anger towards parents who had been forced to deliver them to the schools, were alienated from opposite sex siblings and cousins with whom they were forbidden to speak, and were disconnected from parental and community socialization (Woolford, 2013). Many children lost their identity as their names were changed or simply replaced with a number. The physical, sexual, and emotional abuses suffered by Aboriginal children contributed to high mortality rates, poor health, and low academic achievement (TRC, 2015).

As a result of these abuses, survivors report a legacy of alcohol and drug addiction, feelings of hopelessness, dependency, isolation, low self-esteem, suicide behaviors, prostitution, gambling, homelessness, sexual abuse, and violence (Elias et al., 2012). Residential school survivors also report the toll their experiences have had on their mental health including "... rumination over past events and lost ancestors, survivor guilt, unresolved mourning, feeling

numb in response to traumatic events, anger, depression, intrusive dreams and thoughts, and fantasies about saving lost ancestors” (Evans-Campbell, 2008). Many survivors talk about feelings of inferiority and helplessness (Towle, Godolphin, & Alexander, 2006), and report that they lost years of their lives to alcohol, drugs, or the streets as they sought a way to dull the pain of not belonging anywhere (TRC, 2015). For most children, attendance at residential schools was a frightening, degrading, and humiliating experience. Chrisjohn et al. (2002) argue that the life to which Aboriginal children were to be assimilated was more similar to the domestication of animals than to the creation of citizens. This legacy of trauma and abuse has not only had implications at the individual level, but also at the family and community level.

At the family level, residential school survivors did not experience strong emotional bonds with their families as parents were prevented from having any influence over the educational, spiritual, and cultural development of their children. Lack of parental influence meant that children were not exposed to appropriate parenting role models nor Aboriginal customs and traditions (Tupper, 2014; Williams, 2002). By removing children from their communities and by subjecting them to strict discipline, religious indoctrination, and abuse on many different levels, residential schools often harmed the subsequent ability of students to be caring parents (TRC, 2015). This separation led to confusion on the part of both parents and children as to their roles in life which has left them feeling powerless (Neegan, 2005). Not only were children taken away from parents and grandparents, they were also separated from brothers and sisters. This resulted in a loss of connection to families which often left many children ashamed of themselves, their parents, and their culture (TRC, 2015). As a result of their experiences, many survivors today report difficulty in showing love to their children. Their

experiences of harsh discipline have left them with the tendency to treat their own children harshly as well (TRC, 2015).

At the community level, the residential school experience failed to transmit Aboriginal cultures and traditions causing a breakdown in many First Nations communities that is ongoing. These community consequences are a direct result of the experience of individuals. Children who were placed in residential schools were separated from family for extended periods of time resulting in loss of language, culture, values, customs, spiritual beliefs, and any true sense of belonging to community, family or nation (Kovach, 2009; Menzies, 2008; Young et al., 2010). Many children died while enrolled in residential schools, and many, having been isolated from their families for so long, chose not to return home, leaving Aboriginal communities empty and desolate (Christian & Spittal, 2008). Thus, for many Aboriginal communities, the residential school experience had a significant negative impact on children based on their inability to bond, form relationships with others, or maintain a sense of Indigenous identity (Woolford, 2013). This is the experience under which many of today's Aboriginal grandmothers grew up.

Although a high percentage of Aboriginal children who attended residential schools experienced much trauma, there are survivors who claim to have had positive experiences (Carr, 2009; Neeganagwedgin, 2013). Many survivors have expressed gratitude for the education they received, the fun they had learning, and for the long-lasting relationships that developed between some teachers and students, and among students themselves (TRC, 2015). However, the positive experiences that some Aboriginal children may have had are greatly overshadowed by the tragic accounts of harm and abuse of countless numbers of residential school survivors. Many people suffered these abuses in silence and shame; this has had a profound effect on the generations of today and represent a national challenge for the future.

Sixties Scoop

In the wake of the residential school system, the Canadian government empowered child welfare systems to remove thousands of Aboriginal children from their families to be placed in foster homes or to be adopted into non-Aboriginal families without taking steps to preserve their culture or identity (Dempsey, 2014; Ginn & Kulig, 2015; LaRocque, 2007; TRC, 2015). This wide-scale national apprehension of Aboriginal children from the 1960s onward was a transfer of children from one institution, the residential school, to another, the child welfare agency (TRC, 2015). Like residential schools, the purpose of the Sixties Scoop was to extract and assimilate Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal society (Ash, 2003; Spencer, 2016) stripping them of their language, culture, and traditions. Both residential schools and forced transracial Indigenous adoption serve as modalities by which cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples in Canada was to be achieved (Spencer, 2016). This mass forced removal of Aboriginal children from their homes took place from 1960 through to the 1980s (Smith, 2013). The number of Aboriginal children apprehended peaked in the 1960s and has come to be known as the Sixties Scoop (Pierce, Hemingway, & Schmidt, 2014; Spencer, 2016). Though increasing with the Sixties Scoop settlement in progress, there currently is very little research literature regarding the Sixties Scoop.

In 1951, an amendment to the *Indian Act* allowed social services in the provinces to apprehend children in First Nations communities (Milner, 2001; Spencer, 2016). As child welfare workers were guaranteed payment for every child apprehended, they scooped up children at tremendous rates primarily in Ontario and Manitoba (Spencer, 2016). This was often done without the knowledge or consent of parents. There were times when buses were hired to remove large numbers of children from reserves and relocate them to distant non-Aboriginal

families (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005). Child welfare agencies in Canada removed approximately 20,000 Aboriginal children from their First Nations communities under the auspices of protecting them from neglect (Spencer, 2016). Within Manitoba, Aboriginal children were routinely sent to homes in other provinces, other countries, and other continents (Downey, 1999; Pierce et. al., 2014; Spencer, 2016; Trocme, et al., 2004).

Like residential schools, the effects of the Sixties Scoop are evident today. Many of the Aboriginal children who were forcibly removed from their families and communities are now middle aged adults. Some are grandmothers who are now parenting their grandchildren. These survivors are plagued with the tragedy of losing their names, families, language, culture and traditions, and suffer with feelings of shame and low self-worth (Downey, 1999; Smith, 2013). Many survivors, who are now finding a voice, talk about the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse they experienced in the homes and communities within which they were transplanted (Milner, 2001; Nahwegahbow, 2015; Smith, 2013). Like survivors of the residential school experience, Sixties Scoop survivors report that their experiences have adversely affected their parenting skills and the success of their families (TRC, 2015). One survivor of the Sixties Scoop stated that while growing up he experienced lots of racism and continues to feel the effects of systemic racism in his everyday living (Ash, 2003). Another survivor talked about the countless vain attempts that were made to make him feel like he was “one of them” which was painful, frightening, lonely, and fruitless (Wagamese, 2009). Spencer (2016) interviewed two men who experienced the Sixties Scoop as a violent event that pulverized their cultural identity. These men indicated that the removal from their First Nations communities had harmful effects on their past, present, and future (Spencer, 2016). Both interviewees stated that the violence they experienced at the hands of their adoptive families and school officials primed them for a life of

violence (Spencer, 2016). One interviewee said that he engaged in self-harming behaviors as a way of mitigating the trauma of being violently extracted from his family and losing his identity (Spencer, 2016). This self-harm eventually led him to being homeless (Spencer, 2016). Both interviewees experienced a lack of connection to Aboriginal cultural practices, and continually recall and relive negative memories of their removal and replacement (Spencer, 2016). The Sixties Scoop, like the residential schools, has created a deep and unhealed pain in First Nations communities (Smith, 2013). Like residential school survivors, intergenerational scars and cultural loss makes it essential for Sixties Scoop survivors and their families to embark on a journey of healing and recovery.

Intergenerational Effects of Colonization Efforts

For Aboriginal people in Canada, colonization efforts remain one of the most destructive elements affecting current societal structures (Henderson & Wakeham, 2009; Kubik, Bourassa, & Hampton, 2009). In light of the history of the residential school experience and the Sixties Scoop, the damaging effects of these experiences have not only impacted those who attended residential schools and were adopted into non-Aboriginal homes, they have also had an enormous impact on the healthy functioning of Aboriginal young people, families, and communities in contemporary society. Patterns of abuse that were developed have been transmitted from grandparents to parents to children and are reflected in the array of social conditions that exist within many Aboriginal communities today (Menzies, 2008). High rates of poverty, poor housing conditions, negative health outcomes, suicide, domestic violence, child welfare interventions, drug and alcohol addictions, incarceration, and homelessness are social issues that are experienced by a disproportionate number of Aboriginal people as compared to the general Canadian population (Christian & Spittal, 2008; Elias et al., 2012; Menzies, 2008;

Shantz, 2010; TRC, 2015; Woolford, 2013). The inequities caused by persistent racial and gender discrimination and ongoing colonialism translate into greater levels of poverty among children and families who are Indigenous (Campaign 2000, TRC 2015). Inequities in food security, housing, education, and employment opportunities are ongoing. Aboriginal people who leave reserves to escape extreme poverty are often met with ongoing discrimination and exclusion in Canadian cities (Campaign 2000, 2015). Generations of Aboriginal children in Canada have endured grinding poverty due to legally sanctioned racism and attempted cultural genocide (Campaign 2000, TRC 2015). To this day, Indigenous children and families remain at high risk of poverty in Canada.

In addition to poverty, Aboriginal people have higher use and abuse rates of tobacco, illegal drugs, and alcohol than all other races and ethnicities (Mignon & Holmes, 2013). This higher risk of alcohol abuse translates to an increased rate of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders in Aboriginal children (Mignon & Homes, 2013). In addition to rampant misuse of drugs and alcohol, suicides, early deaths, and imprisonment have left many First Nations communities, especially in the north, virtually childless (Shantz, 2010). A disproportionate number of Aboriginal young people, as compared to non-Aboriginal youth, have been incarcerated (Battiste, 2013; TRC, 2015). The dramatic overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in Canada's prison system continues to expand (TRC, 2015). Violence against family members is epidemic in Aboriginal communities (Dickson-Gilmore, 2014). Dell and Kilty (2012) argue that contemporary processes of colonization are taking their shape by way of criminalization.

A gap in the transmission of family values, parenting knowledge, language acquisition, traditional and cultural knowledge, and community behavior has contributed to these social issues. The Sixties Scoop was seen as being inherently racist and unjust providing reason for

Aboriginal people to be cautious about social work institutions today (Pierce et al., 2014). Racial profiling and discrimination continues to marginalize many families (Campaign 2000, TRC 2015). Although the advent of the residential school system and the Sixties Scoop, and the trauma associated with it may be removed from current generations, many Aboriginal people still carry the trauma of those events as part of their emotional life. Evans-Campbell (2008) argues that, "...trauma, like a wave, continues to roll forward over generations leaving an array of effects in its wake" (p. 329). This wave of destruction continues to contribute to the social problems, poor health, and low levels of education in Aboriginal communities today. Efforts have been made through the Canadian government regarding healing and reconciliation around Aboriginal issues, but the process is ongoing, and often comes too late, particularly for grandmothers currently serving as primary caregivers of school age children.

Aboriginal Women

Although most Aboriginal people have experienced the adverse effects of Canadian colonization efforts, it is Aboriginal women who have faced more extreme effects as both sexism and racism have combined to further oppress and marginalize them (Dell & Kilty, 2012; Green, 2007b). Aboriginal women today are subjected to patriarchal and colonial oppression within society at large, and within their First Nations communities due to the incorporation of colonizer patriarchy (Green, 2007b). Internal colonialism has resulted in practices and processes that have become embedded in contemporary Aboriginal ways of being that produce and perpetuate harm against their own people within Aboriginal communities, organizations, and families (Green, 2007b; Nason, 2010; St. Denis, 2007). It is because of these multiple oppressions that Aboriginal women have become the most deeply marginalized group of people in Canada.

As a result of colonization and patriarchy, Aboriginal women suffer higher rates of poverty, unemployment, ill-health, violence and sexual exploitation than non-Aboriginal women (Kubik et al., 2009; Stewart-Harawira, 2007). In fact, Aboriginal women face the highest poverty and violence rates in Canada (Kubik et al., 2009). At least three-quarters of Aboriginal women have experienced some form of family violence which has led to higher rates of addiction and further victimization such as involvement in the sex trade (Kubik et al., 2009). Aboriginal women report being victimized by violent crime at a rate almost three times higher than non-Aboriginal women (TRC, 2015). LaRocque (2007) argues that "...Aboriginal females of all ages continue to suffer from child abuse, wife battering, sexual assault and murder in epidemic proportions" (p. 56). The disproportionately high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada, largely remaining unaddressed by the Canadian legal system (Dell & Kilty, 2012; NIMMIW, 2019; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2014; TRC, 2015), is clear evidence of the marginalization of Aboriginal women in today's society. A report released by the RCMP in 2014 indicates that 1,017 Aboriginal women and girls between 1980 and 2012 were killed and 164 are missing (TRC, 2015). The TRC (2015) final report states that "...available information suggests a devastating link between the large numbers of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and the many harmful background factors in their lives. These include: overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in child-welfare care; domestic and sexual violence; racism, poverty, and poor educational and health opportunities in Aboriginal communities; discriminatory practices against women related to band membership and Indian status; and inadequate supports for Aboriginal people in cities" (p. 180). It is troubling that Canadian police forces have not been successful in solving these crimes against Aboriginal women. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (2019) final report noted that the violence perpetuated against

Indigenous peoples “amounts to a race-based genocide of Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, which especially targets women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA people. This genocide has been empowered by colonial structures, evidenced notably by the *Indian Act*, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools, and breaches of human and Inuit, Métis and First Nations rights, leading directly to the current increased rates of violence, death, and suicide in Indigenous populations” (pp. 1-2). Sadly, Aboriginal women have been the target of multiple oppressions as a result of Canada’s sexist and racist colonial past which has affected their self-identity, and has created a cycle of poverty and abuse that is difficult to escape.

As violence is a common violation of human rights experienced by many Aboriginal women, it is critical for Indigenous feminists to look at ways to address this issue. Violence increases their social, political, and cultural disempowerment (Suzack, 2015) making it critical for Indigenous feminists to look at ways to address this widespread concern. Finding a voice and making public statements is a political strategy that can effectively bring attention to the injustice of gender violence against Aboriginal women. It is essential for a diverse community of listeners to be able to grasp the overlapping effects of gender disempowerment that the residential schools practiced against women not only as survivors, but also as survivors living out the intergenerational effects of the abuse and violence that the schools enacted against Indigenous people collectively (Suzack, 2015). Speaking before the TRC, female survivors struggled to bring attention to violence against Indigenous women in its wider cultural and social contexts (Suzack, 2015). Ostracism can be strong within First Nations communities if women speak out about the violence they have experienced. Despite the fear of being ostracized in their communities for speaking up against female violence, it is imperative that this human rights issue is addressed as it has become a national issue. To promote healing and reconciliation,

society needs to learn to listen to the claims made by these dissident voices (Hernandez-Castillo, 2010), and to work collectively to build a nation based on equity and respect.

Indigenous feminism provides a lens through which the oppression of Aboriginal women can be analyzed and acted on. Violence and self-determination, the capacity and freedom to make physical and intellectual choices (LaRocque, 2007), are among the most pressing issues faced by Aboriginal women today (Knobblick & Kuokkanen, 2015). For Indigenous women self-determination is not only collective, but also includes women's individual autonomy over their own bodies and reproduction, and the right to be free from violence (Knobblick & Kuokkanen, 2015). For Indigenous feminists, reconciliation between the political and spiritual is the primary task in the development of new and sustainable ways of compassionate co-existence (Stewart-Harawira, 2007). LaRocque (2007) sees Aboriginal women "as victims of colonization and patriarchy, yet as activists and agents in their lives; as oppressed, yet as fighters and survivors; and as among the most stereotyped, dehumanized and objectified of women, yet as the strong, gracious and determined women that they are" (p. 53). As such, Aboriginal feminists are becoming activists in their focus to end violence against women and children (St. Denis, 2007), and to address the many other sexist and racist issues that have arisen as a result of colonization. To move forward in positive ways, Aboriginal women, including Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren, need to embrace gender-justice activism and articulate self-determination goals (Suzack, 2015) in order to act as agents of change within their homes, communities, and nation.

Healing and Reconciliation

The challenge for many residential school and Sixties Scoop survivors is to continue to reclaim their roots and to finding healing. There is a small literature base on healing and

reconciliation efforts that have been implemented, as well as services and programs created by governmental agencies, community based agencies, and Aboriginal communities that support Aboriginal people on their journey towards healing and recovery. The process of healing and reconciliation started with government initiatives, and has carried over into communities and educational systems. These supports must be available to, and cognizant of the needs of, Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren.

Government Initiatives

Residential Schools. In Canada, the history of neglect and abuse in residential schools went largely unspoken for many years. It wasn't until the late 1980s, when class action lawsuits arose to demand compensation from the federal government for abuses experienced in residential schools that the Canadian government and churches began to confront the issue (TRC, 2015; Woolford, 2013). Thousands of former residential students took legal action against churches that ran the schools and the federal government that funded them (Chrisjohn et al., 2002; TRC, 2015). The prospect of a large class action lawsuit resulted in the government issuing a statement of regret in 1996 (Woolford, 2013). In the same year, the Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) became one of the first large-scale processes for witnessing and documenting the experiences of residential school survivors (Henderson & Wakeham, 2009). In response to the RCAP, Canada put \$350 million in funding for the creation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (Chrisjohn et al., 2002; Woolford, 2013). The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, established in 1998, was designed to promote community-based healing and renewal initiatives, and was administered primarily by Aboriginal people (Chrisjohn et al., 2002; Henderson & Wakeham, 2009; TRC, 2015).

These government initiatives failed to end the class action lawsuits that resulted in the federal government negotiating a settlement with the Assembly of First Nations (Woolford, 2013). The 2007 Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement included a compensation package consisting of a Common Experience Payment (CEP) and an Individual Assessment Process (IAP), a public apology by the federal government, and a national Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Woolford, 2013). The intent of these initiatives was to start the healing process for residential school survivors.

The CEP is paid to residential school survivors based on the number of years they attended residential schools. Survivors receive \$10,000 for their first year in school and \$3000 for every subsequent year (Morrisette & Goodwill, 2013; TRC, 2015; Woolford, 2013). This payment is troubling for survivors as it represents only the time spent in residential schools and does not address the cultural and individual harm done (TRC, 2015). The IAP does deal with specific instances of harm done by asking survivors to identify instances of physical, sexual, or psychological harm suffered individually (TRC, 2015). Although these processes are a formal recognition of harm done, financial compensation has not been restorative in terms of identity, culture, community, or individual well-being.

Beginning in the 1980s, apologies from the church system for its treatment of Aboriginal people and disrespect of their cultures have been an important step in the healing and reconciliation process (TRC, 2015). A further step in the healing process for many survivors and subsequent generations of young people took place in the form of a public apology by the government of Canada. On June 11, 2008, Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, offered a public apology for the abuses suffered by Aboriginal children as a result of the federal government residential school policy (Carr, 2009; Dorrell, 2009; Elais et al., 2012;

Neeganagwedgin, 2013; TRC, 2015). He acknowledged the sexual, physical, spiritual, and emotional abuses experienced due to over 150 years of residential school federal legislation, as well as the harm of forced assimilation and its impact on Indigenous communities (Christian & Spittal, 2008; Woolford, 2013). Although not all survivors accepted the apology, for some Aboriginal people Stephen Harper's apology has been a start in their journey towards healing and recovery (Battiste, 2013; Henderson & Wakeham, 2009).

In 2008, subsequent to Prime Minister Harper's apology, the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established to create a living document of the impacts of the Canadian residential school system (Elias et al., 2012; Henderson & Wakeham, 2009). The TRC completed its mandate in 2015 and outlined 94 calls to action to aid in the healing and reconciliation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (TRC, 2015). Thousands of survivors publicly shared their heartbreaking stories about their residential school experiences in regions across Canada. The hope is that these stories will open new healing pathways of reconciliation forged in truth and justice (TRC, 2015).

Sixties Scoop. Very little literature exists on government initiatives for healing and reconciliation for Sixties Scoop survivors. The abduction of Aboriginal children from their families and communities in the wake of the residential school system, and transplanting them into non-Aboriginal families in an attempt to remove their Aboriginal identity has caused much pain and harm. The processes and actions used by social workers have caused difficulty for Sixties Scoop survivors as they work to disentangle their past from the present, and to reclaim some existence outside of the effects of forced adoption (Spencer, 2016).

Nationally, in the 1970s, Aboriginal child and family service agencies began to develop which helped to affirm community-based systems of care, and to stem the tide of children being

placed in non-Aboriginal homes (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005). Today there are over 300 child welfare agencies in Canada operating under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. In addition, Canada provides funding for more than 100 agencies delivering child and family services to First Nations communities under the framework of provincial legislation (TRC, 2015). As such, Aboriginal child and family service agencies need to continue to be supported as they seek to respond to child maltreatment that honours the strength, wisdom, and resiliency embedded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005).

It is important to note that the federal government does not fund services to First Nations children and families who live off-reserve, deferring off-reserve services to provincial and territorial child welfare agencies (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005). Sadly, First Nations child and family service agencies working on reserves typically receive less funding per child than their provincial counterparts despite the documented higher welfare needs (MacDonald & Ladd, cited in Blackstock & Trocme, 2005). Aboriginal child welfare agencies funded by the federal government receive 22% less per capita funding than provincial agencies (Campaign 2000, 2015; TRC 2015). It is not surprising that as a result of this inequity, the TRC's first call to action is to redress current inequalities in funding and resources for child welfare agencies on reserves (Campaign 2000, 2015; TRC 2015).

In addition to the establishment of Aboriginal child welfare authorities throughout Canada, some important changes to child welfare policy were developed (Downey, 1999; Trocme et al., 2004). Some of the changes in child welfare policies and adoption laws now acknowledge the importance of children's Aboriginal heritage and give much greater control of the welfare of Aboriginal children to their communities (Smith, 2013; Trocme et. al., 2004). Blackstock and Trocme (2005) found that although Aboriginal child and family service agencies

experienced significant success, a few barriers that have limited their efficacy are inadequate access to financial resources and the continued marginalization of Indigenous knowledge within Euro-western social work. Despite these barriers, First Nations child and family service agencies have been successful at ensuring that children are cared for within their home communities, and that when placement outside of the community is required, steps are taken to ensure the child has access to cultural and linguistic services and to family whenever possible (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005).

Despite these positive changes, in 2013 there were more Aboriginal children in care in Canada than ever before. It appears that Canada's child welfare system has simply continued the assimilation that the residential schools started (TRC, 2015). At this time, approximately 27,000 Aboriginal children in the child welfare system account for 48% of children in care even though they represent less than five percent of the child population in Canada (Smith, 2013). This overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system continues to be a growing problem rooted in the history of colonization and discrimination (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005; Smith, 2013). Substance misuse, poverty, and inadequate housing appear to be undercurrents to the over representation of Aboriginal children in care (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005). There needs to be an ongoing commitment to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in care and to provide supports to keep families together (TRC, 2015).

Cindy Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations and Family Caring Society, has worked hard to provide equity in funding for all First Nations children. In 2007, along with the Assembly of First Nations, Blackstock filed a complaint against Ottawa regarding the federal government's discrimination against First Nation children on reserves (CBC, 2016). This court case was based on the government's failure to provide the same level of child welfare services in

First Nations communities that exist elsewhere (CBC, 2016). In 2016, this court case was resolved in a positive way (CBC, 2016).

Within the province of Manitoba, a step in the healing process for Sixties Scoop survivors was an apology from Manitoba's premier. Manitoba was the first province to apologize to Aboriginal adoptees for taking them out of their homes and placing them in non-Aboriginal families. In the spring of 2015, Greg Selinger, Premier of Manitoba at that time, apologized to Sixties Scoop adoptees in the provincial legislature (Selinger, 2015). To aid in the healing process, Manitoba instituted a repatriation program with the intent of bringing adopted Aboriginal children back to Manitoba to help them find their roots and reunite them with their families (Downey, 1999). Selinger (2015) announced that the Manitoba government would open adoption records to make them accessible to survivors to help adoptees and birth parents connect with each other. Survivors report working at connecting with their families, communities, culture, and traditions in order to regain their identity (Sinclair, 2007). In addition to this repatriation program, in 1982 Manitoba banned out-of-province adoptions of Aboriginal children and overhauled its child welfare system (Downey, 1999). On October 6, 2017, an \$800 million settlement for class action lawsuits of former wards of the the Sixties Scoop was announced, but it did not include Métis and non-status First Nations peoples. As we move forward, it is imperative for provincial and federal governments to continue to look at policies and practices regarding child welfare agencies in order to provide our Aboriginal children with successful life experiences starting in the early years.

Many Aboriginal grandmothers currently raising grandchildren are survivors of Canadian colonization efforts, and as such look to government initiatives both nationally and provincially to support them in their healing and recovery. Grandmothers who are survivors of the residential

school system are eligible for government payments. Although some Aboriginal grandmothers were skeptical, many felt that Stephen Harper's apology was a wonderful step toward healing and reconciliation. In addition to payments and apologies, there are grandmothers who have found a voice through the government funded TRC process (TRC, 2015). Many Aboriginal grandmothers have also found a voice regarding taking in their grandchildren to keep them within their family (personal conversation). Grandmothers have expressed fear that if they do not take in their grandchildren, child welfare agencies will place them in homes that don't support Aboriginal culture and tradition.

Community Healing

As a result of colonization, the magnitude of political, economic, and social problems faced by Aboriginal people is enormous (Kubik et al., 2009). A collaborative effort is needed for Aboriginal people for healing to occur within families and communities. Cultural healing, supports for mental and physical health, parenting supports, and supports for Aboriginal women all have the potential to bring healing from a legacy of oppression.

The strengthening of cultural identity is essential for healing to take place at both the individual and community level. Residential school and Sixties Scoop survivors report that Indigenous healing and self-care activities such as smudging ceremonies, spiritual teachings with an Elder, building and partaking in sweat lodge ceremonies, and participating in sharing circles have been effective in promoting healing (Ash, 2003; Greene et al., 2014; TRC, 2015; Wagamese, 2009; Yuen, 2011). Grandparents raising grandchildren have expressed a desire to access Aboriginal healing ceremonies and powwows to enhance and maintain their connections with the Aboriginal community (Mignon & Holmes, 2013). Community organizations might best

base their healing efforts within Aboriginal traditions as these traditions have tremendous power to aid in the healing process for many Aboriginal people.

Regaining language is another area that has the potential to strengthen cultural identity. One of the goals of the Canadian government was to rid Aboriginal people of their cultural identities, especially their languages (Neeganagwedgin, 2013). As a result, 50 of Canada's 53 Aboriginal languages are in danger of extinction (Neegan, 2005). To aid in the reclamation of self and collective identity, programs need to be put in place to help Aboriginal people reclaim their languages. In a study by Thompson et al. (2013), grandparent respondents identified the need to reclaim traditional languages so that they could pass them on to their grandchildren. This is one example of the perceived value and importance of community based Aboriginal language education. Systems that provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to learn their respective languages could enhance individual and collective Aboriginal identities as a significant step beyond colonization.

Communities can also promote healing by acquiring or providing further services for mental and physical health. Barton et al. (2005) found that Aboriginal residential school survivors and non-residential school attendees both experience poorer health and quality of life compared to non-Aboriginal peoples. With the many social issues faced by Aboriginal communities, it is imperative for government and community organizations to develop and implement mental and physical health initiatives in collaboration with Aboriginal people. Alcohol and substance abuse, as well as diabetes prevention programs are just a few initiatives that are badly needed in Aboriginal communities (Mignon & Homes, 2013). To ensure success, improvement of health care should be done through culturally relevant, community-based initiatives such as healing ceremonies (Mignon & Holms, 2013; Towle et al., 2006). As effects

of the residential school system are continuing to influence generations of people in relation to Aboriginal health and quality of life (Barton et al., 2005), it is critical that initiatives are developed to further promote physical and mental healing and well-being.

To reclaim family units, communities could perhaps best be facilitated to develop parenting workshops so that Aboriginal parents can be empowered to provide positive parenting and healthy lifestyles for their children. As indicated above, this approach would likely be most successful if based in traditional cultural activities. In a study by Greene et al. (2014), Aboriginal female participants, all with common histories of violence and substance abuse, talked about the impact of intergenerational trauma on their parenting and their need for support. To provide support, the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments need to develop culturally appropriate parenting programs for Aboriginal families (TRC, 2015). In Manitoba, with 81% of children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in care being Aboriginal (Fuchs et al., 2010), there is a clear need to raise awareness and provide support for Aboriginal women in their child bearing years. Given the association between parental substance use and youth exposure to the child welfare system, a focus on addiction treatment within parental support programs would be relevant in keeping children within their biological families (Barker et al., 2014). Family supports are critical in keeping families together and supporting parents and young people on their journey towards healing and recovery.

Aboriginal women are the most marginalized, poor and unhealthy population in Canada (Kubik et al., 2009) making it essential to focus efforts on promoting healing for this particular group of people. As discussed earlier, Aboriginal women experience high rates of poverty, unemployment, ill-health, violence and sexual exploitation. Long term solutions must address the elimination of poverty and the underlying causes of poor health while simultaneously revaluing

Aboriginal women and their culture (Kubik et al, 2009). Further education and training in a small, supportive environment can do much to empower women to gain knowledge and skills to develop sustainable livelihoods (Michell, 2013). In addition to further education, Aboriginal women can find healing through supportive networks. Yuen (2011) found that Aboriginal women who ended up in prison were able to begin to heal from the wounds of their past by collectively revealing their vulnerabilities in a safe and secure emotional environment. These women found healing through weekly discussions with a Native elder, sweat lodge experiences, powwows, and drum circles (Yuen, 2011). Providing space for Aboriginal women to vocalize their experiences of victimization is essential for them to regain a sense of self-identity (Dell & Kilty, 2012). True healing is highly dependent on their sense of belonging and connection with others (Yuen, 2011). Therefore, as Aboriginal women across all ages have been the target of multiple oppressions due to Canada's sexist and racist colonial past, it is essential to find unique ways that promote healing for this group of people.

For Aboriginal grandmothers raising grandchildren, community efforts could do much to help build capacity in their homes thereby contributing to the healing process for themselves and for their grandchildren. Based on conversations I have had with Aboriginal grandmothers who are supporting their grandchildren, many of them live in poverty and have experienced much physical and sexual abuse. These grandmothers may benefit from access to counselling services and need to be provided opportunities to participate in various cultural traditions and healing ceremonies. Thompson et al. (2013) found that grandparents who attend healing groups are better able to deal with ongoing issues stemming from their residential school experiences. In addition to participation in cultural traditions and healing groups, these grandmothers often are in desperate need of a range of other services including transportation, housing, food security, legal

assistance, medical care, and financial assistance (Mignon & Holmes, 2013). Facilitating linkages to all of these existing supports and services could greatly aid grandmothers in the healing process. Raising grandchildren, in addition to dealing with the complexities of the past, is a huge challenge; one that requires a broader societal response.

Support groups. The development of support groups is an intervention that could greatly aid in cultural, mental, emotional, and physical healing within Aboriginal communities. As I started a support group for Aboriginal grandmothers raising their grandchildren in Winnipeg's North End, I was particularly interested in what the research literature said about the use of support groups to bring about healing. There is a plethora of research literature on the use of support groups or self-help groups in helping people deal with nearly every concern or problem found in society. In the area of health, self-help groups exist for most chronic diseases, mental health issues, handicaps and addictions (Powell & Perron, 2010; Trojan, 1989; Wituk, Shepherd, Warren, & Meissen, 2002). There are also a large number of other groups that have an impact on people's psychological and social well-being including women's groups, groups for single parents, divorce support groups, groups for sexual minorities, groups for people who have experienced sexual abuse, groups for the elderly, and groups for many other life-disrupting problems (Ball et al., 2012; Trojan, 1989; Wituk et al., 2002). It may be that the organization of support groups within Aboriginal communities could greatly aid in the process of healing and recovery.

In particular, the use of support groups could benefit Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren. Although there is very limited literature on the use of support groups for Aboriginal caregiving grandmothers, there is some literature on grandmothers in general who are taking on a caregiving role for their grandchildren. For caregiving grandmothers,

participation in support groups has the potential to mitigate psychological distress as this gives them the opportunity to share stressful experiences and strategies for coping (Kelley et al., 2000). The development of grandmother support groups can help target a range of supports for grandmothers who are parenting their grandchildren (Baker & Silverstein, 2008; Kelley et al., 2007). Grandmothers often feel ignored and abandoned by society, and socially isolated due to increased demands of raising children at a time when they should have few child care responsibilities (Goodman et al., 2007; Kelley et al., 2000; Williamson et al., 2003). Attendance at regular support groups would greatly aid in decreasing this feeling of isolation, provide an opportunity to meet other grandmothers in similar or more difficult family situations, and provide increased opportunities to share stressful experiences and strategies for coping (Kelley et al., 2007; Kelley et al., 2000).

In addition to sharing challenging experiences, a support group can provide a wonderful social outlet for grandmothers who are primary caregivers of their grandchildren. Strozier (2012) found that kinship caregivers who attend support groups experienced a significantly greater increase in social support than those who did not attend these groups. Williamson et al. (2003) found that support from family, friends, and service agencies were a source of happiness for grandmothers and was associated with feelings of love and closeness. When this support was lacking, grandmothers felt hurt and resentful, and "...felt that society does not understand their need for more support than regular first-time mothers" (Williamson et al., 2003, p. 28). Attendance at support group meetings may be one of only a few opportunities to be out of their homes and to socialize with their peers (Kelley et al., 2007). Kelley et al. (2007) found that "...support groups provided a forum, not only for information exchange, but they also served as a vehicle to celebrate the joys of being a grandparent and to acknowledge individual self-worth,

something that often gets lost in the myriad of daily challenges” (p. 59). In this way, support groups provide a socialization outlet where grandmothers can become part of a mutual support network where their unique successes, needs, and challenges can be discussed in a safe environment. Attendance at support groups can provide grandmothers with a tremendous sense of empowerment and a strong feeling of belonging (Kelley et al., 2007; Kelley et al., 2000). Research literature is clear that participation in support groups may provide grandmothers with the opportunity for continued, ongoing, sustainable support. This is a strong indication that the development of support groups within Aboriginal communities for caregiving grandmothers could greatly aid the process of healing and recovery.

Aboriginal grandmothers who are primary caregivers of their grandchildren need extra supports to aid not only in their own healing, but in the healing of their grandchildren as well. There are many community efforts, including support groups, that have the potential to promote cultural health and well-being for both grandmothers and grandchildren. In addition to community efforts, educational systems also have great potential to further aid in healing and recovery for Aboriginal young people, families, and communities.

Educational Systems

In light of the intergenerational trauma experienced by many Aboriginal young people today, and the fact that Aboriginal children and youth have dramatic lower educational achievements than non-Aboriginal youth (TRC, 2015), an integral part of their journey towards healing can be facilitated through educational systems. Acknowledging and supporting Aboriginal students within school systems has the potential to promote healing and to have a positive impact in homes where grandmothers are raising grandchildren. School initiatives that have the potential to facilitate healing include integrating Aboriginal perspectives across

curricula and using Indigenous pedagogies, finding ways to give Aboriginal students a voice, and connecting with Aboriginal parents/guardians in the community.

Firstly, integrating Aboriginal perspectives across curricula, and embracing Aboriginal ways of knowing, are powerful ways to interrupt the dominant narrative of colonization and to make curricula more culturally relevant and informative for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (Neeganagwedgin, 2013). This is essential as Canada's educational institutions have largely ignored Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy (Battiste, 2005; Tupper, 2014). Currently, many Aboriginal students continue to be marginalized as they enter educational systems that rarely include their histories, heritage, and cultural traditions (Neeganagwedgin, 2013). AhNee-Benham (2003) argues that the high dropout rates and low test scores among Aboriginal youth signals a need for improved understanding and involvement of Aboriginal scholars in the study and development of pedagogy and content. Indigenous knowledges can be acquired through direct experience and participation in real-world activities (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991) making it critical for educators to provide students with these kinds of opportunities. Therefore, to maximize student success, school leaders need to facilitate a learning environment that mandates the marriage of curriculum and pedagogy with culture, and promote a curriculum that speaks the language of equity (Dantley, 2005; Sefa Dei, 2002). Including Aboriginal perspectives and pedagogies are essential in bringing to light historical knowledge and in helping Aboriginal students gain a strong sense of identity and pride in their cultural heritage.

Secondly, giving Aboriginal students a voice within our schools can be a powerful way to bring about healing and to stop the vicious cycle of trauma and marginalization (Cumings Mansfield, 2014). Helping students find their voice and empowering them to take action is essential as the population of oppressed, alienated, and dehumanized youth in our educational

systems is growing (Cumings Mansfield, 2014; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Giroux, 2003). To reverse this trend, it is imperative for educators to provide a forum where Aboriginal students have a voice, and to provide opportunities for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to dialogue and learn together in the construction of a shared future.

Thirdly, educational systems can aid in the healing process and increase academic achievement of Aboriginal students by making the effort to connect with Aboriginal parents, grandparents, guardians, Elders, and community members (AhNee-Beham, 2003; Dantley, 2005). The disconnect between many families and schools in Aboriginal communities is in large part due to residential school experiences which makes sociocultural integration of utmost importance within our schools (Scanlan, Frattura, Schneider, & Capper, 2012). The mistrust that has developed between survivors of residential schools and educational systems makes it critical for educators to make positive connections with parents/guardians and community members a priority. Home visits and providing educational workshops that are relevant and applicable to school and community needs are two ways to strengthen this connection. In a study by Mignon and Holmes (2013), grandparents indicated a need for schools to educate them on how to help their grandchildren with mental health and attention deficit disorders. Collaboration with parents/guardians and educators in the pursuit of knowledge has great potential for increasing student success and for healing and recovery.

In addition to home visits and workshops, support groups within educational systems also have the potential to benefit grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren. A kinship care study by Strozier, McGrew, Krisman, and Smith (2005) "... demonstrated the effectiveness of school-based services that not only increased caregivers' sense of self-efficacy in relation to dealing with their children's school related issues and needs, but also provided a valuable source

of self-esteem for the children themselves” (p. 1026). Strozier et al. (2005) argue that it is critical for school systems to increase their knowledge about the special needs of kinship care families in order to ensure that children are receiving adequate support to meet school outcomes. The findings in this study indicate the value of support groups, and the importance of initiating and evaluating kinship care programs based within school systems.

Building inclusive school communities and bringing healing to our young Aboriginal students requires educational leaders to tenaciously delve into issues as they relate to culture diversity and proficiency. As generations of Aboriginal children and youth experience success in school, and as knowledge and pride of their ancestry grows, I believe we will see a transformation in the lives, families, and communities of Aboriginal people including Aboriginal grandmothers. Not only will we see a change in Aboriginal people, I believe that we will also see a transformation in the attitudes and views of non-Aboriginal people where mutual respect and understanding will be the foundation upon which our schools and communities will operate. This is critical for Aboriginal grandmothers as they continue to seek healing for themselves and their grandchildren.

The healing and reconciliation process is a long journey for residential school and Sixties Scoop survivors, and for subsequent generations of Aboriginal people. Survivors who were oppressed, victimized, and silenced are struggling to heal themselves and to find a voice as are subsequent generations of women and young people. Aboriginal people who have been relegated to the margins by inappropriate uses of power (Kubik et al., 2009) need continued support in their healing journeys. Aboriginal grandmothers are leveraging their own experiences of cultural disruption to reinvest in the cultural health and well-being of their grandchildren which is bringing cultural healing and joy (Thompson et al., 2013). Hope, pride, purpose, and the belief in

one's ability to exert control over one's life are essential for the restoration of health, safety, and security (Shantz, 2010).

Although the Aboriginal population in Canada has been undergoing a cultural revival in recent years (Wilson, Rosenberg, & Abonyi, 2011), the journey continues to be challenging. With a continued focus on cultural revival, grandmothers who are in the position of being primary caregivers of their grandchildren will find healing and will be better equipped to prepare their grandchildren for a life where the vicious cycle of poverty, abuse, and ill health will be broken. The time is now to create healing environments founded on Aboriginal culture and traditions, and to continue with open, honest dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in an effort to realize true reconciliation.

Summary

Aboriginal people in Canada have a long history of colonization. The Canadian residential school system and the Sixties Scoop have left a wake of destruction and trauma for many Aboriginal people, families, and communities. Although the residential school system no longer exists in Canada, the legacy lives on in the form of pain and suffering among residential school survivors and their families (Barton et al., 2005). This legacy is reflected in the significant educational, income, health, and social disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (TRC, 2015). These disparities are most evident with Aboriginal women as they have been victimized in cycles of abuse. Colonization has relegated Aboriginal women into the background with no voice, creating inequities and injustices that must be addressed for healing and reconciliation to occur.

It is the destructive legacy of the Canadian residential school system that has compromised the plight of Aboriginal women and has led to the phenomenon of Aboriginal

grandmothers raising grandchildren. Grandmothers who build capacity within their homes and communities are instrumental in providing stability and hope for future generations of Aboriginal young people. Thus, this research study has the potential to contribute to a limited research base on the lived experiences of Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren within the complexities and tensions of a post-colonial context.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology for this research study. As a qualitative research study, I used autoethnography to take a look at how a grandmother support group started and how it progressed. Reading and analyzing my diaries helped to determine the pros and cons of this grandmother support group for working through daily lived experiences with an eye towards a larger goal of healing and reconciliation.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter includes an overview of the methodology of autoethnography that was used in this qualitative research study. Qualitative research is the study of research problems that seek the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2007).

McMillan (2004) states, “Researchers using a qualitative approach believe that there are multiple realities represented in participant perspectives, and that context is critical in providing an understanding of the phenomenon being investigated” (p. 256). Creswell (2007) posits that “...a hallmark of qualitative research today is the deep involvement in issues of gender, culture, and marginalized groups. The topics that we write are emotion laden, close to people, and practical” (p. 43). As such, the start and expansion of a school support group for grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren, in particular Aboriginal grandmothers, is the phenomenon that is being investigated in this research study.

The purpose in the use of autoethnography was to explore the initiation and continuation of the St. John’s Grandmother Support Group with an eye towards gleaming its value to the Aboriginal grandmothers who took part for supporting their daily existence, but also as a method of healing. The following research questions drove the analysis of my diaries:

1. Within a Canadian high school, what was the development and progression of a group of grandmothers, in particular Aboriginal grandmothers, who were raising their grandchildren?
2. What supports, resources, and initiatives were helpful and unhelpful in supporting grandmothers, in particular Aboriginal grandmothers, in their role as primary caregivers of their grandchildren?

3. What supports, resources, and initiatives would help promote agency within grandmother's homes and communities?

Autoethnography

Autoethnography was used to explore my experience as the founder and leader of a grandmother support group within a high school. I examined how the group took shape, and the monthly continuation of a group of grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren. To gain a better understanding about the value of autoethnography, the following is discussed: 1) the meaning of autoethnography; 2) the particular features of this type of method; and 3) the advantages, limitations, and criticisms this research method has endured since its emergence during the 1980s (Mendez, 2013).

Meaning of Autoethnography

Autoethnography attempts to research an experience from the perspective of an individual who lived that experience (Mendez, 2013). The use of autoethnography is based on the use of self (Holt, 2003). Clearly, autoethnography is a qualitative research methodology where researchers explore their unique life experiences in the context of the social and cultural institutions that have shaped the world the researcher inhabits (Custer, 2014, cited by Van Katwyk & Seko, 2017). Mendez (2013) states that the purpose of the research may be as varied as the topics with which it deals. The link between the personal and cultural aspect of the study helps support the process of autoethnography (Wall, 2006).

When autoethnography is used, the researcher typically writes about one's self. The process of autoethnography can uncover many different feelings within the personal writer (Custer, 2014). Personal experiences are critical in the development of the research being undertaken, or about experiences of the topic being investigated (Mendez, 2013). Writing

autoethnography is a test of one's ability to become vulnerable to one's self (Custer, 2014).

Custer (2014) states, "Autoethnography can radically alter an individual's perception of the past, inform their present, and reshape their future if they are aware and open to the transformative effects" (p. 2). Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experiences in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Clearly, autoethnography is intrinsically subjective (Custer, 2014).

Autoethnography is a method of research that is beginning to gain ground and momentum. It is a valid and acceptable way of knowing (Custer, 2014). In this case, autoethnography will be used to research a cultural experience. As the method of autoethnography is considered an intriguing and promising qualitative method, giving voice to personal experience for the purpose of extending sociological understanding can be helpful (Wall, 2008).

Autoethnography Research Features

There are particular research features used by the process of autoethnography. Research features are helpful to understand cultural experiences. Three research features examined include the characteristics of autoethnography, research participants, and methods used for participants.

Characteristics of autoethnography. There are several characteristics of autoethnography. A culture's relational practices, common values, and common beliefs are all practices that are used for a study (Ellis et.al., 2011). In particular, autoethnographic researchers seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experiences (Ellis et. al., 2011). Autoethnography respectively and selectively studies experiences that are based on being part of a culture or owning a specific cultural identity (Pitard, 2016). It also supports researchers to draw on their own lived experiences. In addition to

drawing on personal experiences, researchers connect the personal to the cultural, and place self and others within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997, cited by Maguire, 2006).

In addition to being placed in a social context, autoethnography supports alternative forms of writing. Autoethnography is an example of the increasing emergence of alternative forms of writing in the social sciences/humanities that focus on a dialogic notion of self, voice and human consciousness (Maguire, 2006). Alternative forms of writing can be particularly useful when autoethnography is being used.

Maguire (2006) states that autoethnography can 1) serve as a creative, pedagogical and therapeutic resource; 2) provide a textual site of re-authoring the self; and 3) deal with the ethical consequences of self-disclosures and emotionality. Ellis (2007) found that doing autoethnography involves a back-and-forth movement between experiencing and examining a vulnerable self. It is important to observe and reveal the broader context of these experiences (Ellis, 2007).

Finally, autoethnographies depict events in a powerful way and generate a kind of understanding that traditional research reports cannot do (Gaitan, 2000). Autoethnographies allow readers to exercise the author's imagination when certain situations have never been exposed to in a direct way (Gaitan, 2000). Thus, there is demonstrated value in relying on memory in ethnographic work (Wall, 2008).

Research participants. Ethnographic writing involves highly personalized accounts where authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture (Holt, 2003, p. 2). Autoethnography retrospectively and selectively discusses experiences based on being part of a culture or owning a specific cultural identity (Pitard, 2016). In particular, when researchers use this autoethnographic process, the practices used for a study

will include a culture's relational practices, as well as common values and beliefs practices (Ellis et. al., 2011). Mendez (2013) states that "Writing autoethnographically entails being ethical and honest about the events described as well as the content of words expressed by all the people involved in these events" (p. 4). The autoethnographer tries to make personal experiences meaningful, and cultural experiences engaging. In a study the researcher is either an observer or a participant (Pitard, 2016).. The autoethnographer tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging (Ellis et. al., 2011). In the case of this study, then, I was the sole participant in the study.

Participant methodology. The expectation of research methodology is for data to be available to generate interpretations and make claims (Wall, 2008). The data sources accessed by autoethnographers have followed the traditions of participant observation field notes, document and artifact analysis, and research diaries (Wall, 2008). Mendez (2013) states, "Writing autoethnographically entails being ethical and honest about the events described as well as the content of words expressed by all the people involved in these events" (p. 4). When doing research it is important to understand the best way to be ethical and honest in the approach.

The aim for using autoethnography as a methodology is to understand the impact of cultural difference on the researcher and on the relationship with subjects (Pitard, 2016). In the research study autoethnographers want to make sense of themselves and their experiences. Holt (2003) states, "Researchers would be well advised to be persistent in their autoethnographic intentions, and be prepared to face rejection and critiques of their chosen genre. Resilience and conviction are required to pursue this methodology" (p. 19). Ellis (2007) explains that doing autoethnography involves a back-and-forth movement between experiencing and examining a vulnerable self; and observing and revealing the broader context of that experience. To do this, it

is important to know that autoethnography can be approached with different focuses. Thus, being honest and ethical is important for researchers who use the methodology of autoethnography.

Advantages, Limitations, and Criticisms

The advantages, limitations, and criticisms of research methods for the use of autoethnography have been examined and have endured since its emergence during the 1980s. Advantages, limitations, and criticisms of autoethnography are noted below.

Advantages. One advantage in the use of autoethnography is to have the researcher's voice heard. This provides the researcher with a transition from being an outsider to an insider in the research study. According to Mendez (2013), autoethnography represents for many the right to tell their truth as experienced without waiting for others to express what they really want to have known and understood. An advantage of using autoethnography for an author's perspective is that it allows the researcher to write first person accounts which enables the researcher's voice to be heard. Clearly, the researcher often is the first person who is completely explicit about the events that are being analyzed (Mendez, 2013).

Another advantage is the potential of autoethnography to contribute to the lives of others by making them reflect on, and empathize with, the narratives presented. Ellis et. al. (2011) states that autoethnographers value narrative truth based on what a story of experience does. By reading a cultural or social account of an experience, some may become aware of realities that have not been thought of before (Mendez, 2013). Autoethnography creates possibilities for evocative and imaginative ways for researchers to represent realities for themselves and for participants (Naidu, 2014). This makes autoethnography a valuable form of inquiry.

Autoethnography is a useful qualitative research method used to analyze people's lives (Mendez, 2013). More specifically, "Autoethnography can range from research about personal

experiences of a research process to parallel exploration of the researcher's and the participants' experiences" (Mendez, 2013, p. 3). Mendez (2013) states, "Writing accounts of research should always have the goal of informing and educating others, which is an objective that autoethnographies might accomplish through making connections with personal experiences of readers" (p. 3). Therefore, autoethnography allows researchers to draw on their own experiences to understand a particular phenomenon or culture (Mendez, 2013).

Limitations. Despite the advantages of using autoethnography as a method of research, there also are limitations and criticisms that need to be explored. In particular, personal research methods that are part of autoethnography are much more marginalized because of the emphasis on the researcher's self as subject (Wall, 2008). A limitation of the study could be the "exposure it implies of the researcher's inner feelings and thoughts, which require honesty and willingness to self-disclose" (Mendez, 2013, p.4). Regarding relational ethics, autoethnographers often maintain and value interpersonal ties with their participants which can make relational ethics more complicated (Ellis et. al., 2011). Wall (2008) states, "Autoethnography can be a very difficult undertaking because this form of scholarship highlights more than ever issues of representation, objectivity, data quality, legitimacy, and ethics. Although working through these challenges can lead to the production of an excellent text, the intimate and personal nature of autoethnography can, in fact, make it one of the most challenging qualitative approaches to attempt" (p. 39). Limitations and criticisms must be looked at to move forward in the use of autoethnography.

When using autoethnography it is important that it can be evaluated. It seems that there are no formal regulations regarding the writing of an autoethnographic account since it is the meaning that is important, not the production of a highly academic text (Mendez, 2013).

Although there are many issues to consider when engaging in autoethnography, there are no criteria to be used to evaluate this methodology (Mendez, 2013). What is presented as truth can encompass some omissions or changes (Mendez, 2013). Thus, limitations and criticisms need to be looked at and explored to continue the work of increasing the use of autoethnography.

Criticisms. The recent use of autoethnography as a research study has caused a few criticisms for the research that can be done. Mendez (2013) argues that the use of autoethnography and the narratives of self have the potential to cause the status of “proper” research to remain problematic. A recurrent criticism of autoethnography is its strong emphasis on self. This happens to be the core of the resistance to accepting autoethnography as a valuable research method (Mendez, 2013).

In a positive way, reading autoethnography will help many realize that it is valid and effective to draw on personal experiences as an aid to explore a topic, as well as a prime source of data (Gaitan, 2000). Gaitan (2000) argues that: 1) most qualitative research now incorporates a level of reflexivity, 2) data are not presented as accurate representation of some reality; and 3) accounts do not pretend to be objective, but as social constructions of reality. It is helpful to realize how positive the use of autoethnography can be.

In summary, there clearly are advantages and disadvantages for using the process of autoethnography. Although the research method of autoethnography can be an unknown and difficult tool for researchers to use, it can be used for researchers to explore and portray the culture where a phenomenon is being experienced (Mendez, 2013). In addition, Mendez (2013) states, “The richness of autoethnography is in those realities that emerge from the interaction between the self and its own experiences that reflect the cultural and social context in which those events took place” (p. 5). It is through this representation that understanding of a particular

phenomenon is accomplished. Although presenting the real truth is something that we cannot fully accomplish, it is the belief that qualitative methods can help us to better understand a phenomenon in a given community or setting (Mendez, 2013). Understanding a phenomenon in a given community or setting is essential when autoethnography is being used.

Autoethnographies depict events in a powerful way and generate a kind of understanding that traditional research reports cannot (Gaitan, 2000). Autoethnographies allow readers to exercise authors' imagination when certain situations have never been exposed in a direct way (Gaitan, 2000). The aim of autoethnography is to recreate the researcher's experience in a reflexive way, aiming at making a connection to the reader who can think and reflect about their own experiences (Mendez, 2013). This research study was grounded in personal experience. Thus, to explore my experience as the leader of a Grandmother Support Group, I chose to use autoethnography as the research study.

Data Collection

Autoethnography is the research process that was used to collect data. The focus of autoethnography was my experiences with a Grandmother Support Group within a school where I was a Vice-Principal from 2004-2009. Together with school employees I visited all the homes of the Grade 7 and Grade 8 students for whom I was responsible. On these visits I noticed that there were many grandmothers who were raising grandchildren; in particular Aboriginal grandmothers. After meeting these women, it became apparent that they desired a forum to come together to talk about concerns and gain support. As a result, I started a monthly grandmother support group meeting. It is this experience that has given me the opportunity to use autoethnography to examine the start and the continuing support for a grandmother support that was started at St. John's High School.

Autoethnography is about subjective experiences (Van Katwyk & Seko, 2017). To that end, my subjective experience is best captured in the diary I wrote during my work with the Grandmother Support Group. My data collection therefore focuses on my personal diaries that I wrote that documented the development and progression of an Aboriginal grandmother support group. The data from this diary helped to provide an enriched understanding of the phenomenon being studied, and is the information from which my autoethnographic reflections and analysis stem. The document details the organization and details of grandmother support meetings, as well as some of the reflections on the progression of the group meetings.

The diary acts as fieldnotes that can be both descriptive, an objective account of what actually happened in every research session, and reflective, a more subjective, personal account of the course of inquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Any identifying information in the diary were replaced with pseudonyms and did not identify any of the individuals involved. I developed strong, positive, trusting relationships with the grandmothers in the group. I am very connected to these grandmothers and have developed pre-existing relationships with them.

I used my diaries to support an evaluation of my professional work (Wall, 2008). Although I have access to photographs and archival documents to support my memories, I will not refer to these during the writing on my autoethnography (Wall, 2008). I have relied on my personal diaries and the memories of my lived experience. My purpose in using autoethnography is to not only chronicle this support group, but also to consider how I have progressed as a leader and an ally with the initiation and ongoing work with Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren within a school context. In this research process and writing process, I want to use language that can be understood so that learning can take place (Wall, 2008, p. 48).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging data to enable the researcher to come up with findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative data collection techniques often result in a large amount of data that must be summarized and interpreted (McMillan, 2004). The process of distilling large quantities of information, thereby revealing the central features of the problem under study, is essential in the data analysis process (Stringer, 2008). A thorough analysis of data is collecting, then interpreting the data. In the first step, data need to be organized into manageable units while looking for categories, topics, and themes (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007; McMillan, 2004). The researcher looks for words, phrases, or events that stand out, then creates codes to help identify themes (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007; McMillan, 2004; Stringer, 2008). Organized data then need to be summarized which is the second step. Summarized entries that have the same code are examined, and a brief thematic summary is written to capture the essence of the information (McMillan, 2004). In the final step, the researcher interprets the findings inductively, synthesizes the information, and draws inferences (McMillan, 2004). Interpretation of data helps make the findings understandable and shows why the findings are important (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007). In this last step the researcher reveals what has been found and what it means. Ultimately, the purpose of data analysis is to seek the relationship between the data and the research questions (Peden, 2011).

The information from my diary was coded and developed into themes (McMillan, 2004). The codes were categorized into the three main research questions. Throughout this process constant comparison analysis was used to identify emerging categories, patterns, and themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Attention was paid to the themes of each research question and how the themes related to each other (Fullan Kolton, 2013).

I took note of any further changes or initiatives that would help support the meeting of the grandmothers in order to create a future of action and hope. The realities of grandmothers, in particular Aboriginal grandmothers, was described as fully as the diaries allowed. I was mindful of any defensiveness on my part to shape the research in positive ways. I worked hard to discuss the changes that were made based on ideas that grandmothers had.

In summary, I was very aware of my positionality as a researcher, educator, and president of Grannies Gone Global. I acknowledged my privilege and enjoyed reflecting on how the grandmother group started and how it moved forward. I have known these grandmothers for many years and have become an ally with them. I have continued to stand in solidarity with grandmothers raising their grandchildren as we have been together for many years. I believe that one of the first steps to acknowledging the value of these women and all they have done for their grandchildren is to tell the story of their growing advocacy as a collective, and to use this research to advocate for more supports for this resilient group of women.

Quality of Research

It is critical that the findings of a research study are trustworthy and believable. The primary criterion for determining the quality of research is the credibility of the study. McMillan (2004) defines credibility “as the extent to which the data, data analysis, and conclusions are believable and trustworthy” (McMillan, 2004, p. 277). This research study included attempts to make the findings more credible by focusing on triangulation, trustworthiness, confirmability, and transferability. I was mindful of any defensiveness on my part, working hard to use careful and balanced language.

Triangulation

Triangulation of evidence is a common analytical technique used to increase the credibility of a qualitative research study. McMillan (2004) defines triangulation as the collection of information from different data sources so that different approaches to the same thing can be compared. If the results of a variety of data collection methods agree, the findings are judged to be credible (McMillan, 2004).

In this study, triangulation was achieved by collecting data from my diary as well as any fieldnotes, news articles, or additional documents that I kept that were part of the work of the grandmother's group. Findings from multiple methods of data collection were compared to increase the credibility of this research study.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is another way to increase the credibility of a qualitative research study. If a study is trustworthy, then what is recorded as data is what actually occurred in the setting that was studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; McMillan, 2004). Trustworthiness can be enhanced by an in-depth description of methodology. Given that this study will be using autoethnography, I utilized detailed information and reflections from my diary with honest and balanced language in my analysis.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree that the results of a study can be confirmed or corroborated by others. Confirmation by research participants helps ensure that the data collected reflects reality and accurately measures what is being studied. In this study, I was the research participant. Although I perhaps could have confirmed the results of the group description with the grandmothers, some of the grandmothers have passed on, and most of the initial faces have

changed. Instead, I worked to ensure that my diary reflections were analyzed with much self-reflexivity. McMillan (2004) posits that “Good qualitative researchers are aware that their subjectivity and potential bias may threaten the credibility of the research and they take steps to avoid it” (p. 278). Thus, to enhance confirmability, it is imperative for the researcher to check and recheck data throughout the study so that the analysis is accurately portrayed.

In this research study I focused on reflexivity which is the inward reflection of the researcher; an awareness of self in creating knowledge (Kovach, 2009). My subjectivity no doubt influenced the research findings (Kovach, 2009). Throughout the data analysis process I kept detailed fieldnotes to diminish the potential effects of my subjective opinions. In the findings of this study I looked for both confirming and disconfirming evidence of themes established, as well as both positive and negative experiences.

Transferability

Transferability is the ability of research to be applied or generalized to similar settings (Peden, 2011). While the intent of qualitative research is to study a specific context in depth, transferability to comparable settings can be possible as a result of detailed contextual information (Fullan Kolton, 2013). For findings to be transferrable, the data, categories, analyses, and patterns must be described. In addition, transferability depends on how well other researchers can understand the findings so that they can be used in other contexts (McMillan, 2004).

In this research study I provided a detailed description of the background to this study, the purpose of the study, and the data collection and analysis processes. This research study also provided a narrative of my experiences, and by extension, of the experiences of the development and progression of the grandmother group. This might resonate with people who have had

similar lived experiences or been part of other support groups. Research findings were clearly articulated so that other researchers will be able to understand the findings. It is my hope that this research study provided a rich and detailed summary of the methods and findings so that the findings and participant experiences will resonate with others and be transferable to varying contexts where grandmothers are raising their grandchildren.

Ethical Considerations

In this autoethnographic research study, I considered the development and progression of a Grandmother Support Group for Aboriginal grandmothers raising grandchildren. I attempted to represent the experiences of myself in collaboration with others involved in the Grandmother Support Group respectfully. I acknowledge the value and importance of each grandmother's contribution to the success of the Grandmother Support Group. In the report of this study, pseudonyms and altered details were used when referring to any of the grandmothers. Any reflections in the diary that included comments from grandmothers which could identify a participant was not included.

Finally, the bias that I brought to this study is an ethical concern. To minimize its effects, I was explicit about my perspectives and positionality, and how my perspectives and positionality might influence the design, execution, and interpretation of the study. I looked for confirming and disconfirming evidence, and included both positive and negative experiences and findings in the results. It was essential to engage in purposeful work; work and research that authentically supports Aboriginal grandmothers, that is useful and meaningful within Aboriginal homes and communities (Kress, 2014). I was continually aware of my own biases and necessity of consistently locating myself in the research (Kovach, 2009). I honoured the voices of the

grandmothers; and ensured that the long-term reciprocity required within Indigenous homes and communities was honoured (Kress, 2014).

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the qualitative autoethnography methodology used in this research study. The data collection process and data analysis process were provided. This chapter concluded by reviewing the criteria for a quality research as well as ethical considerations. I desired to convey this story in the best possible way so that others will see the value of supporting grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren. Chapter Four provides a description of the initiation and progression of the Grandmother Support Group from 2004-2017.

Chapter Four: St. John's Grandmother Support Group

Introduction

This section describes the initiation and continuation of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The Grandmother Support Group started when I was a school administrator at St. John's High School. When I was doing home visits for Grade 7 and 8 students, and working in my school office, I spoke to many grandmothers who talked about how difficult it was raising their grandchildren. It was these conversations that started the St. John's Grandmother Support Group. This chapter will discuss how this support group got started, and the way it moved forward from 2004-2017. Meetings were held each school year from September to June.

2004-2005

In August, 2004, I started my work as the Vice-Principal at St. John's High School. In this school I was in charge of 459 Grade 7 and Grade 8 students. I immediately found that my new job was challenging but very fulfilling and rewarding (Penner Diary, Oct 31, 2004). It did not take me long to find out that St. John's High School was in a "rough: area of the city. Many students were having a very tough time at school. In the fall of my first year as Vice-Principal, I experienced many difficult school issues. Two examples of difficult student actions I experienced included: 1) a drive by shooting right across the street from the school, and; 2) a fight in the school parking lot right after school (Penner Diary, October 31, 2004). As a first time Vice Principal, I immediately was called to deal with some difficult student issues.

I also found that bullying and threats were a daily occurrence, and that many students were very needy. Many students came to school with behavioral and cognitive disabilities, and were involved in the youth criminal justice system. Conversations with students were often

centered on theft, drugs and alcohol, bullying, violence, and gang activity. I felt that my office looked like a Salvation Army depot, as I came to understand that I had to have basic necessities available for students in need, including granola bars, T-shirts and much more (Penner Diary, October 31, 2004). I found that staff were doing all they could to help students in many ways. Despite the many difficulties that I experienced, however, I enjoyed going to work every day – as my diary notes, each day was full of surprises (Penner Diary, October 31, 2004).

At the end of my first school year as Vice-Principal, I was shocked when I counted 266 suspensions that year. This made me believe that some positive changes needed to be made. In spring, I explained to staff the changes I believed we needed to make for the following school year: 1) start working on restitution to help students make restitution for their mistakes and make better future decisions; and 2) I was going to visit the homes of all of our Grade 7 and 8 students to welcome them to school. The purpose of visiting the homes of our students was to welcome Grade 7 and 8 students back to school in September, 2005, and to meet and talk to parents/guardians. I strongly felt that these visits is where we needed to start to affect change (Penner Diary, June 4, 2005). I spoke with the middle years staff and was pleased that the majority of staff were supportive about my proposal (Penner Diary, June 4, 2005). I was excited about the changes we might make, both for the culture of the school, and for students' personal lives.

2005-2006

In August/September, 2005, I visited all the 459 homes of our Grade 7 and Grade 8 students. The school's Social Worker was eager to join me and drive me to all the homes of our students. My goal was to establish positive communication between students and their parents/guardians. In most homes we talked to our students as well as their parents/guardians

about the plan for the middle years students at St. John's High School. Sadly, I saw much poverty. I visited many dilapidated residences and crack houses, as well as overcrowded conditions. Students often came to school hungry and dressed in clothes not adequate for our cold winter temperatures. My heart felt sad when I happened to talk to grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren. They often talked about what they were trying to do to help their grandchildren move forward.

I was surprised when I found out that the man who had gone on my home visits with me had called the *Winnipeg Free Press*. On October 6, 2005, a picture of me, and a story about my 459 home visits appeared on the front page of the *Winnipeg Free Press* (Penner Diary, October 30, 2005). This was followed by an interview from a CTV news reporter; an interview from radio station CJOB; a local church that called to indicate their desire to collect granola bars and juice boxes for our students; recognition from the Manitoba legislature; and information offered to the public from other local TV and radio stations. I was humbled by all the media attention I received, that gave me the opportunity to talk about St. John's High School in a positive light (Penner Diary, October 30, 2005; Penner Diary, November 19, 2005; Penner Diary, November 27, 2005).

After all the public hype with the media, I reflected personally about why all this attention was drawn to such a simple decision to visit with parents/caregivers. I found it sad that my presence as a white school administrator visiting the homes of (primarily) Aboriginal caregivers living in poor neighbourhoods became so sensational. But I also felt that people needed to see that our school was trying to make positive change for the lives of the families it served. I also reflected on the volume and plight of the many grandmothers I met who were raising their grandchildren. I recall looking through busted doors and broken windows, and

seeing life happen in all its triumphs and sorrows (Penner Diary, December 23, 2005). There was a family in each home, and a grandmother worth loving who was doing her best for the children. As I wiped the tears from my eyes, I prayed for safety of the people in the inner city and North End (Penner Diary, December 23, 2005). By the end of those visits, the kernel of an idea to somehow find a way to support grandmothers raising their grandchildren started to grow.

2006-2007

After the wonderful home visit experiences I had in the fall of 2005, I decided that in the fall of 2006 I would visit the homes of all the Grade 7 students coming to St. John's High School as well as Grade 8 students new to St. John's High School. Middle Years staff had become interested in joining me so I visited the homes with several staff. It was wonderful for parents, guardians, and grandmothers to meet the St. John's middle years teaching staff and me. Once again I was overwhelmed by the number of grandmothers I met who were raising their grandchildren. When I had completed all my home visits it was interesting to see another article appear in the *Winnipeg Free Press* (Penner Diary, September 9, 2006). I recall receiving a letter asking me to be a keynote speaker at the Education Charge Conference at the University of Winnipeg (U of W), as well as being asked to speak to a number of university classes (Penner Diary, September 30, 2006). An Educational Assistant (EA) came up to me one day and said, "Have I ever told you that you inspire me? It's because you give a shit" (Penner Diary, October 25, 2006). I laughed at her comment, and was thankful that I was receiving so much support from school staff. On the other hand, I also felt sorrow that such simple actions of human care were considered so extreme in a community that had felt the repercussions of racism, poverty, and all the effects of colonialism that have traumatized so many families.

After the second year of visiting the middle years students at the end of summer, my compulsion to do something to help grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren had moved beyond thought alone. After Christmas I had a conversation in my office with a grandmother who was raising a very difficult grandchild. She seemed lost regarding what she should do to help her grandchild. Seeing her struggle, at the end of our meeting, I invited her to go for coffee. I asked if it would be okay if I invited two more grandmothers who were also raising their grandchildren. She was quick to agree, as she needed a lot of support. I then called the two grandmothers who also were dealing with some difficult grandchildren. They quickly agreed to join us.

On Thursday, February 1, 2007, I had a meeting with three grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren (Penner Diary, February 3, 2007). I was working with their middle years grandchildren so I thought it was essential that I go out with the grandmothers and talk with them about ways I could support them and their families. I picked up two grandmothers and met the third grandma at Tim Hortons for coffee and dessert. After initial introductions the grandmothers chatted like they had always known each other. They talked about the many challenges of being primary caregivers for their grandchildren. Living in an area with gangs, criminal activity, violence, drug and alcohol use, and poverty caused the grandmothers, at an elderly age, to experience much difficulty in raising their grandchildren. Invigorated by the conversation and the opportunity to connect with other grandmothers who were in the same situation, they asked if they could get together again. I readily agreed and picked them up again the following month. In March, 2007, the original grandmothers met again as well as a few more grandmothers I had met the previous month. We went to the Canad Inn in the local area, had dinner, chatted, and laughed. It was wonderful talking with the grandmothers. They all had many

things to say about their grandchildren, both good and bad. But through it all, it was clear how much they loved those children, and wanted to do everything in their power to give them good lives. At the end of dinner I told the grandmothers that we would meet again the following month. This was the formal origin of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group (Cowan, 2009; Penner Diary, February 3, 2007; Penner Diary, March 18, 2007).

When Spring Break was over I called the grandmothers and told them we would meet at St. John's High School in the staff room on Thursday, April 5, 2007 (Penner Diary, April 22, 2007). This was the start of formal meetings held the first Thursday of every month. I invited a few more grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren. Prior to the meeting, one of the middle years staff had made little Easter packages for me to give to each of the grandmothers. We had a lovely time having dinner together and talking about their lives and that of their grandchildren. At the end of our meeting I gave each of the grandmothers the beautiful Easter gift. They were thrilled to receive a gift that had been made just for them. Although not all the grandmothers were Christian, they none-the-less were touched by the human kindness of the gesture.

A grandmother called me the day before our April grandmother meeting to tell me she was not feeling well and would not be coming. The day after our grandmother meeting I was driving home on Good Friday. As I was driving down Main Street I realized that the grandmother who had not attended the grandmother meeting the night prior lived on a block just off of Main Street. I happened to have one grandmother Easter gift left in my trunk so I thought I should drop it off for this grandmother. This grandmother's granddaughter was in my office a day prior to our April grandmother meeting and saw the gifts that the grandmothers would be receiving for Easter. I debated whether I should drop off my last Easter package for this

grandmother or whether I shouldn't stop by on a holiday. I finally decided that this would be a good thing to do. The school girl's eyes flew open when she answered the door and saw me standing there. She turned around and ran to her grandmother's bedroom to announce my arrival, then ushered me in. I walked into the bedroom, sat down on the bed, took the grandmother's hand, and wished her good health and a happy Easter. I then gave her the Easter gift and said good bye to the grandmother and her granddaughter. When I was leaving, I was just closing the house door when I heard the school girl say, "Grandma, I told you she would bring you a present" (Penner Diary, April 22, 2007). Tears came to my eyes as I reminded myself of the importance of listening to my inner voice. We do not know when a moment of kindness can be inadvertently lost, even with good intentions. We can never take those moments for granted.

Near the end of the school year a grandchild was having a very difficult time. Her grandmother, a teacher and I arranged a meeting at her home to discuss how to help this young adult move forward. I brought the grandmother a cup of coffee and her grandchild a hot chocolate. We had a serious but important discussion that included the responsibilities we all had to support the student. In the end we all agreed on strategies to support this grandchild to have a better school experience. When the teacher and I were about to leave, the grandmother thanked me for the coffee she had received and said it sure had made her feel special (Penner Diary, June 2, 2007). At our next grandmother support meeting she joined us and was able to be fully present to support other grandmothers with similar difficulties (Penner Diary, June 2, 2007).

We held our final grandmother support meeting at the beginning of June. At our final school meeting we had three new grandmothers attend. It was such a pleasure spending time with all the grandmothers. They all had such a good sense of humour that had carried them through life experiences that would have decimated many others (Penner Diary, June 16, 2007). Their

resilience in the face of incredible circumstances made me more determined than ever to carry on with a grandmother support group at the start of the new school year.

2007-2008

Prior to the start of the 2007-2008 school year, I once again visited all the Grade 7 students and the new students in Grade 8 (Penner Diary, September 3, 2007). The St. John's Grandmother Support Group began with a dinner on October 4, 2007. We had a record of 11 grandmothers come out for dinner at the Canad Inn (Penner Diary, October 7, 2007). I picked up a car full of grandmothers and a few staff members volunteered to help me chauffeur the others. We had an amazing evening planning for the yearly events with the group of grandmothers. They came up with some good ideas for the school year, including baking and exchanging cookies, making Star pillows and hangings, getting a grandma group photo, and getting a list of everyone's phone numbers so that they could call each other for support. This initial momentum thrilled me because it was the first time I was able to decentre myself as the "leader" of the group. During this meeting, some of the grandmothers felt comfortable and confident enough to be supports for each other. Though they had always chatted like long lost friends at our meetings, I felt that this was the first evening that the grandmothers really gelled as a group with a collective sense of purpose. For me this was an incredibly special evening and an important turning point for the group (Penner Diary, October 4, 2007).

During the fall of this year, I had a home visit with one of the St. John's Aboriginal grandmothers. This grandmother confided that in December her granddaughter was involved in a court case related to being a victim of sexual violence. The grandmother asked if I would go with them. Of course I agreed. It was at this point that she started to cry and told me how much the Grandmother Support Group meant to her and the other grandmas. She told me that the group

had given the grandmothers pride in what they were doing, and that what they were doing was worthwhile (Penner Diary, November 18, 2007). I thought about how selfless these women were to carry on the difficult tasks of child rearing at their ages in the circumstances they faced daily. To me, these women deserved to be lifted up for all they had done. This event made me face the effects of violence perpetrated on many Aboriginal women, and the damage these traumas do to the women who feel it is their responsibility to carry on in silence, sometimes for decades.

Amidst the backdrop of normalized trauma, the grandmothers were determined to make life worth living, for themselves and their families. At our December meeting, the grandmothers received a framed group photo and a bunch of stocking stuffers. In addition they decided to organize a cookie exchange from their fall baking (Penner Diary, December 6, 2007). In the new year the grandma group started making Star hangings and Star pillows at St. John's High School. A school teacher graciously volunteered her time helping the grandmothers do this. Several months were dedicated to sewing projects. Because each meeting began with a dinner, there was always much visiting, which often ended in less time for the projects. That really was not a problem given that what was most important were the supportive relationships developing between grannies. Sadly, one grandmother had a heart attack prior to one of our meetings. The grandmothers who arrived at our meeting graciously finished her Star pillow for her and signed cards. That weekend I went to see her in the hospital. I gave her some flowers, a card, a picture of her working on her pillow, and the beautiful pillow sewn by the group members. We both cried together as we understood how deeply that support meant to these women who had been made to feel that they had no one to share their burdens. It was impossible not to see the love and trust growing between the grandmothers (Penner Diary, April 13, 2008).

Our grandmother meeting in May was a Mother's Day celebration. At this point we had a record of 16 grandmothers attend. All the grandmothers received Mother's Day gifts and a free gift certificate for a manicure. In June we had our final grandmother gathering of the year. At this meeting the grandmothers honoured me with a \$50 gift certificate to Tim Horton's as well as a number of beautiful momentos that I will treasure forever. They also gave the drivers gifts to thank them for picking them up every month. We finished the year with tickets to a Winnipeg Gold Eyes baseball game! All the grandmothers who wanted to go hopped on a bus ride to the stadium. We were taken up to a box where we had our own seats. There is nothing like eating hamburgers, chips and drinks while watching a big game and laughing with the girls (Penner Diary, June 21, 2008)! We had tons of fun letting go of the cares of life and enjoying each other's company.

The events of the group were sponsored partly by St. John's High School and partly by donations that had started to come in as word of the value of the group spread (Penner Diary, November 18, 2007; Penner Diary, July 5, 2008). In the spring I was nominated for, and won, a Woman of Distinction award for education. Though I was feeling that it was not me who deserved the award, I was thrilled that four grandmas came with me to the event to support me (Penner Diary, May 11, 2008). My acceptance speech deliberately pushed the spotlight to the valuable contributions that these grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren were making, and that their collective support of each other was what needed to be celebrated. Soon after this event, CBC radio called and asked for an interview with a grandmother. The grandmother who was interviewed was very articulate, and not surprisingly, this coverage once again led to more publicity (Penner Diary, May 11, 2008). CBC radio also called me in spring and asked if members of our group would be willing to do an interview. I was thrilled that these

women were being acknowledged for all they were doing (Penner Diary, May 11, 2008). The *Free Press* came to school in spring to interview some of the grandmothers, as did the Winnipeg School Division that turned into an article called “Our Schools and Connections.” Finally, the *Steinbach Carillon News* picked up the story of the value of the St. John’s Grandmother Support Group (Penner Diary, June 21, 2008). This had been a momentous year for the group, full of busy monthly meetings, growing financial contributions, and publicity related to the contributions made by these women. News of the St. John’s Grandmother Support Group was quickly spreading, and the momentum of the group was exciting and ripe with possibilities.

2008-2009

Several Middle Years staff willingly offered to come with me to support the home visits for the 2008-2009 school year. At one home we visited a lady who answered the door and said, “I know you. I read a paper about you this winter. I knew you would come to my home. I was waiting for your visit” (Penner Diary, August 30, 2008). It was wonderful hearing this comment because it made me feel that we were building trust with a community that had not held trust in the school system for a long time. The idea that there was now an expectation that caregivers would be visited and welcomed as partners in education was evidence of a strong positive change.

The 2008-2009 St. John’s Grandmother Support Group started more like a family reunion than a support group. The grandmothers were so excited to see each other and to talk. They once again determined events they would enjoy during their meetings. In December, they participated in a gift exchange with lots of laughter and energy. They also decided to engage in bead working as part of their monthly meetings (Penner Diary, January 24, 2009). At our April grandmother meeting I announced to the grandmothers that I had received an Assistant Superintendent

position at the Interlake School Division. My announcement took them by surprise, and it was not received well. I let them know that although I would not be working at St. John's High School, I would still attend the monthly Grandmother Support Group meetings. The grandmothers recognized that this would change part of the reason for my presence as I would no longer be tied to the school where their grandchildren attended. They also did not necessarily trust my level of commitment to the group given that I would be working outside of Winnipeg in a position with much responsibility. Many of the grandmothers acknowledged their sadness about the turn of events, and we all shared tears. Though I remained committed to the group, it was clear that many were feeling quite dejected (Penner Diary, April 10, 2009). I reiterated my commitment to the group, but I realized that many of the grandmothers saw my move as the beginning of the end of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group. Though I had tried to decentre my positioning, I knew these grandmothers saw my relationship to the school as being the key to the group's survival.

In May we held a special Mother's Day event. We rented a school bus which enabled us to bring all the grandmothers and volunteers from St. John's High School to the Terrace restaurant in Assiniboine Park (Penner Diary, May 15, 2009). A St. John's volunteer, a teacher who had helped me run the St. John's Grandma Support Group, bought corsages for everyone as well as plastic wine glasses with sparkling apple cider (Penner Diary, May 15, 2009). On the bus we poured a drink for every grandmother and toasted the grandmothers for being caregivers for their grandchildren. When we got to the restaurant the teacher volunteer put a little package of bath salts at each plate (Penner Diary, May 15, 2009). We enjoyed a lovely dinner and engaged in wonderful conversations. On the way back to school every grandma received a grandmother T-shirt. On our way back to Winnipeg's North End, anyone who did not know better would have

thought the bus was pulsing with the energy of a group of giggly teenagers rather than a load of grandmothers who carried the weight of the world on their shoulders.

In June we had our final grandmother meeting of the year. Amidst the gifts and acknowledgements, the grandmothers affirmed a desire to support African and Aboriginal grandmothers on reserve - grandmothers in other contexts who were also raising their grandchildren. This was indication of another momentous shift in our group—the move from focusing on self care, to care for others in their immediate circle of relationships, to care for others unknown but who faced challenges that might be similar in vastly different contexts. Many of the grandmothers knew I was going to Kenya, Africa that summer to do some volunteer work. They asked if I could find a group of grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren. I told them I would also look for another grandmother group in Manitoba that needed support. Their excitement was contagious, and the sense of collective efficacy developing within the group was tremendously powerful. How different this was from the year the group first started. How tremendous was the power that could be unleashed when a group of women begin to believe in themselves, in each other, and in their power to change the world.

The public relations activities continued to grow. By that time, I had reconciled with the anxiety caused by the personal credit that was granted to me as a white woman, when it really should be directed to the grandmothers who were leading these families. I felt that the attention should be drawn to the school, to the community, and to the women...but it all deserved attention. To that end, then, I felt that I would take whatever opportunities came my way to make sure the North End received positive, rather than the usual negative, coverage. In this way, I recognized that my privilege granted me access to spaces that could lever change and support the work. That year, a film crew from City TV followed me and a teacher on some of our home

visits. City TV aired this feature on their morning breakfast show. I received a City Heros Certificate (Penner Diary, September 7, 2008) and a two minute report about home visits (Penner Diary, September 7, 2008) aired twice on the *Big Breakfast* show (Penner Diary, September 7, 2008). I also was given an opportunity to speak at the Delta Kappa Gamma annual AGM, and at a ladies tea in Steinbach, Manitoba (Penner Diary, May 15, 2009). I also continued to advocate for the grandmothers to be the centre of these events. At the beginning of June, three grandmothers came with me to the University of Manitoba to speak to a Graduate Education class on Gender and Equity (Penner Diary, July 1, 2009). These grandmothers had never been to a university before so they were excited about being there. They shared funny stories which made the students laugh, and shared other stories about the inequities they faced that made students cry. After their presentation, the grandmothers talked about how much they enjoyed sharing their stories with young people. I could see how these opportunities were bolstering their self-confidence (Penner Diary, July 1, 2009). This school year the St. John's grandmothers moved with confidence into their roles as knowledge keepers, and they enjoyed making time to talk to people about their role of raising their grandchildren.

On July 6, 2009, I travelled to Kenya, Africa (Penner Diary, July 6, 2009). My trip to Kenya gave me the opportunity to meet many people and make some great contacts. At Beacon of Hope I met a grandmother group that happened to be there when I was visiting (Penner Diary, August 1, 2009). These grandmothers were also raising their grandchildren. I had the opportunity to sit down and talk to them. After sharing with them the goals of our grandmothers' group and hearing about their own challenges, I sensed the solidarity and affinity they felt with the Winnipeg grandmothers, I felt that it was appropriate to give this group a donation from the grandmothers in Winnipeg that had been entrusted to me by the St. John's Grandmother Group.

While I was in Kenya, I attended a World Vision meeting and met a wonderful lady from Uganda. One night I spoke with this lady and told her about my Grandmother Support Group in Winnipeg, Canada. I let her know that the grandmothers with whom I worked were women raising their grandchildren. After much conversation she said she would like to start a Grandmother Support Group in Kampala, Uganda. She talked about the many grandmothers in Africa who were also raising their grandchildren, related often to the effects of the AIDS epidemic. I was excited because I knew that the St. John's grandmothers had wanted an opportunity to support other grandmothers around the world. I saw that we could do some potential fundraising for these grandmothers in Uganda if the St. John's grandmothers were interested in a partnership (Penner Diary, August 1, 2009).

2009-2010

The St. John's Grandmother Support Group met the first Thursday in September, 2009. I was excited about seeing the grandmothers again. A teacher at St. John's High School helped me put together a slide show of my African photos. At our first school year meeting I showed the slides of the Kenya grandmothers I had met. I told them about the work they were doing and the money we had given them. I then talked to the St. John's grandmothers about the woman who was going to start a support group in Uganda. The St. John's grandmothers were excited about supporting the Uganda grandmothers so we brainstormed fundraising ideas. It was wonderful seeing the St. John's grandmothers move forward to support a new grandmother group in Uganda (Penner Diary, August 1, 2009). This level of agency was renewing their excitement for making positive change in their own, and others', lives.

In the October granny meeting we had dinner, then discussed a timeline for fundraising. In particular, a discussion took place regarding what projects they wanted to tackle first. This

session gave the grandmothers a sense of purpose (Penner Diary, October 3, 2009). We also talked about when we would have a granny social. The decision was to have this social some time in the upcoming year.

After the October meeting the St. John's grandmother group engaged in fundraising to support African grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren. The grandmothers worked on making a variety of products which were sold in November and December to St. John's staff at noon hour, at Christmas concerts, at the St. John's Winter Gala, and at parent/teacher meetings (Penner Diary, November 7, 2009).

In December the grandmothers held a Christmas party. We met at Canad Inn. We enjoyed dinner and exchanged gifts (Penner Diary, December 6, 2009). The grandmothers laughed a lot, and enjoyed our Christmas celebration. It was wonderful to see the joy and comraderie in the room.

At the January meeting, the grandmothers unanimously supported having a granny social (Penner Diary, January 30, 2010) that we organized over a potluck dinner in February. Throughout our monthly grandmother meetings that spring, the St. John's grandmothers started making beaded necklaces to sell at their fall granny social (Penner Diary, May 15, 2010).

It was difficult to find a hall that was available on the weekend (Penner Diary, February 15, 2010).. One day when I was driving to work I thought about having our granny social at the Convention Centre in downtown Winnipeg (Penner Diary, May 15, 2010). I was not sure that this would work for us as it was a very expensive venue, but I thought it would be worth the effort. I travelled to the Winnipeg Convention Centre to take a look at potential room, noting that it was big enough to welcome 400 people. I was thrilled about the possibility, but when I asked about the cost, I had to let the managers know that our North End group would not be able to

afford that. They immediately told me that if we would rent the room the day before or the day after Remembrance Day, they would offer it to us for a lot less money. They too were struck by the power of this group of women and what they were doing for others. At our last meeting in June, 2010, I talked to the grandmothers about the potential for us to have our granny social at the Convention Centre in downtown Winnipeg. The grandmothers were very excited about the opportunity to attend this major venue for a social with their grandchildren.

After the agreement to have our social at the Convention Centre, we chose the date of November 12 (one day after Remembrance Day). Fred Penner confirmed that he would come and sing to the children (Penner Diary, June 13, 2010). We decided to have young adults do face painting with the young children, and to have an adult put together balloon animals for children. We were able to get a music man to play music throughout the evening. Several people told me that they would be willing to donate items for a silent auction (Penner Diary, June 13, 2010). One of my friends and I spent a day soliciting donations (Penner Diary, August 8, 2010). The excitement over this social was becoming palpable.

Throughout the school year we again were contacted by media outlets that wanted to know about the granny group. They interviewed a number of grandmothers. We also started receiving donations for grandmothers raising their grandchildren as word started to spread about our fundraising efforts to support Ugandan grandmothers. A photographer from Our Schools came to our Christmas party to document our group of grandmothers raising grandchildren (Penner Diary, December 6, 2009). The media stories of the grandmothers continued to amplify the positive work in which these women were engaging. A writer from the Winnipeg *Free Press* interviewed two grandmothers in April for an article for Mother's Day (Penner Diary, April 11, 2010). In April, I was invited to talk to a group of women in Warren, Manitoba, about my trip to

Kenya (Penner Diary, May 15, 2010). At the end of this meeting these women donated funds to the Grandmother Support Group (Penner Diary, May 15, 2010). Here I realized that yet another group of women were being empowered as the work of mothering around the world was being acknowledged. At the end of April I was invited to do a presentation on our group and its efforts at the Healthy Communities Conference in Morden (Penner Diary, May 15, 2010). In conversation with another presenter on the ride back to Winnipeg, an opportunity to advertise our granny social coming up on the CJOB radio broadcast called, *Your Life Unlimited* was presented to us. I was struck once again by how small happenstances had snowballed into life-changing opportunities. The grandmothers group was no longer only touching the lives of the initial group of women. This group was now touching the lives of people locally, nationally, and internationally.

2010-2011

The beginning of the 2010-2011 school year began with a St. John's Grandmother Support Group meeting on September 9. A teacher from the school was now regularly attending our monthly meetings and was in charge of dinner meals. After dinner, our group engaged in a sharing circle that welcomed new grandmothers and allowed everyone to update each other on life since June. At the end of our meeting we discussed the grandmother social and handed out free social tickets for all the grandmothers and their grandchildren (Penner Diary, September 11, 2010). For the next two monthly meetings the grandmothers continued working at making jewelry which would be sold at our granny social.

On Friday, November 12, the day of the social arrived. I took the afternoon off and got set up for the granny social (Penner Diary, November 27, 2010). I had a group of family and friends help me drive all of our prizes that were going to be set up in our room at the Convention

Centre (Penner Diary, November 27, 2010). The St. John's grandmothers started coming at 6:15 p.m. We ended up having full house – approximately 400 people. We had such a fun family atmosphere. Fred Penner did a great job singing to the children and adults who were there. After the concert the dancing floor was open for all people. Many grandmothers got up and danced with their grandchildren. Right from the start we had a person making balloon animals, and the children loved getting their faces painted by the young people who were in charge. The jewelry that the grandmothers had made was up for sale, as were tickets for the large volume of silent auction prizes. Near the end of the evening I called up all the St. John's grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren to recognize their work, their energy and the love they have for their grandchildren (Penner Diary, November 27, 2010). There was a lot of tears shed by the grandmothers who were proud of their ability to host an event in such a reputable venue. What warmed my heart was seeing the children have so much fun in a safe environment (Penner Diary, November 27, 2010).

The morning after the granny social was accounting day. After making all our payments for the social, we ended up with a surplus of \$8000 dollars. When the grandmothers heard this, they were absolutely thrilled (Penner Diary, January 18, 2011). Although many of the grandmothers lived in poverty, they remained committed to reaching out to the Ugandan grandmas with their support. Their selflessness in the face of their own need humbled me and made me think more deeply about my own privilege.

After the success of the fall term, the grandmothers discussed how they wanted to continue their momentum in January. The St. John's grandmothers were excited about the Uganda grandmothers using the money they had fundraised to sustain their livelihoods (Penner Diary, January 18, 2011). The grandmothers began discussing how they might raise money for

grandmothers in northern reserve communities, and perhaps holding a retreat (Penner Diary, January 18, 2011). In February, the grandmothers baked cupcakes to raise money for Valentine's Day (Penner Diary, February 13, 2011). In April, the grandmothers relaxed from their efforts by spending the evening playing BINGO and taking a group photo (Penner Diary, February 13, 2011). For Mother's Day in May, the grandmothers were bussed to Larter's Golf Course for dinner (Penner Diary, May 15, 2011). After our meal a Ugandan lady spoke to the grandmothers about the impact of their work. Her message was soul food for the grandmas (Penner Diary, May 15, 2011). The grandmothers received a small craft with a plant in it for Mother's Day, and I handed out our grandmother pictures (Penner Diary, May 15, 2011). We had a wonderful year supporting one another and continuing our discussions about what the grandmothers could do to support other grandmothers who were also raising their grandchildren.

This school year several organizations wanted to hear about the work of the St. John's grandmothers. On a Saturday in January I had the opportunity to set up a display regarding the St. John's grandmothers, and to speak to women attending the Women's Ministry that took place at The Meeting Place (Penner Diary, February 13, 2011). At the end of April I was asked to speak at the Meals on Wheels annual general meeting (Penner Diary, May 15, 2011). After I spoke, the organization gifted our group with funds for them to support a weekend retreat.

In July I travelled to Uganda to meet the Kampala Grandmother Support Group. It was remarkable to meet 30 grandmothers who were also raising their grandchildren. I let them know that the Canadian grandmothers wanted them to use the money that had been raised for them to develop sustainable livelihoods (Penner Diary, July 14, 2011). The idea was for grandmothers to start a livelihood so that they would earn money every month to give their grandchildren some food, clothing, and to start sending them to school (Penner Diary, July 19, 2011). I gave these

grandmothers beaded necklaces created by the St. John's grandmothers, a picture of the St. John's grandmothers, and care packages of sugar, salt and soap (Penner Diary, July 19, 2011). The African grandmothers reciprocated by offering gifts they had created for the St. John's grandmothers, and they took part in a group photo to send back to Canada. This was a very emotional experience for me, as I felt that I was the emissary between these profoundly knowledgeable women whose lives were connecting out of their shared experiences across the world. Rather than persevering on the tragedies and hardships on their lives, they came together in support and love. It was absolutely beautiful, and I was grateful to be part of this life-changing work.

With the advent of fundraising I was often asked if our group could issue tax receipts. This caused me to start thinking about applying for charitable status through the Canada Revenue Agency. In February, feeling that this was the right thing to do because our group had become much more than a support group by this time, I put together a Charitable Status registration form and sent it forward to the Canada Revenue Agency. When I returned home from Uganda at the end of July, I received a letter telling me that my application had not been accepted. The feedback indicated that I had to be more detailed about the activities supporting our purposes (Penner Diary, September 4, 2011). At the end of July I made a few application changes and sent it back to the Canada Revenue Agency in Ottawa. This was the fourth big change to our group efforts over time. The agency of the group was becoming formalized into organizational status, and our efforts had to reflect this new shift.

2011-2012

On Thursday, September 8, 2011, the St. John's grandmothers met for dinner. They were anxious to hear from the Ugandan grandmothers I had met over the summer and their response to

the St. John's grandmother efforts (Penner Diary, September 17, 2011). The grandmothers paid rapt attention as I shared my experiences with them and showed them pictures (Penner Diary, September 17, 2011). I gave the St. John's grandmothers their gifts from Uganda and an 8x10 photo of the Uganda grandmothers. They were delighted to receive their acknowledgements from the Ugandan grandmothers.

At our October meeting I informed grandmothers that we had become a registered charity. I told them that at the end of the month, on September 28, 2011, we were granted charitable status. Grannies Gone Global (GGG) was officially born (Penner Diary, October 10, 2011)! The mission statement indicated that the charity was to provide emotional and physical support to grandmothers both locally and globally who find themselves in the rewarding but challenging position of being primary caregivers of their grandchildren (Penner Diary, October 10, 2011). The grandmothers were thrilled to hear this news and were appreciative of the formal change to become a recognized charitable organization. They now had a formal recognized mission for their work that renewed their sense of purpose and and direction.

The shift to become a registered charity opened up many financial doors for the St. John's grandmothers and for African grandmothers because we were qualified to receive money from grants and foundations (Penner Diary, October 11, 2011). Because I recognized my own lack of knowledge in this realm, I went to speak to a finance worker to learn more about the process of running a registered charity. (Penner Diary, October 22, 2011). I was now on a new learning journey as the formal spokesperson of a registered charity. At times I wondered how I was going to balance all the responsibilities of my career with the growing work of being the formal spokesperson of GGG. I would think back to that first invitation for a cup of tea and the

amazing consequences it had for grandmothers across the world. Each time my sense of commitment would be renewed.

We also had to create a formal GGG board with four board members. A board meeting was expected to be held twice a year. Given our new formal status, I talked to a school division Webmaster who was delighted to help us set up a GGG website (Penner Diary, January 12, 2012). Yet another shift! We were officially announcing our presence in an online virtual world accessible by anyone linked to the internet!

In November and December, the St. John's grandmothers worked hard to make crafts to sell to the public. They were excited about working towards the formal mission of GGG to help African and Winnipeg grandmothers raise their grandchildren (Penner Diary, October 10, 2011). The assistant leader of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group worked on preparing craft sales for the grandmothers (Penner Diary, October 22, 2011). Several grandmothers came to extra meetings to work on making Christmas crafts. Craft sales took place at the University of Winnipeg, St. John's High School, College Jeanne Sauve, and at a personal home (Penner Diary, December 17, 2011). At the beginning of December the St. John's grandmas had a wonderful Christmas dinner. They chatted excitedly about the work they had done to support grandmothers in different contexts.

During this school year, many activities relating to grandmothers raising grandchildren took place. In the fall of 2011, I got an email letting me know that social workers in a school division in southern Manitoba had started a Grandmother Support Group (Penner Diary, October 10, 2011). I drove down to that division and talked to the leaders about how we had started our grandmother group, and what we had done moving forward. This was yet another example of how the St. John's grandmothers were showing by example how women can collectively

organize to support themselves and each other. I felt that our group was spurring on feminist organizing as women across Manitoba and across all walks of life were seeing our example as an avenue of empowerment for themselves and their families. What a difference these groups can make when people start to self-organize and become agentic.

The requests for speaking engagements continued to grow, but I was happy to do this work to support GGG. In October, I went to a meeting at the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC). This organization donated \$5000 to send to the Ugandan grandmothers (Penner Diary, October 22, 2011). At another event in fall I shared our experience with the Ugandan grandmothers at a Peace Concert in Manitoba (Penner Diary, November 11, 2011). People donated money for the Ugandan grandmothers whose small businesses were supporting their families with food and education. In addition to the Peace Concert, I was asked to speak to the Golden Age Fellowship whose members also donated to our charitable organization. In November I was a keynote speaker at the Healthy Together Now conference in Winnipeg (Penner Diary, December 17, 2011). Somehow our efforts were noted by members of the Bison Men's Alumni Choir, and the choir donated money to GGG. One day, without any acknowledgement, an envelope of money and cheques were dropped off for us to use for grandmothers raising their grandchildren (Penner Diary, December 17, 2011). Just before Christmas I had the opportunity to talk to a yoga class that annually chose a charitable organization for a donation (Penner Diary, December 16, 2011). Also in December I had the opportunity to speak at The Meeting Place church services in Winnipeg (Penner Diary, December 17, 2011). I talked about the start of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group and our work. I mentioned that we would be having a granny retreat in spring. After the service a man came to talk to me and said that he would fund the granny retreat for all the grandmothers

(Penner Diary, December 26, 2011). I was speechless, but I accepted his kindness with gratitude. I could see that the efforts of the grandmothers deeply moved others. The donations we received were in recognition of the spirit and intent of these selfless grandmothers who had little, but who were creating life-changing spaces for others. This kind of work was now spurring others with much more means to do similarly. By their example, the grandmothers were teaching others to give of themselves in a spirit of love and support.

In January 2012, the grandmothers held a potluck dinner that was attended by a Free Press reporter who wanted to write an article about the St. John's grandmothers and the Uganda grandmothers (Penner Diary, January 12, 2012). The grandmothers were keen about getting positive public attention over their efforts to support the Ugandan grandmothers who had used the funds to support family businesses. After dinner I showed pictures of the Uganda grandmother projects. After the reporter left, we had a sharing circle (Penner Diary, January 12, 2012). Although as a group we were moving along with incredible momentum, the sharing circle brought forward many sad stories that many of the grandmothers had experienced over Christmas (Penner Diary, January 12, 2012). I was reminded that although as an organization we were doing good work, our initial purpose to support these women as individuals was still very necessary. After the sharing circle, the grandmothers began planning the upcoming granny retreat and talked about holding another granny social.

At February's grandmother meeting we organized a guest speaker. This was another shift for the grandmothers, as they were now asking for this space to be one of education and learning. A speech pathologist came to talk to the grandmothers about helping their grandchildren improve their speech (Penner Diary, March 18, 2012). There was much conversation about what the grandmothers thought they could do to support their grandchildren. This meeting ended with a

short conversation about meeting the Aboriginal grandmothers at the First Nations reserve community with whom they were connecting outside of Winnipeg.

In February, a new opportunity for collaboration developed. Over the Christmas holidays I had spoken to a woman who was related to people from the First Nations reserve community (Penner Diary, January 12, 2012). She contacted some grandmothers on the reserve who were willing to meet with us. I talked to the St. John's grandmothers and set up a date that would work for the two groups of women. On February 25, I drove with three St. John's grandmothers to the community to meet grandmothers who were also raising their grandchildren (Penner Diary, March 18, 2012). After our conversation, one of the community grandmothers said she would like to start a grandmother support group in her community (Penner Diary, March 18, 2012). This was another new achievement, as our group's example inspired the creation of others. On our ride back to Winnipeg, the St. John's grandmothers were very excited about driving to the community and meeting local grandmothers who were also raising grandchildren.

At our March grandmother meeting I showed the grandmothers pictures from our Christmas party and our trip to the First Nations community (Penner Diary, March 18, 2012). In April, our sharing circle was focused on some of the difficulties the grandmothers were having with their grandchildren. The women supported each other and offered strategies they had used to try to work through similar experiences. It was clear that these women trusted each other and had become fast friends. After the sharing circle, we discussed the granny retreat that would take place in April.

In April, I was asked that year to present on the St. John's Grandmother Support Group at the Winnipeg School Division board meeting (Penner Diary, April 7, 2012). I felt it was very important that the board members understand the experiences of the grandmothers who were

raising grandchildren who were students in the division. The voices of these grandmothers were seldom heard when decisions about schooling were made at the division level. It was gratifying to know that our grandmother's efforts were acknowledged and supported by these decision-makers who were now paying attention to what they had achieved as a collective.

During the last weekend in April, the St. John's grandmothers held a granny retreat. We rented a school bus and picked up the grandmothers at St. John's High School. The grandmothers said goodbye to Winnipeg's North End and drive out to a beautiful camp right beside a river. Many grandmothers had never been outside of Winnipeg's North End, so they were very excited about the trip. The bus ride was loud and chatty as the grandmothers munched on sandwiches made for them along the way. Once we were settled into the camp, we came together in a circle. I passed around a roll of toilet paper and told the grandmothers to take as much as they needed. After the roll had been passed around, each grandmother had to say something about themselves for every square they had taken (Penner Diary, April 28, 2012). The grandmothers laughed uproariously at the activity, and the stories they told for each square of toilet paper kept us all in stitches.

On Saturday the grandmothers enjoyed breakfast, then participated in a session on hand care, and another making crafts that allowed them to relax. After lunch they participated in Tai Chi session, a meditation, and a session on Student Responsibility. The grandmothers articulated their appreciation for the strategies that were presented in the last session, and many noted that they were willing to try the strategies with their grandchildren (Penner Diary, April 28, 2012). An evening discussion session was held on the topic of Difficult Behaviors and Conversations (Penner Diary, April 28, 2012). We ended the evening playing Bingo and watching a beautiful sunset.

On the last morning we took part in Hawaiian dancing that became the fun highlight for many grandmothers. We finished the retreat with a sharing circle. The grandmothers created special bonds over the weekend, and some didn't want to go home (Penner Diary, April 28, 2012). The small reprieve from their daily trials, the laughter, and the comraderie was appreciated by all, and had helped to relieve some of the stress they carried (Penner Diary, April 28, 2012).

At the beginning of May the grandmothers held a wonderful Mother's Day dinner at Larter's Gold Course. In order to continue the focus on creating spaces of learning, we invited an Aboriginal government worker for dinner to share in conversation and discussion about the nature of this work (Penner Diary, May 21, 2012).

In May I got a call from the grandmother of the First Nations community who had started a grandmothers group. She asked if our group would like to meet up with several grandmothers who wanted to get together on May 12 (Penner Diary, May 21, 2012). Three of the St. John's group were able to go on the trip out to the community. We met nine grandmothers at a beautiful log cabin right next to the treaty grounds (Penner Diary, May 21, 2012). All the grandmothers had a wonderful discussion. The grandmothers let us know that they were interested in helping us fundraise. It was fascinating to see that this second group was also shifting to the space of wanting to help other grandmothers. We had a lovely lunch with the group, and then took a picture of the grandmothers to share with the rest of the St. John's grandmothers (Penner Diary, May 21, 2012).

June was our last meeting of the year. After dinner, I showed the grandmothers a video I had put together for them based on the year's activities (Penner Diary, June 9, 2018). The grandmothers found it hard to say good bye for the summer after all the personal time they had

spent with each other. We finished this school year with two new grandmothers who joined our group (Penner Diary, June 9, 2018).

In July I travelled back to Uganda to meet the grandmothers and talk to them about the projects they had created to support their families. The Uganda grandmothers acknowledged their appreciation for all that the Winnipeg grandmothers were doing for them (Penner Diary, July 6, 2012). I was encouraged by how many of the Uganda grandma projects were flourishing (Penner Diary, October 7, 2012). I passed on to a second grandmother group in Uganda the donation from MCIC (Penner Diary, March 18, 2012). I also found out that two more grandmother groups were being established in Uganda organized by the Ugandan leader with whom I was connected, due to the success of the first group. The Ugandan leader was doing a wonderful job supporting grandmothers raising their grandchildren, and these grandmothers were self-organizing in ways that were leading to sustainable lifestyles for themselves and their families.

2012-2013

At our first meeting in September, I showed the St. John's grandmothers pictures from my trip to Uganda, and shared with them the good news that there were more grandmother groups starting because of the support and example they had set for other grandmothers raising grandchildren. We talked about holding another Granny Social and spent the next two months making jewelley and crafts for the event. The joy and comraderie between the grandmothers at each of our meetings was palpable (Penner Diary, November 5, 2012).

On October 24, I travelled to Altona to meet the Borderland School Division grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren. I had the opportunity to talk to this small group of grandmothers about what the St. John's grandmothers have done, and what they wanted to do this school year (Penner Diary, October 24, 2012).

On Saturday, November 10, the Granny Social was held at 7:00 p.m. at the Riverbend Community Club on Main Street. Earlier in the day we set up tables for the 63 silent auction prizes and craft sales. The grandmothers had done some baking so they set up a table with lots of baked goods. Unfortunately, our first Winnipeg winter snow storm came on strong just prior to the social (Penner Diary, November 14, 2012). Sadly, only 200 people were able to attend this granny social due to their inability to travel in the poor weather (Penner Diary, November 14, 2012). Despite the lower attendance than we had hoped, we had a wonderful time. University students came to do face painting for children and adults, and a school teacher made animal balloons (Penner Diary, November 14, 2012). Jake Chenier came to sing to the children, and Kevin Chief introduced Ray St. Germaine as our entertainment for the evening. Ray St. Germaine put on a wonderful performance for all the people at the social (Penner Diary, November 14, 2012). We danced and enjoyed the canteen that was organized by the St. John's grandma group. It was a pleasure to hear from a number of grandmothers who told me that they felt like they were making a difference for themselves, their families, and for women around the world (Penner Diary, November 14, 2012).

The grandmothers did a wonderful job, but we did not make much money at the social this year. However, because we had a charitable status, many donations were made external to the actual event (Penner Diary, November 14, 2012). The silver lining in the cloud was that we got national exposure (Penner Diary, November 14, 2013). We also had many interviews with radio and television employees before and after the Granny Social. On November 5, I had a phone interview with 95.1 FM regarding the St. John's Granny Social (Penner Diary, November 6, 2012). On November 6, CBC came interviewed me for our social (Penner Diary, November 6,

2012). I then had an interview with Global TV at 4:00 p.m. – just prior to our social (Penner Diary, November 14, 2012).

In December we had a Christmas meal with the grandmothers. We also had a Christmas craft sale that helped the grandmothers fundraise (Penner Diary, December 9, 2012). At our meeting in January, 2013, we held a sharing circle. Christmas often was difficult for many of the grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren. The loneliness, unfortunate family circumstances and poverty in a time of gifting was hard to shoulder. In February, we had a lovely potluck dinner during which Jim Rondeau, a Manitoba MLA, came to speak to the grandmothers (Penner Diary, February 10, 2013).

In March, the Manitoba Social Board Association (MSBA) asked if I would be willing to do the closing address at the MSBA conference to talk about GGG. I contacted a few grandmothers and asked them to join me. Three grandmothers were excited to speak about the experiences they had raising their grandchildren. At the end of our presentation a male trustee stood up and talked about the donation he was going to give us. He challenged all trustees to do the same (Penner Diary, March 18, 2013). Many trustees came forward and donated money to GGG. The grandmothers literally ended up holding handfuls of money that were donated to the St. John's grandmothers group. Not surprisingly, the grandmothers left the conference with a tremendous sense of empowerment. They were almost giddy with the excitement of the presentation, the challenge, and the funding that came with one discussion of their experiences.

In April, the first tragedy we faced as a group struck. Sadly, one of the St. John's grandmothers passed away in the middle of April (Penner Diary, April 27, 2013). We were all overwhelmed with sadness. Though of course age and health was always of concern to the members, this was the first grandmother in our group to pass away. Several members of the St.

John's grandmothers went to her funeral at her house. Her grandchildren were heartbroken (Penner Diary, April 27, 2013). She was greatly missed at our grandmother support group, and we grieved together over her passing.

At the beginning of April I was asked to speak to a group of people at the Portage Avenue Church (Penner Diary, April 13, 2013). I enjoyed talking to them and was grateful that they donated to GGG. In May, the St. John's grandmother Mother's Day meeting took place at the Old Spaghetti Factory; a wonderful restaurant at The Forks in Winnipeg's inner city (Penner Diary, May 19, 2013). The grandmothers enjoyed the special room we had for them. We were very fortunate to be able to host the First Nation community grandmothers group that made for interesting conversations around grandmothering as well as what they were doing to support each other as a group.

At our June meeting a wonderful couple in a rural area invited the St. John's grandmothers to come over for a barbeque to see their chicken farm (Penner Diary, July 19, 2013). We were able to rent a bus to travel to this farm. We started our adventure in the chicken barn. The grandmothers laughed and giggled when they got into white "space suits" that protected them (and the chickens) from disease and soiling (Penner Diary, July 19, 2013). After the tour we had a fantastic barbeque hosted by the farm family (Penner Diary, July 19, 2013). Many conversations and much laughter took place (Penner Diary, July 19, 2013). When we left the farm the grandmothers giggled over their adventure all the way home (Penner Diary, July 19, 2013). This was a wonderful way to end the time spent with the grandmothers in the 2012-2013 school year. It was a time of healing for our group, and I felt that the grandmother who passed was with us in spirit.

2013-2014

The St. John's Grandmother Support Group began the new school year by heading to the Canad Inn restaurant for dinner. A couple from Iowa had contacted me after seeing the website and asked if they could join us to donate quilts to the grandmothers. The decision to create a website to communicate the vision of GGG had obviously done us well. After dinner each of the grandmothers received a beautiful quilt that had been made personally by the female guest (Penner Diary, September 28, 2013). The grandmothers snuggled right up to her with their beautiful quilts for a group picture, and thanked her for the beautiful quilts. They felt very special for being acknowledged in this very personal way (Penner Diary, September 28, 2013). The couple from Iowa had travelled 650 miles to give grandmothers raising grandchildren these beautiful quilts as affirmation of the phenomenal work they were doing for their families, and for others (Penner Diary, September 28, 2013).

It was wonderful seeing each other again in October. We had a fantastic dinner at the school and made some fundraising crafts (Penner Diary, October 5, 2013). We also talked about sustainability. I felt that the group had come so far already, that it was time for the grandmothers to consider committing to the leadership skills they had already demonstrated in very many ways. Although the grandmothers were nervous about the responsibilities of leadership, it was also clear that their sense of agency, and their capabilities to handle leadership of their efforts was not in question. Also in October, I drove to Wawanesa, Manitoba, to do a presentation on Grannies Gone Global (Penner Diary, October 19, 2013). There were many questions about how the grandmother group was going. Many of the women who attended this presentation donated money to GGG. At the meeting in November we finished making crafts (Penner Diary, November 9, 2013) and we held our annual festive meal in December. An Aboriginal male

graduate from St. John's High School came to our festive meal and was our guest speaker (Penner Diary, December 14, 2013). Just after Christmas the St. John's grandmothers received a cheque from friends of mine in British Columbia who sold Christmas ornaments to raise money for GGG (Penner Diary, January 11, 2014). It was lovely to hear that others were now supporting our group with their own fundraising efforts.

In the new year we held a potluck meal, then participated in a sharing circle. Throughout the sharing circle grandmothers talked about positive and negative things that were happening in their lives. At various times the grandmothers ended up in tears and in laughter (Penner Diary, January 11, 2014). The feelings of comfort, trust and stability was a joy to behold.

At the beginning of February I picked up several grandmothers and drove to the Pine Creek School Division to do a presentation about grandmothers raising grandchildren (Penner Diary, February 1, 2014). The grandmothers were well received and did a wonderful presentation about raising grandchildren and helping them with their school work. The grandmothers talked to many people when the presentation was over. I was very happy to note that they had internalized the need for local leadership and were taking over the speaking engagements. Although I enjoyed presenting on behalf of the group, I was always more comfortable when the grandmothers were deservedly at the center of attention.

At the beginning of March the St. John's Grandmother Support Group attended an activity evening with their grandchildren. A male graduate from St. John's brought children in Winnipeg's North End to join the grandmothers for an evening of fun. We had pizza for dinner then played several games with the children. The evening was filled with laughter and fun. At the end of the evening the grandmothers gave each child a teddy bear (Penner Diary, March 15,

2014). Seeing the delight in the children's eyes as their grandmothers gave them this simple gift was a joy to behold.

During the first weekend in May the grandmothers held their second granny retreat at Camp Cedarwood. Once again the bus ride was fun (Penner Diary, May 10, 2014). That night we played charades and had lots of laughs. Throughout the weekend we had three sessions on Kid Unique. Throughout these sessions the speaker talked about looking at children and grandchildren through four windows – Observation, Exploration, Affirmation, and Respect (Penner Diary, May 10, 2014). In addition to these sessions, throughout the weekend we participated in hand care, facials, water colour paintings, making cards, and playing BINGO (Penner Diary, May 10, 2014). Sunday morning we ended the retreat with a sharing circle. This sharing circle illuminated that parts of the weekend sessions on Kid Unique was difficult for a few grandmothers whose own tragic childhood traumas had been triggered by some of the content that had been shared (Penner Diary, May 10, 2014). I was reminded again that the support group was an amazing site of healing. I was also reminded that although these women were now engaged in amazing work that impacted women locally and across the world, they still went home each night to families and life histories that often haunted them personally. I spoke individually with a number of grandmothers that weekend who shared stories that were underscored by the traumas and violences that had victimized them as a consequence of residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and their after effects. These women were not faceless words on a page that struck at the conscience. On their aged faces I could see the young girls and women whose bodies and lives had been torn asunder by racism, colonialism, and patriarchy. And yet they carried on, knowing that they held responsibility for grandchildren they

were trying hard to protect so that their young lives could have different trajectories. Many tears were shed this weekend.

At our last grandmother meeting in June we went to a restaurant at the Canad Inn on McPhillips. After dinner I showed the group pictures from our granny retreat in May. The grandmothers laughed so hard at some of the crazy antics caught on camera that they cried (Penner Diary, June 6, 2014). I felt that their laughter in the face of the circumstances some of them faced was a form of resistant triumph.

In July, the St. John's grandmother assistant leader and I travelled to Uganda to meet the four grandmother groups that had been established. Two groups of grandmothers had the opportunity to learn how to paint. They enjoyed painting pictures that supported the African life (Penner Diary, July 8, 2014). Sadly, we found out that some of the money we had sent to a group of grandmothers had been defrauded by a worker (Penner Diary, July 26, 2014). I learned that in situations of dire poverty, the promise of resources can corrupt even the most trusted of people. Aside from the funding concern, we had a wonderful time meeting the four groups of grandmothers in Uganda. It was affirming to see the sustainable livelihood that two groups had created with the money we had sent for them.

2014-2015

In the 2014-2015 school year we once again had two GGG board meetings – one meeting in fall and one meeting in spring. Both meetings went very well. The board members discussed how we would move forward in positive ways at St. John's High School and in Africa.

At the beginning of September the St. John's grandmothers were happy to see each other again. I learned that many of the grandmothers connected with each other over the summer. Their decision to connect outside of the group was another rewarding shift. The grandmothers

were now autonomously organizing their time with each other outside of the purposes of the formal group, and building solid relationships with each other that did not depend on the group structure.

At our October meeting, the leader from Kid Bridge came to talk to the grandmothers. The leader gave a passionate presentation about her organization in Winnipeg's North End. Her organization engaged in activities to help immigrant women and their children (Penner Diary, October 4, 2014). Many of the St. John's grandmothers expressed interest in joining them Tuesday mornings at Turtle Island (Penner Diary, October 4, 2014). This was the first shift to support women who were not necessarily grandmothers, but who needed support in other ways.

In the middle of October, two grandmothers and I attended the International Conference on Women's Education and Human Sustainable Development (Penner Diary, October 19, 2014). The two St. John's grandmothers and I did a presentation about what we do in Winnipeg's North End to help grandmothers learn about sustainable development. Our presentation went over well. It was wonderful to hear many subsequent presenters reference grandmothers raising their grandchildren (Penner Diary, October 19, 2014).

In November the St. John's grandmothers had dinner, did some planning, then participated in a sharing circle. We also held a craft sale where we sold the water colour cards that the St. John's and Ugandan grandmothers had made as a collective. The grandmothers were excited to see that a new logo we had developed together was on the back of the cards (Penner Diary, November 16, 2014). This formal "evidence" of their formal presence as an organization made them very proud of their accomplishments over the years.

At our December grandmother meeting we had another amazing meal. This session had us venture into a masculine space. The leader from Grandpas Can had a powerful story about his

cycling trip across Canada (Penner Diary, December 7, 2014). At the end of his speech he talked about not giving up no matter what the adversity. This spurred on some very good conversations in the discussions afterwards during which the grandmothers shared their own stories of triumphing over adversity.

The grandmothers had some great sessions as well as some difficulty in the new year. In January, the St. John's grandmothers had a wonderful meal, then held a sharing circle. The December holiday time always is difficult for the grandmothers, and there are always more issues to navigate when their grandchildren are not in school for an extended period of time.

At our February meeting we shared a fantastic Ugandan meal. A nutritionist held a session on eating nutritiously on a shoestring budget (Penner Diary, February 13, 2015). The speaker and the grandmothers had a discussion on tips for grocery shopping. At the end of the meeting they got a sheet of paper that had a few easy recipes. The grandmothers very much appreciated this session.

In March, Grands 'n' More, a group that supports grandmothers and AIDS orphans of Africa, joined the St. John's grandmothers for our meeting (Penner Diary, March 7, 2015). We supplied pizza, Subway sandwiches, and drinks. Grands 'n' More brought dessert and tea. In total we had 65 grannies attend this meeting. The room was buzzing with energy. By the end of the evening Grands 'n' More had bought many of the cards the St. John's grandmothers had made.

At the May meeting a bus was rented to take the St. John's grandmothers to the Royal Fork for dinner (Penner Diary, May 10, 2015). This Mother's Day dinner was a celebration for all the grandmothers. There was much talking and laughing throughout the evening.

In June, we met at St. John's High School and had a wonderful barbeque for dinner. I showed the grandmothers pictures of many things they had done this year. All the people at this meal ended up wishing everyone a wonderful summer, and it was always sad to say goodbye.

2015-2016

To start the school year, the St. John's grandmothers met at St. John's school at the beginning of September. At this meeting it was evident that the St. John's Grandmother Support Group had increased in members. A total of 30 grandmothers were now attending grandmother meetings. Word had spread about the good work being done by the grandmothers and the support they received from each other. I felt that the mission and intent of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group was finally being realized as grandmothers felt that they had a space of support, a voice in issues that mattered to them, and the agency to make change.

In October, two education professionals from the Interlake School Division (ISD) came to St. John's High School and held a session on Leadership (Penner Diary, October 10, 2015). Speaking and interacting with the grandmothers went very well. The speakers enjoyed doing the presentation and were eager to come back and help volunteer at our monthly meetings (Penner Diary, October 10, 2015).

In the evening of October 13, eleven grandmothers and five volunteers went to hear Barbara Coloroso talk about raising children. The grandmothers who went had a wonderful evening and had much to say in sharing their own perspectives.

The St. John's grandmothers met the first Thursday of November. After dinner we had an organizational meeting. We discussed what the GGG board meeting was all about and talked about two grandmothers becoming members of this group (Penner Diary, November 11, 2015). We then had the grandmothers write down two grandmothers who they thought would do a good

job at GGG board meetings (Penner Diary, November 11, 2015). The two grandmothers who were voted in were honoured to take on the responsibility of representing the grandmothers' voices as part of the GGG board (Penner Diary, December 19, 2015). After this, a discussion took place regarding how the grandmothers could give back to St. John's High School (Penner Diary, November 11, 2015). They had a conversation about raising money to give to a St. John's High School graduate, who was living with his/her grandmother, a cheque to help them move forward in life.

The grandmothers had another wonderful December meal at a church nearby. After dinner a small band performed for the St. John's grandmothers (Penner Diary, November 19, 2015). The grandmothers really enjoyed the beautiful singing, and appreciated the band coming to provide some entertainment.

In January we had a fantastic grandmother night. After dinner we held a sharing circle during which there was much laughter as grandmothers shared personal stories (Penner Diary, January 9, 2016). In February, the Raging Grannies, a group of social justice activists who mock stereotypes of older women, came to sing some of their songs of protest for the St. John's grandmothers (Penner Diary, February 7, 2016). We had a potluck dinner and enjoyed hearing the Raging Grannies sing. After the music, two St. John's grandmothers opened a discussion that critiqued some of our efforts (Penner Diary, February 7, 2016). These two grandmothers wanted the St. John's Grandmother Support Group to support Aboriginal grandmothers, but not the African grandmothers. They felt that our efforts should focus on the difficult colonial history in Canada that had differentially effected Aboriginal women. We held a group discussion about this that opened up different perspectives. Many of the grandmothers believed that we should support one another, and be open to other grandmothers in the world who were also raising their

grandchildren in very poor countries. The majority of grandmothers wanted to continue with the vision that was its original intent, and decided to remain committed to supporting Aboriginal and African grandmothers. This was the group's first serious discussion about the actual vision and mission of the organization, but it demonstrated that multiple perspectives were evident, and it demonstrated that the grandmothers felt their voices and perspectives would be respected in dialogue. After the meeting, I was able to take one of the two grandmothers who had voiced concerns out for dinner to talk further about how we could move forward in a positive way. Sadly, the second grandmother decided to stop attending the St. John's Grandmother Support Group.

In March the St. John's grandmothers joined Grands 'n' More at the Riverview Community Centre (Penner Diary, March 4, 2016). They prepared a delicious chili dinner for us, then we all played BINGO (Penner Diary, March 4, 2016). I heard much laughter across the gym as we played several games that evening.

In April, the speakers we had asked to come speak to the grandmothers cancelled at the last minute so we had an impromptu sharing circle (Penner Diary, April 8, 2016). As always, these sharing circles allowed the women to talk about important events in their lives knowing that the rest of the group would understand and offer support. The sharing circles provided a space for relationship building, inclusion and respect for each individual's circumstance, and a means for the grandmothers to come to understand other's perspectives.

In June we held our last granny meeting for the school year. A female teacher called me and asked if she could come talk to the St. John's grandmothers about Gonzaga Middle School – a school for middle years Aboriginal students who grew up in poverty (Penner Diary, June 4, 2016). She had a wonderful presentation. The Aboriginal grandmothers showed a lot of interest

in the potential of their grandchildren to attend this new school. After the conversation with the presenter, the grandmothers discussed who would be interested in handing out a \$500 scholarship at the St. John's graduation (Penner Diary, June 4, 2016). Two grandmothers presented the scholarship they had created to a St. John's graduate that spring. At the end of June I joined my grandmothers at Meet Me at the Bell Tower on Selkirk Avenue (Penner Diary, July 1, 2016). This was a regular Friday night event that supports Aboriginal people in Winnipeg's North End. It was fun meeting several grandmothers who attended this event that intends to bring people together to make positive change in the community.

In August, a grandmother and I flew to Cross Lake to attend the community's annual Aboriginal Women's Conference (Penner Diary, August 12, 2016). We were put on their agenda as keynote speakers. We talked about our Grandmother Support Group in Winnipeg. We talked about how we started and our vision (Penner Diary, August 12, 2016). After our presentation, the Aboriginal Cross Lake women talked about starting a Grandmother Support Group. As we were sitting in a tiny airport for our journey back to Winnipeg, I reflected on my own learning at the conference. I admired the resilience and courage evidenced by the Cross Lake women who had faced many difficulties and recognized that they too had to organize events like this conference to build their own agency to make changes for themselves and their families (Penner Diary, August 12, 2016).

2016-2017

It was wonderful seeing the St. John's grandmothers at our September meeting. At this meeting we talked about our 10 year anniversary coming up. The St. John's Grandmother Support Group started February 1, 2007 (Penner Diary, February 3, 2007). In February, 2007, the St. John's Grandmother Support Group started with three grandmothers. As the group meetings

progressed, the group grew to include 30 grandmothers and eight volunteer drivers. The majority of the grandmothers were Aboriginal women, but other ethnic groups were also represented. It was amazing to reflect on all the good work, the changes, and the many women whose lives had been changed by the women of this support group. After dinner I talked about how we started the granny group and our current mission. This year, the grandmothers took part in a simple survey about the organization's direction, then talked in focus groups about how they would like to move forward (Penner Diary, September 17, 2016). This was the first time our group had moved to a more formal method of considering the direction of our organization. At our October meeting we reviewed the data from the survey and focus groups. The information was discussed in support of ensuring the granny group would remain sustainable (Penner Diary, October 29, 2016).

On Friday, October 14, we met several grandmothers at Meet Me at the Bell Tower (Penner Diary, October 29, 2016). A few refugees and Muslim organizations were represented that evening (Penner Diary, October 29, 2016). It was a lovely evening seeing various ethnic backgrounds getting together and talking about important issues.

In December we held our regular Christmas banquet at a church near by. After dinner Santa arrived ringing his bell (Penner Diary, December 10, 2016). The grandmothers' eyes lit up with joy and laughter. Each of the grandmothers told Santa what they wanted for Christmas. After talking to Santa the grandmothers went to a table filled with gifts and picked out something they liked (Penner Diary, December 10, 2016).

In the new year we gave grandmothers Santa photos. They were delighted to see the picture and take it home. At the end of January I drove to Victor Major School where I met the Community Liaison Worker who had sent me an email talking about the possibility of starting a

Grandmother Support Group at her school. I invited her to attend one of our meetings to visit with the group. Workers from Shaughnessy Park School also contacted me and asked if they could come to a meeting because they too wanted to start a Grandmother Support Group. At our grandmother meeting in February we had a few grandmothers from Victor Major School, and a team from Shaughnessy Park School attend our meeting. The grandmothers talked about how we had started the Grandmother Support Group and the many activities in which they had participated (Penner Diary, February 18, 2017). The guests left with an understanding of how important this group had become as a support for grandmothers, but also as an educative and philanthropic organization with a dedicated vision.

In May we had an art worker come to our grandmother meeting to do some art therapy (Penner Diary, May 7, 2017). The grandmothers really enjoyed this session. At our June meeting we enjoyed an amazing meal and ended the year with a sharing circle (Penner Diary, June 3, 2017). At the end of June a few grandmothers went to the St. John's graduation to present the \$500 scholarship to a graduating student who was being raised by a grandmother. Earlier in the year a group of St. John's grandmothers developed a list of criteria that graduating students should have if they were to win this award.

Sadly, at the end this school year, a second dear Aboriginal grandmother passed away. She had attended the monthly meetings almost from the start of the Aboriginal Grandmother Support Group. Her Celebration of Life took place at the beginning of July. Several grandmothers attended a memorial at her home. When this grandmother passed away I grieved for a long time. She had become a very good friend of mine over the years, and had provided much leadership for our group. I realized how much like family these women had become to me, and to each other.

The next chapter will discuss the primary themes that developed out of the reflections on the diary anecdotes related to the St. John's Grandmother Support Group.

Chapter 5: Findings from the St. John's Grandmother Support Group

This chapter discusses the findings from the St. John's Grandmother Support Group that took place monthly for the school years of 2007-2017. The people who attended monthly meetings were grandmothers, in particular Aboriginal grandmothers, who were raising their grandchildren. The section is organized in primary themes that developed out of the reflections on the diary anecdotes, including: 1) St. John's grandmother meetings, 2) Aboriginal grandmothers, 3) grandmother presentations, 4) grandmother groups in Manitoba, 5) Uganda grandmothers, 6) GGG board meetings, and; 7) personal experiences.

St. John's Grandmother Meetings

The St. John's grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren attended a monthly grandmother support meeting. Many of the grandmothers who attended the monthly meetings lived below the poverty line. The grandmothers enjoyed having free dinner meals every month, and had many wonderful conversations with other grandmothers who were also raising their grandchildren. Within the first ten years of being part of this grandmother organization, they participated in a variety of activities including sharing circles, baking, cooking, creating Aboriginal star pillows and tote bags, making crafts for various fundraising events, participating in fundraising activities, participating in educational workshops, and taking part in weekend granny retreats. Generally speaking, I believe that these activities went very well. They were created based on the desires of the group elicited during our September meeting, and planned over the course of the year.

The most common activity the grandmothers participated in over the years have been sharing circles. Kelley et al. (2007) found that "...grandmothers who attended monthly group meetings benefited from meeting other grandparents who were in similar or more difficult family

situations” (p. 59). At times we held a number of smaller sharing circles during a meeting rather than one large one to accommodate the number of people who attended. This gave the grandmothers a wonderful opportunity to talk about their grandchildren. At these sharing circles there were many stories told that caused much laughter and opened up small spaces for healing. There also were many conversations about the difficulties grandmothers faced raising grandchildren who were sometimes not respectful or caught up in dysfunctional activities. Some of their grandchildren were gang members, some were in jail, and some were prostitutes. There often were many tears shed as these grandmother’s broken hearts and sense of helplessness permeated the room. The sharing circles provided the opportunity for women to share their pain and their triumphs in a safe space of care. People listened without judging, and oftentimes, were empathetic because the experiences were common in the group. The circles created the space of healing, care and trust for many grandmothers who had felt isolated in their daily lives.

Many grandmothers enjoyed participating in fundraising activities. In particular, a group of grandmothers really enjoyed making crafts for Christmas craft sales. They chatted about everything and anything, and laughed together as they worked together. When the craft work was finished, a few grandmothers participated in selling their crafts at various craft sales. Although they lived in communities of poverty, they were generous in their commitment to make money for the St. John’s grandmother group, and at times for the African grandmothers.

Some of the speakers who spoke to the grandmothers were favoured more than others. Some of the educational workshops the grandmothers enjoyed and participated in included: 1) teaching children responsibility; 2) having difficult conversations with grandchildren; 3) working on language development; 4) becoming leaders within their homes and communities; 5) eating nutritiously on a shoestring budget, and; 6) Aboriginal role models who spoke to the

grandmothers about courage and hope. A few of the speakers who came to talk to the grandmothers chose topics that were not very relevant for them, and the grandmothers would generally find a gracious way of thanking them even if the session had not been terribly worthwhile.

In addition to activities and workshops, the grandmothers enjoyed the two retreats we held at Cedarwood Lodge. They enjoyed the personal time to focus on themselves without having to look after their grandchildren. The sessions spawned many conversations and walks with other grandmothers who were in similar situations. For most grandmothers, their weekend at Cedarwood Lodge was a reprieve from their lives where they finally had a moment of peaceful reflection with other women who could empathize with their stories.

In the last few years grandmothers participated in cooking meals once a year. At the first September meeting we got the grandmothers into five cooking groups. We then took the time for these grandmothers to discuss what meal they wanted to make and what groceries they would need. Each group came early when it was their turn to cook dinner. As relationships were built over time, cooking dinner for each other was a small way to give back to the group support they each received.

When the St. John's Grandmother Support Group first started I always made sure that we had a meal for the grandmothers. We went out to eat or we ordered a meal that was brought to St. John's during our meeting time. After the first couple of years, a St. John's teacher started cooking meals for the grandmothers. Eventually, the grandmothers took ownership of some of the cooking. There were 10 meetings a year, and the grandmothers cooked for five sessions. The other sessions included Christmas and Mother's Day meals that school employees cooked for the grandmothers, potluck dinners, and yearly meetings with Grands 'n' More where we went to a

restaurant to share a meal. Having the grandmothers make meals once a year helped with the organizational details as they took responsibility for the St. John's Grandmother Support Group. Although overall the idea was a good one, it did start to demonstrate different levels of commitment to the group. The grandmothers who were big supporters of our vision and who were regular attenders were happy to come and make a meal for the grandmother group. Other grandmothers did not want to take part in the meal preparation, but continued to come to monthly meetings and gain the benefit of the comradery and learning.

Many of the grandmothers who attended the Grandmother Support Group lived below the poverty line. This made them look forward to meeting and talking to grandmothers in the same position. I clearly was in charge of calling the grandmothers every month to invite them to the grandmother group at St. John's. Over time, the grandmothers began to take more ownership of the initiatives, which led to a more sustainable organization. Although it is not yet the case, the grandmothers are fully capable of organizing their own meetings. On the other hand, I also realize that the impetus for our support group was to build for them a space where they do not always have to be the primary caregiver for others. Ultimately, the group will have to work on findings ways to move forward sustainably.

Aboriginal Grandmothers

When I became a Vice-Principal at St. John's High School in Winnipeg's North End, I recognized that a sense of community and care for middle years students was definitely lacking. My response to the plethora of needs I saw in Winnipeg's North End was to work at mitigating the many symptoms of poverty, and providing supports for students and grandmothers. The start of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group gave me the opportunity to talk to (mostly) Aboriginal grandmothers who had experienced many negative events in their lives, most of

which were the consequences of our colonial history and the effects of systemic racism. Many grandmothers felt oppressed and marginalized, and they struggled to give their grandchildren positive life experiences. For the Aboriginal grandmothers in the St. John's group, many lived below the poverty line, faced a myriad of daily challenges, and lacked the resources needed to raise children. The Grandmother Support Group was created as a space where these grandmothers could access personal supports in community with others who lived in similar circumstances. They enjoyed getting together with other grandmothers who were also raising their grandchildren and talking about what would be the best way to move forward. This establishment provided a valuable opportunity for grandmothers to connect and network, and to provide emotional and social support to one another. Some Aboriginal grandmothers did not want to talk about their negative experiences, but really enjoyed meeting with grandmothers on a monthly basis for socializing and learning sessions. They also enjoyed connecting with Aboriginal grandmothers within Winnipeg and on reserves who were raising their grandchildren.

Although in general the Aboriginal grandmothers found support in talking to each other about their life circumstances, a few Aboriginal grandmothers in the St. John's Grandmother Support Group did not want to share their experiences of being colonized and attending residential schools as a young child. Their decision was always respected, and they continued to regularly attend our monthly Grandmother Support Group. I learned much in the silences and tears of these meetings, and I realized that much more is needed to support Aboriginal women's healing.

Sadly, since the start of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group in 2007, two Aboriginal grandmothers have passed away. Both of these grandmothers joined the support group within the first few months of inception, and regularly attended monthly meetings. I often

heard them speak about how much they looked forward to their monthly evening out, and the opportunity to network with other grandmothers. These tragedies deeply affected the grandmothers and volunteers. In my conversations with these two grandmothers it was clear that their lives were not easy. They worked hard to raise grandchildren within a post-colonial context. Members of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group attended these funerals which clearly showed the love and support they had for the grandmothers who passed away, and for each other.

The one conflict regarding vision we faced was the desire of a small number of Aboriginal grandmothers to center our efforts on Aboriginal people only. In reality, the St. John's Grandmother Group had a small percentage of non-Aboriginal grandmothers in the group, and our intent had always been to be an inclusive group. We opened this difficult conversation for discussion at a Grandmother Support Group meeting. I also talked to the two grandmothers who wanted to see these changes to discuss how we could move forward with all the grandmothers who were attending our grandmother group meetings. In the end, there was recognition that supporting Aboriginal grandmothers was a primary concern of the group, evidenced by the networks we had created with Aboriginal grandmothers in First Nations communities. However, given our prior links and relationships built with the Ugandan grandmothers, the group members eventually decided that they wanted to support all grandmothers raising grandchildren. Unfortunately this led to the decision by one grandmother to stop attending our meetings.

There is no doubt that the support group needs to continue to work on helping Aboriginal grandmothers deal with the difficult past they have faced given Canada's colonial history. In reality, the effects of our colonial history on Aboriginal peoples is the primary reason why the majority of grandmothers in our group needed support in the first place. Although the support

group has done tremendous work, more needs to be done to create spaces of healing, of affirmation, and parenting support. Moving forward we need to continue to work on finding the appropriate support for Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren.

Although the support group has been a tremendous support to many of the grandmothers, there is no doubt that more personal support should be given to Aboriginal grandmothers who have had a very difficult life. I believe that post-colonial thought on healing and reconciliation is essential for Aboriginal grandmothers to be supported in their quest to provide their grandchildren an upbringing that reflects Aboriginal culture, traditions, and values. The support group is not capable of providing some of the supports that are necessary to deal with trauma and poverty. These grandmothers may benefit from much more access to counselling services, educational opportunities, and opportunities to participate in cultural traditions and healing ceremonies.

Grandmother Presentations

In addition to monthly meetings and community activities, grandmothers collaborated with me on presentations throughout Manitoba. Over the years I received numerous requests to present about the development of a Grandmother Support Group in Winnipeg's North End. I was pleased when the St. John's grandmothers, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, were available to participate in presentations. A few public presentations that were very successful include: 1) Manitoba School Board Association AGM in Winnipeg; 2) Pine Creek School Division in Gladstone; 3) Aboriginal Women's Conference in Cross Lake; 4) International Conference on Women's Education and Sustainable Human Development in Winnipeg, and; 5) an education class at the University of Manitoba. At each event, the grandmothers spoke about the challenges

and difficulties that come with raising grandchildren. They often received standing ovations, encouragement, and praise.

Many of the grandmothers enjoyed doing presentations about the work they were doing raising their grandchildren. Their stories spoke to the hearts of many people who attended their presentations. After public presentations the grandmothers had the opportunity to engage with many people from different walks of life who were inspired by their efforts. I believe that the presentations helped the grandmothers recognize that their work was affirmed by others, and that they could impact influential people and places by using their voice and passionately arguing for something in which they truly believed. The presentations helped them to develop their sense of agency and self-efficacy as they learned first hand that the power of their stories could influence social change.

Manitoba Grandmother Support Groups

Three years after the start of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group, the grandmothers expressed a desire to support grandmothers in other contexts who were also raising their grandchildren. When the Grannies Gone Global organization got started, our vision was to support grandmother groups throughout Manitoba. It was exciting to think about the many ways we could collaborate and move forward (Penner Diary, January 27, 2017).

The St. John's grandmothers helped develop support groups within Winnipeg and in rural Manitoba. Within Winnipeg the St. John's Grandmother Support Group helped initiate a grandmother group at Shaughnessy Park School. A group of Shaughnessy Park staff attended our St. John's grandmother meeting. The St. John's grandmothers had lots to talk about regarding how we had started a Grandmother Support Group and how we had moved forward. After this meeting a few of the St. John's grandmothers attended the first Grandmother Support Group

meeting at Shaughnessy Park. They contributed to conversations regarding activities that took place at our monthly meetings. The Shaughnessy Aboriginal Grandmother Support Group is moving forward in a positive way with the help of a school teacher at the school. The St. John's grandmothers were proud of the fact that their efforts inspired other grandmothers to self-organize to support themselves and their families.

Victor Major School also started a Grandmother Support Group. I received a phone call from an employee at that school asking me about the process of starting a support group. Along with two grandmothers, this woman came to one of our monthly meetings. In the end, the three women began attending our monthly meetings due to the fact that there were not enough members for the group to get off the ground.

The St. John's grandmothers were aware of two grandmother groups that took place outside of Winnipeg. One was at Fisher River. A few of the St. John's grandmothers went out to meet with them. Wonderful relationships were established after our first and second meeting at Fisher River. Several times the Fisher River grandmothers came to Winnipeg to join the St. John's group. It was wonderful touching base with these grandmothers. Unfortunately, the Fisher River grandmother group was unable to sustain itself and has stopped meeting.

The Borderland School Division grandmother group started in southern Manitoba. I had the opportunity to meet the grandmothers and talk to them about the many things the St. John's grandmothers have done. They were a wonderful group of five grandmothers in the Borderland School Division. These grandmothers were from Paraguey and the Rosseau River Reserve. They often worked at raising money and sending it to the St. John's grandmothers to use whenever we as a group needed it, or if individual grandmothers needed help. It was wonderful touching base with these women and hearing what they were doing. Unfortunately, this grandmother support

group in the Borderland School Division is also no longer meeting because the two division leaders retired.

Two northern reserves had the potential to start a Grandmother Support Group. A St. John's grandmother and I flew to Cross Lake to talk at their yearly women's conference. At the end of the conference we heard that they wanted to start an Aboriginal Grandmother Support Group, but we learned later that the idea never came to fruition.

Another potential Aboriginal Grandmother Support Group was for the Moose Lake Reserve. I flew up to Thompson in March, 2015, to do a presentation about our grandmother group. After my speech several people came to speak to me regarding starting Grandmother Support Groups. In particular, the School District of Mystery Lake indicated a desire to move ahead to start a grandmother group. This grandmother support group never got started.

All of these examples speak to the importance of creating sustainable leadership for support group organizations. The compelling need for the groups exist, but leadership is key to their creation, after which there is a need to help members build their capacity to self-organize and self-actualize. The St. John's example demonstrates that these women have the potential to make tremendous changes for themselves, their families, and other women in similar situations. However, given their life histories, most of them as individuals would not have the sense of efficacy, the resources, the health, or the time commitment to begin a group on their own. System leaders or community leaders need to commit to the creation and organization of the groups up until such time as the members have built the capacity and agency to lead.

Uganda Grandmothers

After three years of monthly meetings, a few of the St. John's grandmothers expressed a desire to support African grandmothers who were also raising their grandchildren. The St. John's

grandmother group helped initiate support for the first grandmother group in Kampala. The St. John's grandmothers took part in a variety of fundraising activities including granny socials, Christmas craft sales, selling desserts, and selling cards made from their watercolor paintings. The additional three Uganda grandmother groups have been supported by donations and an international grant. Becoming a charitable status helped us support grandmothers in Uganda who are raising their grandchildren. The effects of the St. John's support group are leading to economic and educational sustainability for Ugandan grandmothers and their grandchildren.

Although the St. John's grandmothers were excited about supporting African grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren, as the years went by some of the grandmothers felt our vision should target Aboriginal grandmothers only. This was perhaps the largest conflict over vision that we faced as a group. The grandmothers openly discussed that there was no right or wrong in the differences in viewpoints, and they had to work together to come to a decision on what they wanted to do. As a result of their conversations and needs, the decision was made to continue supporting Aboriginal grandmothers, and the grandmother groups that were established in Uganda. The support for both groups of grandmothers continues.

Grannies Gone Global Board Meetings

With the advent of fundraising, I was often asked if we could issue tax receipts. This made me start thinking about applying for charitable status through the Canada Revenue Agency. In September, 2011, we were granted charitable status and Grannies Gone Global (GGG) was born. The mission of GGG is to provide emotional and physical support to grandmothers locally and globally who find themselves in the rewarding but challenging position of being primary caregivers of their grandchildren. At our first board meeting in September, 2011, we started with four board members who were not part of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group. As we

evolved, two of the St. John's grandmothers were elected on as board members for two year terms. This has continued over time with different grandmothers serving as representatives. This role provides a different form of voice for the grandmothers, but it has been a very beneficial aspect for board discussions.

As we move forward, the members of the GGG board has also learned more about what it means to be a registered charitable organization. With that learning comes more formalized processes for funding requests and dealing with local and international groups. We now are asking group leaders in Manitoba and Africa to send information to the board regarding the purpose and rationales for their requests for donations. The board will then discuss the purpose of the requests, and determine criteria for distribution. Donating money to different requests would depend on how much money has been given to GGG. The registered charitable organization was certainly not something conceived at the beginning of the support group, but it demonstrates that the smallest seeds can bloom into unanticipated consequences that have major implications for social change. Who would have thought that the invitation for a Tim's coffee would have led to sustainable economic and educational initiatives for Canadian and Ugandan grandmothers? Yet here it is.

Personal Experiences

As a Vice-Principal at St. John's High School I had the privilege of meeting grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren throughout my home visit experience. When I was ready to start a school grandmother group, many of these grandmothers were invited to join the St. John's Grandmother Support Group. The grandmother group began with three members, then continually grew to a group of 30 grandmothers. Many grandmothers discussed that it was difficult raising grandchildren at their age. They also talked and took action to support

themselves and other grandmothers in similar situations. At our monthly grandmother meetings we often participated in sharing circles which supported the grandmothers in sharing and understanding each other's life circumstances. We learned from the start that they all faced incredible challenges, but they did all they could to support their grandchildren. At our monthly meetings grandmothers received lots of support to help them raise their grandchildren in a positive way. The sessions became informative, educative, and healing spaces.

Throughout the time that the grandmother support group started, I listened to what the grandmothers said they would like to do, then worked at making it happen. Many times a grandmother would come talk to me individually about help and support. I always did what I could to support individual grandmothers who needed help.

I learned over time to use my privilege to open up spaces for conversations about the need for Grandmother Support Groups and all they could achieve for women and families locally and internationally. I also recognized that much of the initial attention centred me as a white savior. From the beginning, I tried to balance the attention I received with sending the appropriate messages that it was the work these women were doing that had to be acknowledged. I knew that it was the grandmother's voices that needed to be heard, and their stories that were the real evidence of resilience and agency. After working with the group for awhile, I found that many grandmothers enjoyed being interviewed about their experiences, or being asked to present. It was a real learning experience to take grandmothers to television and radio stations, or conferences. It was the honesty, tragedy, and triumphs of their lived experiences, along with their continued hope for a better future that inevitably inspired all those who listened to them speak.

In addition to taking on more of the public relations for the group, the grandmothers also started to take more ownership for the initiatives in which they were interested. This

development helped the Grandmother Support Group to become more sustainable, and helped to move the focus of leadership away from me as a primary point person to other group members. Their leadership, along with the involvement of a number of volunteers who became interested in supporting the group, helped me shift my role in the group, and allowed me to act in a more ancilliary capacity. It also helped me interrogate some of my own assumptions about white privilege and humbled me in the face of the true resilience and courage that the grandmothers evidenced over the course of their lives. I learned more about the damaging effects of colonialism than I ever would want to know, and I had to move beyond my own sense of white guilt to a place where we could use our collective influence to make change. It was not always easy to face the extent of my white privilege, but the grandmothers graciously passed on teachings because they trusted that I would respect and support them in their efforts in the venues of influence I could access. I learned that this trust came with an incredible sense of reciprocal responsibility based on the care and relationships we developed with each other over time. Although I may have been the original “leader” of the support group, there is no doubt that the support, learning, and care was mutual.

Summary

I believe that the St. John’s grandmothers enjoyed and benefited from their monthly meetings. They became good friends and look forward to seeing each other. The St. John’s grandmothers also enjoyed the opportunity to meet and talk to other grandmothers who also were raising their grandchildren. As a result of their conversations and needs, not only did the grandmothers work on becoming better grandmothers raising their grandchildren, they also worked on supporting grandmother groups that were established in Winnipeg and in Uganda. As the St. John’s Grandmother Support Group moves forward, the grandmothers are taking more

responsibility for the leadership of the group. It will be interesting to see what new directions take shape as their different perspectives shift the agendas.

I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting and working with grandmothers in Winnipeg's North End who are raising their grandchildren. I am a changed person as a result of the relationships I created with these women, and the personal learning from which I have benefited because of my involvement with them, personally and professionally. These grandmothers have taught me much about organizational dynamics, leadership, white privilege, colonization, and poverty. The members of the St. John's Grandmothers Support group need many supports that have been denied to them over the course of their lives; but they also have much to teach us about feminism, resilience, agency, and hope. I have been honoured to be part of their journey, and I will continue my efforts to find ways to support this incredible group of women who are selflessly giving of themselves to ensure better lives for their grandchildren.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In my position as a high school administrator, I saw and dealt with many grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren. The St. John's Grandmother Support Group was created out of a recognition that these grandmothers needed a venue to reduce their isolation, and to support them in their efforts to raise their grandchildren. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, what began as a support group shifted into an incredible lesson on organizational dynamics and Indigenous feminism.

From an organizational perspective, a number of interesting shifts occurred as the support group developed over time. At its inception, the members of the group were interested primarily in personal support. Most of these women were Aboriginal grandmothers whose lives were products of the consequences of the residential school system and the Sixties Scoop. As women who had faced many hardships throughout their lives, the grandmothers came together primarily in order to gain personal support from others who understood their life circumstances. As they got to know and care for each other, however, the group dynamic shifted to one of solidarity with a commitment to group concerns. Their concern moved beyond a focus on the individual, to caring for the local circle of women involved in the group. Friendships were formed that minimized the sense of individual isolation. Trust was developed as stories were shared and the commonality of their human tragedies and triumphs bonded them together as a group. Eventually, evolving discussions weaved the individual narratives into a social narrative based on the common experience of being women who had lived through residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the effects of circumstances that had culminated in each of them raising grandchildren in communities of poverty. As the group understanding of their social location developed, another shift in the organizational dynamic occurred as their commitment to a

common purpose beyond their immediate circumstances was fostered. The desire to support others as they felt they were supporting each other became a primary concern and a new vision for group members. The group's attention was turned to a desire to help grandmothers outside of their local area who were raising grandchildren—women they did not know, but whose experiences resonated with their own. Although they lived in communities of poverty, their common purpose called them to give generously to other women whose circumstances were similar to their own. They began to self-organize for the purpose of fundraising, even though many would have suggested they should have been fundraising for themselves. As their efforts to fundraise were successful, and their work became more broadly known, others were inspired by the vision and agency of the group. This led to a fourth shift in the organizational dynamic when the size of donations began to increase and there became a need to provide tax receipts. It was at this point when the group was registered as a charitable organization. With this organizational shift came a need to more formally organize. A board of directors for the registered charity was formed, with the grandmothers able to significantly advocate for where and how monies were spent. Eventually, two elected seats for the grandmothers were created to sit at the board of directors for the registered charity. This shift further formalized the roles of grandmothers as significant decision-makers within an organization rather than as recipients of support services only.

The group was also a space of spiritual and cultural healing for many of the women as they sensed touchstones of cultural comfort in how the group was organized (Hernandez-Castillo, 2010; Paquette et. al., 2015; Smith, 2013; Spencer, 2016; TRC, 2015). During each session, the group met in sharing circles for sharing stories and supporting each other. As noted above, as the relationality of this safe space developed, women in the group were able to share

more of their personal stories with poverty, racism, the effects of residential schools and the Sixties Scoop. The recognition of the sacred nature of the circle helped with the healing that occurred in the group. It was also clear that other cultural touchstones supported the creation of the safe space for spiritual and cultural healing. The women decided what kinds of crafts and fundraising activities would be made each year. Often those crafts or fundraising artifacts took the form of beadwork, Indigenous food preparation, and other activities that celebrated and showcased the value of Indigenous knowledge and experience. The invitations to share stories also supported the creation of a cultural space for healing. As the women told their stories to educational and community groups, their individual experiences were affirmed, and their collective experiences were acknowledged to have been atrocities perpetuated out of a racist colonial agenda. Yet their spiritual and cultural triumph of resilience in the face of the odds acknowledged by those who heard them speak created a space where healing could flourish. Finally, the granny retreats allowed the women to access time in peaceful solitude in beautiful landscapes where they could commune with the world and share their stories with each other. The appreciation for this time away from the hustle and bustle of urban life on the land became places of healing for the grandmothers who often shared more of themselves in that time away than they usually did in the urban spaces. Finally, I believe that the decision to support Ugandan grandmothers also created a space of healing for the grandmothers whose sense of generosity and care transcended their own hardships in their desire to help others. Their ability to help others led to a spiritual healing of its own when they realized that although in many times in their own lives they had lacked care and attention, they could provide that care and attention to others who needed it.

At each shift in the organizational dynamic, subtle increases in the sense of efficacy of the women in the group became noticeable. Instead of passively accepting the organizational structure and activities that were organized on their behalf, the grandmothers became more attentive to their roles in driving agendas, requesting information, and organizing events. They also shifted the focus of the meetings to include socializing and personal support, but also learning sessions on relevant topics of interest. The structure and work of the group became so admired over time that it became a role model for the development of other support groups for women. Agency and efficacy continued to grow as the grandmothers' experiences were affirmed and examples of their efforts were taken up by others who wanted to emulate what they were doing. This also led to the creation of relationships with other support groups during which women from very different walks of life could network and learn from each other.

As the group grew to include more women with different perspectives, tensions around the vision of the group developed. The means for deciding direction and purpose remained with group members, but it shifted to become more formalized as a board of directors led the registered charity aspect, and more formalized meetings about direction and goal setting for the year developed in addition to the sharing circles that were regularly held. Choice and voice were also formalized with the election of two grandmothers onto the board of directors, and leadership was enacted in the creation of smaller groups of women who took responsibility for designing criteria for scholarships, cooking groups, decisions around which women would speak at presentations, etcetera. Ultimately, however, the group remained true to its original intent to serve as a support group for these women who came to know and trust each other. The leadership of the group also remained fluid, as the sharing circle continued to be the primary means of

building relationships and understanding with one another. This understanding ultimately helped when conflicts developed or different points of view were raised.

My role as the original organizer of the group also shifted over time. At the beginning of our time together, my role as organizer was front and center. Although I always asked the grandmothers for their input on our activities, it was necessary that I drove to pick them up, found venues for us, and took the lead in organizing activities. I was also the center of attention for media coverage and presentation requests. Fortunately over time, this role shifted such that the grandmothers took ownership of their own story and work efforts. I was able to deflect attention from myself and make sure grandmothers were included in discussions. I made no apology, however, for using my privilege in venues where we could share our vision and efforts with the broader community. I believed these groups and organizations would be amazed at the resilience and philanthropy of the group, and would be inspired to support us. As the group members' sense of efficacy and confidence grew, I was able to distance myself from some organizational details as volunteers and the grandmothers became more self-organizing. I grew to be more sensitive towards the need to decentre my white privilege and work towards creating space for others. For me, this became a clear role for those who wish to provide allied leadership (Smith et. al, 2016). Although I had led schools and school systems, organizationally I had much to learn as the organization shifted into a registered charity. I had to learn how these organizations functioned legally, and we needed to formalize the structure of the organization if we were going to accomplish our vision. I also had much to learn from the grandmothers about my own privilege as I came to know them as colleagues and friends. Most days, I was humbled by their commitment and care, and the resilience they demonstrated. I also learned how difficult it must have been for them to learn to trust me given the privilege that I represented, and to

maintain a sense of hope when so many of them lived such difficult lives. Losing some of the grandmothers who passed away created much grief for group members because the relationality inherent in our reasons for existing wove itself throughout everything we did.

In my view, the St. John's Support Group was an organization developed on the principles of Indigenous feminism (Green, 2007b; Knobbloch & Kuokkanen, 2015; Suzack, 2015), though I would suggest many of the grandmothers would resist the terminology. The organization came to be because of the need to support mothering. It was about supporting group members in their common experiences as women and grandmothers. It was about remaining resilient and efficacious in the face of tremendous odds and effects of residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, poverty, and the patriarchy that has differentially affected Aboriginal women. And it was about the empowerment, self-organizing, and agency of women who came together to help each other make the world a better place for themselves and their families. In my view, that is what Indigenous feminism is all about, and I was honoured to be able to get to know and work with these amazing women leaders. It has been such a pleasure getting to know the grandmothers in Winnipeg's North End who are raising their grandchildren. They have become very dear friends of mine. I continue to have many wonderful friendships with the grandmothers of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group who are working hard to raise their grandchildren while supporting other grandmothers who are in difficulty around the world.

Within our school community I have seen first-hand the negative effects of colonization. My response to the plethora of needs I saw in Winnipeg's North End was to work at mitigating the many symptoms of poverty, and providing supports for students and their grandmothers. Based on personal conversations, many of these grandmothers felt oppressed and marginalized, and struggled to give their grandchildren positive life experiences. For Aboriginal grandmothers

this can be very difficult as many of them live below the poverty line, face a myriad of daily challenges, and lack the resources needed to raise children. Post-colonial thought on healing and reconciliation is essential for Aboriginal grandmothers to be supported in their quest to provide their grandchildren an upbringing that reflects Aboriginal culture, traditions, and values.

From the experiences I have had, I have come to understand that grandmothers raising grandchildren is common practice in Aboriginal communities. The establishment of grandmother support groups has the potential to provide a valuable opportunity for grandmothers to connect and network (Ball et. al, 2012; Wituk et. al, 2002). This also gives grandmothers the opportunity to provide emotional and social support to one another. The hope is that as these grandmothers continue to share challenges and successes, they will be empowered to promote sustainability within their homes and communities as agents of positive change.

I have really enjoyed meeting and working with grandmothers in Winnipeg's North End who are raising their grandchildren. Although many caregiving grandmothers are deeply committed to their grandchildren, the myriad of challenges they face may hinder their ability to provide a supportive home environment. My hope is that grandmothers raising grandchildren will continue to work at supporting a warm, caring environment so that honesty and acceptance of varying perspectives will be welcomed. I believe that establishing a Grandmother Support Group has been helpful for grandmothers as they work to raise their grandchildren, and to obtain personal support. I also believe that more research is necessary that includes them as participants and directors of the research process. We need to know more about the supports these women need, and the extent to which support groups help to alleviate some of the stresses they face daily. More research on the role of grandmothers and mothering is also necessary, as these women are selflessly doing all they can to support their families. Finally, given the conflict in

values that we faced in our group, research that compared the effectiveness of support groups that have mandates solely for Aboriginal women and those that have mandates open to all women or other particular groups should be encouraged. I do not believe that one is more valuable than the other, but I do think that comparative research may help to refine how support groups may best serve the individuals whose needs are targeted.

A final conclusion that I make supports the value of autoethnography as a methodology (Custor, 2014; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Wall, 2006). Throughout the process of my reflective work, I learned much about the development of the support group, as well as myself. I was able to articulate how the organizational dynamic of the group shifted over time, and the value the support group had for supporting the agency, self-efficacy and learning of the grandmothers as they enacted social change for themselves, their families, and other grandmothers across the world. I also learned much about my own impetus for leadership, my white privilege, the avenues during which I could act as an ally, and my attempts to support the sustainability of the St. John's Grandmothers Support Group by decentring myself in the process. My relationships with the grandmothers continually positioned each one of us as learners, teachers or leaders at different points in the journey. We all shared in the joys of our successes and the tears in our common tragedies. Most of all, we shared in our common purpose as women to make the world a better place for children and families. That is the feminist trajectory of our group that brought us together, and kept us firm in our commitments for over 10 years.

Sadly, I am no longer the leader of the St. John's Grandmother Support Group. I also no longer attend the GGG board meetings. In July of 2017, I found out that I have brain cancer. I have had three brain surgeries within two years. I am so grateful that I was able to get a new

leader for the St. John's Grandmother Support Group, and two new leaders for the GGG board meetings. I am so pleased that the Grandmother Support Groups are continuing to move forward.

In conclusion, it is with hope that we look forward to a future where grandmothers raising grandchildren are empowered to build capacity within their homes and communities. This would help improve the lives of their grandchildren. Friere (1992) states, "I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dreams" (p. 2). It is with hope and dreams that we look forward to a more beautiful world where grandmothers will be encouraged and supported in becoming beacons of light as they take action to transform the world for themselves and for their precious grandchildren.

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