

**Contributing to an ecology of knowledges for understanding the education
neglect of children in care: Perspectives from school social workers and educators**

by

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Abstract

Children in care (CIC) in Manitoba face persistent educational disparities, with low high school graduation rates serving as a major barrier to post-secondary access and future well-being. Despite long-standing concerns, the educational neglect (EN) of CIC remains critically underexamined and largely unreported, perpetuating their invisibility within policy and practice. This study investigates how the perceptions of school social workers, teachers, and Indigenous education team members contribute to an ecology of knowledges that deepens the understanding of the EN of CIC. Insights from Indigenous knowledges and developmental cognitive neuroscience provide context for understanding healthy child development and the effects of adverse childhood experiences. Given that most CIC in Manitoba are Indigenous, this demographic reality was carefully considered and reflected across all aspects of the study and its reporting.

Employing a Critical Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology, this qualitative inquiry engaged 17 participants across Manitoba through semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using Charmaz's grounded theory methods, guided by the Critical Theory of Coloniality (CTC) for reflexive and critical engagement with colonial, neoliberal, and systemic power dynamics. Three major themes emerged: (1) colonization, neoliberalism, and power—illuminating how structural inequities perpetuate the marginalization of CIC; (2) educational repair—emphasizing the need for coordinated and individualized supports that emphasize attachment and belonging; and (3) Healing education—centering trauma-informed, relational, and culturally responsive approaches to learning and care that empower CIC.

From these findings, the Transformative Care-Education Theory was developed, offering a framework that integrates a CTC perspective as a starting point to address the EN of CIC. The

study underscores the urgent need for collaborative policy mandates, culturally grounded training, and cross-sector partnerships to confront educational inequities faced by CIC. This research study contributes to transformative approaches in the practice, policy, and professional education of social workers and educators. Its findings also hold relevance for related disciplines engaged in supporting children and families who are involved with child welfare.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	4
Table of Contents	6
Chapter 1: Rendered invisible.....	14
Rationale for study	16
Methodological framework.....	17
Theoretical framework.....	18
Situating myself	18
A brief overview	20
Chapter 2: A critical colonial analysis of the education of children in care	23
Child welfare in Canada.....	23
Current context of child welfare	25
Education neglect.....	27
Critical theory of coloniality.....	31
Neoliberalism, colonization and power	34
Neoliberalism.....	34
Colonial impact.....	39
Power	43
Summary	46

Chapter 3: Development and education.....	48
An ethical space	51
An ecology of knowledges.....	53
Considerations from developmental cognitive neuroscience (DCN)	55
DCN and inequality	57
Indigenous perspectives on development	60
View of children	62
View of caregiver roles	63
Critical colonial analysis of knowledges	65
DCN knowledge considerations	66
Colonial context and Indigenous knowledges	68
Education neglect.....	70
Graduation and life trajectories.....	71
Summary	72
Chapter 4: Methodology & methods.....	74
Methodology	74
Methods.....	79
Research question	79
Objectives	79
Participants.....	80

Data collection procedures.....	83
Ethical considerations	84
Informed consent	85
Anonymity & confidentiality	86
Data analysis using CCGT	87
Coding process.....	87
Trustworthiness in qualitative research	95
Credibility	95
Transferability	96
Dependability	97
Confirmability	97
Limitations	98
Chapter 5: Colonization, Neoliberalism and Power	101
Participant demographics.....	101
Colonization, neoliberalism and power	104
Theoretical code 1: Managerialism and capitalism have created a value-for-service model, rendering CIC a commodity, overworking staff, and generating adversarial relationships	105
Theoretical code 2: CIC are left powerless and invisible, with little or no control over their lives or education	116
Theoretical code 3: Colonization shapes EN	126

Chapter 6: Repairing education	138
Theoretical code 4: Gaps in supporting the education of CIC exist in the education system and teacher training.....	139
Silence, awareness, and systemic non-responsiveness	139
System structures that set CIC up for failure	140
Educational gaps, inconsistencies, and systemic fragmentation.....	140
Staff preparedness, bias, and professional capacity.....	141
Unequal access to skilled staff and regional resource disparities	142
Leadership and organizational priorities shape outcomes	142
Rigidity in educational systems undermines belonging and success.....	143
Absence of clinicians and specialized support.....	144
Cultural supports missing in education.....	144
Fragmented collaboration and communication.....	145
COVID-19 deepened pre-existing inequities.....	146
Theoretical code 5: Better communication, collaboration and collegial understanding is needed between CW and education.	149
Collaboration as a bridge to shared understanding	149
CW workers as active partners in education.....	151
Steps Toward Effective Collaboration.....	152
Mandated and structural collaboration.....	154

Benefits of collaboration.....	155
Theoretical code 6: Supports are needed to assist with the trauma and potential mental health issues CIC may be experiencing	157
Trauma as an inherent condition of being in care.....	158
Flexibility and trauma-informed educational approaches.....	160
Structural and material resources needed to support CIC.....	161
Professional and clinical supports required	163
Regional variation in support and cultural access.....	164
Creating a village of support around CIC	164
Accountability in education to address trauma and mental health needs	166
Chapter 7: Healing and preparing CIC for education	169
Theoretical code 7: Children need to be heard and seen as individuals	170
Structural barriers to seeing the individual child	170
Harm of universalized assumptions	172
Seeing the child as a person.....	173
Shifting education toward individualization.....	175
Theoretical code 8: Belonging and attachment are important and CIC need to be provided opportunities to connect.....	177
Belonging as the foundation for academic success.....	178
School as a safe and healing space	179

Theoretical code 9: CIC need to be shown respect and have their self-esteem built up to hope for their future	185
Chapter 8: Discussion: presenting a transformative theory	192
Colonization, neoliberalism, and power	194
Managerialism and capitalism: children as commodities	194
Colonization: historical and ongoing impacts on education of CIC	195
Powerlessness: CIC rendered invisible	196
Repairing education	197
Gaps in education and teacher training	198
Collaboration, communication, and collegial understanding	198
Trauma and mental health supports for CIC	199
COVID-19.....	200
Healing education	200
Belonging and attachment as foundations for healing and learning	201
Seeing and Hearing Children as Individuals.....	202
Respect, empowerment, and hope as transformative forces	203
Connecting to research.....	204
Evaluation and limitations	208
Strengths	208
Limitations	210

Building a theory: The Transformative Care-Education Theory (TCET)	211
Situating the TCET within CTC	213
Connecting to the data	215
Conceptualizing TCET	217
Theoretical contributions	222
Concluding remarks	224
Chapter 9: From knowing to transforming: implications for transformative change	226
Implications for the TCET	227
Theoretical implications.....	228
Practical implications.....	230
Broader Implications for Systemic and Liberation-Based Practice	231
Policy implications.....	232
Research implications	233
Social work	233
Education and interdisciplinary research	234
Academia and knowledge production.....	236
Future directions	236
Conclusion	237
References.....	241
Appendix I: Participant consent form	275

Appendix II: Advertisement poster.....	283
Appendix III: areas of exploration.....	285
Appendix IV: Interview Schedule	287
Appendix V: Pre-Interview Script	288
Appendix VI: Recruitment Script for Organizations.....	290
Appendix VII: Participant Demographics	292
Appendix VIII: Participant Resource List	294
Appendix IX: Checklist	296

Chapter 1: Rendered invisible

Although graduation rates for children in care (CIC) in Manitoba have been found to be alarmingly low, they are not currently reported (Brownell et al., 2017). CIC in Manitoba experience systemic educational neglect (EN), which renders them largely invisible within the education system and disconnected from their broader communities, particularly in comparison to their non-child welfare (CW)-involved peers (Janzen, 2023; Brownell et al., 2015). These students often move frequently between schools, with few attaining a high school diploma alongside their age-related cohort (Brownell et al., 2015; Forlanski & McNabb, 2015). For many CIC, daily survival takes precedence over academic engagement, making subjects such as English and science secondary concerns (Janzen, 2023). Education professionals are acutely aware of the EN experienced by CIC and recognize the urgent need to address it, despite its continued marginalization within mainstream educational discourse (Janzen, 2023; Evidence Network, 2015).

This research study was undertaken to address a significant gap in knowledge regarding the phenomenon of EN among CIC—a critically underexplored issue despite its profound implications. Graduation rates for CIC in Manitoba remain alarmingly low, with minimal scholarly or political attention directed toward understanding the root causes or identifying viable solutions (Van Wert et al., 2018; Brownell et al., 2017). At this juncture, it is essential to investigate what constitutes EN for CIC to inform effective interventions and policy reform aimed at improving educational outcomes within this population.

The study presented in the following chapters is exploratory in nature, aiming both to contribute to the existing literature and to build an ecology of knowledges. An ecology of knowledges is a framework proposed by Santos (2004) that challenges dominant, Western

epistemologies by recognizing the coexistence of diverse ways of knowing, each shaped by different epistemic positions and cultural contexts, and seeks to create space for marginalized knowledges to be heard, engaged with, and valued (Ciofalo et al., 2022; Derichs, 2021; Fraile-Marcos, 2020; Santos, 2008, 2009). This study attempted to do this through the lens of the Critical Theory of Coloniality (CTC). Given the focus on CIC in Manitoba, the colonial context of Canada was central to this study's design, data collection, and analysis. The CTC framework facilitated a critical examination of colonization, neoliberalism, and power, ensuring the researcher remained accountable to the structural forces shaping the experiences of CIC.

Educational success has the potential to profoundly influence an individual's life trajectory. Schools often serve as foundational institutions that foster hope and opportunities for a positive future (Finnan et al., 2017). Conversely, negative experiences within the education system can have long-term, harmful consequences, including increased likelihood of poverty, poor health outcomes, and involvement in the criminal justice system (Brownell et al., 2015). These challenges are compounded by intersectional factors rooted in colonial histories and systemic inequities. For instance, Indigenous students report the lowest graduation rates in Manitoba (Manitoba Department of Education, 2023), highlighting the urgent need to address these disparities.

This study is guided by the research question: *How can educators, Indigenous education teams and school social workers' perceptions contribute to building an ecology of knowledges that helps understand the EN of CIC?* To answer this, the study examines the context in which EN occurs, explores relevant intersectional factors, and seeks to develop a broader ecology of knowledges. The subsequent chapters will outline the study's methodology and methods,

followed by a discussion of potential risks and benefits, as well as ethical considerations and strategies to address them.

Rationale for study

Marginalization perpetuates exclusion which more often results in invisibility within society. In Manitoba, the absence of publicly available data on graduation rates for CIC contributes to their continued erasure from public discourse. This data had been put forward by Brownell et al. (2015) and Manitoba has not publicly reported graduation rates for CIC since its publication. Understanding and bringing the EN of CIC to light may result in more attention from the public and decision makers. When an issue remains unseen, it is easily ignored, allowing those in positions of power and privilege to remain unaccountable. This invisibility extends into schools themselves, where policies and practices often render CIC as different from their peers and reinforce their lack of full inclusion in the school community. While children are often referred to as the future, those in care are frequently preoccupied with basic survival, leaving little space to imagine a future or envision a career. Awareness needs to be brought to the issue of EN for CIC by building an ecology of knowledges that brings EN into public discourse.

Given the substantial gap in existing literature, this ecology of knowledges aims to inform future research, practice, and policy efforts to address the EN of CIC. Enhancing graduation outcomes for CIC could significantly reduce pressure on Manitoba's social welfare systems. Tailored approaches are necessary to support CIC in achieving educational success and fostering community integration. The urgency of this issue is underscored by the numerous adverse outcomes associated with both EN and CW involvement. Bellis et al. (2019) estimated that the annual economic burden of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in North America amounts to \$748 billion, largely driven by associated risk factors such as smoking, obesity,

substance use, and both physical and mental health complications. Notably, a 10% reduction in ACEs could yield an estimated savings of \$56 billion annually (Bellis et al., 2019). While this neoliberal rationale highlights the economic benefits of investing in this area of research, the primary goal remains to improve the lived experiences of children, youth, and families affected by the CW system.

Methodological framework

The proposed study will employ a Critical Constructivist Grounded Theory (CCGT) methodology, which integrates constructivist and critical theoretical perspectives to explore both how meaning is constructed and how societal processes and injustices are maintained (Levitt, 2021). This approach aligns with the study's overarching critical lens, particularly the Critical Theory of Coloniality (CTC) (Martins, 2022), enabling an examination of meaning-making within colonial and capitalist contexts. Drawing on Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory, the study emphasizes the co-construction of meaning with participants, allowing emergent themes to shape subsequent data collection and analysis in a flexible and iterative process.

The CCGT methodology supports an adaptive research design, where the researcher can refine questions and revisit participants as deeper insights emerge (Charmaz, 2017). This responsiveness enhances clarity and depth in theory development while maintaining methodological transparency and rigor (Birks et al., 2019). The approach is also well-suited to the practical constraints of the study, offering a structured yet time-efficient path to theory generation. Furthermore, CCGT complements Santos' concept of an "ecology of knowledges," as it values diverse knowledge systems and situates knowledge production within specific social and historical contexts (Birks et al., 2019; Charmaz, 2014).

Theoretical framework

The proposed study adopts Martins (2022) CTC as its theoretical framework, which centers on two core objectives: deconstructing dominant discourses and constructing a new, liberatory epistemology that validates non-dominant (particularly non-white) knowledge systems (Martins, 2022). The CTC critically examines the enduring legacies of colonial power and global capitalism, highlighting how they perpetuate systems of oppression both structurally and discursively (Martins, 2022; Clarke, 2023). It emphasizes the need to interrogate Western ontological assumptions in order to understand how these broader structures are continuously reproduced.

In operationalizing this framework, the CTC integrates discourse analysis and materialist perspectives to explore identity, difference, and the intersections of being, knowledge, and power—concepts it views as fluid and interconnected. This approach not only enriches the analysis of societal structures but also holds the researcher accountable for actively addressing colonial and capitalist influences in their work. Specifically, by foregrounding the colonality of power and knowledge, the framework supports liberatory action and critical discourse, offering valuable insights for the study of the education of CIC. It ensures that the research remains critically engaged with the colonial contexts of CW, guiding all stages of participant interaction and data interpretation.

Situating myself

To provide context for this research, I begin by situating myself through a reflection on my positionality. My identity and experiences shape the lens through which I approach this work. I am a person of Anishinaabe and European descent with Red River Métis ancestry, a fact that remained obscured within my family for many years due to the effects of colonialism and

the resulting stigmatization of Indigenous identity. Only recently have I begun to more fully understand the historical forces that contributed to this silence, and why reclaiming and honouring this ancestry is both an act of resistance and an affirmation of identity. This journey has deepened my awareness of Canada's colonial history and its ongoing impacts.

Currently, I have the privilege of working collaboratively with community Elders, and through these relationships, I have been temporarily gifted a spirit name: *White Buffalo Calf Woman*. At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge that I am also a white-presenting, cis-gendered, able-bodied, educated, middle-class woman. These aspects of my identity have afforded me significant unearned privilege within the dominant settler-colonial society.

My interest in conducting research with CIC stems from my previous professional role as a school social worker, where I was tasked with supporting this population. This work provided me with direct insights into the structural barriers CIC face within educational settings. My experiences also position me uniquely to undertake this research, as I bring both practical and contextual understanding of the education and CW systems.

Academically, I hold a Master's degree in social work and served as president of the Manitoba Association of School Social Workers (MASSW). I have developed strong relationships with Indigenous education team members and resource teachers across the province. I was also successful in previously procuring a federal grant on behalf of a Winnipeg school division to explore ways to make public schools safer and more supportive for Indigenous female youth, with the aim of increasing graduation rates.

Beyond education, I have worked across a range of social services fields in Manitoba and have extensive experience navigating and collaborating with the CW system. I have served as a sessional instructor at the University of Manitoba, where I taught material related to CW, and I

maintain a private therapy practice. Additionally, I have completed coursework for the master's program in Marriage and Family Therapy, which has further honed my qualitative interviewing skills. These collective experiences have significantly informed both the data collection and analysis processes within this study.

A brief overview

The following chapters aim to provide a deeper understanding of the issue of EN among CIC, while amplifying the voices of the participants represented in the study's findings. The structure of this dissertation consists of a literature review, background information on the topic, study methodology, findings, discussion, and implications.

Chapter Two presents a review of the relevant literature related to the study's theoretical framework and topic area. This chapter outlines the theoretical framework selected for the research, followed by discussions on power, neoliberalism, and colonization. It also includes a brief history of CW and an overview of the current CW context in Canada. The chapter concludes with an exploration of how CIC are positioned on the periphery of society and a summary of the issue of EN within this population.

Chapter Three examines the importance of graduation and its relationship to life trajectories and presents a framework for integrating diverse knowledge systems. This chapter addresses key topics including graduation outcomes, multiple sources of knowledge, considerations from developmental cognitive neuroscience (DCN), and Canadian Indigenous perspectives on development. A summary of the chapter's main points is provided at the end.

Chapter Four discusses the study's methodology and methods. It outlines the CCGT approach used to guide the research. This chapter details the participant sampling process, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and issues of anonymity and confidentiality.

Additionally, it reviews the data analysis process, including coding procedures, trustworthiness, and limitations.

Chapters five, six, and seven present the study's findings, organized into three overarching themes. Chapter five focuses on colonization, neoliberalism, and power, and includes three theoretical codes: (1) managerialism and capitalism have created a service-value model that renders CIC as commodities, resulting in overworked staff and adversarial relationships; (2) children are left powerless and invisible, with little control over their lives or education; and (3) colonization shapes educational neglect.

Chapter Six explores the theme of repairing education. Findings are presented through three theoretical codes: (1) gaps in support for CIC exist within the education system and teacher training; (2) there is a need for improved communication, collaboration, and collegial understanding between CW and education sectors; and (3) children must be heard and seen as individuals with unique needs and rights.

Chapter Seven focuses on the theme of healing education. It presents three theoretical codes: (1) supports are needed to address the trauma and potential mental health issues experienced by CIC; (2) belonging and attachment are essential, and CIC need opportunities to form meaningful connections; and (3) CIC must be treated with respect and nurtured to foster hope, dreaming, and self-worth. All findings' chapters are organized by categories and prioritize the voices of study participants.

Chapter Eight provides a critical discussion and analysis of the study's findings through the lens of the CTC. Drawing on the work of Paulo Henrique Martins (2022), this chapter examines how colonial structures continue to shape contemporary CW and education systems. Central to this analysis is the introduction of the theory that was built from this study the

Transformative Care-Education Theory (TCET) through which the CW and education systems are seen as spaces that can move from inflicting harm to creating healing. Theoretical contributions for the TCET are explored and connected to the findings from the study presenting a framework for education and CW systems to move forward with. A checklist to assist education and CW systems address this issue is also presented.

The final chapter of this dissertation presents the study's implications and offers recommendations for future research, policy, and practice informed by the findings. Key recommendations emerging from the data are discussed. The dissertation concludes with a summary of its main contributions and a reflection on potential directions for ongoing exploration in this field.

Chapter 2: A critical colonial analysis of the education of children in care

The practices of CW, in Canada, have been a point of contention for some time. The proceeding discussion will outline historical and current considerations within the field of CW while introducing the area of EN. The issue of EN experienced by children who are in out of home care placements is underdeveloped in professional literature, rendering it virtually invisible in the public policy sphere. The proceeding chapter will introduce the historic and current context of CW in Canada while outlining the CTC which will be the lens used to examine the situation of CW and EN throughout this chapter. The CTC illuminates how power, colonization and capitalism influence social phenomena and has proven to be a useful theory, informing all aspects of this study from design to analysis.

Child welfare in Canada

Aspects of society are deemed as residing either within a public or private sphere (Calhoun, 1995). The CW system has been a part of the public domain in Canada since its formal establishment in legislation in 1893. Throughout the 19th century children met the need of expanding industrialized urban centers and were indentured to live with, and work for employers. Children working also assisted with the financial instability experienced by their families (Dunlop, 2017). Prior to the 1820s children were left to look after themselves receiving similar societal attention to that of homeless adults. After the 1820s, things shifted when middle class attention picked up on homeless and neglected children. This led to the creation of Protestant Orphan Homes during the 30 years that followed. This was in keeping with the middle-class values of the time, where children needed saviours to rescue them from entering a potential life of crime, while positioning them to become contributing members of society (Bullen, 1985).

The first Children's Aid Society was founded in Toronto in 1891 by John Kelso, taking the idea from those formed earlier in the United States (Dunlop, 2017). Following this in 1893, the Act for the Prevention of Cruelty to and Better Protection of Children was enacted by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. This Act allowed for the Children's Aid Societies to legally care for neglected children and collect money. This formalized the social movements and sentiments that were prevalent within Canada since the 1880s, and was very much grounded in the values and beliefs held by the dominant elite of the time (Dunlop, 2017, 2018). Even though a CW Act had been passed in Nova Scotia in 1882, the Act that passed in Ontario in 1891 has influenced the context of Canadian Welfare policy and was considered groundbreaking at the time (Dunlop, 2017).

The colonial context of CW in Canada should be considered. The CW system in Canada has disproportionately surveilled and impacted Indigenous populations, exerting significant power and control over Indigenous children and their families. (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020). Sinclair (2017) identifies how the closures of residential schools resulted in increased involvement with CW agencies for Indigenous children in Canada. Between 1960 and 1985 Indigenous children were apprehended and, in some cases, adopted internationally (Sinclair, 2017). Sinclair goes on to say that Indigenous political leaders argued that removal of Indigenous children from their communities constituted genocide, and a public inquiry was conducted in Manitoba that concluded in the 1985 Kimelman report. The Kimelman report (1985) found the CW files, that were reviewed commonly contained incomplete, inaccurate, and misleading information.

Due to the disproportionate numbers of Indigenous CIC within Canada, some provinces began a process of devolution at the turn of the twenty-first century. In Manitoba this resulted

from the 1999 Aboriginal Justice Inquiry and in Ontario a process began in the early 1980s that resulted in a change to the Child and Family Services Act, R. S. O. c. C.11 in 1990 and the devolution of services to Indigenous nations in 2003. In 2007 a complaint was put forward to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and substantiated in January of 2016, bringing to light the inequitable funding Indigenous children in the CW system received. Currently, Bill C-92 an Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families received Royal Assent in June of 2019, and was the first time the Federal government has ever legislated in the area of child and family services. This Act provides authority to Indigenous nations to exercise their jurisdiction over CW. This is promising, however it will not take place overnight. For example, in Manitoba, it took four years for the first Indigenous community to break from the provincial CW Act and take advantage of this Federal Legislation.

Current context of child welfare

Canada has room for improvement in terms of the care and resources, it allocates to Canadian children. This is evident in the report issued by UNICEF ranking first world countries in their child wellbeing study, with Canada ranked 11th out of the 39 richest countries worldwide (UNICEF, 2023). Notably this is a marked improvement from the previous report ranking Canada 28th out of 39 (UNICEF, 2022). Despite this improvement the UNICEF report (2023) outlines the increase in childhood poverty in Manitoba. This is noteworthy due to the effects of poverty resulting in Indigenous children in Canada being seventeen times more likely to be apprehended by CW than their non-Indigenous counterparts (Campaign 2000, 2023, p. 35).

More Indigenous children are in out-of-home care than were enrolled in residential schools at their height in 1953 (Global news, 2021). According to the most recent Census data, Indigenous children make up 53.8% of CIC in Canada under the age of fourteen, despite this

demographic only encompassing 7.7% of Canadian children under the age of fourteen (Government of Canada, 2022). The most recent attainable statistic shows Manitoba holding an even more dismal ratio when it comes to CW demographics, with 91% of its CIC being Indigenous (Government of Manitoba, 2024). Manitoba has the highest number of CIC within Canada (Pollock et al., 2024), having over 8,990 in care as of 2023 (Government of Manitoba, 2024) as well as the highest number of incarcerated youths at a rate of 9.16 per 10,000 persons in 2022/2023 (Statistics Canada, 2024). In Manitoba, nearly half of CIC have been charged with a criminal offence by the age of 21 impacting the life trajectories of this population as well as social services (Brownell et al., 2020). The same study found that Indigenous youth “have 24 times the odds of being involved in both systems” referring to both CW and the justice system (p. 85).

Despite being underfunded through austerity as outlined by MacKinnon (2024), the cost of CW in Manitoba remains high. The Manitoba Families budget report (2024) identified the expenditure for child and youth services related to child protection and child and family services to be \$1,016,452,000 for 2023-2024. It has also been announced that the Manitoba government budget for CW will be increasing. In February 2025 the Manitoba government announced increased support for CIC with an increase in funds of 10% moving daily rates between \$24.32 and \$34.72 (depending on age and needs of children) for a total investment of \$3.59 billion paid to foster parents for the care of children to meet their basic needs (Government of Manitoba, 2025). Although this seems like an impressive figure, it should be noted that foster care daily rates have not increased since 2012 according to the same press release and when using the Bank of Canada inflation calculator, it does not match the percentage change which would actually be a 33.64% increase, to keep up with inflation, not 10% (Bank of Canada, n.d.). To further

highlight this disparity, Statistics Canada (2023) reported that the average Canadian family spends approximately \$47.22 per day to raise a child.

The CW systems in Canada and Manitoba have been widely critiqued for the harms and injustices embedded in both their historical foundations and contemporary practices. There is a pressing need to research and explore innovative approaches to CW policy, practice, and education in order to mitigate the ongoing harm, which disproportionately affects Indigenous children, youth, and families. From a proactive standpoint—and given the significant financial burden the CW system places on both federal and provincial governments—continued study and exploration in this area are essential. The low graduation rates among CIC may hinder their future opportunities, increasing their reliance on other social service systems. As Van Wert (2018) emphasizes, EN experienced by CIC must be examined as a critical factor contributing to these poor educational outcomes.

Education neglect

For the purpose of this paper EN is defined in two parts the first being: the failure of the legal guardian to provide the necessities to obtain an education and secondly, the failure of the education system to facilitate the necessities of a safe and successful learning environment. At present, the literature and knowledge related to EN for CIC is virtually non-existent (Van Wert et al., 2018). To justify the importance of study in this area of CW, it is necessary to note that the general population of CIC has one of the lowest graduation rates in Manitoba, at 33.4% for children in out of home care, compared with 89.3% for those never involved with the CW system (Brownell et al., 2017). This study was conducted at the University of Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, with the purpose of examining the educational outcomes of CIC.

For CIC—who already face elevated risk for emotional and behavioural challenges, school disengagement, and risk-taking behaviours (Brownell et al., 2008, 2010, 2015; Maclean et al., 2015)—EN may further intensify these vulnerabilities. Overall, EN is associated with significant adverse outcomes across the life course, including behavioural and emotional difficulties in school, placement in remedial programming, poverty, mental health challenges, substance use, homelessness, involvement with the justice system, and difficulty meeting basic needs (Van Wert et al., 2018). Additionally, CIC may have unique needs within the education system, as stress, encountered in early life, has been implicated in risks to development and mental health (Hambrick et al., 2019). Stemming from this, it has been found that some of the factors that significantly influence educational outcomes were poverty and number of placements (Brownell, et al., 2015). Changes in placement have been shown to have an effect on cortisol rhythms when CIC enter a new placement (Fisher et al., 2011). The significance of both confounding variables was found by Brownell et al. (2015) to increase in their significance from kindergarten to high school.

In 2016 a report was released by the Manitoba task force on educational outcomes for CIC in which several recommendations were put forward. However, there is no information to date on how these recommendations have been implemented and/or evaluated. A decade after the report by the Manitoba Department of Education task force (2016) there has been no further mention of addressing or keeping track of how recommendations were implemented or any reference to it. British Columbia seems to be the only Western province that reports the graduation statistics for CIC. Currently, Manitoba Education is not reporting any statistics on graduation rates for this demographic and has not offered any explanation as to why it does not publish these statistics.

Moving forward, an important consideration to keep in mind while exploring the EN of CIC, includes the fact that the CW system is responsible for providing for all of the needs of CIC including education (Van Wert et al., 2018). Additionally, since EN may be co-occurring with other forms of neglect and abuse, it becomes clearer as to why relatively low rates of EN are reported within Canada compared with that of the United States and some European countries (Van Wert et al., 2018). Additionally, this may be due to the fact that provinces such as Ontario have no specific legislation to identify EN (Van Wert et al., 2018). Overall, the low rate of reporting appears to be an incongruent reflection of the graduation statistic for children in out of home care listed above.

Van Wert et al. (2018) has found that the majority of EN cases referred to CW in Canada, were from school personnel and were related to concerns of low attendance, general neglect related to caregivers and the developmental needs of children. These allegations were also more likely to be confirmed than other forms of neglect reported to CW and were more likely to find mental health issues in children and youth and socioeconomic risk factors for caregivers (Van Wert et al., 2018). In addition, Van Wert et al. (2018) identified that cases of confirmed EN by caregivers are more likely to receive ongoing services than other forms of neglect and abuse.

Once again it is necessary to take the colonial context of Canada into account as there are some additional considerations for Indigenous children related to the school system and CW (Sinclair, 2017). These may intersect to create multiple barriers for Indigenous youths in care in obtaining their high school diplomas. For example, Indigenous children within Manitoba had a graduation rate of 50.7% in the 2023 school year compared to a 91.3% graduation rate for non-Indigenous students (Manitoba Department of Education, 2024). As previously mentioned, the

most recent attainable statistic shows Manitoba with 91% of its CIC being Indigenous (Government of Manitoba, 2024). This reflects that the reported graduation rate of 33.4% for CIC may face intersectional factors while also remaining invisible within the public sphere.

Shifting focus slightly, consideration also needs to be given to the intersectional forces that are at play in this area for Indigenous children. Geographical location determines the resources that are available to help children in schools (Thompson et al., 2019). Many Indigenous children must relocate because there are no schools available in their home communities and so they are left with no supports in urban centers when they do relocate, leaving them vulnerable (Thompson et al., 2019). Thompson brings up an important issue as many Indigenous communities are remote in Manitoba. He further discusses how their children have to move away to attend school, leaving them vulnerable in urban communities for victimization.

Beyond geographical considerations, education continues to be a Westernized ‘adult-centric’ environment that operates in an exclusionary manner to peripheral knowledge systems (Ritchie & Phillips, 2023). Most children have their experiences analyzed by the Western canon of colonial knowledge that dominates (Abebe et al., 2022). This “canon” refers to the compartmentalization and hierarchical attributions to Western approaches of knowledge acquisition, construction and particular histories while ignoring and devaluing peripheral knowledge systems. Additionally, we can never forget how the Canadian education system has enacted irreparable harm upon Indigenous peoples (Hare, 2012) and as a result there is an understandable amount of mistrust. Despite this some Indigenous youth do graduate although as previously stated in Manitoba only approximately 50% of Indigenous children graduate on time.

When looking toward an entry point for engaging in discourse around a solution, the CW system would appear to be well positioned to deal with EN although ultimately, collaboration across disciplines will be the best approach (Van Wert et al., 2018). Schools have the power to set up the trajectory of students' lives and if school is a negative experience it will lead to various biopsychosocial problems (Calis & Calis, 2015). As a result, schools are an obvious choice to aid in addressing this issue. Schools are situated to intervene in many ways such as: early identification and referral services for students and families. However, they are not positioned to provide all effective services (Van Wert et al., 2018).

Children who are experiencing EN often have complex needs to be addressed and interventions that are targeted to improve their attendance and academic success could go a long way (Van Wert et al., 2018). As identified above, a collaborative approach could go a great distance to assist in positive outcomes, for children in out of home care, who are experiencing EN. The limited nature of this section also needs to be addressed, as the focus is relatively brief for a paper of this length and there has been a heavy reliance on incredibly few references. This demonstrates the lack of information, and attention to this area while identifying a pivotal need for researchers to study causes, solutions, and outcomes that can bring much needed awareness to the EN of CIC because CIC deserve better than a 33% chance at graduation.

Critical theory of coloniality

Moving into the theoretical framework employed for this study the CTC seeks to analyze and deconstruct dominant discourses while attempting to identify and form a new episteme to “liberate” non-dominant knowledge (Martins, 2022). Clarke (2023) argues that critical engagement with colonial assumptions in Western ontologies also needs to occur in order to decipher how wider structures of oppression are reproduced. This can be addressed within the

context of a CTC, by placing colonial power and capitalism at the forefront of what is being analyzed, and bringing to light systems of oppression not only at various levels of society but also globally (Martins, 2022).

The CTC is put forward by Martins (2022) as a tool to bring awareness to the struggles associated with colonial power as well as the “rescu[ing] of forgotten or violated memories and traditions” in an effort to produce new knowledge that illustrates inequity while critically engaging with the status quo in society (p. 1). The CTC has as its aim, the deconstruction of being, knowledge, and power (Martins, 2022) which are fluid concepts and can interact with one another. It also incorporates discourse analysis and materialism into an analysis of identity and difference. This provides a more robust analysis of the societal influence and holds the researcher accountable to ensure they are incorporating aspects of colonial power and capitalism into their analysis. Coloniality of power and knowledge needs to be paid particular attention to in order to engage in liberatory action and critical discourse (Martins, 2022). This focus on critical discourse and liberatory action may be of particular advantage to this study to assist in uncovering new perspectives on the education of CIC through the act of creating space for participants reflections on the study topic. Overall, the CTC has challenged the researcher to keep the colonial context of CW in consideration throughout all aspects of the research design and process.

To begin, Sartre (1961) puts forward the idea of difference deriving itself from colonial history which in effect leads to oppression. This may be particularly relevant within the settler-colonial context of value placed on certain aspects of knowledge and culture over others. This settler-colonial context needs to be considered, and in the contemporary context of colonialism, the challenge facing academics is how to incorporate “anti-colonial feelings” within the context

of social and societal issues (Martins, 2022). Critical engagement with colonial assumptions in Western ontologies needs to occur in order to decipher how wider structures of oppression are reproduced (Clarke, 2022). Critical theory, more specifically the Frankfurt school, has never looked to incorporate colonial histories within their analysis (Bhambra, 2021). This is an immense oversight as critical theories, and the knowledge they generate operate within the colonial context and the frame of reference of the author(s) (Collins, 2019).

Although this theory does address gaps there are always limitations present in all theoretical standpoints. As the CTC, proposed by Martins, is very new and was released in Chile in Spanish, there are no formal reviews at present on this text that have been translated to English. As a result, some limitations that are apparent to the researcher include Martins grounding his theory very strongly in economics and appearing to posit that as the unit of analysis. Additionally, Martins makes leaps at times, for example making connections to neoliberalism and colonial capitalism causing mental health issues but does not sufficiently substantiate the claims. The text at times also reads as being repetitive throughout the chapters; however, this may be due to limitations of translation.

Despite these limitations, the CTC put forward by Martins (2022) produces a good starting point for extending the discussion of critical theory by exposing and arguing the need for a method to identify and critique neoliberalism and the impact of extreme capitalism. Previous critical engagements with dominant discourses have proven to be ineffective at suppressing the arrival of neoliberalism, and Martins' CTC helps critically engage with the "new neoliberal coloniality" for a more comprehensive analysis of social phenomenon (p. 3). The CTC's critical engagement is in keeping with other critical theories. However, the additional accountability of focus on colonial contexts and the neocolonialism that has been waged on the world, with

neoliberalism, brings it into the current world context. The current state of the United States leaves some uncertainty as to the future of a globalist economy and trajectory of colonialism. Despite this the CTC appears to provide the opportunity to engage in comprehensive critical analysis. An application of analysis within the context of the education of CIC will be presented throughout this paper. This analysis will attempt to illuminate discourse around hegemony in various spaces as well as colonial power and neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism, colonization and power

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is posited to have created a new wave of colonialism controlled by a group of global oligarchy elites (Martins, 2022). Unfortunately, the examination of neoliberalism remains virtually untouched in many theoretical orientations and the dominant discourse at large (Martins, 2022). This could be due to the fact that colonization becomes internalized among the members of a society, and aids in the perpetuation of colonial power and capitalism, rendering colonial processes and violence invisible (Browne, 2017, Martins, 2022). This is something that needs to be considered in how CW and education are perceived in handling the education of CIC.

It is important to keep in mind that disciplines are limited by the political and neoliberal context of the times in their pursuits of social justice (Bryson, 2019), making it a paramount point to consider in analysis related to CIC. Contemporary struggles increasingly centre on control over power and knowledge, which now function as key forms of currency in the commodification of resources (Martins, 2022). Neoliberalism renders everything into a commodity and results in “a dehumanizing tendency that has coloniality as its source of inspiration.” (Martins, 2022, p. 39) thus, impacting multiple spaces of society simultaneously in

its wake. Within the context of CW, we need to consider how CIC may be reduced to a commodity and the processes that enable and maintain this.

Neoliberalism is seeking to increase privatization efforts and “has an important deregulatory and institutional destabilizing effect on public and private national institutions.” (Martins, 2022, p. 112) As a result, Martins (2022) believes that neoliberalism is creating new forms of colonialism through consumerism, virtual communication, and catering to the interests of the global elite. As the majority of CIC in Manitoba are Indigenous it will be important to consider how this may influence perceptions of this population and what, if any efforts there may be to support this population in the context of education.

Neoliberal Impact. Neoliberalism “reduces social life to a problem of economic calculation.” (Martins, 2022, p. 10). Currently, managerialism and financialization imported business principles, implemented into social welfare services, has resulted in a value for dollar measurement in the human services field that is not easy to quantify and has increased competition (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2015). This competition places greater accountability on practitioners, resulting in more time spent record keeping with limited resources, which is often taking time away from clients (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2015). This impact may be greatly felt by the children and families; a CW worker is assigned to case manage and may contribute to a feeling of powerlessness.

Further, these principles, which have resulted in privatization, have meant a loss of funding, which has direct impact on service delivery, leaving employees over-worked with fewer community resources available for referral (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2015). As competition increases, workers are asked to demonstrate effectiveness, placing increased importance on evidenced based practices (Allen-Meares, 2013). These evidence-based programs are aligned

with Western ideologies making it difficult to engage in cultural competence from a prescribed intervention.

An example of this is the term case management which “validates the spirit of managerialism” being informed by the ontological view that any problem can be improved by implementing “good business practices” (Zufferey, 2011: 515). Historically, case management was used to coordinate services while attempting to control the costs of services (Kersbergen, 1996). Case management is used in both education and social work disciplines. Martinez (2022) notes that social workers are limited in their work by the capitalist system that simultaneously affects the families and individuals they work with. For example, there is enforcement to comply with market expectations, (Browne, 2017) which imposes numerous limitations to an employee’s ability to engage in and promote social justice. This may also risk positioning children as a commodity in the neoliberal state.

Currently it is expected that services delivered will be done so demonstrating their cost effectiveness meaning an increase in paperwork and value for service models (Dunlop, 2018). This echoes the values and beliefs with which the CW system was built on and the current climate of managerialism. This is evident in the way that Canadian society deems who is worthy of service, who the decision makers will be, and how many resources will be allocated to the issue (Dunlop, 2018). Austerity movements in the Manitoba government have caused issues for CW through cuts in spending, wage freezes, privatization, and vacancy management (MacKinnon, 2024). The study by MacKinnon identifies how this has resulted in fewer supports to families while increasing inequality and stress on the demographics who receive services and increasing demands on workers.

A further consideration resulting from neoliberalism, as discussed earlier, is the increase in inequality. In the wake of the pandemic, with inflation on the rise, many people are stressed and find it hard to make ends meet. The consumer price index has consistently been on the rise post pandemic, with an annual change in 2024 of 2.4% in addition to an increase in mortgage cost index rates for January 2025 (Statistics Canada, 2025).

This is impactful on families working multiple jobs, having less time available to spend with children, higher stress levels, and less money to buy healthy food. If poverty is a risk factor for involvement with the CW system, as demonstrated previously, more children and families may come into contact with CW. This may be due to something as innocent as a child being left alone while parents work, because the babysitter did not show up or a child did not attend school because no one is home to make sure they attended. When looking at the effects of poverty, youth identified experiencing some of the following long-lasting negative effects as a result of growing up in poverty such as: safety, high school and post-secondary education, employment opportunities, family relationships, and mental health (Campaign 2000, 2023). Deleterious effects can occur at multiple intersections of identity (Collins, 2019).

Capitalism and neoliberalism. The logic of financialization has won out in the time of neoliberalism (Martins, 2022). The separation from economy and society, inherent in neoliberalism, seeks to dehumanize those below the white elites and convince all “that there is no way out outside the labor market, competition, and consumption.” (Martins, 2022, p. 35). This is a dismal view of our current societal structure, however, observable through increasing consumption and inequalities building in capitalist societies.

The widening gap between rich and poor, alongside relatively static income brackets, has contributed to more pronounced income inequality. (Browne, 2017, Habermas et al., 1998,

Martinez, 2022, p. 164). A recommendation was made to address income inequality in Canada and in the report by Campaign 2000 (2023), it was suggested this be done by a reduction in tax loopholes and targeting the extreme wealthy elite to contribute a representative share within the nation. To date nothing meaningful has been implemented to address these recommendations.

Currently in Canada, more than 1 in 8 children experience detrimental physical, mental, emotional, economic, and social impacts of poverty. (Campaign 2000, 2023). As of 2022, 1 in 5 children live in poverty in Canada with Manitoba holding the second highest child poverty rate in the country at 27.1% (Campaign 2000, 2024). Neoliberal greed appears to have gotten in the way of taking care of children, as the wealthy elite appear okay to hold immense wealth, while others within their country of residence face housing and food insecurity.

Sands (2018) puts forward the question: ‘How free are we?’ when we live in an economically dependent world. This may be better put forward within a colonial capitalist world whereas Martins (2022) asserts governments and nations no longer hold power, but rather the oligarchy elites. For example, this is recently evidenced by mis and dis-information campaigns coming into immense prominence during the United States 2016 election. This disruption of reality has been commodified within the neoliberal context and social media conglomerates receive financial gain from the spread of mis and dis-information (Habermas, 2022) generating profit and keeping shareholders happy.

Families and development. Neoliberalism has many deleterious effects on families and children. Neoliberalism has been found to decrease social connection and increase loneliness due to perceptions of competition amongst others (Becker et al., 2021). Additionally, increases in psychosomatic disorders have resulted from the technological advances of neoliberalism

(Martins, 2022). Zeira (2022) also brings forward how neoliberalism has an effect on how we treat and diagnose mental health concerns.

Beyond this, many social groups that have been “abandoned and humiliated” by neoliberal capitalism, are most susceptible to conservative, populist national groups (Martins, 2022, p. 107). In the contemporary context, it seems there is a presence of dominant ideologies that are being circulated “stressing individualism, personal freedom, and hostility to government” (Martinez, 2022, p. 168). This has resulted in psychological manipulation of the population to believe that they, along with oppressed groups, are the cause of social problems (Martinez, 2022). However, in reality these problems are actually being created through the structural injustices present in neoliberalism (Martinez, 2022).

As previously identified in context of the Manitoba CW system, the austerity movement has resulted in CW being underfunded for years (MacKinnon, 2024). The outcome of the study conducted by MacKinnon found that circumstances bringing children and families into contact with CW are not being targeted; rather policy and practice is working to maintain the status quo. This directly connects to the importance a neoliberal society, places on children and families involved in the CW system.

Colonial impact

Moving into a discussion on the colonial impacts of CIC this portion of the paper begins with a quote from Sartre (1961) that provides an opportunity for self-reflection: “we have all profited from colonial exploitation.” (p. lxiv). This can be a hard thing to sit with in an honest way for those who are aware of and recognize the injustice. It is important that we are aware of the role we play, within the context of colonial power and capitalism. It is important to remember that those working in social welfare positions are enacted as brokers between the colonizers and

colonized (Fanon, 1968) and should be especially aware of the power they hold. Colonization of the North American continent began in the 16th century and left a wake of devastation in its path that is still present today (Ciofalo et al., 2022) in novel ways (Martins, 2022).

Colonial violence seeks to dehumanize those who are othered, while simultaneously engaging in psychological warfare, leaving marginalized groups disconnected and shameful of their identities (Sartre, 1961). When looking at peripheral groups they often become the “objects” of study, effectively dehumanizing them and focusing on deficits (Said, 2004). This also works to make invisible the macro level forces that are enacted upon them and situate them within the academics’ frame of reference (Said, 2004). Currently CIC have become the “objects” of study in the dominant discourse of literature.

The Canadian CW system is designed from a Westernized hegemonic lens (Kopp et al., 2021) which positions the creation and caring for children in a gendered position (Strong-Boag, 2010). Poverty is also gendered, and single headed female families currently experience the highest rates of poverty in Canada at 32.6% (Campaign 2000, 2023). As we have seen previously, those living in poverty have an increased risk of being involved with the CW system, meaning this space is a gendered space as well. Additionally, this space is a cultural space preferencing those who conform to the dominant discourses of what good child rearing and family life should look like. The space of CW also holds an immense amount of power and can choose to apprehend a child at the discretion of the CW worker.

Both social workers and educators have enacted colonial violence on children. In the beginning, social workers were first introduced to Indigenous peoples when they became wards of the Federal government through the Department of Indian Affairs (Sinclair, 2009). The relationships between social workers and Indigenous peoples at best, remain strained as a result

of the historical practices and actions taken by social workers against Indigenous peoples (Sinclair, 2009). Understandably, many Indigenous peoples still hold negative views of social workers, based on the history of this discipline taking part in the various assimilative policy projects of the government (Sinclair, 2009).

Like social workers, teachers and the education system have a legacy of participation and complicities with the colonial violence inflicted during residential schools. This history has resulted in an inherit distrust with some Indigenous peoples and communities (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020, Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019). At present there have been efforts in policy and practice to incorporate Indigenous pedagogy in curriculum and increase representation of Indigenous culture in schools; however, distrust continues (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020, Smith et al., 2011). Schools are Westernized institutions adhering to Western European pedagogies on how to best educate children (Madison et al., 2016). It has been found that Indigenous students have a better school experience when they feel represented in the school building (O’Gorman & Pandey, 2015). As evidenced by the low graduation rate of Indigenous students, the education system in Manitoba has a long way to go in its reconciliatory efforts. In 2022 the Manitoba government released the Mamàhtawisiwin policy framework attempting to be more responsive to Indigenous students and families. This document is only a framework and does not clearly outline how this can be adopted into curriculum or hold anyone accountable for implementing and maintaining adherence to it.

Currently, the Westernized systems of CW, remain disconnected from Indigenous worldviews. Josey & McRee (2021) identify their understanding of an Indigenous view of children being that no one can ‘own’ a child. This goes against the notion of guardianship being held by one or two people in the Canadian public sphere. To demonstrate this disconnection, the

importance of incorporating Elders and ceremony is not considered a priority within CW (Kopp et al., 2021) either. Intergenerational trauma is also often overlooked, within the context of Indigenous children and families involved within the CW system (Quinn, 2022), and it is important to note that the idea of the ‘best interests of the child’ is culturally specific (Sinclair, 2017).

Raven Sinclair (2017) has called out the CW system as the “Indigenous child removal system” in the title of her article. She states that this practice has been in motion since the 1950s in Canada. Sinclair (2017) makes the claim that the 60’s scoop has not come to an end, it has just transformed itself. The involvement of the CW system, in Indigenous life, increased with the deterioration of Residential Schools and the introduction of federal funding transfers (Sinclair, 2017). As discussed earlier this was a discriminatory practice with non-Indigenous children receiving higher funding levels.

As noted, Manitoba had 8,990 CIC, 91% of which were Indigenous as of March 2023 (Manitoba Government, 2024). It has been previously discussed that Indigenous families hold a higher risk of poverty in Canada. Poverty will more frequently be construed as neglect than a systemic issue resulting in Indigenous children being apprehended at higher rates in Canada (Fallon et al., 2021). Racism also persists within the CW system, simultaneously driving the rates of Indigenous children within the CW system (Fallon et al., 2021). Additionally, intergenerational effects, from trauma experienced at the hands of colonization, are at the forefront of Indigenous children being overrepresented in CW (Quinn, 2022).

The government of Canada is being forced to acknowledge its history of colonization, and take measures to transform dysfunctional and harmful systems, organizations, and relationships (Greenwood et al., 2017). Although there is a sense that this issue needs to take the

forefront, the operationalization of it is often lacking and inconsistent between the provinces. The Federal intervention in Child and Family Services, through legislation in 2019, could be a promising first step in decolonizing the CW system. However, there has been a lack of support in helping Indigenous communities make this shift. Additionally, austerity measures in Manitoba has left CW underfunded and unable to meet the needs of families while over taxing CW staff (MacKinnon, 2024).

Power

Moving into a discussion on power, neoliberalism has eliminated the previous liberal commitment to social welfare in its efforts to displace wealth and power into small elite global oligarchies increasing violence, inequality, and peripheral societies that become or remain powerless (Martins, 2022). Devaluing a sense of nation and dismantling of social services creates uncertainty and instability among citizens as well as removing a sense of community (Martins, 2022). Neoliberalism effectually puts pressure on the middle class and creates an environment that fosters “anti-democratic and anti-intellectual discourses that flirt with fascism and totalitarianism.” (Martins, 2022, p. 115). Accompanying this pressure, inequality and poverty position populations to become more susceptible to the manipulation of reactionary populist groups and leadership (Martins, 2022). This system places those residing in marginalized spaces in powerless positions, being rendered victims of the decisions of elite groups in charge.

Neoliberalism is growing through increased control over many aspects of life, including human and financial resources of nations that increase the wealth concentration of the elite (Browne, 2017, Martins, 2022). We need to begin to recognize that the rich form a global ethnic group that reproduce “their clan logics” legitimizing the dominant structures built around colonial capitalism (Martins, 2022, p. 93). The power of this group “tries to sabotage the

liberation movements”, which has resulted in an expediated “appropriation of national wealth by the minority, amplifying colonial violence and destabilizing politics” (Martins, 2022, p. 95). In this context CIC do not reside in the same sphere as those in power and therefore may be rendered invisible to those who hold the power and resources in society.

Powerless position. When citizens are reduced, through discourse, to an inferior status, across multiple intersections, it challenges their ability to engage critically toward a liberatory direction because a justification has been created for the position, they hold in society making it appear to be their fault (Martins, 2022). When we get stuck at the micro level of analysis, or attributing individual blame, it makes it harder, or irrelevant to look upward. If an individual’s position is of their own making, then there is no need for structural analysis or change. This narrative has been skillfully woven into society resulting in CIC being placed on the periphery and not at the forefront of policy and funding decisions.

Feeling powerless can have deleterious effects on an individual’s psyche and overall wellbeing. When individuals perceive they have little to no control over their lives, they are not able to take action to change or advocate for change (Martinez, 2022). Those who hold no power can feel as if “the world acts upon them in contrast to being an active actor in the world.” (Martinez, 2022, p. 169). Martinez’s statement also highlights Freire’s notion of object versus subject. The more profound an individual’s experience of oppression, the more likely this is to result in the feeling of being an object because they are being acted upon with no autonomy or power over what happens (Freire, 1970). Said (2004) shared a similar sentiment, in that he discussed the power held in making another individual of a group an object to be studied, not only to the world at large, but also to the individual being prescribed as an object.

Not only are CIC oppressed as a group but there are intersectional aspects at play within this demographic. Intersectional inequality exists within CW, and divides occur between the values associated with different ‘bodies’ that take up space within CW (Knezevic, 2020). Collins (2019) puts forward the suggestion that the points in which power converges may be better settings to analyze and search for explanations because power also circulates horizontally. An intersectionality framework is a tool for a more complete accounting of the mechanisms in which violence operates, by bringing to light its relationality across multiple intersections (Collins et al., 2021). For example, the CW system enacts violence upon children and families across multiple intersections. As previously identified, in the realm of education, children are cut off from community in placements, away from home, possibly attending new schools or having missed a portion of a school year due to issues with placements and not being able to catch up on missed work. Children are also placed in higher risk situations while living in out of home care, which could result in increased involvement in the justice system, as has been previously demonstrated by Brownell’s work. Children may also be disconnected from family and their identity, creating violence in the realm of attachments and psychological wellbeing.

Living on the periphery. From the standpoint of critical social theory, we need to look at what brought us to this point, and what is maintaining it. How has the graduation rate of CIC remained relatively invisible to the public and what is happening in the current context of the education of CIC that is impeding their academic success? Specifically, from a CTC standpoint, how is the role of settler-colonial power and capitalism impacting policies, practices, and dominant discourses surrounding CIC.

The group of CIC resides in a periphery to the dominant society and discourse. The term peripheral is often seen in sociological and philosophical constructs to refer to positions within

society. The Oxford dictionary (2023) defines peripheral as something that is related yet positioned on the edge. This helps situate what is meant by CIC being on a periphery. They share membership with the dominant society; however, they are not part of the dominant discourse, or those who hold power, and so they have no voice in the decisions being made. Awareness is only brought into the dominant discourse, or central society, when something happens that makes dominant structures, and groups, take notice as it has some form of impact on them. As a result of this weakened position, CIC are overlooked until those with power are forced to act, because the issue can no longer be ignored.

Friere (1970) does not completely agree with the concept of peripheries as he argues oppressed groups live within the dominant sphere where oppression takes place. Although the concept of peripheries helps to see that not all individuals and groups are able to fully participate within a society it is also important to keep in mind that they are members of the dominant sphere. Oppression is exerted against them within this dominant space so that the status quo may be maintained.

Summary

The EN of CIC remains an overlooked area in the care and wellbeing of this population. Within the context of Manitoba, Indigenous children and youth are predominantly impacted, as they represent the majority of the population of CIC. Not graduating high school can have many deleterious effects on an individual's life. Manitoba is not currently publishing any graduation statistics for CIC. This renders the issue relatively invisible, and outside of the dominant discourse in Manitoba policy and practice related to CIC. The CW and education systems both have been complicit in harms against Indigenous peoples through residential schools and

removing children from homes. Therefore, there is an intersectional aspect to the EN of CIC, as it will likely have a greater effect on Indigenous children and youth.

Neoliberalism has ravaged the social welfare field through various austerity movements such as privatization, funding cuts, and the expectation of cost effectiveness in the human service field. This has immensely impacted both service providers and users. Colonization has also immensely impacted the pedagogy in which the education system operates, as well as the legacy of colonial violence enacted upon Indigenous peoples in Canada. This has led to a state of distrust between Indigenous peoples and the education system. Attempts have been made to engage in reconciliatory efforts; however it is unclear if staff are being held accountable to these undertakings. As CIC are disproportionately Indigenous in Manitoba colonialism and neocolonialism need to be considered in the context of the EN of CIC.

The CTC considers how power influences a social phenomenon in addition to neoliberalism and colonial forces. In the context of CIC, they are a powerless population that live in a peripheral space outside of the dominant space held by those who hold power in Manitoba. It is common for CIC to have experienced intersectional adverse childhood experiences, and they have decisions made for them by government representatives who have the power to decide where and with whom they will reside with. Often groups residing in the periphery can be reduced to objects of study, remaining voiceless and having others determine their realities. The issue of EN for CIC can be ignored because it does not affect the dominant group in Manitoba society and subsequently those residing within this sphere have the privilege of remaining ignorant of its existence. Alternatively, the invisibility of this issue may serve a purpose to maintaining the status quo.

Chapter 3: Development and education

In this chapter, child development will be considered to help situate the research findings on the EN of CIC. Many disciplines, societies, and cultures hold knowledge regarding child development. For the purposes of this discussion, the focus is on developmental cognitive neuroscience (DCN) and Canadian Indigenous knowledges on children and families. The definition put forward by Tassell-Matamua (2025) will be used to define what is meant by Indigenous knowledges:

a body of understandings that have accumulated over time and been informed by the worldviews of the communities that have generated, practiced, refined, and modified them...reflect[ing] common principles about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment...inclusive of both tangible and intangible phenomena and extend from the micro- to the macro, and from the terrestrial to the celestial. (p. 2)

Combining DCN with Indigenous knowledges is hoped to assist in generating a more holistic interpretation of child development. DCN has recently become influential in shaping Canadian policy and practice, while Indigenous knowledges hold relevance as it is applicable to the demographic of CIC within Manitoba.

Before embarking on this discussion, it should be noted that Indigenous and Western European epistemologies are often presented in academic discourse as fundamentally dichotomous systems. This is not an accurate representation as many scholars argue that this framing oversimplifies a much more complex historical relationship (Kumar 2023, Robinson et al., 2021). Western scientific traditions, while frequently positioned as universal and objective, have historically drawn from and incorporated knowledges generated by Indigenous peoples

without acknowledging those origins (Alum, 2024, Kumar, 2023, Robinson et al., 2021).

Scholars have shown that European exploration, natural sciences, and agricultural practices frequently relied on Indigenous ecological knowledges, including plant medicine, land stewardship practices, and environmental observation (Alum et al., 2024, Battiste, 2013, Kumar, 2023, Negi et al., 2021). Rather than existing as isolated epistemologies, Indigenous and Western knowledge systems have been entangled through colonial encounters, where knowledge exchange often occurred within unequal power relationships that privileged Western institutions while marginalizing the Indigenous sources of knowledge.

Many Indigenous scholars therefore argue that what is often described as Western knowledge has, in part, developed through the appropriation, extraction, and reclassification of Indigenous knowledge systems (Alum, 2024, Kumar, 2023, Robinson et al., 2021). Battiste (2013) explains that colonial institutions historically dismissed Indigenous knowledge as primitive while simultaneously incorporating its insights into Western scientific frameworks. Similarly, Tuhiwai Smith (2012) notes that colonial research practices have frequently extracted Indigenous knowledges and reframed them within Western epistemologies, removing them from their cultural and relational contexts.

Recognizing this history challenges the assumption that Indigenous and Western knowledge systems exist in strict opposition. Instead, scholars increasingly call for approaches that acknowledge the contributions of Indigenous knowledge systems and create space for respectful dialogue among diverse epistemologies (Alum et al., 2024, Battiste, 2013, Robinson et al., 2021). Such recognition is central to decolonizing education and research, where knowledge systems can coexist and inform one another without reproducing colonial hierarchies of legitimacy.

In order to weave this knowledge together, the ecology of knowledges (de Sousa, 2004) will be introduced as a method to incorporate multiple epistemologies to assist in constructing a more comprehensive understanding of a social phenomenon. The CTC will be used to incorporate a critical colonial analysis of child development in order to recognize and mitigate the inequity inherent in diverse knowledge sources situated within a neocolonial context. A connection will be drawn between systemic and colonial issues and the knowledge emerging from both DCN and Indigenous knowledge systems. Specifically, the analysis will explore how structural inequities—such as intergenerational trauma, racism, underfunded education systems, and culturally irrelevant pedagogies—intersect with neuroscientific understandings of child development and Indigenous perspectives on learning, identity, and relationality. Finally, a brief discussion will end the chapter on how graduation has an effect on life trajectories.

Knowledge is not only essential for understanding and shaping the world but also functions as a significant source of power. The production, validation, and dissemination of knowledge are inherently tied to systems of authority and control. As discussed in the last chapter, who holds the power to define what is considered legitimate knowledge—and whose knowledge is marginalized or excluded—has profound implications for policy, practice, and lived experience. In the context of this study, both Western scientific knowledge, such as DCN, and Indigenous knowledge systems must be critically examined for how they are valued, accessed, and operationalized within colonial structures, particularly in the CW and education systems. These two spaces possess asymmetrical power positions, and attention will be paid to this asymmetry to ensure DCN does not overpower or try to explain spaces of Indigenous knowledge. The following discussion will review a model of incorporating knowledge systems and situate what is meant by an ethical space.

An ethical space

Multiple epistemologies need to be positioned within an ethical space. This space should acknowledge the unequal positioning diverse knowledge systems hold in relation to one another. Willie Ermine (2007) coined the phrase “ethical space of engagement” to refer to the space between asymmetrical knowledge systems. This may rather be termed unequitable knowledge as different knowledges hold different value within Canadian society. Therefore, the creation of an ethical space is difficult because there is an epistemological inequity residing within diverse knowledge systems that is impacted upon by settler-colonial power dynamics (Santos, 2009). As in the case of CW within Canada, Sinclair (2017) advocates for CW to be examined within a colonial context. Analyzing the Canadian CW system through a colonial framework allows for a deeper understanding of how historical and ongoing processes of colonization continue to shape the structures, policies, and practices of CW today.

In developing the concept of ethical space, Ermine was influenced by Roger Poole’s 1972 idea that there is subjectivity in all knowledges, and the fact that the truth one believes, about knowledge, is shaped by their worldview (Laurila & Carey, 2022). Western views universally permeate society in Canada creating the illusion of having only one public sphere, or rather one that matters (Ermine, 2007). Ermine (2007) believed that there is an undisputable rift between Indigenous and Western settler-colonial knowledge systems. This rift needs to be addressed to increase equity for peripheral knowledge sources.

Currently, universalist approaches dominate the public discourse in Canadian society. The notion of universality remains unchecked and is recreated from the archives of colonial knowledge systems, rules, and values (Ermine, 2007). This creates the unfounded belief that there is a consensus about society, and that the status quo of Indigenous-Western relations is the

norm (Ermine, 2007). Ermine (2007) posits that this maintenance of the status quo works to further solidify the notion that social inequities are justified. Consequently, he argues that the ethical space of engagement can shift the status quo of an asymmetrical social order to a partnership model between world communities. This will create new currents of thought that will overrun the old ways of thinking.

At present, various initiatives have been introduced across Canada with the stated aim of incorporating diverse knowledge systems—particularly Indigenous knowledges—into public policies and institutional practices. These efforts can be seen in areas such as education, CW, and healthcare, where governments and organizations increasingly acknowledge the value of Indigenous worldviews and cultural practices. For example, the recognition of traditional healing methods in health programs reflects a growing willingness to move beyond solely Western European frameworks (Greenwood et al., 2017).

However, despite these initiatives, significant challenges remain in effectively implementing Indigenous knowledge systems in a meaningful and sustained way. Many institutions lack the necessary resources, training, and cultural understanding to properly integrate Indigenous perspectives into practice (Marsh et al., 2015). This lack of capacity can result in superficial or symbolic inclusion—often referred to as "tokenism"—rather than systemic change. For instance, Indigenous knowledges may be referenced in policy documents but not embedded into service delivery models, governance structures, or decision-making processes.

Overall, it is not possible to translate something from one knowledge system to another as pivotal points will be missed, resulting in a risk of perpetrating violence against unfamiliar knowledge systems (Calhoun, 1995). This can be observed through instances of the Western

canon of knowledge presuming that Indigenous knowledges are inferior and need to go through Westernized evaluation methods in order to be valid and accepted. Through this process, Indigenous knowledge is manufactured into Western knowledge, through the rites and passages held within that cultural and epistemological space of power. Hope can be held for avoiding this with a “transformation of the knower”, in addition to the inclusion of multiple knowledge systems that are not attempted to be reduced or incorporated to the other (Calhoun, 1995).

An ecology of knowledges presents as a desirable starting point due to the use of the term ecology, which orients to the environment and circumstance in which the knowledge systems were created. The following discussion will introduce and outline the ecology of knowledges as a starting point. This will be used as a point of reference to engage with diverse knowledge sources later in the chapter within the spaces of DCN and Canadian Indigenous knowledges. Situating these knowledge sources should aid in the later analysis of how spaces of knowledge can be positioned, within a critical colonial context, to engage in an ethical space. An ecology of knowledge, as brought forth by Santos (2008), incorporates multiple knowledge systems in an effort to create a more holistic understanding of a phenomenon.

An ecology of knowledges

An ecology of knowledges was put forth by Santos in 2004, identifying how epistemic positions create different meanings (Derichs, 2021). In order to do this, one needs to decenter dominant discourses and monolithic explanation (Ciofalo et al., 2022; Derichs, 2021; Fraile-Marcos, 2020). In his work, Santos (2008) posits that “there is no complete knowledge” and really that any form of knowledge is merely “overcoming a particular ignorance” (p. xlvii). In an effort to counteract this, an ecology of knowledges seeks to open up space and decentre Westernized settler-colonial knowledge. Opening space provides an opportunity for other

knowledge sources to be heard and considered, not necessarily as equally valid, but open for consideration, and challenging the dominant epistemological framework in which knowledge is usually consumed (Santos, 2008 & 2009).

Allowing for an ecology of knowledges brings forward the opportunity to look at intersections that may be present within knowledge systems (Rouleau-Berger, 2021).

There are many ways to think about the diverse ecologies of knowledges and culture that co-exist within Canada, but Indigenous knowledges must play a crucial, guiding role (Coleman, 2012). Indigenous ecological thinking derives from very different intellectual genealogy and has the potential to reveal what has been missing in Western-European epistemology (Coleman, 2012). In Canada we are located on the traditional territories of 50 Indigenous nations (Government of Canada, 2024), and in an effort to engage in reconciliatory efforts, Indigenous knowledge systems should be put at the forefront along with Western perspectives of understanding. Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies should inform the space occupied by Indigenous children and families within CW as CIC are predominantly Indigenous in Canada.

Overall, we need to look at “epistemological pluralism” in an effort to move forward in an emancipatory direction (Martins, 2022, p. 129). Santos puts forward the tenet, in his ecology of knowledges, that there are visible and invisible lines that divide the world (Finardi et al., 2022). In the discussion section of their study Finardi et al. (2022) identifies that the Western side of the line is visible while that of the global south is rendered invisible through what Sousa (2009) identifies as abyssal thinking. In the context of this paper the concept of lines drawn for visibility pertain to Western European scientific methods and peripheral knowledge sources such as Indigenous knowledge systems that have historically been rendered invisible.

Epistemological asymmetry resides within diverse knowledge systems that is impacted upon by colonial power dynamics (Santos, 2009). Colonial power dynamics are hard to mitigate in disseminating knowledge. Further challenges face an ecology of knowledges, and attention needs to be paid to operationalizing a way to compare ways of knowing while taking epistemological differences into account, simultaneously considering how to disseminate the ways of knowing that will form, and participate in the ecology of knowledges (Santos, 2009).

It can be concluded that the ecology of knowledges will assist in positioning knowledge systems in a conscientious way that honours the space in which they are located. It is a powerful metaphor that provides a framework for viewing interactions between knowledge systems that can influence action (Aker, 2007). Ideally, an ecology of knowledges would move away from the discourse of causality, and toward a more process focused approach (Aker, 2007). This could be a further step in the search for knowledge equity. Specifically, when discussing knowledge systems with disproportionate power in Canadian society.

Considerations from developmental cognitive neuroscience (DCN)

DCN is an interdisciplinary field that possesses a scientific connection at the intersection of neuroscience and developmental psychology (Johnson, 2013). Technical advances in the field of neuroscience, and an alignment with developmental psychology, gave way to the emergence of DCN (Blakemore et al., 2011). The first DCN conference was held in 1989 and was organized by a quintessential figure in the field, Adele Diamond. The first journal of DCN was launched in 2011. Initially, the field of DCN originated with some conflict, in terms of its uptake of theory, as arguments arose that theory is not necessary, in favour of an empiricist approach that prioritizes neurobiological mechanisms (Johnson, 2013). This claim is over a decade old, however, there continues to be no readily available literature engaging in this discussion. An

empiricist approach is, in and of itself, a theoretical orientation, or approach to research where the researcher positions themselves within a particular ontology about the world. From a critical theory standpoint, we are all situated with a certain ontological and epistemological orientation that will inform what knowledge is important and how to obtain it.

Damien Fair is another influential figure in this field and has highlighted both strengths and weaknesses associated with DCN. Fair et al. (2021) highlights several key strengths of DCN, including advances in neuroimaging, a growing recognition of individual differences, access to large-scale datasets, the ability to integrate findings across species, and increased efforts in public and private knowledge mobilization. In addition, some of the weaknesses identified include erosion of ties to psychology and neurobiology, insufficient cross-disciplinary training, poor replicability, and reproducibility.

Bruce Perry is one of the leading figures within the discipline that is engaged in translating neuroscience into clinical practice. The Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT), developed by Perry in 2006, is based on the premise that clinical problems may be brain related, and therefore better clinical insight is obtained by an understanding of neurodevelopment (Perry, 2009; Hambrick et al., 2019). This model is an example of translating neuroscience to practice and has received a lot of attention in the field of education.

At this point in time, there has been recent improvement within the field of DCN for addressing issues of diversity with larger, more inclusive sampling. However, critiques of DCN still identified room for improvement in this area (Garcini et al., 2021). More consideration of intersectional aspects should be incorporated into studies to obtain more representative samples (Garcini et al., 2021, Harden et al., 2024, Murray & Slonnan, 2024, Nkeita et al., 2021). In saying this, care also needs to be taken to consider how this information may be used when data

on potentially marginalized groups are identified (Garcini et al., 2021). Garcini et al. (2021) also puts forward that all undertakings should be approached from a culturally safe and humble standpoint. This will be important to keep in mind in the proceeding discussion on DCN findings.

DCN and inequality

A niche of DCN has taken up space looking into the effects of ACEs and inequality on development. This shows promise in advocating the need for policy and practice changes as well as funding allocations. Children who experience ACEs are at increased risk for lower academic achievement and poorer mental health and behavioural outcomes; however, these outcomes are not universal, and there are children who demonstrate resilience and adaptive functioning despite early adversity. (Myat Zaw, 2022). Kovach (2009) discusses the idea of strategic alliances and DCN has the potential to be a powerful ally in advocacy. As will be discussed, DCN holds power in the knowledge generated by the field because it is highly valued in the dominant discourse of Canadian settler-colonial society with its connection to science. The following will outline some findings in this area related to early life, environment, and neuroplasticity.

Early life. Experiencing adversity or stress during childhood has been shown to predict poorer outcomes related to self-regulation and cognitive outcomes (Hambrick et al., 2019). The same study also found that healthy relational outcomes appeared to work as a protective factor increasing functioning for self-regulation, cognitive outcomes, and sensory integration. Additionally, early-life stress may risk the development of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical health problems, which in turn may influence outcomes on the developing brain (Cohodes et al., 2021). In the review by Cohodes et al. (2021), early adversity was found to have an effect on frontolimbic circuitry. This circuitry is associated with the affective network of the

brain and is thought to be responsible for processing and regulating emotion (Zhang et al., 2020). Moreover, earlier exposure to ACEs was found to be connected to smaller thalamic volume which may increase the likelihood of being predisposed to developing post-traumatic stress symptom severity and PTSD after exposure to trauma in adulthood (Huffman et al., 2023).

These findings are important; however, care needs to be taken so that they are not overgeneralized and universally applied. Exposure to early-life stressors may affect a child's brain development and long-term mental health, but the links between specific aspects of stress exposure and neurodevelopment to date, remain elusive (Cohodes et al., 2021). A further critique regarding the limitations will be explored later in this chapter.

Environment. Environmental variables need to be more comprehensively identified to ascertain their effect on study outcomes (Hambrick et al., 2019). Living in poverty is associated with disruptions in children's neural development, contributing to poorer developmental outcomes and increased mental health concerns (Johnson et al., 2016; Hambrick et al., 2019). In relation to neurocognitive development, the establishment of ACEs during the first seven years of life has been shown to further compound these effects (Yu et al., 2024). Further, early life stressors have been linked to the development of mood disorders (Fumagalli et al., 2007).

Additionally, negative childhood experiences have been consistently associated with reduced cognitive flexibility and diminished capacity for behavioural inhibition. (Fisher et al., 2013). In consideration of poverty on families, caregiving abilities are thought to be impacted by socioeconomic status due to the stressors associated with living in poverty (Bernier et al., 2010; Luby et al., 2013). This is unfortunate, as a warm and caring environment, through caregivers, may work as a buffer on physiological stress responses for children who have experienced adversity (Magnuson & Schindler, 2019). In addition, the level of parent education may have an

influence on brain activation when engaging in a task requiring inhibitory control (Stinson et al., 2024).

Neuroplasticity. Maltreatment that is experienced during critical periods of brain development, has an effect on maturation (Miskolczi et al., 2019). Critical periods in brain development are defined by Dehorter & Del Pino (2020) as “narrow time windows of heightened plasticity driven by environmental input” (p. 3). In their review, Miskolczi et al. (2019) identified that findings supporting early exposure to adversity are mitigated by supportive environments acting as protective factors in brain development.

There has been a lot of attention paid toward the concept of neuroplasticity in recent years. Plasticity has been found to be dependent upon time, cortical-layer, and brain-region (Kolb & Gibb, 2014) and becomes less optimal with age (Kolb & Gibb, 2014; Miskolczi et al., 2019; Dohorter & Del Pino, 2021). For example, grey matter forms during childhood, and is thought to peak at around the age of seven (Miskolczi et al., 2019). Herzberg et al. (2025) has recently put forward a recommendation to apply interventions at times where neuroplasticity is at its height to maximize preventative efforts. Even though plasticity, in the brain, becomes less optimal with age, neuroplasticity assists in developmental trajectories to shift alongside environment due to protective factors related to caregiving (Blair et al., 2011; Kao et al., 2018).

Moving forward. Moving from the discussion on advantages, care also needs to be taken to ensure knowledge disseminated from neurobiological findings is being critically consumed to determine if the research is being done ethically (D'angiulli et al., 2012, Nketia et al., 2021). Nketia et al. (2021) puts forward that scientific inquiry into neurodevelopment has the potential to positively affect children's lives. However, care needs to be taken to ensure that it is consumed and applied responsibly, with consideration given to marginalized populations (Nketia

et al., 2021). This may indicate that some form of training is required for the translation of neuroscience into clinical applications.

Diversity in population samples will provide more comprehensive and representative findings. Murray et al. (2024) identifies the importance and benefits of building in diversity and equity initiatives within the Healthy Brain and Child Development (HCBd) study to recruit and ethically collect data. Moreover, Harden et al. (2024) emphasizes the importance of considering historical contexts and systemic racism to facilitate participant recruitment and retention. As DCN gains prominence within the dominant sociopolitical and scientific discourses within Manitoba, researchers should consider the old aphorism ‘with power comes a great deal of responsibility.’ Researchers and scholars need to be cognizant of and anticipate potential harm that may be inflicted on individuals and groups as a result of a flawed interpretation of their research.

Indigenous perspectives on development

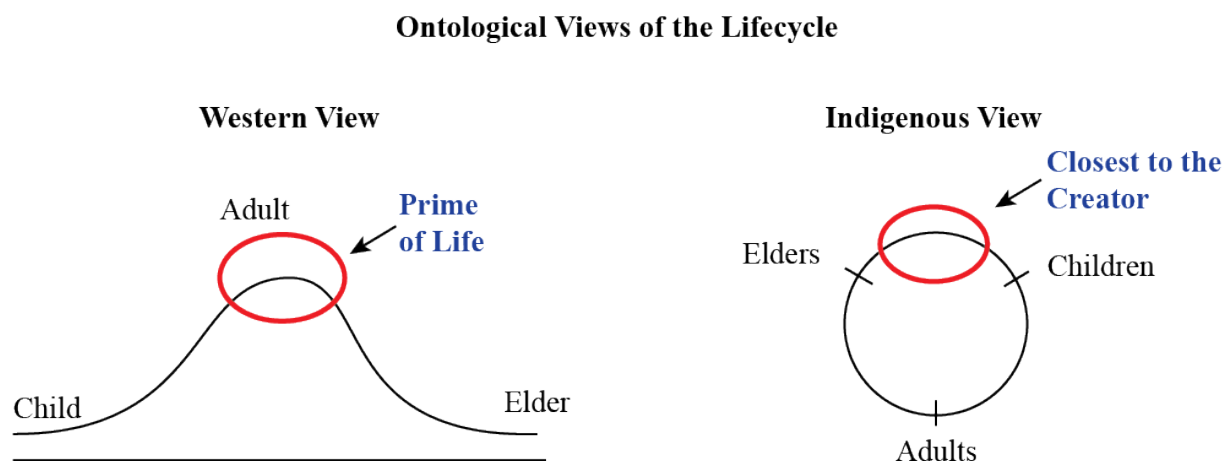
This section needs to be prefaced with the acknowledgement that information, beliefs, and ideas presented here are not all encompassing for Indigenous peoples in Canada. It should be further recognized that although there may be some commonalities in the views of diverse Canadian Indigenous Nations, on the lifecycle and raising of children, there will also be differences. A vast plurality of knowledge exists on children and communities within Indigenous epistemologies. Indigenous peoples have generated, transmitted, and applied scientific information about the natural world long before Western-European scientific inquiry was formalized (Jessen et al., 2022). This may be overlooked as Peltier (2021) puts forward that Indigenous knowledges may be relayed orally, and not available for review in literature. He further believes that knowledge is acquired through observed experience within some Indigenous

ontologies, differing from that of dominant North American society that requires knowledge to pass through Westernized scientific rigour to be deemed valid.

Identity and relationships are at the forefront of how scholars discuss Canadian Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. Some Indigenous communities see connectedness to nature as paramount in identity formation and attainment of balance (Hare, 2012; Ciofalo et al., 2022). Fraile-Marcos (2020) believes that the interconnectedness and connection to all beings, of Indigenous thought, is paramount in epistemological structure. Further, Josey & McRee (2021) believe that who you are connected to creates your identity and sense of belonging. Makokis (2021) states that “Our relationships create us. We are accountable to these relationships” (p.37). Therefore, as put forward by Barker (2021), you can only be as healthy as your relationships because everything is connected.

Here the model below, in Figure 1, sets the stage for an admittedly generalized understanding of the ontological views held by some capitalist, nonsecular Western European societies and some Indigenous societies, on the lifecycle. This is an important aspect to note, as these viewpoints inform beliefs and actions around how children are valued and treated within societies. Again, this may differ across communities, Nations, and geographic location.

Figure 1



Here we see that in a Western capitalist ontological view, children and the elderly fall outside of the most valued position in the lifecycle. This may be evident in the action we see in dominant spaces, and the rhetoric around “children should be seen and not heard.” Additionally, how the elderly are often warehoused in personal care homes, where strangers take care of their needs. Contrasting this, from an Indigenous ontological standpoint, children and elders are closest to the Creator. Here elders/Elders are respected and sought after for wisdom, and children are seen as gifts. The influence on epistemology and practice will be evidenced in the discussion below.

View of children

One of the most important beliefs to begin this section is to situate that “children are a gift from the Creator, on loan to us from the spirit world” (p. 2), as identified in the document developed by the National Collaboration Centre for Aboriginal Health [NCCAHA] (2013). Additionally, Heck et al., (2023) believes that children are seen as the connection to the future. The Best Start manual (2011) further describes the lifecycle from their Indigenous viewpoint, and states that children are seen as belonging to the East where the sun rises and are associated with the spring and new life. Additionally, this manual states that childhood is seen as the ‘good life’ being the most important stage, from the seven stages of the lifecycle. A further claim made by the manual is that childhood is a crucial time in development, where children need to be surrounded by family, and where community supports the parents to care for the child.

The teaching put forward by Makokis et al. (2021), states that “The ancestors prepare us, as small spirits, to come to a family and community to experience love and to have our personal gifts honoured, supported and encouraged.” (p. 38). The NCCAHA (2013) identified their view that one of the most critical elements for a child to ‘flourish’, is to have people in their lives that

love them, meaning supports to parents should be prioritized so they can provide for this need. In addition, the NCCAH report believed that “children revel in that extended web of relationships.” (p. 4).

As previously noted, a sense of belonging and identity are considered to be paramount in the raising of a child. As part of this process, language and connection to the land are seen as necessary for the optimal development of a child’s cultural identity and belonging according to the NCCAH (2013). Peltier (2021) also sees children as capable beings whose agency should be fostered. In addition, Barker (2021) believes that children should be seen as teachers who adults can learn from because in their communities they trust in children’s judgement.

View of caregiver roles

It is pivotal to note here that the fallout from residential schools and colonization has resulted in parents being disconnected from the holistic Indigenous perspective on parenting that incorporated the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental (NCCAH, 2013). As a result of this intergenerational trauma, there is a disconnect from traditional views for parents and families with their communities. This is detrimental because the knowledge on how to raise children is in the communities (NCCAH, 2013). Many Indigenous communities see it as pivotal that children are raised with an ‘open door policy’ where they are welcomed by all community members (NCCAH, 2013). Josey & McRee (2021) state that from their perspective, the community helps raise children during parental difficulty, like killer whales. Flowing from this view they state the community will look after a child if the parent is unable to until they are ready to return.

One of the best ways to capture one belief of an Indigenous view of caregiving is through the following statement: “The foundation for creating a human being [is] to spend the first three years of a child’s life educating the heart” (NCCAH, 2013, p. 4). The Best Start manual (2011)

puts forward that during the time of childhood there is the idea that you are also parenting your grandchildren. This happens because you are teaching children how to treat their children.

Further, some Indigenous scholars believe that relationships are crucial to Indigenous worldviews and create an understanding of identity and connectedness to all beings (Hare, 2012; Laurila & Carey, 2022). Through this unconditional love and support, a child is able to flourish, learn to trust, and feel secure (Best Start, 2011).

As children are seen as important, they are attended to by adults and elders in the community. Barker (2021) puts forward that in some Indigenous communities the belief is held that time should be taken to see things from the perspective of the child. Spending time with children and having structure is important during the stage of childhood, and they need to be given responsibility to feel connected and like they belong in the family (Best Start, 2011).

Heck et al. (2023) puts forward the belief that learning is important in childhood and starts as early as possible. Important tools for parenting during childhood to facilitate this include storytelling, teaching lessons, humour, and discipline (Best Start, 2011). In some communities Barker (2021) believes that children learn from Elders and the adults around them from birth. Additionally, Heck et al. (2023) believes that hands on learning and engaging children in tasks are seen as an important way to build relationships. Learning through direct experience is important, and children need to learn how to navigate their world, which helps them find their voice (Pazderka et al., 2014). Additionally, it is important for the child to experience difficulty through the natural consequences of their behaviours, providing learning opportunities through direct experience (Pazderka et al., 2014). Importance is also placed on play and nature which brings with it numerous health benefits but also works to teach survival skills and orient the child to foster a “respect and love for the environment.” (Pazderka et al., 2014, p. 60).

In some Indigenous communities the practice is to prenatally counsel pregnant women, so they understand the importance of how their mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical state have an effect on the development of the child (NCCAH, 2013; Pazderka et al., 2014). This goes further to help show the mother that her actions have consequences (Pazderka et al., 2014). Pazderka et al. (2014) also discuss their views on how attachment is encouraged to the unborn child, among all the relations, and there is a belief that infants need attending to and cries should not be ignored as they are always for a reason.

Critical colonial analysis of knowledges

Even the notion of space is informed by hegemonic discourses, as Foucault stated, the discourse around space is grounded in Western-European epistemology and ontology (Sudradjat, 2012). This works to limit knowledge transmission exponentially because we do not, or are not trained to, look beyond the frames that have been established by these Westernized epistemologies (Mbembe, 2016). By privileging one knowledge source over the others, we are losing out on rich context and potentially superior approaches to addressing and understanding problems.

Moving forward, the challenge with creating an ecology of knowledges relates to what knowledge to include within it (Santos, 2009). The chosen knowledge sources were carefully considered based on power and relevance to the population. For instance, DCN holds a lot of power currently with its increasing popularity, while Indigenous knowledge systems are most relevant to the children and families involved with CW within Manitoba. The concern now rests in how to disseminate the ways of knowing that will form, and participate in the ecology of knowledges (Santos, 2009).

DCN knowledge considerations

Neuroscience has been very effective in making a case for policy and practice reform for children who have experienced trauma and ACEs (Weems et al., 2021). Neuroscience findings related to development and resilience, in particular ACEs, have the potential to inform social welfare policies and practices, however, have not been paid the attention they deserve (Huntington, 2012; Schauss et al., 2019; Weems et al. 2021). These findings hold potential for identifying practices and policies to increase resiliency and flexibility in those who have faced adversity (Weems et al., 2021) such as CIC. Further, neuroscience can inform policies and practices resulting in funding being allocated to prevention, especially related to early childhood (Albert et al., 2015; Boyle, 2019). This can be illustrated through the work of Allan Schore (2017) who used his findings to advocate for increasing maternity leave.

Although it is true that neuroscience has been helpful in creating attention to child maltreatment and initiating governmental policy reform, it currently runs the risk of being adopted uncritically (Beddoe & Joy, 2017). Care needs to be taken to ensure that findings are not being misused or decontextualized for children from marginalized communities (Nkeita et al., 2021). Therefore, diversity and equity considerations should be paramount throughout the study design and data collection procedures of any research exploring these matters as exemplified by the HEALthy Brain and Childhood Development (HBCD) study (Murray & Slopen, 2024, Harden et al., 2024). Nkeita et al. (2021) also discusses the HBCD longitudinal study being initiated by the United States. This study, through recruiting 7500 participants, is seeking to explore the brain, cognition, socio-emotional, and behavioural development factors from prenatal environments into childhood. Nkeita et al., (2021) put forward that although this study is being designed as an

observational study, it runs the risk of being taken up as a causality model which it is not qualified to do.

For further consideration, what counts as abuse or maltreatment is both culturally and historically constructed, meaning the definitions are dynamic in nature, making it hard to link these categories to biological markers within neuroscience (Smith & Pollack, 2021). Seeking correlational outcomes has been a misdirection in the study of childhood adversity, as individual difference plays a large role in outcome (Smith & Pollack, 2021). For example, Meng & D'Arcy (2016) identified that females have historically been found to have an increased risk of experiencing a neuropsychiatric diagnosis. However, as identified by Waters & Gould (2022), this may be merely attributable to differences in reporting rates.

Moving on to CW, a study by Hambrick et al., (2018) identified that due to cost constraints, CW systems have predominantly kept their primary focus revolving around universal approaches for social and clinical interventions for children and families (Hambrick et al., 2018). This is unfortunate as consideration of intersectional aspects of a child's circumstances should be considered (Cox et al., 2021). The study by Hambrick et al. (2018) advocates for heterogeneity in policy and practice, seeking to explore how outcomes may be associated with the timing of developmental risk and their current 'relational health' (p. 106). The findings show that current relational health was one of the two strongest predictors associated with central nervous system (CNS) functioning. This means that a positive and healthy relational environment may act as a protective factor for exposure to early adversity. Additionally, children in out of home care showed lower CNS functioning scores than "typical" children (p. 110).

Some of the implications for CW, put forward by Hambrick's et al. (2018) study, included that the quality of relational connectedness between CIC and caregivers may supersede

the type of placement needed. Therefore, Hambrick found that the CW system needs to expand relational contexts to improve relationships, for the child, with peers, school, community, and family. Support for the expansion of relational contexts was also supported by Cox's et al. (2021) study, which found a relational health intervention to have positive effects on conduct problems, hyperactivity, and peer problems. This study is a good example of how neuroscience findings can inform practice and future areas of research within the field of CW. Additionally, neuroscience can help demonstrate the need to reduce exposure to adversity and importance of resiliency and healthy development (Yu et al., 2024).

Colonial context and Indigenous knowledges

Present day systems of knowledge production reinforce inequalities and coloniality (Zeineddine et al., 2022). Colonial policies in Canada systematically dismantled Indigenous kinship structures, severing the traditional roles of grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, and other extended family members in the upbringing and care of children (Barker, 2021). This began with the establishment of the residential school system. These institutions deliberately disrupted intergenerational transmission of language, culture, and caregiving practices, often through traumatic and abusive means. As discussed earlier the overrepresentation of Indigenous children today, in the CW system reflects a continuation of these colonial practices. This has resulted in a devaluing of peripheral knowledge through the Western ontological and epistemological canons in colonized nations contributing to its invisibility. Producers of knowledge need to be cognizant of this fact and be aware that they not only hold the power in framing knowledge but also to establish how a subject is seen within both the public and private spheres (Hoagland, 2020; Said, 2004).

Ultimately, barriers arise with alternative knowledge and explanation, because Western-European models of science are anxious about knowledges that have not been produced and analyzed through its systems (Calhoun, 1995). There appears to be a sense that peripheral knowledges needs to align with dominant epistemologies or be explained through their rites and processes. As a result, when looking at a prestigious form of Westernized knowledge, such as DCN, care needs to be taken as “the neoliberal agenda is wedded to neuroscientism” (Beddoe & Joy, 2017 p. 74).

Whitehead et al. (2019) introduce the concept of "neuroliberalism," describing it as a form of behavioral governance that incorporates neuroscientific findings to reinforce neoliberal principles. They argue that this integration influences policies and practices in education and mental health, emphasizing individual responsibility and self-regulation. However, some scholars caution against oversimplifying the relationship between neoliberalism and neuroscience. For instance, a study published by Brun et al. (2024) notes that while neuroscience has gained significant attention, its applications have been inflated by the media at times, to further the neoliberal narrative that has not always led to tangible benefits for patients or students. It should also be noted that the field of DCN is involved in furthering social justice and active in preventative work to decolonize the profession as has been noted earlier in this chapter.

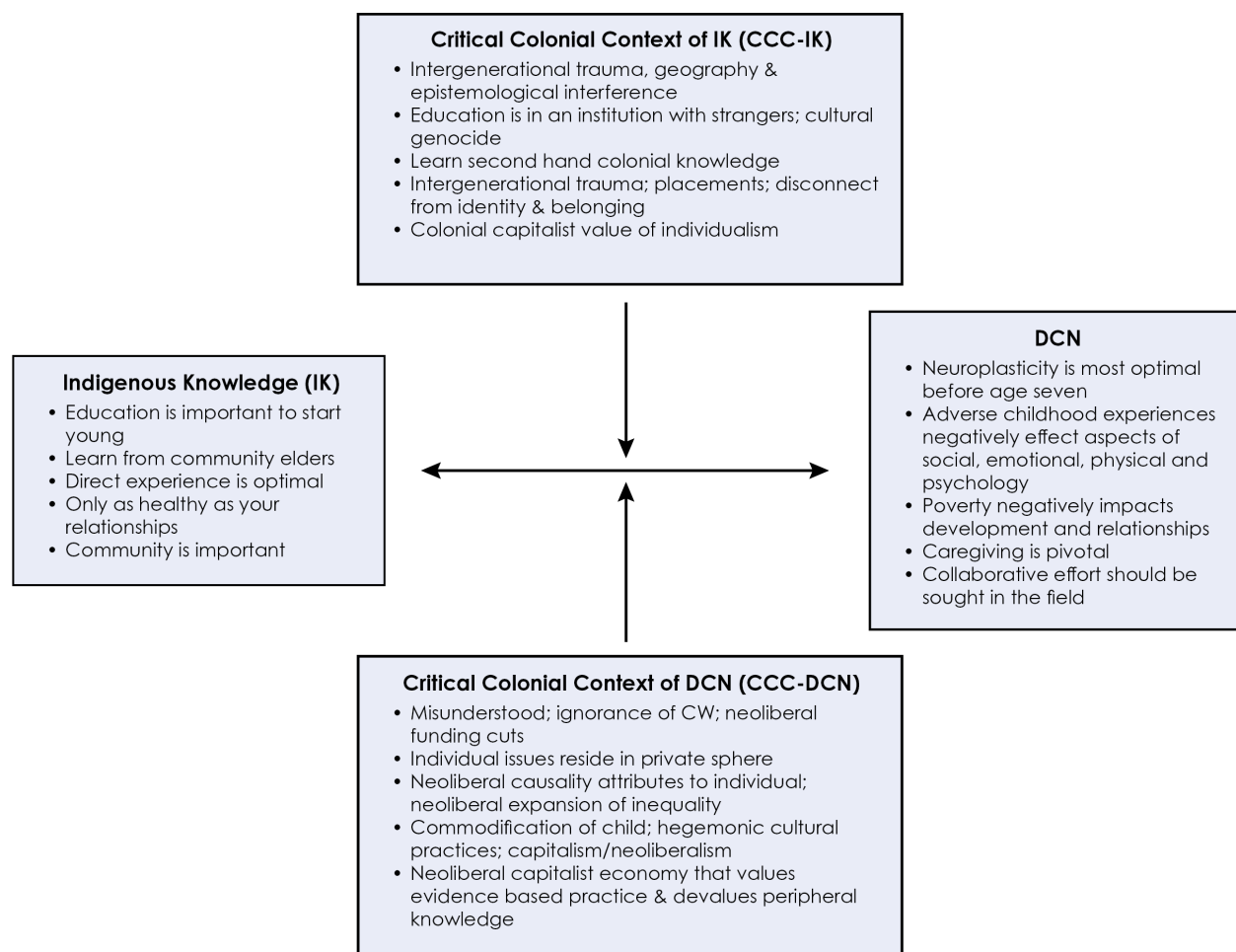
Overall, it is the opinion of some Indigenous scholars that Indigenous views of raising children are congruent with current understandings of brain development (Barker, 2021; Pazderka et al., 2014). However, care needs to be taken to ensure that Westernized models of science are not privileged over other knowledge sources. Researchers and scholars need to be conscious of the fact that this could be an easy slide into complacency for anyone located within the dominant epistemological and ontological universe.

Education neglect

Through the preceding discussion it should be apparent how knowledge from DCN, Indigenous knowledges, and colonial considerations hold explanation for the situation of EN, within CW. Peltier (2021) believes that Indigenous peoples place a strong emphasis on education, and teaching starts at a young age. However, there are disconnects in terms of how care and education are approached from a Western settler colonialist and Indigenous perspective. Below, in Figure 2, knowledge transmitted from different standpoints is outlined.

Figure 2

A critical colonial interaction of knowledge systems



Note. This figure depicts how information sources may interact with one another while the colonial context exerts influence.

The way in which this is presented is not intended to form a linear list in comparison with each other, but rather to see how these points may intersect and connect from their own epistemological and ontological standpoints. This chart is by no means comprehensive in nature but rather put forward as a visual example of some of the information that has been discussed in this section. Also, it is meant as an example that brings forward that all information is situated within the colonial context of Canada.

Graduation and life trajectories

High school graduation opens doors for young people finding their footing in adulthood, whether it be through direct entry to the work force or attending post-secondary schooling. High school dropout is not unique to Manitoba, but rather something being studied around the globe (Ressa & Andrews, 2022). Issues with academics alone is not the only reason that results in dropping out of high school, as many social factors in both school and community impact dropout as well (Duffin, 2021, Mckee & Caldarella, 2016).

Not obtaining a high school diploma, even on time, has many deleterious effects on an individual's life trajectory (Brownell et al., 2015; Brownell et al., 2008; Brownell et al., 2010; Lansford et al., 2016; Maclean et al., 2015). Some of the following negative effects can result from not obtaining a high school diploma, including contact with the criminal justice system, living in poverty, poor health, and addictions (Lansford et al., 2016; Van Wert et al., 2018). As stated earlier, if only approximately 33% of CIC are graduating on time, they are being set up for poorer outcomes in adulthood than their peers.

Disconnection from school results in a loss of potential positive support and relationships with peers and school staff and is more detrimental to children with fewer supports outside of the school (Butler, 2022). This is in keeping with the importance of relationships acting as a

protective factor (Cox et al., 2019, Cox et al. 2021, Hambrick et al., 2018). Positive relationships were also identified as paramount to child development in Indigenous knowledge systems (Barker, 2021, Fraile-Marcos, 2020, Makokis, 2021, Pazderka et al., 2014). As relationships were found to potentially mitigate factors related to inequality (Cox et al., 2019, Cox et al., 2021, Hambrick et al., 2018), loss of school relationships could result in the loss of a support system along with potential protective factors for children and youth.

Dropout rates not only have an effect on individuals faced with poor life trajectories as previously discussed, but also for society as a whole. From a neoliberalist perspective, addressing high school dropout rates has the advantage of decreasing social services costs that are associated with dropping out of high school such as poverty, poor health, addictions, and crime (Lansford et al., 2016). From a pragmatic perspective, the costs associated with high school dropout may be a motivator for governments and policymakers to pay attention to and devote resources to increasing the graduation rates for CIC.

Summary

One of the paramount takeaways from this chapter should be that knowledge is inequitable. It would be idealistic to presume that we can incorporate community knowledges without them being overpowered by Western settler-colonial epistemologies. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the colonial context of knowledge is being considered in conjunction with the knowledge sources presented. The power imbalance that presents in this situation is hard to mitigate, and it is important not to fall into the trap of explaining peripheral knowledge sources through a Westernized epistemological view.

The field of DCN is a highly regarded discipline overall, particularly within the context of child development. Many relevant findings have been produced related to studies on ACEs

and inequality. This work can help with advocacy and lobbying for preventative practices with decision makers. The field of DCN holds prestige, and may be taken seriously by policy makers. Despite the strong explanatory power potential of DCN it may be missing relevance to particular community epistemologies and ontologies. Combining DCN and Indigenous knowledge systems on child development may provide a more holistic understanding, as similarities and differences are combined.

Consideration should be given to the fact that the environment in which children in out of home care develop is suboptimal, to say the least, from both a DCN and an Indigenous perspective. Moving forward, in a way that honours the gifts of children and attempts to improve their relational contexts may help foster an environment where children can learn. Thus, attempting to correct the poor graduation rates for CIC, and improving their life trajectories. The lack of obtaining a high school diploma places CIC in vulnerable situations leaving them more susceptible to negative outcomes and poorer life trajectories than their peers.

Chapter 4: Methodology & methods

Given the limited literature on the EN of CIC, this study aimed to generate a grounded, contextually situated understanding of EN through the co-construction of meaning with educators. By engaging multiple perspectives, the research sought to develop an ecology of knowledges that reflects the complexity of educators' experiences within the Manitoba education system. The methodology and methods were therefore selected to support iterative analysis, reflexivity, and the inclusion of diverse voices in the construction of theory related to the EN of CIC.

Methodology

The methodological approach chosen to guide this study was critical constructivist grounded theory (CCGT). Originally, constructivist grounded theory (CGT) emerged through the work of Charmaz in the late twentieth century (Mills et al., 2006). This work sought to expand the grounded theory approach to include an epistemological shift that de-positioned the objectivism inherent in Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Mills et al., 2006). CGT is relativistic in nature and takes into consideration difference while "defining and developing emergent critical questions systematically." (Charmaz, 2017: 35). When the researcher takes a reflective stance, they can critically engage with how they see the research design, the participants and themselves (Charmaz, 2017; Foster-Fishman et al., 2005; Swartz, 2011). CGT requires that reflection on social positioning in relation to the research question and participants be considered in the research design (Gilgun, 2015). Additionally, CGT does not look to uncover a universal truth, as opposed to Glasser's grounded theory, because every study comes from a time and place rendering it applicable to that location rather than anticipating generalizability (Charmaz, 2017).

A CGT methodology has been found to have merit in different venues of research. CGT has been used in many professional venues as a means for ascertaining perceptions of social phenomena. It has been used in health research to explore perceptions of medical health professionals and patients related to their experiences in the medical health system. CGT studies in this area have examined how to include patients' perspectives and explored how recovery is conceptualized (Delgadillo-Sánchez et al., 2024; Kuek et al., 2023; Metersky et al., 2022). Additionally, it has been found beneficial in educational settings to examine both teachers' and students' perceptions (Chiriac et al., 2023; Layton & Gerstenblatt, 2021; Lindqvist & Forsberg, 2023). It also shows promise in the development of theories to inform educational practices (Chiriac et al., 2023; Lindqvist & Forsberg, 2023), while also assisting to uncover the limitations in training protocols in education (Reed, 2023). Finally, in terms of CW, CGT has also been used to study the effects of stable kinship care placements in Australia (Clarke et al., 2023).

Charmaz (2017) put forward that CGT can be a guide for engaging in critical inquiry. Here she argues its pragmatist roots provide a position for critical inquiry while CGT provides the method for the inquiry (Charmaz, 2017; Charmaz 2020). Other authors have also spoken about CGT's applicability to critical inquiry; however, they make some recommendations on how it should be conducted critically. For example, Hadley (2017) stated that in the application of a CGT, the researchers have the important task of providing a voice for those who do not have one and consequently need to remain critical of both themselves and their participants (Hadley, 2017). Additionally, Zaida (2022) argues that from a critical CGT approach, the researchers should have an established theoretical perspective before engaging in research rather than vaguely defined sensitizing concepts. Power and powerlessness also need to be considered

during the research process (Hadley, 2017). Table 1 below demonstrates Charmaz's view on CGT's complementarity to critical inquiry.

Table 1

CGT's compatibility to critical inquiry (Charmaz, 2020)

Critical Qualitative Inquiry	Constructivist Grounded Theory
• Compatible with pragmatist philosophy • Rejects positivist epistemologies • Reaches across disciplines • Aims to advance social justice • Studies power and inequality • Fosters developing social consciousness • Requires reflexivity and methodological self-consciousness	• Roots in pragmatist philosophy • Rejects positivist epistemologies • Reaches across disciplines • Provides a method of conducting social justice research • Offers a way to study power and inequality • Fosters developing social consciousness • Requires reflexivity and methodological self-consciousness

A CGT methodology is positioned as being compatible to critical inquiry because through its methods it helps decrease the likelihood that findings will reaffirm conventional assumptions while providing a foundation to examine intersections of power and oppression (Charmaz, 2017; Charmaz, 2020). CGT is believed to make it harder for injustice to hide and can bring to light new aspects of phenomenon that have been previously overlooked (Charmaz, 2020). For example, Sebeelo (2022) paired a post-structuralist theoretical framework with CGT methods to critically examine policy. Although this study was not positioned as a critical CGT approach based on its chosen theoretical framework, it aligns with Levitt's (2021) identification of a CCGT which will be discussed below. Further, Clarke et al. (2023) made note that CGT is compatible with social work research for valuing the individual within their environments, and for aligning with the profession's ethical standards around social justice.

Despite the epistemological and methodological advantages of CGT, there are limitations to this approach. Overall, qualitative data can be superficial due to the small amount of data that is collected (Charmaz, 2017). It has also been argued that constructivist theory, despite its social

justice aims, would further benefit from the addition of a critical lens (Baird, 2021). Some authors also put forward the opinion that interpretive inquiry does not meet the standards of critical inquiry (Myers & Klein, 2011; Belfrage & Hauf, 2017). Moving forward, Levitt (2021) has introduced a CCGT approach. This critical approach helped position the researcher to choose the most appropriate critical theory to inform the research design rather than solely relying on the pragmatist roots of CGT Charmaz identified. Positioning a critical theoretical framework alongside CGT was done to help keep societal issues at the forefront of the research process.

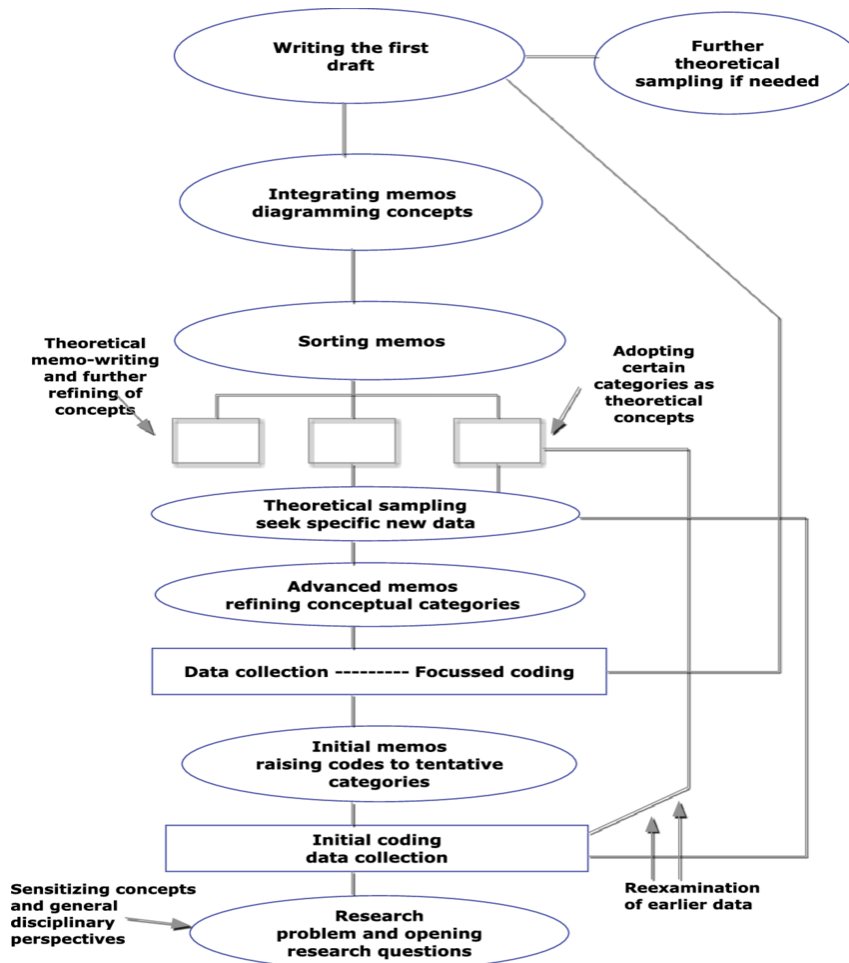
As mentioned, a CCGT methodology was used in this study to allow the researcher to explore both how meaning is constructed, along with uncovering societal processes. Levitt (2021) sees the tenets of constructivist positions in making meaning as complimentary to critical perspectives that seek to uncover societal norms and injustices. This complementarity can then be moved toward liberatory action through advocacy. Charmaz's (2014) approach to constructivist grounded theory, as well as Martins' (2022) CTC were used to guide this study's design, implementation, and analysis in an effort to uncover meaning within a critical colonial context.

Charmaz's (2014) CGT approach was used to assist in constructing and interpreting the data collected within the context from which it was obtained. CGT also allowed for meaning to arise and inform the subsequent directions of sampling and interpretation (Charmaz, 2014; Metelski et al., 2021). Further, it provided the freedom to expand upon and obtain clarity on collected data. In keeping with Charmaz (2017), the data collection process was flexible, allowing for more precise and new questions to be constructed as data collection and familiarity with data developed.

Below in Figure 3, a diagram is presented demonstrating the CGT framework developed by Charmaz (2006) outlining the phases of research design and collection. This diagram provides a visual for the trajectory of the framework used to inform this study.

Figure 3

From Charmaz (2006: 11) Constructivist grounded theory research



Overall, the CCGT proved to be a desirable method, as it fit with the idea of Santos' concept of an ecology of knowledges. The compatibility rested in the fact that CGT research is co-constructed with participants within a specific time and context (Birks et al. 2019, Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, as will be seen in the discussion of methods, sampling remained in Manitoba to clearly situate the data within similar regions and political contexts.

Methods

A qualitative approach to explore the topic area of EN for CIC was used to provide a richer context of data that may assist in future directions of exploration. Through the use of a CCGT orientation, and grounded within a CTC theoretical framework, this exploratory study aimed to begin with examining the perceptions of school social workers (SSW), resource teachers (RT), and Indigenous education team (IET) members on their perceptions of the EN of CIC. The study research question, objectives, and procedural details will be outlined and discussed below.

Research question

How can Indigenous education teams and school social workers' perceptions contribute to building an ecology of knowledges that helps understand the EN of CIC?

Objectives

The following three objectives were put forward to assist in guiding the study design, implementation and analysis:

1. Contribute toward an ecology of knowledges that creates context for understanding how to view the EN for CIC.
2. Contribute to an understanding of how neoliberal and colonial contexts are impacting the EN of CIC.
3. Use potential findings to contribute toward a transformative approach to social work education, practice, and policy within CW and education.

Through these objectives it was hoped that a valid contribution would be made towards this topic area.

Participants

In keeping with Charmaz's (2014) view, sampling was flexible and ceased when the data was perceived as fully saturated. Participant recruitment began once the study had been approved by the University of Manitoba's Office of Human Research Ethics.

Participant sampling. Recruitment began with the purposive sampling of SSW, RT and IET members from Manitoba. From here, data collection transitioned toward a theoretical sampling model. A total of 17 participants were recruited for this study. The initial participants included SSWs, RTs and IET members. At the outset, participants were required to meet the following inclusion criteria:

1. Are, or have been employed as a SSW, RT or IET member within a Manitoba school division,
2. Have had at least 2 years experience in 1 of these positions, and
3. Have been involved in academic or program planning for a student involved in the CW system.

Recruitment was limited to the geographic context of Manitoba. Expanding recruitment beyond this province was not pursued, as doing so could have compromised the trustworthiness and depth of the data given resource constraints. Focusing on a single provincial context allowed for more concentrated recruitment and supported the development of a richer, more contextually grounded understanding of participants' experiences within that specific educational and CW landscape.

After interviewing an initial sample of participants, Strauss & Corbin's (1998) concept of theoretical sampling was employed and continued until no new findings could be ascertained from data analysis. Theoretical sampling techniques are deemed appropriate when there is data to

analyze, and provide a direction to move the research in (Birks et al., 2019). From the initial three categories of educators, three other professions were added to the sample. These included a university instructor, guidance counsellor, and teachers. As identified by Hunting (2014), the sample should be as representative as possible therefore attempts were made to interview diverse areas of experiences across regions in Manitoba. As IET members were recruited, it was necessary to address dangers of tokenism as identified by Baird (2021). To prevent tokenism, initial screening interviews were used to ensure that an equitable sample of this population was recruited to assist in facilitating a strong voice to emerge through the data. Theoretical sampling helped in this effort.

Recruitment. To recruit participants, information posters were shared, and permission was sought to circulate these through the Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS), the MASSW, as well as the MCSW. It was hoped that by recruiting through professional unions and colleges potential barriers would be minimized that could have arisen when recruiting directly through school divisions. It was also hoped that this would alleviate potential negative impacts from participation in this study if recruitment had occurred directly through the employer. Snowball sampling was also a method used for recruitment, as participants referred other individuals to participate. The option to refer others to the study was outlined in the participant information sheet provided to all participants. Regardless of the recruitment method, participants were required to make the first contact with the primary investigator (PI) if they were interested in participating in the study.

A brief pre-screen interview was held and offered either virtually or over the phone between the PI and all participants, prior to being interviewed, to ensure suitability (Appendix V). All participants chose to participate in the pre-screen interview over the phone. This pre-

screen involved ascertaining whether or not participants met the necessary study requirements. It was also used as an information session to explain the study, outline any potential harms that may occur, and answer any questions participants may have had. When individuals agreed to participate, all study forms were explained and provided to the participants via email to complete. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time should they change their minds (See Appendix I).

It was immensely helpful that the PI had connections to the education system, was a former member and president of the MASSW, and has been a committee member at the MCSW, as recruitment was difficult. Appropriate connections assisted initially in navigating appropriate contacts to help advertise the study. However, MTS did not have means to advertise the study outside a quarterly magazine with a charge that did not coincide with the timeline of the study. It was suggested that the Special Area Group of Educators (SAGE) groups be contacted from their websites to see if they would email members. Only one SAGE group responded saying they would not forward the recruitment poster, and no other groups responded after the second email sent. It should be noted that the MASSW falls into this category and was incredibly helpful in recruitment, along with the MCSW. Despite the difficulties in recruiting teaching staff solely through word of mouth, the PI's experience in the field of education did assist in building rapport and trust with participants.

Participant demographics. Demographics were collected from all participants as part of a demographic profile form that was distributed to all participants prior to taking part in the one-on-one interview (this can be referenced in Appendix II). This was an optional form; however, all participants filled it in with only two participants leaving one answer blank each. Demographics were collected related to identified gender, age group, current occupation, race,

rural or urban setting, years in the profession, and years of experience with CIC. This information helped to better situate the data that was collected and may be useful in determining future areas of study.

The participants were split near evenly in terms of race, although there was not a lot of diversity in race as will be discussed in Chapter 5. Demographic forms illuminated that there were an equal number of participants who identified as either white/Caucasian or Indigenous. It should also be noted one participant indicated their discomfort declaring Indigenous status due to losing their familial history through colonial violence and therefore being unable to register for a Metis card. This participant chose to self-identify as white/Caucasian despite being an active and accepted member in their respective community. The participant worried about the implications for declaring status without being able to provide a government card.¹ All participants' demographic responses were honoured and recorded as listed.

Data collection procedures

Data collection included gathering qualitative data through a set of one-on-one interviews with participants that consisted of open-ended questions (see Appendix III). Participants were offered the option, during the pre-screen interview, to complete their interview either in-person or virtually. All participants chose to complete their interviews virtually. This allowed for more freedom to schedule interviews around the participants' schedules. After providing consent, all participants were audio recorded over zoom to ensure data was collected accurately. Participants were given the option to have their cameras on or off during the interview and only audio recordings were saved by the PI. All video recordings in zoom were deleted.

¹ For a description on Indian status in Canada you can refer to this Government of Canada website: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100032463/1572459644986>

Standardized questions were not created to best align with the chosen methodology as Charmaz (2014) outlines the need to have flexibility to allow data to emerge in interviews. Despite this need for flexibility, initial areas of exploration were discussed with participants. Initial questions were derived from the following five areas of exploration (see Appendix III):

1. Biggest barriers observed to the education experience of CIC.
2. Steps taken in your school division to address barriers to the education of CIC.
3. How does systemic oppression and colonization impact CIC's success in school.
4. Perceived student and family needs to succeed in school setting for CIC.
5. Thoughts and ideas moving forward to improve connection to education for CIC.

Interviews also began and ended with opportunities to share experiences or any information that the participants felt were relevant to the topic. From these areas of exploration, questions evolved based on the data that was collected to align with a CCGT approach.

Ethical considerations

Due to the nature of the topic on CW, it was possible that the discussion might have stimulated discomfort in the participants, depending on their experiences with the CW system. This possibility was identified and acknowledged at the pre-screen interview, as well as at the beginning and end of the one-on-one interview, so that participants were fully informed of the feelings that might arise for them and to better prepare them to offer their consent to participate in the study and to anticipate the possible need to access support services should any disturbance arise for them. The PI also advised the participants that a resource list was available that could address potential needs for additional supports and was emailed to participants with the consent form (see Appendix VIII). Additionally, participants were advised that interviews could be

stopped at anytime, paused, rescheduled, and/or the participant could withdraw from further participation.

The risk of feeling professionally obligated into participating in the study was something that was considered in this study. To address this, reminders that participants could withdraw at any time were provided throughout the study and interview process. Participants were also made aware of the length of time data would be stored and the purpose for which it would be used. Further, participants were able to view the data they provided in the form of transcripts that were emailed out. This provided them with the opportunity to review and request any changes they would like made to the information provided.

Every effort was made to ensure confidentiality. However, with electronic data there are always potential risks for security breaches where data may be compromised. A breach could have resulted in participants facing harm to their professional and/or social status, depending on whether they expressed critical views. Although this may have posed harm to the participant given their professional roles, it did not exceed the risks they experience in their day-to-day professions. All efforts were taken to avoid a security breach with McAfee security software installed on any computer used for the study. Additionally, all electronic devices and online files were password protected. Should a security breach have occurred, participants would have been notified of the breach by the PI immediately. They also would have been provided an explanation of the exact information that was compromised, and the PI would have provided any necessary resources to assist in the situation.

Informed consent

The PI reviewed consent forms with participants once they expressed interest in participating in the study. When participants agreed to participate in the study, they were

provided a consent form and asked to sign it should they consent to participate. Written consent was obtained electronically from all participants. The PI was available for any questions or concerns participants may have had regarding consent. Participants were also made aware that they could revoke consent at any time throughout the course of the study without coercion.

As all interviews took place virtually over the University of Manitoba Zoom account at the request of the participants. Consent forms were emailed to the email addresses participants provided. Once signed, these forms were emailed back to the PI after participants had either signed the document electronically or printed, signed, and scanned the document. A \$50 honorarium was provided to all participants in the form of an Amazon gift card. Participants received this at the beginning of the interview regardless of whether they completed the interview. Participants were able to contact the PI any time at the email address provided in the consent form.

Anonymity & confidentiality

Confidentiality and protection of participant information was at the forefront of all data collection and storage procedures. Any paper containing participant information was kept with the PI until it could be placed in a locked filing cabinet within the PI's office. Only the PI had access to the key to the filing cabinet. Paper copies were kept until they could be scanned onto a secure and password protected University of Manitoba OneDrive account. Once any documents had been uploaded to this OneDrive account by the PI in their original form, the paper documents were shredded and destroyed onsite.

Audio recordings were taken through Zoom and saved then stored in a password protected file within the OneDrive account. These files included some identifying data depending on what participants disclosed. At the start of the interview, an effort was made to

minimize the likelihood of this. Participants were encouraged to avoid disclosing their names, names of colleagues, and the school and division they work for. In cases where identifying information was disclosed, it was removed or anonymized in the transcription. Participants also chose a pseudonym which was used to further anonymize data and narratives within the study results.

All data was transcribed by the PI using Otter AI transcription services. The PI reviewed all transcripts for accuracy while listening to audio recordings. The generated transcripts were uploaded directly into the OneDrive account. All participants were made aware of the length of time data would be held in the consent form (Appendix I).

Data analysis using CCGT

Coding process

Charmaz's approach to coding was used with three phases including initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014). Once initial interviews began, initial coding commenced with a line-by-line coding procedure to identify potential patterns. From here focused coding was employed to begin to form more focused codes on themes and meaning emerging so that categories could be developed. Theoretical coding was the final phase to examine the relationship between the categories and data.

Initial coding. Data analysis was assisted through specialized computer software beginning with Otter AI transcription services. Interviews were transcribed using this software and then reviewed for accuracy by the PI. Once transcripts were deemed accurate, the initial line by line coding commenced. The PI assigned initial codes based on Charmaz's (2014) view that this process will uncover initial concepts and meanings as a preliminary means of understanding

the data. Below Table 2 provides an example of the process with an excerpt of the raw data from the study.

Table 2

Initial coding example generated from study data set

Raw data	Initial code
...everybody in the schools knows that [CFS workers] don't come and they don't do anything. So the flip side of that is, you know that if you have only, if you have a speech language pathologist that's flying up here, and they can only do five assessments you're not going to do the kid in care because there's only five spots. No one's going to complain if you don't do the kid in care,	Consensus CFS workers seen as uninvolved Schools have limited resources Resources are not always prioritized based on greatest need Ignoring CIC has no repercussions

Focused coding. After initial coding took place, focused coding was used to develop a deeper understanding of what was emerging from the data. The PI reviewed initial codes looking for patterns and relationships that may be present. This process of comparison assists researchers in movement towards developing a CGT (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019, Charmaz, 2014, Bobbink et. Al., 2024). Categorizing data also helps to expediate analysis by sorting it into larger bundles after initial coding (Charmaz, 2014).

Focused coding remained a fluid process, and the PI remained open and flexible to the process adapting and modifying categories as the data unfolded. Conceptual categories were formulated and this data informed categories. However, it was important for the PI to remain cognizant of the fact that their positioning had the potential to influence data analysis and category creation. To combat this, memoing and word clouds were strategies that assisted in developing categories from the data. Memos will be discussed in more detail below. NVivo software was also used in a limited capacity to help assist in the coding process, specifically to

assist in categorization of data. As seen in Figure 4, word clouds allowed for creative thinking to engage in a visual representation and record of categories that were emerging from the data.

Below Table 3 breaks down three levels of coding that were used to prepare for the development of theoretical codes.

Table 3

Focused coding example generated from study data set

Initial coding	Nodes	Category
Consensus CFS workers seen as uninvolved	CFS workers not attending meetings, not returning calls/emails	Absent or inaccessible legal guardians
Schools have limited resources	Chronic resource shortages	Neoliberal austerity and resource rationing
Resources are not always prioritized based on greatest need	Need for focused, consistent advocacy	Advocacy as a necessary corrective
Ignoring CIC has no repercussions		

Figure 4*Focused coding using word cloud*

Theoretical coding. Although Glaser (2005) believed it is not always necessary to engage in theoretical coding, this study aligned with the view of Birks et al. (2019) that the full explanatory power of a grounded theory cannot be realized without theoretical coding. Therefore, the final stage of coding for this study involved theoretical sorting to construct a theoretical integration of categories. Theoretical coding was grounded in the CTC, which informed how the data was analyzed and what emerged. This was the final stage of analysis and flowed from not only focused coding and categorization, but also memos.

Table 4*Theoretical coding example generated from study data set*

Raw data	Initial coding	Categories	Memos	Theoretical coding
...everybody in the schools knows that [CFS workers] don't come and they don't do anything. So the flip side of that is, you know that if you have only, if you have a speech language pathologist that's flying up here, and they can only do five assessments you're not going to do the kid in care because there's only five spots. No one's going to complain if you don't do the kid in care.	Consensus CFS workers seen as uninvolved Schools have limited resources Resources are not always prioritized based on greatest need Ignoring CIC has no repercussions	Absent or inaccessible legal guardians Neoliberal austerity and resource rationing Advocacy as a necessary corrective	Through the CTC impacts of capitalism emerge creating competition for resources and possibly increased workload for CFS workers rendering them unable to meet demands and therefore viewed in a negative light. Power emerges in the ease in which CIC can be overlooked without consequence as if it never happened.	Neoliberal managerialism practices have reduced resources creating competition and adversarial relationships CIC occupy an invisible and powerless space in the periphery

Memos. As identified by Mohajan & Mohajan (2022), memo writing is essential in any grounded theory study. Charmaz (2014) identifies the use of memos as beneficial within the research process because it helps researchers move from focused codes to categorizations. Charmaz also identifies that memos assist with early analysis of codes and data, which in turn keep track of the PI's thoughts and important trends that may be emerging.

Memos were used continuously throughout the study, between data collection and writing of the study results. Memos were mainly handwritten to allow for contributions to be made readily as ideas and thoughts emerged. A research diary method as identified by Charmaz (2014) was used to keep a running record of ideas as the study progressed. This also provided an

opportunity to record self-reflections of the PI to minimize researcher bias in conducting interviews and analyzing data. Memos also assisted in determining saturation of data as it became apparent that at times the memos were getting repetitive. This repetition also aided in recognizing patterns in the data.

Methodological memos. Methodological memos were used to adapt practices as needed while also ensuring that the PI was adhering to the main criteria of CGT as outlined by Charmaz (2014). These memos document rationales for decisions made regarding how data was collected, analyzed, and coded while also assisting in identifying relationships present in the data set (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2019). Below is an example of a methodological memo created during the study.

Example. It has become apparent that novel information is better generated when participants are given more freedom to share ideas and information. Using the areas of exploration as a guideline has been useful in generating discussion. However, moving forward space should be given initially to the participant to share their thoughts without being confined to the areas of exploration. Going forward these can be introduced and used to refocus the interview once the participant seems to have exhausted their initial knowledge contribution.

Analytical memos. Analytical memos help to engage with the data and enter dialogue with yourself as described by Charmaz (2014). This type of memoing began at the start of the study to assist in organizing and tracking ideas, engaging in reflection, analyzing data, and assisting theory development. An example of an analytical memo generated during the study is outlined below.

Example. The data has introduced a new idea of invisibility that I have not previously thought of before. This demonstrates how people can be rendered powerless in plain sight with

no one thinking twice about the impact this can have on CIC. There appears to be an illusion of inclusion in school communities by the use of emojis covering students faces but really, they're rendered invisible and erased from the documented memory or celebratory event. Schools are complying with CW policies however in the bigger picture how does being rendered invisible in your school and community impact connection to school and overall development? This is an area to explore to gain perspectives from participants.

Doodle and process memos. Doodles and process diagrams were used to assist in freethinking as the data was engaged with. As mentioned above in figure 4, word clouds assisted in flushing out ideas and identifying categories in the data. Engaging visually helped to increase flexibility and creativity when interacting and analyzing data and procedures. Below in figures 5 and 6, examples are presented on how this was done.

Figure 5 below is an example of a process diagram memo that was used to guide analysis at all levels of engagement with the data. Through continually engaging with data to find meaning in how these forces may have an effect on participants' responses and the meaning that was emerging. This helped to focus the PI to stay connected to the theoretical approach employed by the study and find meaning and relationships in the data.

Figure 5

Process diagram of CTC considerations in data.

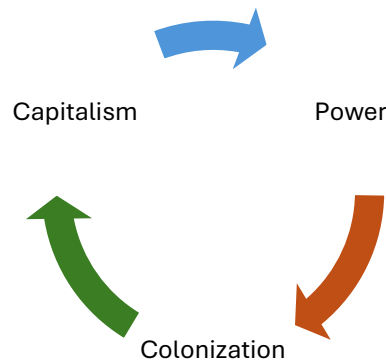
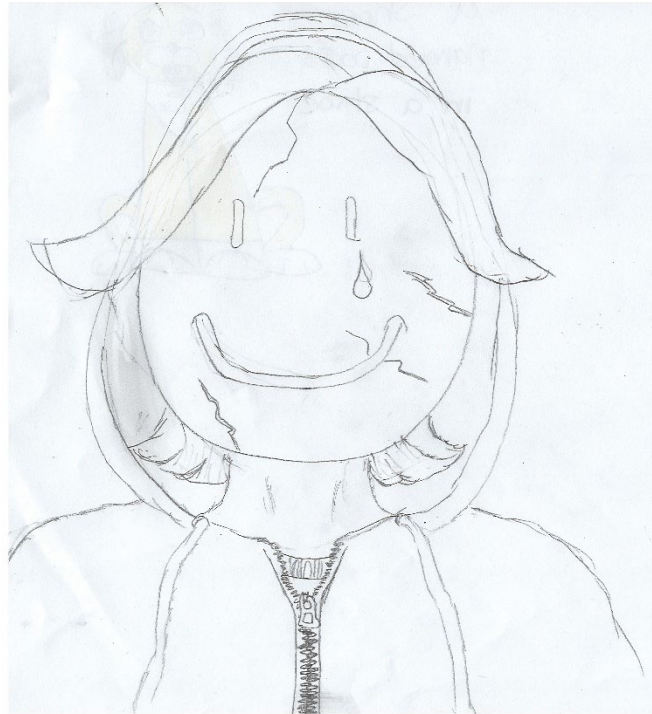


Figure 6 below was constructed after the analytical memo was written in the example above. It assisted in connecting to theory to visualize the idea of how a heterotopia can emerge when a social phenomenon no longer coincides with pre-existing assumptions held by society. This idea that CIC have happy face emojis covering their faces to allude to them being happy participants within their schools and communities, when in actuality they are rendered invisible and powerless over decisions made about them. The emojis take away the ability to convey genuine emotion, and rather an emotion is assigned to the young person by an institution rendering what's underneath invisible. The cracks in the emoji face represent the break from the status quo that is emerging from the data and the heterotopia that is being illuminated.

Figure 6

Concept doodle of the heterotopia of child welfare.



Trustworthiness in qualitative research

Establishing trustworthiness is an important step in research, particularly when attempting to build cumulative knowledge (Ahmed, 2024). Below, four categories that determine trustworthiness in qualitative research will be outlined with connection to this study. The proceeding discussion is based on the strategies for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative data put forward by Ahmed (2024).

Credibility

Triangulation. Triangulation was established by recruiting participants from different professions and disciplines to gather data from diverse perspectives. To accomplish this SSWs, teachers, RTs, IET members, management staff, a guidance counsellor, and a university

instructor in education were interviewed. Additionally, as discussed in demographics, participants were from different social locations and regions.

Reflexivity. Reflexivity was engaged in before data collection began and continually throughout the study. This was done through a research journal to minimize the risk of the PI's biases and preconceived ideas from their experiences interfering with interviews. As previously mentioned, the PI has experience in the field of education particularly with CIC and through reflection it was hoped that these experiences would not interfere with the research study but rather be used to help understand the context in which the data collected was situated.

Transferability

Applicability/Sampling strategies. The participant sample consisted of various professionals within Manitoba schools who work with CIC. This study is representative of the experience of professionals within the Manitoba region of education. In keeping with Charmaz's (2014) view on applicability, this study is applicable to the time and place it was collected within specific regions of Manitoba.

Thick description. The purpose of this research study was to establish a preliminary understanding of the current context of the EN of CIC within Manitoba. There was no intention of generalizing data outside of the Manitoba region, although the findings in the study may be relevant to other regions with similar demographics due to the shared colonial history within Canada. This study offers a framework in which future research may expand upon to contrast and gain a deeper understanding of the social phenomenon of the EN of CIC within their region. In order to assist readers in ascertaining the applicability of this study to their contexts, memoing was used to keep track of the decisions made throughout the study.

Dependability

Audit trail. Records were kept through a research journal that was continually contributed to during the study. This document(s) provides a resource for others to review and helps to situate the study design and rationale behind the decisions that were made.

Methodological documentation. Methodological documentation was used to assist with transparency so that others might be able to discern the rationale behind decisions (Ahmed, 2024). Methodological memos were kept by the PI in the research journal ensuring that there was a record that could be followed that illuminated the logic behind the methodological decisions being made.

Confirmability

Member checking. Member checking was accomplished by allowing participants to review their transcripts to ensure participants' viewpoints were accurately captured in the data (Ahmed, 2024). Transcripts were sent via email to all participants so that they had the opportunity to verify the data collected was accurate.

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing was conducted by meeting with peers in the fields of CW and education to gain clarity through debriefing. Feedback was also sought from peers during debriefing sessions and this continued throughout data analysis.

Reflexive memos/journals. Reflexive journaling is a practice that helps improve confirmability, developing transparency in the study through the researcher bringing their biases to light while tracking their changing thoughts and ideas about the project (Ahmed, 2024). As discussed in credibility, a research journal was kept for the duration of the study and the PI engaged in reflexive journaling before data collection began and throughout the study. This

helped to organize ideas and minimize researcher bias and preconceived ideas from interfering with data collection and analysis.

Limitations

Historically, grounded theories have advocated for abstaining from a literature review prior to the start of a study to avoid biasing perceptions. This was a challenge as the PI has been exposed to a great deal of research in this field prior to the study and therefore held prior knowledge and conceptions before engaging in this work. However, recently there have been some contradicting views on this as it has been suggested that a literature review to provide context to the study will be helpful and adhere to institutional requirements (Birks et al, 2019, Hoare et al., 2012). Additionally, it was necessary for the PI to be informed on the literature in this topic area to establish the rationale for the study. Of note, the area of inquiry related to the EN for CIC at present has very little research and literature available. As a result, there was not a lot to bias the PI prior to the commencement of data collection. This also limited quantitative inquiry with the topic area, demonstrating a need to build from the ground up.

One of the primary limitations of this study was difficulty recruiting educators. No agencies or professional organizations representing educators agreed to assist with recruitment or to distribute study information to their members. It should be noted that this lack of participation was not related to the study topic. As a result, the pool of potential educator participants was limited. To mitigate this challenge, the PI's professional background in education facilitated access to participants through existing relationships, word-of-mouth recruitment, and connections within the education system. These connections enabled the recruitment of educators who may not have been reachable without prior community ties.

While this insider status helped address recruitment barriers, it also introduced a potential limitation. The PI had prior experience working with students involved in CW and therefore brought pre-existing knowledge and perspectives to the research, while being a strength in some ways it also presented the potential for bias. To address this potential bias, analytic memoing was used throughout the research process to support ongoing reflexivity. Memoing enabled the PI to critically examine their assumptions, monitor their responses during interviews, and intentionally avoid guiding or shaping participants' contributions.

themselves in interviews and to try to refrain from guiding participants' responses.

Another limitation to this study was the small population that was only situated within the Manitoba region as well the exclusion of CW staff and individuals who are or have been in care within the CW system. Therefore, this study is only a steppingstone in creating a comprehensive understanding of the issue of EN for CIC. Due to limitations in the resources available with only one investigator for this study, it was not possible to recruit a larger sample. As a result, the sample collected was purposefully limited to the education system within the Manitoba region to create a richer data sample rather than diluting it by including other regions and other professionals.

Finally, all interviews were conducted virtually which limited the PI's ability to incorporate nonverbal responses of participants in the data. All participants discussed the busyness of their jobs and homelives, so their decision to participate virtually was honoured. This did allow for participants in remote regions to participate in the study and for homogeneity in the data collection procedure. Participant responses and voices were the only data that was collected and analyzed. The PI also made every effort to build relationships virtually to ensure the comfortability of participants. Additionally, since the COVID-19 pandemic, more people are

proficient and comfortable with technology and engaging virtually in interviews (Keen et al., 2022).

The preceding chapter outlined the methodological framework guiding this CCGT study, detailing the research design, participant recruitment, data collection, and analytic processes used to explore the EN of CIC. Through this approach, the study sought to foreground participant voice and critically examine how systemic structures of education and CW intersect to shape the experiences of CIC. The reflexive and iterative processes described enabled the emergence of concepts grounded in participants' lived realities. The following chapter presents the study's findings, organized into themes and theoretical codes that trace the progression from harm to transformation.

Chapter 5: Colonization, Neoliberalism and Power

This chapter along with the proceeding chapters will focus on the presentation of findings from the study data. The findings have been broken down into three themes for presentation. The theme that will be outlined in this chapter includes colonization, neoliberalism and power. The remaining two themes repairing education and healing the education system will be presented in the proceeding chapters six and seven. The three themes will be broken down into the theoretical codes that correspond to each theme. In an effort to maintain the integrity of participants' voices and the intent of their message the data will be presented in quotations. In alignment with CCGT narratives that reflect the participants' experiences through their own language are outlined.

To assist readability data collected from participant responses has been minimally edited. The minimal edits are aimed at assisting with the flow of narrative while maintaining the meaning and intent from participant responses. Table 5 below is presented as an example of how raw data was edited for the purpose of presentation in this paper.

Table 5

Raw data	Edited data
So it's all it's all about relationships, the buy in factor for the projects, like, has to be something that interests them. So that has to be high. And then they, they, they do need, we need to hold them accountable, but we also need to cut them breaks, if that makes sense, you know, so it's, it's a very it's, it's a very tough balancing act that we do all day. (LIN7)	So, it's all about relationships, the buy in factor for the projects, has to be something that interests them. So that has to be high. And then we need to hold them accountable, but we also need to cut them breaks, if that makes sense. So, it's a very tough balancing act that we do all day. (LIN7)

Participant demographics

The demographic data shows the participant sample as 94% female, with 70.6% holding a bachelor's degree (Figure 8) as their highest level of education and 52.9% being between the ages of 40-49 years old (Figure 10). In terms of their current occupation, three professions were

almost equally drawn from within IET members at 29.4%, SSWs at 23.5% and resource teachers at 23.5% (Figure 7). Most participants, 88.2%, had attended some form of training related to working with CW involved students (Table 5), ranging from a seminar to formal education. There was some diversity in the geographic location of participants although 70.6% of participants reported being from a school division in an urban setting within the southern region of Manitoba (Table 6).

Figure 7

Participants' current profession

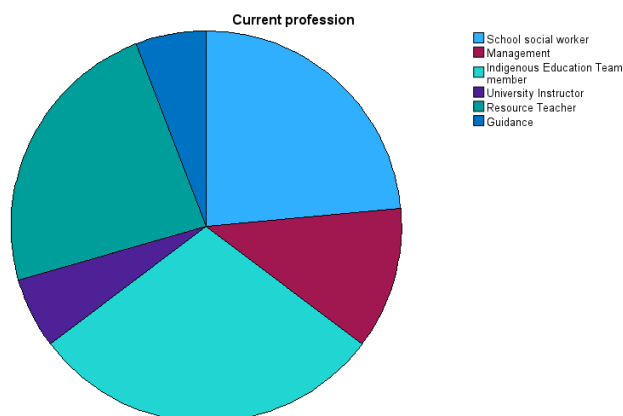


Figure 8

Participants' highest level of education

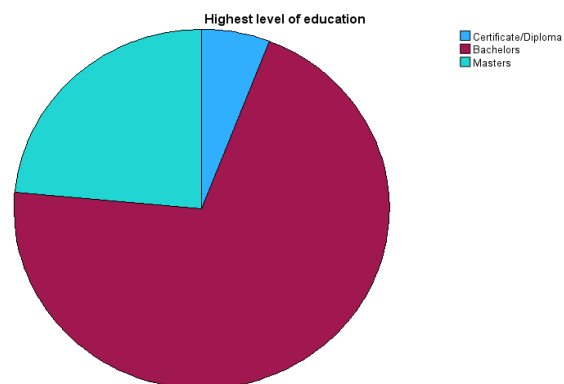


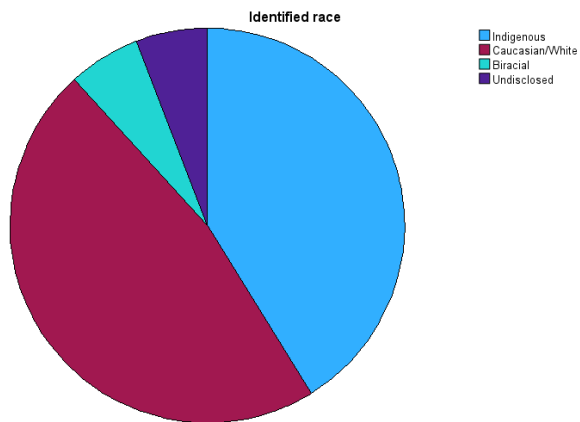
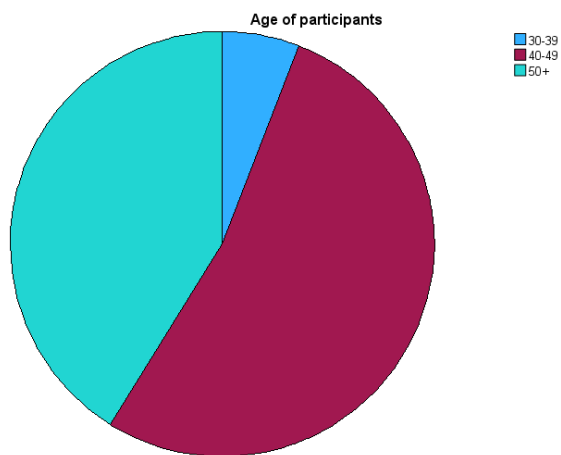
Figure 9*Participants' identified race***Figure 10***Participant age ranges*

Table 5*Participants' child welfare training*

Child Welfare training		
	N	%
1-2 seminars	2	11.8%
3-5 seminars	2	11.8%
5 > seminars	4	23.5%
Formal	6	35.3%
Specialization	1	5.9%
Other	1	5.9%
undisclosed	1	5.9%

Table 6*Regional distribution of participants*

Geographic region in Manitoba		
	N	%
Urban southern region	12	70.6%
Rural southern region	1	5.9%
Urban northern region	2	11.8%
Rural northern region	2	11.8%

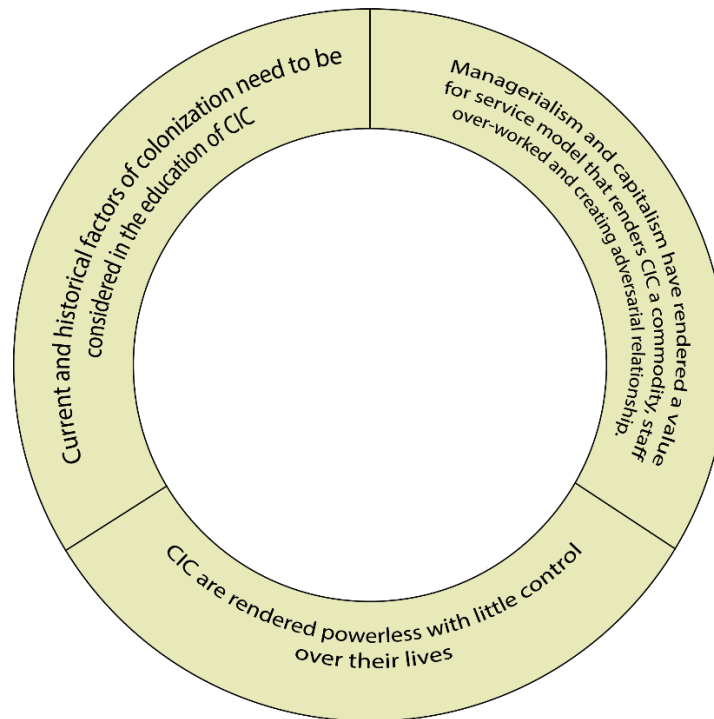
Colonization, neoliberalism and power

This theme emerged from three theoretical codes identified in the data depicted in Figure 11. Through a CTC analysis of data colonization, neoliberalism and power were kept at the forefront in data interpretation. Participant responses paint a picture of how this theme is playing out within the perceptions of education staff in the current context of the EN of CIC. Below, the three theoretical codes that will be explored include the idea that managerialism and capitalism have created a value for service model rendering CIC a commodity, staff overworked and generated adversarial relationships. Secondly, data collected identified children being left

powerless and invisible with little to no control over their lives or education. Finally, data illuminated how colonization shapes EN.

Figure 11

Theoretical codes of colonization, neoliberalism and power



Theoretical code 1: Managerialism and capitalism have created a value-for-service model, rendering CIC a commodity, overworking staff, and generating adversarial relationships

This theoretical code examines how education and CW systems that are shaped by neoliberal austerity, managerial procedures, and capitalist notions of value-for-service—position CIC as administrative units to be managed rather than relational beings to be supported. Participants described environments where chronic resource shortages, rigid rules, and budget-driven decisions overshadow children’s developmental and cultural needs, reflecting ongoing colonial power structures that prioritize institutional compliance over care. In this context, CIC become simultaneously over-regulated and under-served, as overburdened workers navigate

competing mandates and fragmented responsibilities. This code captures how these intertwined forces normalize EN as a systemic outcome rather than an individual oversight.

Neoliberal austerity and resource rationing. Across the dataset, participants described a landscape of chronic scarcity—austerity-driven environments where schools, CW, and community agencies compete for limited resources. This scarcity forms the backdrop against which managerial and capitalist logics take hold. Participants repeatedly linked resource cuts, long wait times, and shrinking supports to the erosion of care for CIC. BLA summarized the core condition bluntly: “There is not enough resources to go around ever.” MIR echoed this sentiment, stating, “There’s no resources, very limited, so somebody has to be neglected.” RUT similarly noted the pervasive impact of systemic underfunding: “There’s a lack of time and resources to really do the follow through that all students deserve.” These statements capture the normalized scarcity that educators, administrators, and caregivers navigate daily forcing schools into rationing decisions that disproportionately harm those without strong advocates.

Austerity is not simply a backdrop it actively shapes how CIC are positioned and treated. Participants consistently reported reductions in supports that once formed the foundation of stability. For example, BLA recalled that when they first started in administration, “we knew [CIC] would have really robust access to like counseling supports, tutoring, transportation... and then... they weren't able anymore to access those things... that's really been cut back a lot now.” DAW described a similar shift, noting that “student services teachers and guidance counselors are running around... they don’t have extra time to sit down with these students.” MIR pointed to the loss of school-based programming linked directly to budget cuts: “We’re losing positions, we’re not gaining them... two retirees weren’t replaced.” These cuts were not framed as temporary fluctuations but as a structural retrenchment tied to broader neoliberal governance.

Austerity has taken time away from students while creating burnout for teachers. MIL explained the consequences in everyday practice: “Teachers are pretty burnt out... I’m really just putting out fires most of the time... rather than actually doing what I wanted to do with these students.” In rural and northern contexts, scarcity becomes even more acute. ELL emphasized that “there’s only like one resource teacher per school... and there probably should be more supports for children in care.” The effect is compounded by competition for scarce services. MIR explained that when specialists such as speech-language pathologists can only conduct a limited number of assessments, schools ration access based on who is most likely to advocate: “You’re not going to do the kid in care... no one’s going to complain if you don’t do the kid in care.” In this system, CIC become the most “neglectable” population—an effect not of malice but of structural incentives that reward attending to those with political or interpersonal power.

Chronic resource shortages also take the form of profound staffing gaps. LIN emphasized, “I have 25 kids and zero EAs... kids with major needs are all on the teacher’s shoulders.” RUT echoed this sentiment, stating, “there’s a lack of time and resources to really do the follow through that all students deserve.” DAW similarly noted that “we are lacking... student services teachers and guidance counselors... they don’t have extra time to sit down with these students.” These comments collectively show how austerity erodes the time and relational space required to support children whose learning is deeply impacted by trauma, instability, and colonial disruption.

The austerity-driven work intensification of teachers and social workers produces cascading delays in service delivery. BLA described a child who “waited over a year for a communication device... in the meantime we loan an iPad, which takes from someone else.” JAN shared that even basic supports become stalled in the system: “It took months for the

glasses to come in.” These delays represent more than administrative inconvenience—they mark the erosion of children’s rights to equitable education.

Participants frequently talked about how austerity has resulted in schools and CW to look for funding opportunities outside of their budgets. EMI expressed concern that the reliance on Jordan’s Principle to compensate for austerity creates new distortions, with divisions increasingly seeing it as a funding workaround rather than a mechanism of equity: “I have now sat in meetings where... ‘you can apply for those... your school doesn’t have to pay for that’... that EA could be paid for by someone other than the division... that’s a scary trend.” MAU described how these pressures also shift school-based decision making, with administrators asking, “Who can we bill this to?” before considering a child’s needs. MIR noted that “these kids just get nothing their whole life.” Taken together, these accounts illustrate how neoliberal austerity creates the conditions in which CIC become commodities within interlocking funding systems, where support becomes contingent, negotiable, and subject to the financial priorities of institutions rather than the inherent rights of the child.

Managerialist governance and proceduralism. Under austerity, managerialism becomes the dominant mode of organizing work. Participants repeatedly described systems that prioritize procedures, timelines, compliance, and documentation over children’s relational, cultural, and educational needs. These bureaucratic structures produce conditions in which CIC are known as files rather than people, and where services hinge on paperwork rather than urgency. A central example is the bureaucratic fragmentation produced by multi-agency involvement. JAN described a case where the child’s agency was located on-reserve, with no local office: “Efforts to engage the agency really were not effective... there was no worker to engage in conversations with.” J described similar patterns, noting that cases were shuffled

repeatedly across workers: “cases kept getting moved... every worker had to find the story out again... kids are stuck in limbo.”

Procedural delays were highlighted as a key mechanism through which EN is produced. BLA explained, “registration gets held up because workers have such heavy caseloads... we can’t start until forms are complete.” SOP described the introduction of an intersectoral intake form requiring an executive director’s signature—an impossible barrier in practice: “It’s impossible to get an executive director to sign anything... that’s something they would not budge on.” This example illustrates a core feature of managerialism that rules designed to standardize practice end up delaying or denying services.

The documentation burden was a dominant theme across participants. MIC stated, “Everybody is so concerned about filling in forms... what’s happening with the children?” She added, “They have to do things in triplicate... by the time you get the paperwork done, the kid has walked.” LIS similarly lamented the displacement of the child by administrative requirements: “The number of forms clinicians have to fill out... my concern is that who they are as a person gets lost in all that paperwork.” These quotes collectively show how managerialism reorients the focus of educators and social workers from relational work toward bureaucratic compliance.

Procedures also frequently overrode professional judgment. MAU noted that schools often feel compelled to make formal reports due to liability concerns, even when relational approaches would be more appropriate: “I can’t advise them not to report... but sometimes schools are making reports for things they really shouldn’t be.” MIL critiqued the inclusion model as implemented, stating, “everyone’s in a classroom, but we’re not giving exactly what the child needs... we’re not really nailing inclusion properly.” These examples show how

standardized models—though designed to produce uniformity—fail to account for complexity and trauma in the lives of CIC.

Many participants emphasized that managerial processes lack clear accountability. RUT described a transition-to-adulthood process with no designated lead: “It doesn’t say who should be taking the first step... if I miss it and don’t do it, I’ve never had the experience of somebody calling me saying, ‘Hey, we haven’t talked about their future.’” In this managerial vacuum, children’s futures become dependent on which adult happens to have the time or capacity to notice. These bureaucratic structures reflect the broader colonial logics that surveillance, documentation, and risk management supersede relational engagement. Managerialism thus becomes a structural expression of colonial power, determining who is seen, who is supported, and who is left behind.

Commodification of CIC. Participants described multiple ways in which CIC are positioned as financial units within the neoliberal CW–education ecosystem. These comments illustrate a deep entanglement between capitalism and care, where supports, placements, and decisions are shaped by questions of cost rather than relational or developmental needs. EMI articulated this most explicitly: “You can have all the plans in place and all the funding in place, and you can’t control whether that kid comes or goes, because it becomes a financial decision... it’s a question of who pays, who pays for what.” This comment reveals how market logics structure care decisions, transforming children into cost items that agencies seek to redirect or minimize.

Participants also highlighted how funding formulas and eligibility produce unequal supports. LIN noted, “Our division doesn’t apply for Jordan’s Principle... kids miss out depending on where they go to school.” MAU similarly described how children receive different

levels of support based on funding categories: “Kids in care were often funded at kind of a social assistance level... unless they’re leveled higher homes.” These patterns reveal a two-tiered system where children’s access to support hinges on bureaucratic classifications rather than need or rights.

A recurring theme involved foster care as an income stream. BLA shared, “Some foster families are fostering as a career and an income... not necessarily in it for the right reason.” MIL expanded on this dynamic, referencing a boy who experienced profound neglect: “Sometimes it’s like... is this child just a paycheck to you?” These reflections illustrate how financial incentives can distort relationships, reproducing harm in some ways similar to that seen historically in residential and institutional care systems.

Participants further noted how children become leverage for funding rather than individuals with inherent worth. EMI stated, “I never like to see a kid... seen as a bargaining chip or kind of a cash cow... ‘we should take them... because we could possibly get more for this.’” MIR described the minimal funding allocated for foundational aspects of childhood—birthdays, recreation—as evidence of structural underinvestment: “We get \$400 a year... we get \$50 for birthdays.” Taken together, these reflections show that commodification operates at multiple levels: systemic (funding), relational (caregiver motives), and procedural (eligibility rules). Through these mechanisms, CIC are positioned not as learners or relational beings but as “units” whose value is determined by what they cost or generate within the system.

Adversarial and fragmented inter-system relationships. Participants consistently described relationships between education and CW as strained, conflictual, or adversarial, shaped by mistrust, fragmented communication, and incompatible mandates. These patterns emerge directly from the value-for-service model, where institutions protect scarce resources and deflect

responsibility. SOP felt that “by the time the workers get to meetings, their relationship is not usually positive” and recalled:

I had a meeting yesterday and...the worker was like, well, because of pressure from the school, and I'm like, no, no, no, no. I said, let me stop you right there. I said it's not pressure from the school that we want you at this meeting. I said we're trying to advocate for services for your child in care. So it's still seen as we're a pain in the ass. (SOP)

ERI similarly observed that “in some cases, the relationship is often adversarial from the start... there'll be an edge, and it never seems to go away.”

Communication breakdowns were omnipresent. PUR described how schools often are not even told a child is in care: “Sometimes we're not even told if the kid is... in CFS... we have to get a hold of CFS... that information is not always passed on right away.” J shared that constant worker turnover leads to “every worker... having to find the story out again,” leaving children “stuck in limbo.” Additionally, front-line expertise was frequently dismissed. ERI stated, “We say, ‘this is the child we're most concerned about,’ and the worker says, ‘that's impossible.’” LIS described a case where her concerns were overridden by senior administration: “We had expressed concerns... but it was overridden without discussion.”

Another major theme involved absent or inaccessible legal guardians. SOP provided a vivid example: “there's such a turnover... we had a kid last week where the worker hadn't even met the child... and they were at an intake meeting.” RUT added, “meetings were canceled... promises were made.” PUR emphasized the structural nature of this absence: “One social worker has 22 children... information gets lost in translation because the caseload is so heavy.” Across the dataset, participants framed these tensions not as interpersonal conflict but as structural

outcomes of systems that operate in silos, enforce compliance through hierarchical controls, and lack meaningful accountability to the children they serve.

Overburdened CW workforce. While participants described significant frustrations with CW, they also expressed deep empathy for workers navigating impossible workloads. This dual recognition underscores how overburdened systems create conditions for neglect while also producing moral distress among the adults tasked with protecting children. ERI began her interview by naming their tension: “Everybody is trying to support kids as best they can... everyone is overwhelmed... we are all really wanting to do the best.” PUR similarly noted, “If I had 22 children, I wouldn’t be able to keep on top of things either.” These statements recognize that structural conditions—not individual failures—drive many gaps experienced by CIC.

Turnover and discontinuity were described as endemic. RUT shared that when a worker remained consistent over several years, “that’s one of the biggest things,” because stability enables relationship-building. In contrast, most participants described high turnover as the norm, with MIC stating, “They have so many kids on their caseload that they don’t actually get to see any of them. So all of them are falling through the cracks.” Participants also described the emotional toll on workers. MIR stated, “I feel bad for our social workers... they’re caught in this circle too... they don’t actually get to see any of them.” MIL added that in schools, teachers operate in constant “fire-fighting mode”: “I’m really just putting out fires most of the time... rather than actually doing what I wanted to do with these students.”

This workload leaves little room for proactive engagement, cultural connection, or trauma-informed planning. As SOP explained, “we were... setting kids up for failure... there wasn’t that planning phase,” showing how system design eliminates the possibility of early, preventative, or relational work.

Consequences for children's educational trajectories. The cumulative effect of austerity, managerialism, commodification, and adversarial relationships manifests most clearly in the educational trajectories of CIC. Participants described a pattern of missed supports, delayed interventions, unstable schooling, disrupted attachments, and ongoing academic gaps. Instability across home and school environments was a dominant theme. SOP stated, "kids are in four or five different schools a year... it doesn't set them up for success." DAW described how each move restarts the process of connection: "Every time they start in a school, you have to support their attachment... and so often... those children are then being moved... they are restarting right from zero."

Supports that could close learning gaps are often delayed or never implemented. JAN described a Grade 8 student with "significant gaps... still no assessment." LIN added, "She had 27 homes... no one fought the education battle." LIS summarized the cumulative effect: "All of that headway that was made is undone... often the child is pushed even further back." Participants clearly linked these patterns to structural—not individual—failures. J powerfully framed the life-course impact: "Being in apprehension has taught them just how to survive: 'I just need to get by'... we need to teach them how to excel." MIR captured the long-term consequence of systemic neglect: "We do... nothing... and then we wonder why we have some hooligans at 16... we've shown them no respect, love, stability, trust for 16 years."

RUT described how stalled education limits future possibilities: "...that leads to not getting a high school diploma... which really limits their ability to... proceed in life." SOP added, "They just stop caring... because they felt like people around them stopped caring." Together, these accounts illustrate a clear pattern: EN is not a series of isolated incidents, but the

predictable, cumulative product of a system governed by market values, bureaucratic control, and chronic scarcity.

Table 7

Categories and subcategories for managerialism and capitalism have created a value for service model rendering CIC a commodity, staff overworked and generated adversarial relationships.

Categories	Subcategories
Neoliberal austerity and resource rationing	• Historical and ongoing budget austerity • Chronic resource shortages • Work intensification and high caseloads • Competition for limited supports
Managerialist governance and proceduralism	• Bureaucratic fragmentation and compartmentalization • Standardization and documentation burdens • Procedures over people
Commodification of children in care	• Children as financial units (“value for service”) • 3.2 Fostering as income stream • Incentive structures that reward higher “needs”
Adversarial and fragmented inter-system relationships	• Fragmented communication and mutual ignorance • Dismissal of front-line expertise • Conflictual and adversarial interactions • Absent or inaccessible legal guardians • Regional and agency variability
Overburdened CW workforce	• Burnout and moral distress • High turnover and discontinuity • Inexperience and “learning on the job”
Consequences for children’s educational trajectories	• Unmet academic, emotional, and cultural needs • Absenteeism, disengagement, and “push-through” schooling • Cumulative disruption and lost potential

Theoretical code 2: CIC are left powerless and invisible, with little or no control over their lives or education

Situated within the broader theme of colonization, neoliberalism, and power, this theoretical code captures how CIC are rendered administratively, relationally, and symbolically invisible, while decisions about their lives and education are made through hierarchical, bureaucratic, and often racialized systems that operate “on” them rather than “with” them. Across participants, CIC were repeatedly described as not only falling through the cracks but being systematically pushed there by policies, practices, and resource logics that prioritize institutional convenience, risk management, and procedural compliance over relational accountability, belonging, and educational justice. The following sections trace how invisibility and powerlessness are produced, experienced, and occasionally resisted in schools and related systems.

Invisibility in education and community. Participants described multiple ways CIC are erased from school spaces—not tracked, not included, and often literally missing from the visual and administrative record of school life. MAU highlighted how files and histories simply do not follow children, noting that “kids come... they’ve been through a ton of schools, and there’s hardly anything in their files. And why is that...?” This administrative gap means new schools encounter CIC as unknown cases, rather than as learners with histories and existing needs, reinforcing their invisibility each time they move.

Several participants emphasized that even basic identification of being in care is often obscured. Participant RUT described how,

as a teacher, I find sometimes we don't know if a student has been in care... sometimes then we don't know and we can't find that information... at some point the information just kind of goes away, or we can't access it.

Without this context, schools cannot connect students to specialized supports or post-secondary waivers, leading RUT to conclude that "they're missing once again... missing out on some of those potential programs that... are out there."

Invisibility also shows up symbolically and visually. Participant ELL described how CIC are excluded from everyday recognition practices because of policy restrictions:

we don't have permission to post their work, or we don't have permission to post their pictures... you're displaying everyone else's work, but you can't put a particular student's up.

EMI similarly noted that in team photos or media projects, "everyone else has their picture taken and you are not... or your face is going to be covered in that photo... that really draws negative attention to you." MIR captured the cumulative effect of this practice: "kids in care can't have their face publicly, so they would just get a circle or an image blocking their face... it leads to erasure." Policy ostensibly framed as "protection" thus acts as a technology of colonial erasure, removing CIC from the shared memory of school and community life.

Invisibility also takes the form of exclusion from community participation and enrichment. BSK described a boy who was physically present in the school but not enrolled while adults coordinated paperwork: "by the time we get everybody together to meet, it could be a month or a month and a half down the line... he ended up just playing around in the halls and... finally got kicked out." Similarly, MIR noted that "simple things are not simple for them... homework club requires transportation. Many of our kids in care don't have that. So they

don't go." ELL recalled recommending a CIC student for a special science group but "she wasn't able to participate... because she was in care." These examples highlight how bureaucratic and logistical constraints quietly exclude CIC from the informal and formal spaces where belonging, confidence, and aspiration are built.

At the same time, CIC are often subject to high expectations without meaningful support. LIN described a student with learning disabilities who was expected to perform like peers without any coordination of support: "they expect her to hand things in... but no one told us... no support." RUT echoed this contradiction at the post-secondary level, pointing to tuition waivers and supports that are technically available but not accessed because past care status is not identified: "we want them to be functioning members of society at 18, but... we're missing out... we can't easily connect them." As MIR echoed, "we want them to be functioning members of society at 18, but they're given nothing their whole life... no stability, no trust, no love." This pattern reflects a neoliberal paradox—individual achievement is demanded in the absence of structural care, making invisibility itself a mechanism of EN.

Powerlessness and lack of autonomy. Participants consistently described CIC as having little or no voice in decisions that fundamentally shape their schooling and daily lives. EMI described a youth whose placement and schooling were dictated by sibling needs and housing availability: "that placement was dictated by their sibling, not by them... then [they] moved out to a rural area...[resulting in] second school in two years... none of this is his fault." MIL similarly recounted, "we get a new student... they've been to eight schools in three years... we have them for two months, and then they're in their high school. So it's like, we can't even support them in that, if we wanted to." In both examples, children are moved as outputs of

system decisions meaning their educational trajectories are collateral to resource and placement logic.

For some participants, this powerlessness was distilled in children's own words. MIC described asking a 14-year-old how long he would be in a group home and his response back was, "I don't know, whenever they decide, I guess." MIC concluded, "their lives... they have no control whatsoever... they're just there." Participant RUT similarly noted that when supports end at graduation, this is decided by systems, not youth:

once they're graduated, they're... no longer... going to be supporting them... when you're worried about where you're going to go live after graduation, that definitely doesn't make you focus on, oh, I'm going to go to university or college.

Powerlessness is also produced through everyday hierarchical authority in both home and school. PUR described a foster parent who told children as they left for school that they could not return: "'By the end of the day, you need to pack your bags and go.' How is that going to make that child go on with their day?" For PUR, this exemplified how "foster parents exert that power when they shouldn't," leaving children to navigate a school day while knowing that "tomorrow I'm not going to be waking up in the same place." SOP described school-level decisions in similar terms: "if a child is out of district... they will move that kid to the next school... if a kid is a problem, they will get that kid out as fast as they can... we're just ripping that from under them... and they don't have a say."

These patterns reflect colonial and neoliberal logics of disposability: CIC are moved, sorted, and removed to manage risk and resources, while their own voices and attachments are treated as secondary. Participants repeatedly emphasized that power was exercised over CIC, often with minimal accountability. LIN recounted a child removed from a long-term foster home

“because the worker didn’t like the foster parent.” JAN described a case where “they were told the kids could not be on the premises... without any conversation with their legal guardian.” In each instance, institutional authority makes abrupt, life-defining decisions while children and families are positioned as passive recipients.

Not being heard and heightened scrutiny. While CIC are procedurally invisible, their behaviours and bodies are often hyper-visible and scrutinized. DAW described the persistence of deficit framings: “one of the things that is still difficult is behavior, and still the mindset of ‘they’re being manipulative,’ or ‘they’re just trying to get their way.’” She noted that what is read as defiance may be a survival strategy: “if they drop their bravado in school, they need to put that bravado back on in the community to stay safe.” PUR similarly observed that when children are grieving or longing for family, “either they become really susceptible to just following the rules... or they become... defiant... you’re labeled as defiant, you’re labeled as difficult... meanwhile, you have a broken heart because you haven’t seen your mom in a year.”

Several participants highlighted how CIC and Indigenous youth are stereotyped and racialized. BSK recalled being confronted by community members: “‘How come you’re bringing gangsters to the community?’... just because they dress in that way... my kids aren’t gangsters.” LIS described a teacher who assumed a student was in care and treated him differently: “the teacher was treating that student with some bias, assuming he was a child in care... meanwhile, his parent was in university and a fabulous parent.” These accounts point to colonial racial logics that mark Indigenous and racialized children as dangerous, deficient, or inherently problematic, rather than as learners entitled to care.

Participants also emphasized that CIC often know exactly what is happening, even as adults assume ignorance. Participant J noted that:

because they're kids... workers, the teachers... they expect... 'oh, they don't really know what's going on,' and that's not true. They know exactly what's going on... but they feel they have no right to voice how they're feeling... kids should be grateful... but they're also still very sad... traumatized... and they still miss their parents.

RUT added that students often avoid disclosing CFS involvement because of anticipated judgement: "students don't want to talk about CFS involvement... they fear what might happen if they say something." Silence, in this sense, becomes a protective response to surveillance and stigma.

Participant MAU captured how increased scrutiny is often misnamed as support stating: sometimes kids are looked at through a different lens... maybe they're monitored more closely, maybe they're looked at more critically... I think some school teams would think of that as being supportive... but... we're pathologizing everything that student does... we're not using that same lens for other kids.

Under neoliberal accountability regimes, risk is managed through surveillance and documentation, and CIC become subjects of this gaze. As MIR put it bluntly kids in care are the ones who have no one to "complain if they don't get supports. And everyone knows that." Their quietness makes them easier to scrutinize and easier to overlook.

Effects of invisibility and powerlessness. Participants linked invisibility and powerlessness to profound emotional, psychological, and educational harms. Many described CIC as being in crisis mode, as MIC said: "they're always in crisis mode so they're never going to learn. They're just surviving... 'Are they going to have a meal for today? Is somebody going to bully them today?'" MIL recounted a youth who withdrew from multiple high schools: "we're on to his third group home and his third school... he goes in for two, three days, and he's just

like, ‘Yeah, this isn’t for me’... there’s no one there to support him.” For LIS, the emotional effects were clear: exclusion “fosters that sense of being different... not belonging, less than.”

Several participants described missed opportunities and long-term loss. BSK observed that many of the youth she worked with “have no dreams... it’s like the trauma from generations... ‘you’re not going to achieve anything, you’re stupid’... they don’t think they can achieve anything.” MIR spoke of students who “didn’t go to school for two years... the gap was shocking,” and concluded, “we’ve lost them — we never got some of those kids back into the educational system.” RUT similarly reflected that some students “would have graduated... but the supports didn’t happen consistently.” These accounts show EN not as isolated incidents but as cumulative processes where small delays like “waiting two three weeks trying to navigate with a social worker,” as EMI noted snowball into crises: “what can start as a little problem... all of a sudden you have a problem that’s a much bigger problem.”

The mental health impacts were repeatedly described as severe and largely unaddressed. LIN recalled a young person who “had suicide attempts, cutting... and no worker saw her for a year.” MIC noted students coming to school “disheveled, unwashed... and that’s basic hygiene.” LIN noted an example of a child in care who had no involvement from the CW worker signaling that “no one checked if she was even alive.” PUR described children who, overwhelmed by grief and instability, ask, “‘What the fuck am I going to go to school for?’” Participant SOP linked multiple school moves to high-risk behavior stating:

I saw lots of high-risk behaviour... kids go from being really stable into a foster home to moving and then all of a sudden they’re running away... getting into drugs... they just stop caring, because they felt like people around them stopped caring.

Powerlessness also shapes how school is deprioritized in the face of survival needs. JAN noted that “education was not really the priority for this family at this point in time... there were domestic abuse and safety concerns.” RUT emphasized that for youth whose housing will end at graduation school was not a priority “when you’re worried about where you’re going to go live.” Participant J described how some youth:

stop coming, and some just retreat into themselves... others... learn to rely on that, ‘oh, you know... I couldn’t come to school because I was so sad’... they end up in adult ed... training programs... their potential is inhibited.

Here, colonial and neoliberal structures converge systems that have historically dispossessed Indigenous and marginalized families. These systems continue to prioritize risk, efficiency, and budget over long-term relational support, and CIC may be internalizing the message that education is not truly for them.

Advocacy as a necessary corrective. Across interviews, advocacy emerged as a fragile counter-power—a way that some adults try to interrupt invisibility and powerlessness, even as their efforts are often constrained by the very systems they challenge. BLA noted that “schools really have to be advocating for those children... otherwise they float through the system.” Yet even robust advocacy can be exhausting and precarious. DAW described reaching out “for months with no reply... then go up the chain, to supervisors, advocates... it becomes a relationship-breaking process.” MIR similarly stated, “we need someone who could help us navigate with CFS... there is no one,” and concluded, “so I’m advocating... I’m taking on that extra role because no one else will.” MIR talked about this resulting in animosity with her employer at times.

Several participants shared moments when they felt compelled to seek external advocacy because internal mechanisms had failed. JAN recounted, “because I felt like I was no longer able to be a voice... I did reach out to the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth.” LIN similarly said, “I had to call the child advocate because no one was checking on her.” For them, drawing on independent advocacy structures was both a last resort and an act of resistance to institutional silencing.

At the same time, participants emphasized that advocacy is unevenly available and dependent on individual knowledge and stamina. BSK reflected, “...not every foster home cares enough to fight for them... I used to really advocate for my kids, but I’m educated on advocating... I know what the problems are... but not everybody’s like that.” MIR noted that her ability to “get things done” often rested on “constantly complaining.” Where caregivers lack time, resources, or confidence to confront systems, CIC remain unprotected.

Some participants described advocacy as deeply relational and safety-enhancing for children. PUR shared that one boy “knowing that we are here to advocate for him... it makes him feel safe to know that we can contact his social worker at any time... that he knows that we will talk on his behalf.” EMI framed advocacy as collective responsibility: “they need advocacy in schools... this is a community thing... if this child is going to succeed, they’re going to succeed with all of our efforts put together, not because one person did it.” LIS imagined a more just structure where “CFS, the school system, clinicians, Elders, community members [are] all at the table... then kids would know there’s a whole team supporting them.”

Taken together, these accounts show that under colonial and neoliberal conditions, advocacy functions both as a symptom of systemic failure and as a site of possibility. It is required precisely because CIC are structurally rendered powerless and invisible. Advocacy

when it is relational, collective, and sustained can temporarily redistribute power, affirm children's worth, and carve out spaces of visibility within systems that otherwise erase them.

Table 8

Children are left powerless and invisible with little to no control over their lives or education.

Categories	Subcategories
Invisibility in education and community	• Erased from school spaces (not tracked, not included, overlooked) • Excluded from community participation (no belonging, no inclusion) • High expectations without meaningful support (given nothing with high expectations)
Powerless and lack of autonomy	• Decisions made for them (no voice in educational or care decisions) • Lack of control over daily life and schooling • Power exercised over them (hierarchical authority shaping experiences)
Not being heard and heightened scrutiny	• Stigma, othering, and stereotyping • Increased scrutiny and surveillance (more discipline, more judgement)
Effects of invisibility and powerlessness	• Ignored or dismissed • Mental health challenges • Isolation and ostracization (feeling alone; social exclusion) • Missed opportunities and loss (falling behind; missing out) • Needs not met / inadequate support • School deprioritized (education not seen as central to their care plan)
Advocacy as a necessary corrective	• Need for focused, consistent advocacy (CIC need more support) • Advocacy failing at the system level (not coming from where it should; structural weaknesses) • Emotional and workload impacts on staff (tiring process; effects employment)

	• Educational advocacy (navigating school systems; filling gaps) • Addressing discrimination ('isms') (anti-racism, anti-colonial engagement) • Cultural advocacy (protecting and affirming identity) • Supporting families' advocacy efforts • Foster parents as advocates • Advocacy fosters safety (children feel protected when someone stands up for them)
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Theoretical code 3: Colonization shapes EN

Participants consistently emphasized that EN cannot be understood apart from colonial history and its contemporary manifestations. Across accounts, the legacies of residential schools, forced assimilation, systemic racism, and institutional power imbalances were described not as historical artifacts but as ongoing conditions structuring the present-day experiences of CIC. The following categories illuminate how participants interpreted colonization as an enduring backdrop shaping trust, belonging, educational opportunity, and the everyday functioning of CW and school systems.

Historical trauma. Historical trauma emerged as a defining influence on how families and children relate to schools. Participants repeatedly emphasized that present-day educational experiences are profoundly shaped by the enduring effects of residential schools, family disruption, and collective mistrust of institutions. Many participants described deep distrust of schools among Indigenous families, which limited communication, advocacy, and willingness to engage. As a participant explained, "They know the adults in their lives... do not trust the education system and are afraid that if they say something to me, right away, I call CFS." (RUT). Another participant made similar observations, noting that "the impact of the residential school

system [means] parents are fearful of the system and not coming in to advocate” (MIC). This “guardedness,” as several participants called it, was viewed not as a deficit but as a rational response to generations of institutional harm.

Participants with lived experience of residential schools spoke directly to the intergenerational nature of trauma. One reflected, “My mom couldn't be a parent... all she knew how to do was to hurt us, because that's what was done to her in residential schools... we're still healing from this trauma” (PUR). This statement was echoed by another participant's assertion that “CFS is now the new residential school system,” (MIC) drawing a direct line between historical removal and contemporary CW involvement. One participant similarly argued that “we're where we are at because of colonization,” (SOP) highlighting that present-day issues in education cannot be separated from this past.

Historical trauma also manifested in impaired advocacy, where families feared judgment or unintended consequences if they approached schools. A participant reported that many Indigenous parents “stay quiet because every time they speak up, someone thinks they're being difficult,” (ELL) while one noted that “bias is there... and if you assume a kid is going to be a challenge, you treat them differently” (LIS). This mistrust impeded consistent advocacy for CIC, leaving children without strong adult champions in school contexts. As BSK summarized, “They don't trust the system at all.”

Colonial forces shaping current systems. Participants consistently described education and CW as contemporary extensions of colonial power. They emphasized that these systems operate through policy rigidity, bureaucratic control, and practices that continue to marginalize Indigenous families. Educators repeatedly acknowledged that schools function as colonial institutions. EMI stated directly that “Western education is a colonial system... everything from

spacing to the bell schedule,” while RUT added that the school day “works well for certain people growing up in certain environments, but not necessarily for students who have been oppressed.” These insights position educational structures—not only curriculum—as shaped by colonial norms.

Participants also described CW as a continuation of colonial removal, often comparing it explicitly to residential schools. Participant MIC expressed, “I’ve heard that CFS is the new residential school system, and I’m starting to believe it.” Participant BSK reinforced this when they stated, “They’re still keeping us oppressed. They’re still keeping us behind... It’s working for the government, not for the child.” Mirroring this, MIR explained, “The colonizers never left... we’re still in it,” highlighting the persistent nature of colonial control across systems.

A strong pattern emerged around political and bureaucratic influence shaping educational access. JAN described a case in which senior administrators “told us alternative programming needed to be looked at... They could not be on the premises,” despite the school’s concerns for the child’s wellbeing. Sophie illustrated similar procedural rigidity in recounting a case where a student was denied entry because “they did not have the permanent Ward papers,” a decision that later required advocacy at higher levels.

Fragmentation and siloed responses—another hallmark of colonial governance—were described across participants. Participant MAU noted that “school divisions don’t understand the parameters under which CFS works... and CFS doesn’t understand the school system,” leading children to slip between systems. JAN emphasized that when this happens, “kids get lost again when no one communicates.”

Finally, participants described pervasive bias and judgement within institutional decision-making. BSK recounted being told that her foster children looked like “gangsters,” while LIS

described a principal who “automatically assumed [her] child was in care” based on appearance. These examples illustrate how colonial assumptions inform everyday interactions in schooling contexts.

Structural and educational impacts of coloniality. Participants identified multiple ways colonial structures generate educational disadvantage for CIC. The most prominent was the frequency with which children fell through the cracks due to systemic gaps, delayed registration, and inadequate tracking. Participant SOP provided an example of children “sitting in shelters for 9–10 months because the right paperwork wasn’t submitted.” This was echoed by BSK who described “Kids wait 1–1.5 months to register.” Participant LIN provided an example of systems not working for a CIC who “didn’t attend for 2 years...no one intervened.”

Several participants pointed out how dominant cultural assumptions shape expectations around attendance, punctuality, and behaviour. RUT explained that “being timely... when the bell rings... is not a value in every family or culture,” yet these norms are enforced universally, resulting in penalties that disproportionately affect CIC. Participant MAU linked this to broader Westernized expectations, stating that teachers often assume parents “should get up every morning to make breakfast,” without understanding that not all families live inside these normative frameworks.

Participants also identified Westernized definitions of wellbeing and success as exclusionary. LIS noted that schools concentrate on “behaviour or academics, but not who they are as a whole person and what they’ve been through.” Multiple participants described curriculum misalignment, with DAW emphasizing that many Indigenous students “do not see themselves in the curriculum,” leading to disengagement and absenteeism.

Loss of cultural connection was another structural impact. ELL described how children fostered by non-Indigenous families “weren’t allowed to learn their language,” while PUR recounted Indigenous children in Filipino homes “learning Tagalog” and commenting on how being exposed to a culture that is not their own while being denied access to their own “that’s not right.”

Finally, participants described inequitable access to supports, such as inconsistent implementation of Jordan’s Principle. JAN noted that one student received “full day, every day direct support” in one division but lost all access after moving to another jurisdiction. MIC similarly lamented that “Aboriginal students... are falling through the cracks” without coordinated intervention.

Educators as agents within a colonial system. Participants viewed educators as both shaped by and capable of resisting colonial systems. Many emphasized the need for critical awareness and reflexivity, as demonstrated when Participant MIC said, “I am colonized... I follow the guidelines too,” acknowledging that even Indigenous educators operate within colonial structures. LIS similarly argued that teachers must interrogate their assumptions because “if you automatically assume this kid’s going to be a challenge, you treat them differently.”

Overall, a recurring concern was the lack of Indigenous representation within schools. DAW noted that schools “aren’t having as many Indigenous applicants” despite efforts to hire diversely, and RUT emphasized that diversity among staff helps students “see there’s not one right way to live.”

Participants also described how educators create space for Indigenous ways of knowing. PUR described schools where “opening prayers are in Ojibwe... we smudge... we’re land based,” and RUT shared how Elders were brought in to support students spiritually and

emotionally. These examples illustrate possibilities for educators to act as counter-colonial agents within constrained systems.

Bias, discrimination, and racism. Participants described racism as an ever-present reality shaping EN. These were not isolated incidents, but patterned experiences reproduced across settings. PUR recounted how Indigenous children experience discrimination stating, “Ugly stereotypes about us show up in city schools all the time.” EMI described how “Colonial expectations of what ‘proper’ looks like shape how kids are judged,” revealing the depth of racialized assumptions.

Racism also shaped misinterpretations of Indigenous cultural practices. LIS described a scenario where a boy with a slingshot—culturally normal in his community—was labelled “dangerous,” resulting in unnecessary threat assessments. ELL noted that Indigenous families were asked “more quickly if...kids have been taken by CFS when they go missing from school,” demonstrating differential suspicion. These accounts illustrate how colonial stereotypes shape teachers’ interpretations of behaviour and risk.

Participants also reported epistemic inequity, where Indigenous knowledges were undervalued. LIS observed that “people often see Elders’ knowledge as lesser than.” MIR described how their daughter had been assigned a number instead of her name “One of my children came home with all of her papers marked with the number [2],” which evoked colonial erasure of identity. They elaborated on how they told their daughter “You are not a number” and went to administration to say “I implore you to rethink this policy with residential schools... my child will only have her name on her papers.” despite bringing it to the school’s attention nothing was done.

Regional and contextual differences. Geography was described as a significant factor shaping educational experiences. Participants emphasized that urban and northern contexts differ sharply in access to cultural programming, school structure, and community attitudes. EMI highlighted that in the North, Indigenous culture “is just part of life,” whereas in the South, schools rely on tokenistic gestures such as “special events, special units, here’s my special book.” MIR noted that northern schools often only go to grade eight, forcing students to leave home and enter large urban high schools, which “are hard moves.”

Participants also highlighted significant regional variation in services, funding, and continuity of support, particularly when children moved across jurisdictions. Participant JAN explained that students transitioning from First Nations schools into urban divisions often lose essential services overnight stating:

A child came from a First Nations school where he had full-day, every-day direct support. But when he moved here, he lost everything because our division doesn’t offer that. Same kid, same needs—different region, totally different support.

MIC similarly described how off-reserve agencies without local workers exacerbate these inequities. When agencies are based outside the region, “you’re constantly waiting—waiting for someone to drive in, waiting for someone to return your call, waiting for someone who actually knows the child,” resulting in stalled assessments and delayed educational interventions. She emphasized that these delays are not occasional but structural:

Some agencies have workers here in town with eight or nine kids and some come from another region and have thirty or forty. If you’re in the wrong region, your kid is not getting what they need (MIC).

These accounts demonstrate how geography—particularly the movement between reserve, northern, and urban contexts—produces service inconsistencies that directly impact educational stability and contribute to cumulative disadvantage for CIC. These structural differences reveal how colonial policies, jurisdictional divides, and resource inequities shape EN differently across regions.

Importance of culture as resistance and healing. Participants consistently identified culture as a protective, identity-affirming force that counteracts the harms of colonial systems. When cultural supports were present, students demonstrated increased regulation, belonging, and academic engagement. As SOP stated, “I’ve seen culture save children, literally save them.” RUT described the impact of involving Elders when students struggled: “Very quickly, there was an Elder involved... it grounded them.” PUR highlighted that on her reserve, culture is “center to everything we do,” noting that her daughter thrived only when immersed in cultural and land-based programming.

Participants also emphasized the importance of cultural spaces within schools. BSK celebrated Indigenous Education rooms as “places where they feel they belong.” LIS described a student whose confidence surged when they adapted their curriculum to empower a student in care “As soon as I brought out that sage, his head popped up, and he said, ‘I know how to pick sage’... then he was teaching the class how to build a drum... his self-efficacy really increased.”

When cultural supports were absent, participants reported increased disconnection and alienation. ELL described the harm caused when a foster parent “was dead set against” language learning. PUR noted that children placed in environments where they are not represented “felt lost as Indigenous students... like they didn’t matter.”

Movement toward change and reconciliation. Despite the persistence of colonial structures, participants also identified emerging shifts toward decolonial practice. Many highlighted slow but growing recognition of the need for transformation. SOP observed that “change is happening, but it’s slow,” while LIS noted increasing acknowledgment of Indigenous knowledges, even if “actions don’t match the words yet.”

Participants also described improved understanding of historical context among some educators. MIR emphasized that when students learn “this was purposely done to us... the shame is taken away,” positioning historical truth-telling as an avenue for healing. Possibilities for forgiveness and relational repair were also described. PUR highlighted the “beautiful forgiveness” of Indigenous youth once they understand colonial history, allowing them to move forward without internalizing blame.

Finally, participants described small but meaningful glimpses of what decolonial practice could look like when systems act in relational, culturally grounded ways. RUT shared a rare moment when collaboration and cultural support aligned, recalling, “This is how it's supposed to work. Everyone showed up, everyone listened, and the plan followed the child— not the paperwork.” EMI similarly saw change when staff recognized that “culture isn’t an add-on—it’s the heart of who these kids are,” noting that students became more engaged when ceremony, land-based learning, and community involvement were centred. JAN described a principal who resisted procedural norms by refusing to move a child after a placement change, stating, “We’re not doing that to him again. He stays here.” For JAN, this rare act demonstrated what decolonial decision-making looks like when children’s relational worlds are prioritized over bureaucratic conventions. SOP added that some divisions are beginning to “walk the walk,” pointing to efforts

to embed treaty education from kindergarten onward, which she saw as a step toward meaningful reconciliation.

Participants also emphasized that these shifts often begin with individual educators cultivating historical understanding and relational humility. MAU described how teachers' perspectives changed once they learned "why families are hesitant, guarded, or scared," noting that such knowledge fosters patience, empathy, and reduced defensiveness. SOP echoed this, observing that when staff understand how colonial trauma shapes contemporary mistrust, their practice becomes more compassionate and less adversarial. Though these examples were limited, they illustrated what educators viewed as the direction forward. A movement toward practice rooted in cultural safety, relational accountability, and genuine partnership with Indigenous families which are incremental but necessary steps toward dismantling colonial harm in schools.

Table 9

Current and historical aspects of colonization need to be considered when addressing the EN of CIC.

Categories	Subcategories
Historical trauma	• Enduring distrust of schools (school as the enemy; avoidance; guardedness) • Residential schools as an ongoing reality (historical trauma still lived) • Impaired advocacy (family/community reluctance to engage with school systems)
Colonial forces shaping current systems	• Education as a colonial institution (school as a colonial system; teachers operating within colonial norms) • Colonialism persists today (colonialism as a current issue; CFS as the new residential school) • Political and bureaucratic influence (politics; policy-driven practices)

	• Compartmentalization of children and services (fragmentation; siloed responses) • Bias and judgement embedded in systems (implicit and explicit colonial assumptions)
Structural and educational impacts of coloniality	• Falling through the cracks (systemic failure to track and support CIC) • Decision-making grounded in dominant cultural assumptions • Westernized notions of wellbeing and success • Lack of cultural connection in curriculum (no connection to curriculum; appropriation concerns) • Loss and disconnection from identity and culture • Inequitable supports and opportunities
Educators as agents within a colonial system	• Need for educator awareness and critical reflexivity • Diversity and representation gaps • Creating space for Indigenous ways of knowing (make space; shift practice)
Bias/discrimination/racism	• Stigma and racism (persistent, normalized) • Projection of dominant values onto students and families • Unequal valuing of Indigenous knowledge (epistemic inequity)
Regional and contextual differences	• Urban vs. northern distinctions • Variations in access, resources and cultural programming
Importance of culture as resistance and healing	• Culture not consistently recognized or supported • Culture as a source of strength and healing (culture saves) • Cultural programs create connection and belonging • Cultural difference as a factor requiring respect and integration
Movement toward change and reconciliation	• Slow and uneven progress • Understanding historical context reduces shame and increases insight • Possibility of forgiveness and relational repair

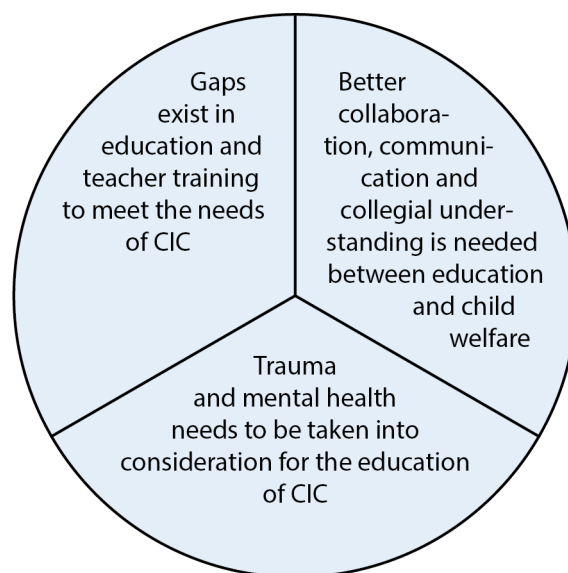
	• Growing recognition of the need for transformation
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Chapter 6: Repairing education

Repairing education was a theme that emerged from three theoretical codes presented from the study data. Participants' perceptions of the EN of CIC illustrated a need to address current gaps they were seeing within the education system and its relationship with the CW system. The first theoretical code that will be reviewed in this chapter will be gaps in supporting CIC exist in the education system and teacher training. The second theoretical code that will be explored will be better communication, collaboration and collegial understanding is needed between CW and education. The final theoretical code to be examined in this chapter is that supports are needed to assist with the trauma and potential mental health issues CIC may be experiencing.

Figure 12

Theoretical codes for repairing education



Theoretical code 4: Gaps in supporting the education of CIC exist in the education system and teacher training

Participants described an education system that knows CIC are at heightened risk, yet lacks the structures, preparation, and coordinated responses needed to support them. This theoretical code shows how silence, structural design, capacity gaps, and fragmented collaboration produce what many participants framed as predictable EN. At the same time, their accounts point toward what “repairing education” would require: explicit mandates, trauma- and culture-informed practice, shared responsibility, and leadership willing to challenge rigid, colonial logics.

Silence, awareness, and systemic non-responsiveness

Across roles and regions, participants emphasized that educational risk for CIC is widely recognized but rarely addressed in a systematic way. JAN noted that while schools focus on mental health, bullying, and culture, “nothing is specific for kids involved in child welfare... we’re not that targeted yet,” capturing how CIC remain invisible at the level of policy and planning. LIN similarly stated, “There are no programs focused on kids in care... nothing,” describing a landscape where concerns are diffuse rather than translated into targeted initiatives. For some, this silence felt increasingly urgent; LIS reflected, “Right now, I see for our kids things getting worse, not better... I’m hoping it’s just the result of the pandemic, but I’m not sure,” signalling that non-action is now actively deepening inequities. Staff often felt caught between awareness and powerlessness. As one educator put it, “We had requested a meeting... nothing happened. No one followed through,” reinforcing a sense that, despite concern, there are few levers inside the system to compel change.

System structures that set CIC up for failure

Participants repeatedly described structural and procedural barriers that undermine CIC long before individual effort can make a difference. ERI recounted being told by a worker, “‘I’m not registering that child for school because school is not really his focus right now,’” and stressed that this “removes all the options that we can provide as a school.” SOP described children being denied registration because “the school wanted permanent ward papers,” illustrating how CIC face extra scrutiny and delay simply to access a basic right to education. BLA observed that “delayed registration because forms aren’t filled... slows everything down.” Over time, these delays accumulate into missed opportunities and lost potential. PUR noted that sometimes schools only learn a child is in care when the family discloses it: “‘my kid’s in care’... then we’re at a road block.” In this context, participants described CIC “getting lost in the shuffle” (MAU) as no one system assumes responsibility, and effective support becomes dependent on extraordinary advocacy rather than guaranteed provision.

Educational gaps, inconsistencies, and systemic fragmentation

The consequences of these structures are visible in fragmented learning trajectories and low graduation success. SOP reflected bluntly that “kids are not graduating... an Indigenous child that’s in care... I haven’t seen too many in my career... that have actually finished.” BLA described children being “pushed through grades... [with] significant literacy and numeracy gaps,” and being placed “by birth year even if they haven’t been in school since the pandemic.” ELL highlighted how repeated moves between schools and divisions create cumulative curricular gaps: “if this is happening repeatedly... then there’s huge gaps in their learning. Huge.”

DAW noted that for their division, “low graduation rate tends to be our Indigenous population... we haven’t necessarily pulled data if these kids are in care,” emphasizing how CIC

are statistically hidden within broader categories, making their EN harder to track or repair. Participants also spoke about the “illusion” of support—policies or frameworks that exist on paper but are not integrated into practice. SOP described an intersectoral guide that “a lot of people don’t even know about... I’ve never seen it in a school where they’re referencing it or anything.” LIS noted a lack of information “who is their worker? Who do we contact? No information,” showing how policy tools fail to translate into coordinated care. For some, the overall impression was of a “revolving door... with no intervention... they’re left on their own to navigate all of that” (MIC), prompting calls for a structural overhaul rather than small adjustments.

Staff preparedness, bias, and professional capacity

Teachers, SSWs, and administrators frequently described feeling underprepared to support CIC within these complex structures. RUT recalled, “the first time I had a meeting... with a student who was in care, I didn’t really know what I was doing... you don’t know what you don’t know,” highlighting the gap between one-off training and the realities of practice. DAW argued that “trauma-informed care training for school staff... from the secretary to the custodian to the classroom teacher... absolutely everybody” is needed, but current training is uneven and sporadic.

SOP underscored the need to address beliefs and biases directly: “you can feel a certain way about a certain group of people, but you can’t act that way... more trauma-like lens thinking has to happen... you have to kind of assume everybody’s been through something.” LIS similarly noted that “teachers are not taught about colonialism unless they seek it out,” leaving staff to interpret complex behaviours through a middle-class, individualizing lens. When concerns are raised, there is little accountability or follow-up. As RUT put it, “It would help if

someone checked in and said, ‘Hey, have you done your part?’ ... I wouldn’t be offended,” suggesting that repairing education for CIC requires both capacity-building and structures that support and expect relational, trauma-informed practice.

Unequal access to skilled staff and regional resource disparities

Participants also highlighted stark regional differences in what support is even possible. MAU described students living very far from school and “kids [were] expected to take the transit bus... people that have low income can’t afford that... suggesting bus tickets was squashed because of the cost.” This points to geographic and economic barriers that are known but under-addressed. LIN contrasted urban and northern contexts, recalling that “up north half the class had FASD... we had to teach survival skills first,” yet staffing and resources did not match this level of need. PUR emphasized that “city is different from the reserve in how they deal with school... it’d be a completely different outcome for the child,” underscoring place-based inequity.

At the level of professional skill, RUT observed that “if I’m not skilled enough or the worker is not skilled enough... then that is to the detriment of the student,” while MIC noted that sponsored students in some programs receive intensive academic monitoring and tutoring, “whereas kids in care do not receive equivalent structured academic support.” For participants, repairing education requires acknowledging these uneven landscapes and investing in both staffing and competencies in communities most affected by colonial underfunding and structural inequality.

Leadership and organizational priorities shape outcomes

While many gaps are systemic, participants pointed to school and divisional leadership as crucial levers. MAU reflected that “we talk about attendance being important but we have one attendance person for the whole division,” noting that leadership rhetoric about priorities is not

matched with resources or concrete strategies. MIC argued that when “laws change on procedures on how to handle our children... if we’re going to do this at the school level, we should have our procedure,” suggesting that without an explicit mandate, CIC remain peripheral.

LIS described how different leadership styles changed school climate: “I’ve had administrators who are extremely rigid and unwavering, and I’ve seen the whole atmosphere of the school struggle... and others who say, ‘I trust you,’ and I see the school thrive.” SOP gave a concrete example of a principal who decided it was in a child’s best interest to stay at their current school until year-end, noting “some principals will do... end of a natural break... it’s usually the admin that decide.” These accounts show that while educators often feel constrained, leadership choices can either reproduce or interrupt patterns of neglect, especially when administrators explicitly name CIC as a priority and protect relational, flexible responses.

Rigidity in educational systems undermines belonging and success

Participants linked many harms to rigid, rule-based structures that take little account of trauma, culture, or instability. J observed that adolescents in care are often treated “like a mini adult... they’re pressured to be more responsible... more understanding, and that’s unfair because they’re still kids.” Participant RUT pointed out that expectations around time and attendance are grounded in specific cultural norms stating:

being timely, like showing up... when a bell rings, is not something that is a value in every family or culture... then they get consequences for it at school... missing out on learning time... and then down the line credits.

LIS similarly noted that “when educators are rigid and immovable... behaviours will continue or increase... including isolation and not feeling part of the classroom.” SOP described how School of Choice forms she submitted on behalf of CIC “were always denied... at the end of the day, it

was the school's decision... and that disrupts children in care big time," especially when moves are driven by placement changes rather than children's needs. Participants interpreted these patterns as embedded colonial logics—systems prioritizing order, compliance, and procedural fairness over belonging, regulation, and healing.

Absence of clinicians and specialized support

Many participants emphasized that teachers are being asked to carry complex mental health and trauma-related needs without adequate clinical support. BLA imagined what repair could look like: "To have clinicians in classrooms daily would be amazing... but we don't have them." DAW similarly pointed to "trauma-informed care training for school staff" and the need for knowledgeable clinicians who can support both students and educators. RUT described how even accessing basic information was difficult: "We asked clinicians how to access a database... we still couldn't figure it out," suggesting that clinical resources, where they exist, are often siloed and hard to mobilize. JAN recounted a student who became selectively mute over a summer: "there is no one there. It wasn't deemed a child protection matter... what resources are then available for them?" For participants, the absence or inaccessibility of clinicians was not just a resourcing issue but a structural gap that they felt left trauma unaddressed and pushed schools toward crisis response rather than sustained, reparative support.

Cultural supports missing in education

Repairing education for CIC, particularly Indigenous children, was also understood as a cultural project. BLA described having to "fight really hard to get Elders... I barely squeak by," highlighting how culture-based supports exist at the margins of budgets and timetables. SOP recalled working in a rural school where staff said, "'Why would we have to do that? They don't go to school here'... 'Why should we have to teach them?'" despite "a high percentage of foster

kids that go to the school,” capturing both resistance and a narrow view of responsibility for Indigenous education.

PUR described an Indigenous student in an urban school who “felt like she didn’t belong, because there were so many refugees, immigrants, newcomers... she was lost in translation... her culture was so lost in everyone else’s.” LIS worried that without deeper structural support, “people don’t have that knowledge of Indigenous pedagogy... they’re not working with Elders, knowledge keepers, community members... that’s when it becomes performative.” Participants’ accounts suggest that repairing education requires embedding Indigenous knowledges and relationships as core, not optional, features of schooling for CIC.

Fragmented collaboration and communication

Participants consistently described fragmented communication as a central mechanism through which CIC fall through the cracks. LIS noted that “we as educators... have very limited knowledge or background information as to whether they actually even are children in care... we generally don’t know about that,” while MAU pointed to “a lack of communication between CFS and student services... and then... to the classroom teacher.”

PUR wished that “CFS had a meeting every September... across the board... instead of us during the school year trying to find out information,” proposing a structural repair to the current patchwork. RUT highlighted role ambiguity: transition-to-adulthood processes “who should be taking the first step... I might miss a student.” LIS encapsulated this dynamic by describing “gaps, miscommunication and lack of team involvement, of system involvement, lack of working together as a system.” In practice, collaboration is often dependent on individual relationships and persistence and when those falter, CIC’s educational needs simply go unmet.

COVID-19 deepened pre-existing inequities

Finally, participants stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic intensified already existing gaps, making repair even more urgent. BLA observed that “some students registering now haven’t been in school since the pandemic... huge gaps academically and socially,” with CIC often among those most disconnected. LIN recalled a student for whom “COVID hit... she never went back for two years,” illustrating how fragile educational attachment can be for youth in care. PUR reflected that “COVID did such a number on everyone’s child... a lot of things went under the radar and missed,” especially for children in unstable or surveilled home environments. LIS argued that “because of the pandemic, many of our children in care did not receive the supports they needed... if you cut those supports in half, you need to increase them fourfold after,” reframing pandemic recovery as a reparative obligation rather than a simple return to “normal.”

Taken together, this theoretical code shows that repairing education for CIC is not simply a matter of individual goodwill or isolated interventions. Participants’ accounts reveal a system where silence, structural design, capacity gaps, and fragmented collaboration make EN predictable, even as staff express deep concern and commitment. At the same time, their narratives point toward concrete pathways for repair: targeted mandates for CIC, trauma-informed and culturally grounded training, regionally responsive resourcing, clinical and cultural supports, flexible and relational policies, and leadership that treats CIC’s educational success as a non-negotiable responsibility rather than an optional add-on.

Table 10

Categories and subcategories of gaps in supporting the education of CIC exist in teacher training and the education system code.

Categories	Subcategories
Silence, awareness and system non-responsiveness	• Widespread awareness but no action • Lack of initiatives or policy direction • Issue requires urgent attention • Staff frustration and sense of powerlessness
System structures that set CIC up for failure	• Delayed registration and administrative barriers • CIC becoming lost in systems; missed potential • Insufficient resources for a highly vulnerable population • Unrealistic expectations placed on children • No individual or system assuming responsibility • Advocacy required to address structural gaps
Educational gaps, inconsistencies and systemic fragmentation	• Low graduation success for CIC • Compartmentalized systems and missing information • Teachers lack time and resources • Illusion of support—policies without practice • Inclusion model not meeting needs; limits of EBP • Short-term focus hindering long-term progress • Inconsistent learning due to instability • Transportation barriers • Transitions between schools and grades; knowledge gaps • Lowered expectations • Education system needs structural overhaul
Staff preparedness, bias and professional capacity	• Staff feel unprepared to support CIC • Need for trauma-informed competence • Improved teacher training and professional education • Training to address values, beliefs, and implicit bias

	• Accountability for applying training • All staff should contribute to creating a welcoming, relational environment
Unequal access to skilled staff and regional resource disparities	• Impact of school location • Severe shortages in northern/remote regions • Variation in staff skill and preparedness • Dependence on staff diversity and cultural knowledge • Language as a barrier or support
Leadership and organizational outcomes shape outcomes	• Educational neglect of CIC requires explicit mandate • Principal leadership shapes school climate and response
Rigidity in educational systems undermines belonging and success	• Need for flexibility and relational understanding • Harmful effects of rigid rules and policies • Systemic colonial logics embedded in structure • Rigid systems disrupt belonging, regulation, and trust
Absence of clinicians and specialized support	• Teachers lack adequate clinical training • Clinicians provide essential guidance and intervention • Chronic shortages or delays in accessing clinical supports
Culture supports missing in education	• Need for funding for culture-based programming • Importance of integrating culture into curriculum • Staff unsupported in implementing culture-based practices
Fragmented collaboration and communication	• Lack of clarity about who should be involved • Communication breakdowns • Limited opportunities for cross-system collaboration • Cultural collaboration missing or inconsistent
COVID-19 deepened pre-existing inequities	• Disconnection from school and relationships • Negative effects on mental health • System still recovering; inconsistent learning and gaps expanded

Theoretical code 5: Better communication, collaboration and collegial understanding is needed between CW and education.

Building on the earlier identification of adversarial relationships between education and CW systems, this theoretical code captures participants' emphasis on the necessity of collaboration and communication to improve outcomes for CIC. Across the dataset, participants highlighted the transformative potential of inter-sectoral cooperation to replace misunderstanding and siloed practice with coordinated, informed, and child-centred responses. Participants consistently viewed collaboration and information sharing as essential for supporting CIC in educational settings. Collaboration was described not only as a mechanism for sharing information but as a means of fostering mutual understanding across systems that have historically operated in isolation. This theoretical code captures both sides of this dynamic: the entrenched barriers that impede cross-system collaboration and the conditions under which collaboration becomes a reparative force capable of transforming educational trajectories.

Collaboration as a bridge to shared understanding

Participants repeatedly returned to the idea that collaboration itself is a bridge—linking fragmented systems and creating a shared picture of the child's needs. At the most basic level, this required reliable information-sharing. RUT observed that “a lack of communication between schools and some workers... leads to them not being able to access everything that they could... to support them with their learning.” LIS similarly described “lack of communication between community partners... not working together” as a structural, not individual, problem. In these accounts, communication is not simply a courtesy but the gateway through which existing supports are either activated or left dormant.

Several participants emphasized the importance of intentional, coordinated meetings as concrete expressions of collaboration. BLA summarized this succinctly: “When we get the whole team together and on the same page, we see huge growth.” DAW offered a similar example, describing how collaboration “works really beautifully when we do have CFS workers, foster parents, school all come together for meetings... everybody takes a piece of the pie.” J extended this vision by imagining a standing team around each child in care: meetings with administration, the teacher, resource staff, and the worker, followed by monthly check-ins, “at least once a month.” These narratives demonstrate that when collaboration is operationalized through regular, multi-party meetings, education becomes a shared project rather than a set of isolated tasks.

At the same time, participants illustrated how the absence of shared understanding derails these efforts. ERI reflected that “I’m not sure that CFS workers entirely understand what school’s responsibility is... there’s maybe a disconnect between us understanding each other’s roles,” while JAN noted “a lack of communication between some of our community partners and the school” where professionals are “working together in our silos.” In this sense, collaboration is not just about frequency of contact but about developing a common language and mutual comprehension of each system’s mandate and constraints.

Importantly, several participants pointed out that children themselves are often excluded from these collaborative spaces. SOP explained that “the child is not usually present at those meetings... it’s usually amongst the caregivers,” and that until all the adults are coordinated, “the child can’t come to school.” Even when collaboration occurs, it may be about CIC rather than with them, reinforcing their marginalization. JAN put forward the question “Would this have looked different if there was more cultural understanding... if systems worked differently?” This

also hints at the potential role of Elders and Indigenous knowledge keepers in shaping more relational and culturally grounded collaborative spaces.

Finally, participants identified specific bridging roles that make this kind of collaboration more likely. DAW described a jointly funded CFS–school position where “that person kind of did bring both systems together,” translating expectations across contexts. ERI highlighted the role of SSWs, who “do a lot of work to pave the way for [CFS workers] to be accepted in schools, seen as safe people.” Together, these accounts show why “collaboration as a bridge to shared understanding” emerges as a key category: it encapsulates the conditions under which isolated systems begin to see the child’s situation as shared, relational, and collective.

CW workers as active partners in education

A second major pattern in the data concerns the role of CW workers as educational partners—or, more often, their conspicuous absence from that role. Participants were clear that CFS holds legal guardianship and significant power over decisions, yet workers are frequently missing from the everyday processes that shape educational trajectories. SOP explained that “workers rarely go to parent teacher... they don’t really know what’s going on with the kid,” pointing out that attendance at routine school events is more the exception than the rule. EMI imagined a very different baseline: “It would help if CFS would attend parent teacher... twice a year, come in, meet the kid’s teachers... not just when there’s a problem.” These comments illustrate why participants framed workers as potential partners whose engagement remains largely unrealized.

Educators also described the practical consequences when workers do not attend meetings. DAW stated that “most Child and Family Services workers will not come to school meetings,” with foster parents attending instead even though “they cannot be the decision

makers, because they're not the legal guardians." ELL added that obtaining necessary signatures can be very difficult as they "don't hear back [from workers]... it'll take them a while to get back to us, if at all... which is really difficult, because... we need signatures from them." In these stories, worker disengagement creates procedural dead-ends—plans stall, supports are delayed, and the child's right to education is effectively held hostage by non-response.

At the same time, participants offered powerful contrasts where workers did act as active partners and the results were transformative. ELL recounted that it "wasn't until he switched workers that we were able to get him into counseling and get him diagnosed and on medication... completely night and day now... we were able to get him into all the support systems that he needed." RUT described a family of three students in care whose success she attributed directly to consistent, engaged workers: "The reason they're succeeding is because you can see they have had excellent support... the worker was consistent throughout several years... there was an immediate follow up and action." When workers access progress, attend meetings, and respond quickly, they help activate tutoring, assessments, cultural supports, and stability. When they remain distant or unresponsive, schools are left in limbo, and children bear the consequences.

Steps Toward Effective Collaboration

A third category captures participants' reflections on how to move from fragmented, ad hoc collaboration toward more coherent and effective cross-system work. Rather than accepting fragmentation as inevitable, many participants articulated specific practices and changes they believed would repair relationships.

A central theme was the need for clearer roles and responsibilities. RUT explained that "I don't quite know what my role is, and what CFS or any other organization's role is... that makes

it harder for me to do the follow ups,” while LIN asked, “Who’s helping mom get them to school? We don’t want to call ANCR because we fear apprehension.” SOP similarly argued that “I shouldn’t be the first person to call the worker saying there’s a problem in the school... they should be involved more in the planning of the kids at school.” These narratives show that staff are willing to collaborate but are constrained by uncertainty about who is responsible for initiating contact, coordinating supports, or following up on plans.

Participants also stressed the importance of consistent communication practices and predictable routes for escalation. PUR described a clear protocol in her context: “If we can’t get a hold of the social worker, then we’ll tell the principal, and then the principal will make their call... If they want us on our A game then you need to be on your A game too.” By contrast, MIC highlighted the extra labour required when such structures are absent: “Most times [workers don’t respond]. So, what I usually do is I just physically leave my office and go down to their office... and I shouldn’t have to do that.” These accounts underline that effective collaboration is not just about goodwill rather, it depends on predictable pathways that do not rely on extraordinary effort by individual staff.

Finally, participants identified cross-system training and shared conceptual frameworks as essential steps. JAN suggested that “if there was... more understanding of the perspective that social workers have” feeling there needed to be more “trauma-informed, harm-reduction” this could help to move things in a different direction. MAU noted that presentations and informal efforts “never filter down,” acknowledging that relying on individual champions “is not terribly effective.” Collectively, these reflections demonstrate that collaboration improves when roles are clarified, communication routines are built in, and staff across systems share at least a basic understanding of each other’s mandates and approaches.

Mandated and structural collaboration

Participants were clear that collaboration cannot be sustained solely by individual initiative. This category captures their insistence that structural mandates, policies, and leadership actions are necessary to embed collaboration into the everyday functioning of systems. Several accounts pointed to the limitations of existing tools and policies when they lack clear operational instructions. RUT remarked that forms such as transition plans “don’t say who should be taking the first step... I’ve never had someone from external organizations call me saying, ‘This student is graduating; we haven’t made a plan.’” ERI likewise suggested that misunderstandings about mandates are rooted in the absence of structured mechanisms that clarify boundaries and responsibilities across systems stating “there’s maybe a disconnect between us understanding each other’s roles.”

Participants also called explicitly for government-level support and policy direction. LIS argued, “I think it has to start at the provincial level... a mandate saying you all need to work together, share information, come to the table and support these children in a meaningful way.” MAU proposed “regular, like annual... information sharing about CFS... what can be expected and what kids can get funded... maybe annual or twice-a-year training as a minimum.” SOP described the development of an intersectoral guide intended to standardize collaboration sharing it “was going to be presented to all the admins... they were going to be taught how to follow the guide and the new intake form.” These accounts show that participants do not see collaboration as a purely relational issue rather locate it within the realm of policy, mandate, and professional regulation.

Leadership practices were also understood as part of structural collaboration. ERI imagined ministers and agency leaders “having these conversations... that we see this modeled

for all the rest of us,” while J argued that, “At the division level, I think they need a person assigned to implementing that program... at the provincial level, you have to find dollars.” In other words, without visible cross-ministerial collaboration, dedicated roles, and resourcing, frontline efforts remain fragile and inconsistent. The cumulative effect of these narratives’ points beyond interpersonal goodwill to the need for formalized, accountable structures that make collaboration an expectation rather than an optional extra.

Benefits of collaboration

The final category synthesizes participants’ descriptions of what becomes possible when collaboration is present, coherent, and sustained. These accounts function as both evidence and aspiration, illuminating the reparative potential of cross-system work. Participants observed that when collaboration is strong, student outcomes change. BLA noted that “children are more regulated and successful when workers check in and therapy is in place.” ELL described a student who had not been in school since Grade 4 and, through coordinated efforts, “is now coming every day.” RUT reflected on a particularly positive case by saying, “This is how it’s supposed to work... things will not fall apart... because everybody is doing what they’re supposed to be doing, and helping each other out and collaborating.”

Collaboration also improved the quality of relationships among adults. SOP reported that when everyone finally comes to the table, “usually... it’s positive... it becomes less adversarial.” PUR similarly emphasized how monthly meetings with CFS emerged only “through request after request,” but once in place, “communication is a huge piece” that enables shared problem-solving. Participants stressed that effective collaboration is preventative, not merely reactive. JAN reflected that “if supports had been coordinated earlier... maybe things would have looked different,” explicitly linking early, coordinated responses to the possibility of avoiding later

crises. RUT described how consistent, rapid action by a stable worker prevented students from “hit[ting] rock bottom before they get support.”

Finally, collaboration was experienced as protective for professionals as well as for students. MIC noted that through collaborative work, “we end up developing some really good relationships with the homes... the parents trust us a little bit more.” DAW described feeling less adversarial and more supported when roles were clear and responsibility sharing that “everybody takes a piece of the pie of what they’re going to do... and then come back”. At the same time, participants acknowledged that these benefits were uneven, shaped by regional capacity and resources. EMI highlighted rural–urban distance as a barrier where schools are “chasing someone in the city,” showing that collaboration’s benefits are constrained by broader inequalities.

Taken together, these accounts demonstrate that when communication, collaboration, and collegial understanding are intentionally cultivated—not just hoped for—education can shift from a site of repeated neglect to a site of stability, relational safety, and possibility for CIC.

Table 11

Categories and subcategories for better communication, collaboration and collegial understanding is needed between CW and education code.

Categories	Subcategories
Collaboration as a bridge to shared understanding	• Importance of meaningful information-sharing • Value of coordinated meetings • Gaps in collaboration caused by ignorance or misunderstanding • CIC excluded from collaborative processes • Clarifying who should be involved in collaboration • Elders as facilitators of relational, cultural, and ethical space

	• Dedicated liaison roles as connectors • Role of school social workers in bridging systems
CW workers as active partners in education	• Accessing school progress • Participation in school meetings • Collaboration to obtain information and align support • Positive outcomes when workers are engaged and present
Steps toward effective collaboration	• Clarifying roles and responsibilities • Consistent communication practices • Cross-system training and understanding of one another's mandates
Mandated and structured collaboration	• Understanding boundaries and jurisdictional roles • Government-level support and policy clarification • Collaboration modeled at leadership and organizational levels
Benefits of collaboration	• Improved student outcomes • More positive and effective communication • Preventative, rather than reactive, collaboration • Professional dedication strengthened through teamwork • Regional differences showing uneven benefits

Theoretical code 6: Supports are needed to assist with the trauma and potential mental health issues CIC may be experiencing

All participants emphasized that the trauma and mental health challenges experienced by CIC must be central considerations in education. Participants described how CIC often arrive at school having experienced significant disruption, loss, and trauma, and that educational systems are not yet equipped to adequately meet these needs. Across interviews, participants emphasized that EN cannot be addressed through academic interventions alone; instead, it must be understood as intertwined with the pervasive trauma, instability, and mental health challenges that characterize many care journeys. Within this context, repairing education meant building

trauma-informed, relational, and well-resourced environments that could function as stabilizing “villages” around CIC, rather than expecting students in survival mode to simply adapt to rigid schooling norms.

Trauma as an inherent condition of being in care

Participants consistently described trauma not as an occasional feature of CIC’s lives but as the baseline condition shaping how they enter and move through school. BLA captured this succinctly: “Some children come completely dysregulated... carrying so much baggage.” Educators repeatedly linked this dysregulation to the combined effects of removal, multiple placements, and ongoing instability. SOP highlighted that “some kids are in four or five different schools a year... it just impacts the kids so much to switch schools... their only stability in their life... and we’re just ripping that from under them.” For many CIC, schooling is layered onto a life already shaped by grief, insecurity, and chronic uncertainty.

This context was frequently described as “survival mode.” MIC observed, “They’re always in crisis mode so they’re never going to learn. They’re just surviving... Education is not a priority in their lives right now, surviving is.” PUR extended this notion over the life course, explaining that:

moving from home to home, there’s no security in that... you begin to develop a sense of... ‘I’m just here for the time being’... once we turn 18, we’re kicked to the curb... if you can’t even get through grade nine... you know right away that once I turn 18, I’m on the streets.

Here, trauma is not only emotional but also structural, rooted in systems that communicate disposability and temporariness.

Participants also described how trauma compromises attention, memory, and concentration. JAN pointed to overlapping harms such as “domestic violence, separation, protection orders being violated,” noting that in these contexts “remote learning is not the best way to try and engage students, particularly when there’s other things going on.” LIN spoke of a student with “suicide attempts, cutting... huge mental health struggles,” emphasizing how such experiences make it difficult to engage in typical academic expectations. RUT similarly reflected that, because of trauma and instability, some students “didn’t have role models or the support network to build a routine... little progress becomes very frustrating.”

School itself can become a trigger when environments are not adapted. LIN noted, “When he didn’t like the teacher he became violent... fight or flight,” underscoring how seemingly minor conflicts can activate deeper trauma responses. J captured the emotional intensity following apprehension: “If anything, the first month, they are bad—they’re mad, they’re sad, they’re upset, they’re confused, they’re depressed—and that needs to be dealt with immediately.”

At the same time, participants highlighted the importance of rebuilding attachment and relational safety. PUR reflected on their own experience: “If I didn’t have that longevity [with my foster mom]... I wouldn’t be the person I am today... that attachment piece is so huge... if you don’t understand trauma and the brain and the connections... you’re going to have foundational breakdowns.” ERI similarly emphasized that many students are “just looking for attachment,” stressing that school can be a critical site where safe relationships are rebuilt if adults understand the impact of trauma on behaviour and learning.

Flexibility and trauma-informed educational approaches

Given this pervasive trauma, participants argued that repairing education requires flexible, trauma-informed approaches rather than rigid adherence to conventional classroom norms. BLA described intentionally “focus[ing] our first six weeks on how to do school—assume nothing, teach everything,” highlighting a pedagogical stance that recognizes disrupted school histories and explicitly teaches routines, regulation, and expectations. LIN similarly emphasized the need to scale expectations to capacity: “We pick our battles... maybe just one academic task a day,” presenting flexibility not as lowered standards but as a trauma-aligned pacing strategy.

Several educators described concrete adaptations to reduce sensory and relational triggers. EMI explained, “We don’t use the regular classroom lighting... we have a kitchen, we have a laundry, we have a bathroom... we have a futon you can go work on... just really trying to say to kids, ‘this is your home as much as it’s my home.’” For DAW, trauma-informed practice required both environmental awareness and universal design: “the bells in your school, that can be quite alarming for some kids... So looking at can we change our alarms? Just going around your school and just recognizing what are some of the things that could be triggers.” She argued that “trauma informed care... is good for everybody,” suggesting that universal trauma practice can benefit all students while particularly supporting CIC.

Other participants described flexible entry and attendance expectations as emerging responses. SOP explained that in her context “we do a lot of staggered entries for those children... they wouldn’t start off full time school, they would start off slow... based on the child’s needs... some of them are two hours long and some of them are 15 minutes.” Rather than interpreting limited attendance as disinterest, staggered entry recognizes regulation capacity as a

precondition for learning. LIS provided an example of shifting curriculum around one student's needs: after engaging a boy who was withdrawn through sage and drumming, she reflected, "Yes, we changed what the class was learning for one child, but one child is important... and all the other kids benefited." In each case, flexibility is framed as a form of care and inclusion.

Participants also emphasized the importance of embedding compassion and non-labelling into school culture. PUR described a trauma-informed stance as "we are the safe place." PUR went on to caution "we've got to be careful of labels as well... We don't label kids here, you're just a kid. You're not a bad kid it's just behaviours... they're living through stuff at home." RUT similarly argued that trauma training must be "ongoing... it's not a, I've learned this now and I can go on," calling for sustained reflection on how staff remain calm, non-reactive, and attuned "if something isn't going exactly how we think it should be going." These accounts depict trauma-informed education as a relational, ethical commitment rather than a one-off strategy.

Structural and material resources needed to support CIC

Participants stressed that trauma-informed intentions cannot be realized without adequate structural and material resources. BLA was clear: "Smaller class sizes... transportation... dedicated supports... more teachers." Large classes and overstretched staff were described as incompatible with the level of relational and regulatory support required. MAU offered a concrete example of how basic resources shape access, describing "one of the biggest pockets of low attendance" located in a Housing complex far from the high school, where transportation was an issue "people that have low income... can't afford [the bus]." In this context, transportation is not a minor logistical issue but a core trauma and attendance intervention.

Other participants linked promised but undelivered resources directly to EN. RUT recalled that "transportation was promised but didn't happen... then attendance continued not

going well,” while SOP noted that CFS could sometimes fund rides only “short term... they don’t have the resources or the funds to... it would be put on the foster parents.” These examples show how structural gaps in transportation undermine efforts to maintain continuity of schooling, especially when students are moved across catchments for safety or placement reasons.

Supports for families caring for CIC were also identified as essential resources. ERI stated,

I would love to see every foster family given the gamut of support... therapy, attachment training, respite support... that’s just not the reality right now... I’m probably most concerned about the lack of support that kinship care gets... they receive less money than foster parents who are not kin.

MIC similarly underscored the role of foster homes in daily regulation: “The foster homes themselves... they have to play a part... get their kids up in the morning to get them to school.”

LIS described how “I’ve seen grandparents from remote communities struggling to register their grandchildren... no translator, no supports... already they have a barrier.” While JAN echoed this noting that caregivers from remote communities often navigate registration and school meetings “with no translator, no supports... already they have a barrier.” Material resources—funding, transportation, translation, child care, respite—were presented as non-negotiable components of trauma-responsive education.

Cultural resources were also framed as structural necessities. PUR described her school as one where:

our culture is center to everything that we do... seven teachings... land based... cultural camp... that’s what we used to do... we still have hunters and we’re still trying to make sure we have hunters that grow up.

positioning cultural programming as a core support for regulation, identity, and hope rather than an enrichment add-on. MIR similarly argued that “unlimited funds for community involvement...dance...hockey...powwow dancing” would allow children to “understand how to be part of a team... If you’re a part of a community, you’ll want to learn more.” In these accounts, structural resources are the scaffolding that make trauma-aware practice possible.

Professional and clinical supports required

A further strand of this theoretical code focused on the shortage of professional and clinical supports to address trauma and mental health needs. BLA put it plainly: “You need social workers, psychologists, OTs in the classroom.” Participants described a persistent gap between the complexity of CIC’s needs and the available expertise in schools. LIN commented, “We need more social workers...[their] caseloads too high to help,” while SOP argued that “there needs to be more of it... more qualified people that are involved... in planning meetings, in support for students in the school.”

Delays in assessment and treatment were a recurring concern. EMI recounted, “We knew there was a cognitive case... it was a fight to get it reassessed... we fought for years to have it done... and in that time we were just trying to make do with what we had.” LIS similarly described “no assessment despite years in care... no worker follow-through.” MIC linked bureaucratic delay directly to missed treatment windows: “The children want to go on to treatment, but it takes so long for the paperwork... by the time you get the paperwork done, the kid has walked.” These narratives reinforce how systemic slowness in clinical pathways compounds trauma and undermines educational progress.

Participants also highlighted the critical role of school-based clinicians and therapists. ERI argued that having mental health professionals and attachment-informed supports embedded

in schools would provide “consistency... enrichment learning in a safe and supported way, to try and close some of those gaps.” PUR described how an on-site therapist allowed for immediate regulation support: “We also have our mental health therapist here... we can intervene right away, and we can help a child learn how to regulate themselves... it’s okay to not be okay... we try to give them those emotional regulation skills.” RUT emphasized that clinicians not only support students but also “support classroom teachers in delivery that is trying to be more inclusive and responsive to student needs.” Together, these accounts present professional supports as central to any effort to repair education for CIC.

Regional variation in support and cultural access

Participants reported significant regional differences in access to trauma-related supports and cultural programming. MAU described grandparents from remote communities “struggling to register their grandchildren... no translator, no supports,” illustrating how geographic and linguistic barriers intersect with trauma histories to compound educational exclusion. Several participants contrasted urban and non-urban supports. PUR observed that “city is different from the reserve... it’d be a completely different outcome for the child... community is different,” while BSK argued that First Nations homes and kinship placements often have better knowledge of adult education and community resources but face structural barriers: “At least a First Nations home would have some idea of what [adult ed program] is... but they make it almost impossible to be a First Nations foster parent.” These inequalities mean that access to trauma-responsive, culturally grounded supports depends heavily on where a child happens to live or be placed.

Creating a village of support around CIC

A core component of “repairing” education in this theoretical code was the idea of building a village of support around CIC as an interlocking network of caring adults and

community resources. BLA described the children who succeed as those “who access therapy, sports, elders, pet therapy—those are the ones who succeed,” emphasizing that success is relational and multi-systemic. DAW noted that CIC:

might not have a lot of safe adults in their life... so yeah, just having... a lens, as opposed to, like a consequence... opens up the ability to see that... there are safe and caring adults at the school that they can feel safe to share stuff with.

Participants repeatedly highlighted staff in schools as pivotal in the success of CIC. ERI framed school more broadly as an anchoring environment:

We in the school system firmly believe that attending school is the safest place for most students... routine, being around peers, access to clinicians, access to food... mental health benefits from positive routines and positive connections.

For this potential to be realized, however, the village must be intentional, coordinated, and well-resourced.

Participants linked this village explicitly to community and cultural supports. SOP lamented that “even in CFS, Indigenous agencies, the Elders are not at the table for planning... more ‘we’ll consult as needed’,” advocating for a standing team of Elders and knowledge keepers “that could be consulted... that would make our job, the clinical team, a lot easier.” RUT described a case where “very quickly, there was like an Elder that now became involved to ensure... more spiritual and mental health support,” framing Elders as both cultural and therapeutic resources. PUR’s earlier account of a school where culture is central, supported by on-site mental health services, illustrates what a more complete village could look like in practice.

Consistent, engaged contact from CW was also seen as part of this village. PUR described previously contrasted stories of abandonment with the protective effect that they experienced of long-term, reliable relationships. While MIC added to this arguing that “foster homes themselves... have to play a part,” suggesting that repairing education requires shared responsibility across school, CFS, caregivers, and community. In these narratives, trauma-responsive education is inseparable from building and sustaining a relational ecosystem around each child.

Accountability in education to address trauma and mental health needs

Finally, participants framed support for trauma and mental health as an ethical responsibility of education systems, not an optional add-on. LIS argued, “We need to ensure we meet the needs of our students and their families where they’re at... that’s the only way we’ll begin to see true healing in our society.” RUT emphasized that trauma learning for staff “has to be ongoing” calling for accountability mechanisms that ensure training translates into sustained practice.

Participants also drew attention to who gets seen and supported. BLA reflected, “We prioritize safety... but that means quiet kids with academic needs don’t get support,” highlighting how systems often respond to visible behavioural crises while neglecting internalized distress and learning gaps. RUT noted that “students are afraid that anything they say might be used against them... that they could get taken away,” suggesting that trauma-informed accountability must also involve dismantling fear and surveillance dynamics in schools. MIC warned that “we lose a lot of those opportune times to work with our children because of the paperwork,” advocating for prevention-focused redesign so supports are available when youth are ready.

Taken together, these accounts position accountability as multi-layered where staff must understand trauma and neurodevelopment, schools must embed mental health and relational safety into everyday practice, systems must extend and sustain resources rather than rely on short-term fixes and all actors must recognize CIC as rights-bearing learners whose healing and education are inseparable. Within this theoretical code, repairing education for CIC means building trauma-aware environments, resourcing them adequately, and holding systems responsible for creating the conditions in which CIC can learn, belong, and heal.

Table 12

Categories and subcategories for supports are needed to assist with the trauma and potential mental health issues CIC may be experiencing

Categories	Subcategories
Trauma as an inherent condition of being in care	• Instability, placement changes, and trauma histories • Living in survival mode • Academics deprioritized due to emotional dysregulation • Trauma inhibits learning and concentration • School as a trigger (sensory, relational, cultural triggers) • Development of unhealthy coping mechanisms • Healing attachment and rebuilding relational safety
Flexibility and trauma-informed educational approaches	• Adapting classrooms to reduce triggers • Adapting learning and instruction • Trying new and responsive strategies • Embedding compassion into learning environments
Structural and material resources needed to support CIC	• Smaller class sizes • Adequate funding • Dedicated supports specifically for CIC • Transportation as an essential resource • Supports for families caring for CIC • Cultural resources and programming

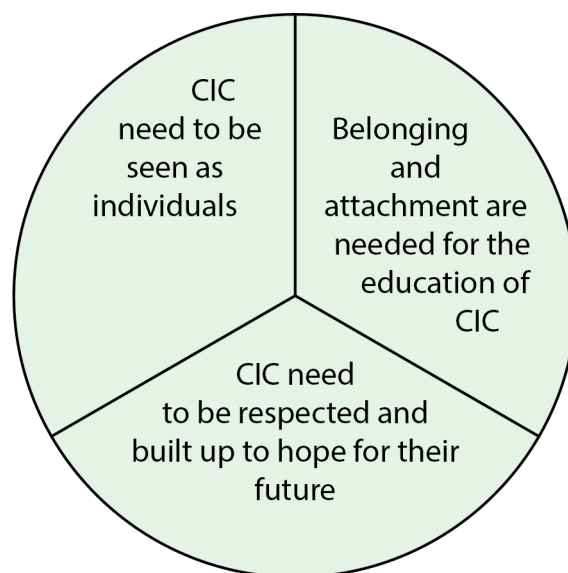
	• Learning from or modeling after other effective programs
Professional and clinical supports needed	• Access to trained professionals • Clinicians and school social workers as essential • Education assistants as regulated support • Staff to support transitions between placements and schools • Tutoring and targeted academic support
Regional variation in support and cultural access	• Differences in cultural programming across regions • Differences in community engagement • Urban/rural/northern variation in resources and capacity
Creating a village of support around CIC	• Building trust among all adults involved • Expectation of collaboration across systems • Addressing insufficient supports • Coordinating and enlisting community resources • Family-based programming • Consistent contact and engagement from CW • Government involvement in system-wide support
Accountability in education to address trauma and mental health needs	• Staff understanding trauma and neurodevelopment • Avoiding stigma toward CIC • Access to mental health resources • Embedding mental health into school environments • Extending available resources • Compassion as a professional stance • Educational accountability to meet holistic needs • Prevention-focused approaches

Chapter 7: Healing and preparing CIC for education

This chapter focuses on areas that participants felt needed to be addressed or that were being addressed to support CIC. The final theme that emerged from the study data includes healing and preparing CIC for education. This theme was the result of three theoretical codes that will be outlined throughout this chapter (see Figure 13 below). The first theoretical code that will be discussed in this chapter is, children need to be seen as individuals supports are needed to assist with the trauma and potential mental health issues CIC may be experiencing. The second theoretical code that will be explored includes belonging and attachment are important, and CIC need to be provided with opportunities to connect. The final theoretical code to be overviewed in this chapter will be the acknowledgement that CIC need to be shown respect and have their self-esteem built up to hope for their future to foster dreaming and self-worth.

Figure 13

Theoretical codes for healing education



Theoretical code 7: Children need to be heard and seen as individuals

Participants discussed how a “one-size-fits-all” approach in education does not meet the needs of CIC. Many emphasized the importance of recognizing each child’s individuality—their interests, strengths, and life experiences—as a foundation for supporting success and self-worth. Seeing and hearing CIC as individuals required flexibility, compassion, and a shift in how schools approach learning and care. Across the dataset, participants repeatedly asserted that healing within education begins when CIC are recognized, listened to, and treated as individuals. The following sections explore these dynamics across four major categories.

Structural barriers to seeing the individual child

Participants consistently described structural, procedural, and resource-based barriers that make it difficult for educators and CW staff to truly know the children they support. These barriers limit the possibility of individualized, trauma-responsive practice, often reducing children to files, numbers, or behavioural descriptors rather than complex beings with histories and needs. A recurring issue was the pervasive lack of time and resources. MIR captured this bluntly: “There’s just too many kids.” Without consistent presence from those who know the child’s background, individualized understanding becomes nearly impossible. RUT described the instructional implications: “...if you feel like you have not enough time and resources to do that, then you have to kind of teach... to the herd... you can’t always meet the ones that are struggling.” This inability to tailor attention is not a matter of individual neglect but the predictable outcome of overloaded systems.

These structural barriers extend into the processes schools use to intake and track students. BLA noted that “Forms come blank... we don’t know their history, needs, fears,” explaining that children often arrive with little or no information about their learning profile,

trauma history, or support needs. MAU echoed this, sharing that after each placement change, “those kids are often almost starting over again... the school team doesn’t know them... they have to do some preliminary testing,” meaning valuable time is spent reconstructing a profile already known elsewhere.

Participants also described standardized practices that inadvertently erase individuality. MIR shared a striking example: “One of my children came home with all of her papers marked with the number 24... I said, ‘Why is your name 24?’... ‘That’s just how teachers do it.’ I said no... ‘Your name is your name.’” What appears to be a simple classroom management technique—numbering work—becomes, for CIC, a symbolic erasure echoing colonial legacies of dehumanization.

Other routine school practices similarly overlook complexity. PUR cautioned against activities like family trees: “You’re not going to do a family tree when you have maybe three students in there who are in a foster home... that sends confusion... ‘What about my family?’” Such activities assume normative family structures, unintentionally marginalizing those whose lives do not fit prescriptive templates. ELL described how administrative rules affect belonging: “If we’re taking pictures... telling them ‘you have to leave the classroom’... it definitely leaves them feeling left out.” These exclusion practices, often linked to privacy policies, communicate to children that they are liabilities rather than full participants in communal classroom life.

Collectively, these barriers shed light on how systems designed around standardization and efficiency struggle to recognize the specificity of children’s lives. Healing education, participants suggest, begins by dismantling or reimagining these very structures.

Harm of universalized assumptions

If structural barriers create conditions for anonymity, universalized assumptions reinforce it by treating CIC as a homogenous group expected to conform to norms that do not reflect their lived realities. Participants described these assumptions as harmful, unrealistic, and often retraumatizing. A key universal assumption is that the same rules or expectations should apply to all children. LIN highlighted this when she described a child “expected to do regular curriculum with an age-seven assessment,” revealing the deep mismatch between standardized grade-level expectations and individual developmental profiles. Another example came from her observation: “We expect them to sit and read 15 minutes...they can’t hold attention that long,” underscoring that rigid instructional routines fail to account for trauma and neurodiversity. BSK critiqued these forms of universalism explicitly: “...they keep applying things to people that it’s just not working... if it worked for one child, it must work for all... they keep us further oppressed.” Her language of oppression is notable—it situates universalism not simply as an oversight but as a reproducer of harm within colonial systems.

Universal expectations also surface through authority-centered interactions. DAW recounted an interaction in which a youth greeted a staff member informally: “‘what’s up, bro?’...And she just says... ‘I’m not your bro. That’s the way you address your friend. I am not your friend...You will address me as madam, so and so.’ That kid is seeking connection, right?” Here, relational bids are reframed as disrespect under standardized behavioural norms. JAN offered another example of how universal assumptions map onto decision-making: “If there had been a parent who felt comfortable advocating for her kids... would this decision have been made without ever having had a conversation with the guardian first?” The system assumes all

families have equal capacity to advocate, failing to see the structural silencing of caregivers—especially in Indigenous and rural communities.

Universal approaches also set CIC up to fail academically. EMI challenged disciplinary adherence to the integrity of grades: “Ask yourself, is grade 10 science going to make a difference to them when they’re 24?... If they promise to never take chemistry again, could we maybe give them this credit?” Her provocation sheds light on the rigidity of academic purity standards that do little to support long-term wellbeing of marginalized youth.

MIR summarized the issue of universal assumptions most poignantly: “Every single child in care’s life is completely different.” Healing, from this perspective, requires abandoning sameness as the default orientation and instead embracing multiplicity.

Seeing the child as a person

While structural barriers and universal assumptions obscure individuality, participants described powerful practices that counteract these forces—practices that allow children to be seen, heard, and valued as whole people. These relational gestures form the heart of healing education. Seeing the child begins with relational curiosity. BLA described her school’s approach: “We ask what they love—Lego, art... we try to build connection right away.” Such early inquiries signal to students that their interests matter, forming entry points for trust and regulation. MIL described how individualized connection unfolds through shared activity: “I would spend that extra time with those boys... doing an activity... is like therapy in a way... giving that one-on-one time... is extremely important.”

Participants described individualized compassion as a counterbalance to deficit narratives. PUR exemplified this stance: “I will never label a kid bad.” By contextualizing behaviour rather than pathologizing it, teachers preserve a child’s dignity and reinforce their

personhood. Other participants highlighted the importance of everyday micro-practices. DAW shared a story about a teacher greeting a late student gently: “One knock is enough. Thank you for coming in... come on in.” In this moment, lateness is not a disciplinary issue but an opportunity for connection. DAW described soft starts in similar terms: “Do you want to make friendship bracelets?... color?... Lego?... How was your night?” These rituals position teachers as attuned, responsive adults who welcome the child rather than react to their behaviour.

Seeing the child also involves understanding their emotional rhythms. MIL observed, “Mondays are really, really hard for them... Fridays are really hard too... some of the students don’t want to go home.” Such observations frame school as an emotional landscape shaped by weekend instability or impending returns to unsafe environments. Educators also emphasized the importance of seeing strengths rather than only struggles. MAU described resisting deficit narratives: “When I look at the student, I see a whole bunch of really positive things.” Similarly, EMI reflected on former students who “stick with you,” noting, “I never think it’s a fault of the kid... sometimes it’s not the right time, not the right place.” These statements reject moral judgments and instead hold space for complexity and growth.

Crucially, being seen means having an advocate. As JAN put it, “Knowing that they have an advocate... somebody who is their cheerleader... who has their back, no matter what. I think that’s huge.” Advocacy is not merely procedural but relational as it tells a child that they are worth protecting, supporting, and investing in. Together, these practices demonstrate that healing begins not with programs but with people who take the time to know children as individuals and respond to their full humanity.

Shifting education toward individualization

Participants emphasized that seeing the child as an individual must extend beyond relational gestures into systemic and pedagogical change. Healing education requires structural flexibility, professional learning, and resource allocation that supports individualized pathways and developmental pacing. One strand of this shift involves professional learning. MIR advocated for teacher preparation rooted in trauma understanding:

A mental health course for pre-service teachers would be a really great thing... They need to understand more about what life is like for a child in care... and their own triggers... so they don't unintentionally create bad situations.

Without this foundational training, teachers may inadvertently reenact harm through rigid or reactive practices.

Another strand involves matching needs to resources. SOP described planning processes where teams align referrals and supports with the child's context: "...we would determine whether an OT referral, psychology... social work referral... was appropriate for that child... see how we can best support that child." ERI described creative use of supports: "We had one student whose EBD funded staff member took them to therapy... schools are getting much better at thinking outside the classroom box around this." These examples demonstrate individualized resource deployment rather than generic programming.

Flexibility in instructional approaches also emerged as essential. ERI explained that individualized scheduling is common and necessary: "Students coming for one hour a day, 10 minutes a day if that's all they can handle" they talked about the school team's ability to "tailor their school experience" and even when necessary "focus on regulation and relationship first." MIR suggested tutoring, homework clubs, or consultation staff as ways to personalize academic

support: “My kids don’t want to learn from me... it would be nice to have access to tutors... homework clubs.” These proposals underscore the need for options that reflect diverse learning trajectories.

Participants also argued for meeting children where they are developmentally and emotionally. PUR described the value of honest, developmentally attuned conversations: “Being as real and open with the kids to help them understand their situation.” MIR emphasized that acute trauma fundamentally alters readiness: “There’s no point... you cannot learn if you’re experiencing acute trauma.” Therefore, individualized pathways—such as land-based learning, alternative credits, or mature diplomas—are framed as equitable, not exceptional. RUT extended this idea, arguing for structural flexibility: “Teachers being trained... to look at education in a different way... offering flexibility in their classrooms. Valuing different credits for a variety of different things.” Similarly, BSK demanded non-stigmatizing differentiation: “We have to put them in at what level they’re at... not a ‘dummy room’... a class respected by all students.” Individualization, in this view, must be dignity-affirming.

Finally, participants described individualization as inherently hopeful. J argued that healing through education enables a shift from survival to thriving: “We need to teach them how to excel, not just how to survive... success in your education is what’s going to break the cycle of being in care.” Education becomes not only a site of learning but a pathway toward restored agency.

This theoretical code demonstrates that healing in education requires more than trauma-informed awareness rather, an active, relational, and structural commitment to seeing CIC as whole, unique human beings. Participants highlighted how structural barriers and universalized assumptions impede this work, while relational practices and individualized pedagogical shifts

offer pathways toward healing. To really hear and see CIC is to challenge the very systems that obscure them, creating educational environments where belonging, dignity, and individualized support are not privileges but entitlements.

Table 13

Categories and subcategories of children need to be heard and seen as individuals code.

Categories	Subcategories (nodes)
Structural barriers to seeing the individual child	• Lack of time and resources to know the individual child • Standardized practices that overlook individuality
Harm of universalized assumptions	• Universal approaches do not work for CIC • Standard expectations set CIC up to fail
Seeing the child as a person	• Individualized compassion and support • Seeing and valuing the individual • Educational experiences as individualized journeys • Meeting individual needs within peer contexts
Shifting education toward individualization	• Professional learning needed to understand individual needs • Matching needs to appropriate resources • Flexibility in instructional and structural approaches • Meeting children where they are developmentally, emotionally, and academically

Theoretical code 8: Belonging and attachment are important and CIC need to be provided opportunities to connect

All participants emphasized that belonging and attachment were essential to the educational and social success of CIC. Participants emphasized that learning cannot meaningfully begin until young people experience safety, connection, and a sense of mattering in at least one domain of their lives. They also shared a collective belief that both the CW and

education systems have a responsibility to provide meaningful opportunities for CIC to form and maintain connections—with peers, educators, caregivers, and their wider communities. They noted that because CIC often experience instability and disrupted attachments, a sense of belonging should be prioritized within educational settings. Rather than treating belonging as an “extra,” participants framed it as the core mechanism through which education either reproduces harm or becomes a site of healing.

Belonging as the foundation for academic success

Participants consistently described belonging and attachment as prerequisites to academic engagement. BLA was explicit: “Children need belonging and regulation before academics... without belonging, they can’t attend to academics.” PUR framed it similarly: “If you cannot satisfy or fulfill that basic need of just belonging, you’re not going to want to excel... nothing else really matters if you don’t have a sense of belonging.” Motivation and persistence in school were understood as emerging from relational safety rather than from individual grit.

Belonging was closely tied to consistent relationships. LIN explained, “It took months to build that relationship... that’s our buy-in factor.” Once that trust was established, “when kids feel they have a consistent person in their life, when they feel successful, then they’ll stay engaged.” In contrast, JAN described how “members of the school team had started to make some inroads with the family, and then to suddenly not have those supports with no explanation why...” Abrupt removal of trusted adults cut off emerging attachment and signaled that connection in school is fragile and conditional.

Several participants highlighted how belonging can persist even when formal enrolment ends. SOP recalled children who “would go back to that school and just hang out...because they had built those attachments and those bonds... even if it was a minimal attachment, they still felt

a sense of belonging.” For ERI, reconnecting young people to school began with relationship rather than curriculum: “Our whole goal is just to get the children in the door at school and connect to them positively” they discussed how a student who had gone years without attending was now “coming every day... going from non-learner, non-reader, non-attender to doing all of those things.”

Participants also pointed to education–CW collaboration as a mechanism for preserving attachment. ERI described families who avoided apprehension because of coordinated supports: “Children who were out of the home are able to remain in their home because everybody’s working together.” In these examples, school-based belonging is intertwined with the stability of home and care networks.

School as a safe and healing space

For many CIC, school was described as the most predictable or safe environment in their lives. BLA noted that “school is often the safest place... especially around holidays,” when family conflict may intensify. PUR presented school as a sanctuary: “We are the safe place... we are the point of contact... Yeah, we do have kids acting out. So what, they’re in their safe place. Let them act it out... this is their safe zone.” This sense of safety was grounded in relationships with caring adults. MIC explained, “My goal... was to have children feel safe in my room... my classroom is always going to be a safe place for them. My door is never closed.” She saw that students “attend more regularly with me... they keep coming back... they know this is a safe place for them.” J reminded that attachment often includes non-instructional staff: “Sometimes even the custodian... gives them a smile and feeling of safety... they’ll attach themselves to them.”

MIR captured students' attachment to school as refuge: "They find out there's a PD day and they're like, 'What? There's no school on Friday. No, I want to come to school'... that is their safe place." In the context of healing education, these everyday experiences of safety and welcome are not peripheral rather, they are central interventions in children's lives.

Addressing instability to strengthen attachment. Participants were clear that the healing potential of school is constantly undermined by instability and mobility. BLA described students who had been "moved 7, 8, 9 times before coming to us." SOP similarly noted that "some kids are in four or five different schools a year... [school] is their only stability in their life... and we're just ripping that from under them." Every move resets the slow process of building trust. Participant RUT contrasted youth in stable placements with those who move frequently while stating:

Most students that I've worked with... they've been kind of in stable homes... one student... has moved around. And I think that's also one of the reasons... she hasn't been able to be successful in completing her studies and in finding that routine and structure. LIN shared the story of a young person who "was in 27 homes... everyone gave up on her." In both accounts, instability is not just logistical disruption but accumulated evidence to children that adults and institutions will not stay. System decisions often fail to prioritize attachment. EMI observed that "the decision there is being made because of space and overall risk, not because of what a kid needs." For these participants, disengagement and high-risk behaviour are the predictable outcomes of long-term relational neglect.

Fostering a sense of belonging in everyday school life. Against this backdrop, participants described specific practices through which schools actively nurture belonging. BLA spoke of "welcoming back with open arms after dysregulation" and approaching students with a

“clean slate every day,” refusing to let crises define a child. LIN summarized her school’s stance simply: “We surround them with attention and love.” Participant DAW highlighted the role of relational routines, such as soft starts stating:

A soft start for every single student in the morning... time for you to be with your friends... teachers need to be in that classroom and engaging with those students and finding out, ‘How was your night? How was your weekend?’

Over time, DAW reported seeing a shift: “They no longer run out of the classroom to go see a guidance counselor. They ran to their classroom teacher because they had built that relationship.” Attachment moved from episodic crisis support to daily connection.

Belonging also involved visibility and representation. ELL described how students take “pride in their work and” which they felt helped facilitate “ownership of the space... like this is our classroom and our hallway and our work.” ELL went on to reflect on how CIC are not allowed to have their work posted at times stating “they’re already taken from their family, right? Like, let’s take that sense of belonging and remove it from both spheres.” Excluding CIC from displays or photos was experienced as another layer of erasure.

Cultural spaces were central to belonging for Indigenous youth in care. BSK praised “granny rooms, Indigenous Education rooms... that’s a sense of belonging... they can come together, feel like they belong in the school.” ELL noted that students “have a sense of peace and calm when they go and see this Elder... the bonding really, that’s what it’s about, is bonding.” PUR described a school where “our culture is center.” Through these practices, school becomes a place where identity is affirmed rather than erased.

Peer and sibling connections also fostered belonging. DAW observed integrated classrooms where “the ‘jock’ is supporting that kid who has behavioural needs... ‘that’s my

buddy from my class.” ELL shared that a junior high student would visit her younger sister’s classroom to help with schoolwork—“some things would just click”—even though “they can’t go home at the end of the day and see each other.” School here becomes a shared home where sibling relationships can be maintained.

Community integration as an extension of belonging. Participants stressed that belonging must extend into community life. BLA noted that it takes multiple members of a community to “build confidence and belonging,” and that children who accessed these supports “are the ones who succeed.” EMI invoked the language of the village: “It takes all of us. It takes the extracurriculars, it takes the school, it takes the families.” MIR argued that experiences beyond the classroom are fundamental to identity: “That is what makes a person a human. Is going on trips with their family, is doing quality time, is being in sports... our kids don’t get to find passion because none of that is funded.”

ELL described how community-school programs like FAST families help caregivers and children “learn and grow together ... a year later... they’re still doing the things we did with them... cooking together,” creating relational continuity that lasts long after the program ends. ERI highlighted how coordinated supports across school and community can even prevent apprehension, noting that “children who were out of the home are able to remain in their home because everybody’s working together.” For PUR, community itself is a protective structure: “In the community, everyone knows everyone... we keep the kids at home. That’s the mandate here,” underscoring how local relational networks anchor belonging for CIC. Yet MIR pointed to the persistent gap in access to community life, lamenting the lack of funding for activities which she sees as crucial because “when we give our kids these activities, they understand how to be part of a team.” Together, these accounts frame community integration as an important

dimension of belonging—one that sustains families, prevents disruption, and provides CIC with the relational and cultural experiences necessary to feel connected and valued.

The role of foster parents and the costs of attachment disruption. Caregivers were described as pivotal to whether CIC felt like guests or family members. EMI highlighted kinship care: “It makes you less of a guest in a home and more someone who feels like they have a belonging and a place there... that innate sense of safety.” BSK drew on teepee teachings: “When my boys came into my house and sat on the couch, I welcomed them into my teepee... I never called them foster kids; I called them my boys.”

Others pointed to harmful practices. BLA observed that “some foster parents don’t want to pick up dysregulated kids... see it as inconvenience.” PUR recounted that “foster parents shouldn’t be able to tell the child that they can’t come home at the end of the day, but this is happening,” and warned that “if foster parents can’t deal with behavioral issues... the placement breaks... you’re on that rotating door of homes.” For her, “Are they going to graduate school when they're shuffled around? Nope, probably not.”

Effects of attachment disruption on educational outcomes. Across accounts, participants linked instability, lost attachments, and poor educational outcomes. J described a youth who “would go to school but sit in the bathroom all day... refused to connect with anybody.” RUT explained that when a young person does not feel they have a community “education becomes the least of your worries.” Taken together, these findings show that healing education for CIC depends on sustained opportunities to connect—to teachers, peers, Elders, caregivers, and community. Belonging and attachment are not nice extras rather they are the primary conditions through which CIC move from survival toward learning and from isolation toward imagining a future.

BLA summarized that “children need belonging and regulation before academics” and that “without belonging, they can’t attend to academics.” PUR echoed this, arguing that “if you cannot satisfy or fulfill that basic need of just belonging, you’re not going to want to excel... nothing else really matters if you don’t have a sense of belonging.” Others showed how chronic instability compounds this risk with MAU linked attachment “to their positive connections to school teams” to school becoming “more challenging for students that are in care.” SOP similarly observed that once attachments fracture, young people often “just stop caring, because they felt like people around them stopped caring.” Together these accounts reinforce that disrupted attachment and instability may actively erode the cognitive, emotional, and relational conditions required for CIC to engage in schooling at all.

Table 14

Belonging and attachment are important and CIC need to be provided opportunities to connect

Categories	Subcategories
Belonging as the foundation for academic success	• Creating consistency in school relationships and routines • Providing stability and emotional support • Meeting attachment needs as a prerequisite for learning • Maintaining ongoing school connection despite instability • Education–CW collaboration to support belonging
School as a safe space and healing space	• Presence of caring, reliable adults • School as a safe escape from instability or harm
Addressing instability to strengthen attachment	• Addressing high transiency • Establishing consistency and predictability • Fostering safety and security • Prioritizing the child’s best interests in placement and schooling decisions

Fostering a sense of belonging in every day school life	• Welcoming children genuinely • Building healthy, trusting relationships • Ensuring representation so children see themselves in school spaces • Connecting children with peers • Inclusion in all school contexts • Creating intentional opportunities for belonging • School responsibility to cultivate belonging • Bridging children to cultural supports and identity-affirming experiences
Community integration as an extension of belonging	• Removing barriers to community involvement • Importance of connection to broader community • Schools collaborating with families and community supports
The role of foster parents in attachment and belonging	• Addressing situations where foster parents act against the child's best interests • Building supportive relationships with foster parents • Strengthening foster parent capacity • Setting realistic expectations for foster parents
Effects of attachment disruption on educational outcomes	• Instability disrupting attachment • Negative impacts on academics and attendance • Lower likelihood of graduation • Loss of consistent support systems • Lack of attachment leading to othering and marginalization

Theoretical code 9: CIC need to be shown respect and have their self-esteem built up to hope for their future

This theoretical code captures how healing education for CIC depends on rebuilding dignity and self-belief in the aftermath of relational and structural harm. Participants repeatedly emphasized that without a felt sense of respect and worth—communicated through everyday

interactions, opportunities, and expectations—children struggle to imagine any hopeful future for themselves. In this way, respect and self-esteem are not peripheral “extras,” but core conditions through which CIC can begin to engage with school as a site of possibility rather than another arena of judgment and failure.

Respect as the foundation for confidence and self-worth. Participants emphasized that respect is the necessary starting point for any educational or healing work with CIC. Respect was described not simply as kindness, but as recognizing CIC as whole human beings shaped by harm rather than blame. As BLA stated, “It’s not a child’s fault if they’re struggling... they’ve been hurt by adults supposedly safe.” Several linked low self-confidence directly to past trauma. LIN noted, “She’s been through so much... she needs support, not blame.”

Respect was also described as a matter of everyday perceptions and interactions. BSK challenged the way Indigenous youth are read through racialized stereotypes: “what we really need is respect... respect comes before love.” For her, respect meant dismantling automatic suspicion and deficit assumptions. Others stressed that respect must be communicated explicitly. PUR described telling students, “We tell them, none of this is your fault... you’re not a bad kid,” to counter internalized narratives of being “trouble.” RUT extended the notion of respect to basic resources, arguing that having to repeatedly ask for necessities “kind of dehumanizes you... when you have to ask for things that are essential... they might then stop asking.”

Across accounts, low confidence was seen as a predictable outcome of such histories. BSK observed, “A lot of our kids think that adults don’t care about them. They don’t see respect anywhere, so why would they respect themselves?” In this study, respect functioned as a precondition for hope: without feeling valued and seen, young people struggled to imagine a different future for themselves.

Building children up through strength-based support. Participants described a range of strength-based practices aimed at actively rebuilding self-esteem and agency. These strategies were not abstract rather, they were grounded in very small, concrete acts of recognition. BSK recounted telling an adult learner, “Oh, are you ever smart,” and noticing that “she started to cry. I don’t think anybody ever told her she was smart.” She went on to say, “Sometimes nobody has ever told them they’re good at anything... we have to show them what they’re good at, help them see it.” For BSK, naming intelligence and capacity became a form of decolonial repair.

Strength-based support also involved drawing attention to growth rather than only to crisis and failure. BLA emphasized “showing them growth over time... building confidence... helps them succeed,” and linked this directly to academic engagement. LIS similarly stressed the importance of consistency and encouragement: “Consistency, stability, knowing they have a cheerleader,” are what help CIC stay engaged and begin to believe in themselves. JAN framed mentorship as a key vehicle for this, explaining that “the more role models and mentoring that would be available for kids in care... just because this might be part of your story does not mean that this is the path that you’re going to follow.” Mentorship, in her account, helps young people re-story their lives.

Participants also described building children up by giving them tools rather than simply telling them to do better. PUR explained, “We try to build them back up... give them emotional regulation skills... teach them how to protect themselves.” RUT described transition planning as an opportunity to scaffold independence: identifying “the skills that the student is still needing to build in order to... succeed with whatever they want to do after high school and how to make it happen.” MIC highlighted the importance of listening and emotional validation: “Sitting down,

listening to them, letting them talk... let them get angry... they don't have all the vocabulary to express how they're feeling," but being heard is part of rebuilding worth.

Strength-based support was not limited to academic arenas. MIR described choosing joy-based activities over more pressure describing how if required to choose as CFS will "pay for a tutor, or we'll pay for your daughter to go into gymnastics. She's going to gymnastics because she has enough struggle at school already... Go to gymnastics. Find some joy." For her, experiencing competence and enjoyment in community spaces was part of protecting self-esteem. ELL spoke similarly about enrichment opportunities like science workshops "building that self-efficacy... they start to turn their lives around." Across these accounts, participants framed strength-based work as a slow, relational process through which CIC are invited to discover talents, experience success, and reclaim a sense of possibility.

Staff belief and high-expectations pedagogy. Alongside respect and strength-based support, educator belief emerged as a powerful mechanism for hope. Participants argued that CIC notice when adults genuinely believe in their potential—and respond to that belief. MIC observed, "one of the biggest lessons a four-year-old has ever taught me was respect," and described "going down to their eye level and speaking with them in a calm, reassuring voice." Treating children as extremely important communicated worth and expectation simultaneously. Participant BSK articulated a philosophy of high expectations grounded in relationship stating:

If they say, 'I want to be an auto mechanic,' I say, 'That's great, let me help you'... if they say, 'I want to be a marine biologist,' I say, 'Okay, let me help you.'... we have to introduce them to bigger dreams and say, you can be anything you want to be.

She added, "If they've never heard someone say, 'You can do it,' why would they think they can?" Similarly, MIL reflected on working with boys who carry "I'm not smart" narratives and

insisted, “you can be so much more than what your situation is,” even as he struggled with how to shift that mindset.

For EMI, belief meant refusing to accept minimal benchmarks as success: “Not successful because we got them to attend three days this month. No—successful as in, they’re getting out the door in grade 12 with a positive impression of the education system.” She linked this to holding a vision for young people’s futures: “They need a path... a plan for how we’re going to get to grade 12 or post secondary... feeling like the system was there for them, not there to see their deficits.” RUT, in her role, imagined planning that explicitly identified “what are some of the skills that the student is still needing to build... and how to make it happen,” connecting belief to concrete support.

Participants also emphasized that high expectations must be delivered with empathy. BSK cautioned, “We need to challenge them, but with love. Expectations don’t mean anything without care behind them. Kids know when you believe in them. When someone believes in you, you try harder.” ERI described staff in her context who “are willing to bend over backwards to support kids... they could be 10% meeting them and staff will go the extra mile.” For PUR, advocacy itself communicated belief: “Their confidence is up... knowing we advocate for him... that makes him feel safe.”

In these accounts, staff belief counteracts the internalized messaging that CIC are “less than” or destined to fail. High-expectations pedagogy, when combined with relational care, operates as a key mechanism of healing education helping young people imagine themselves as capable, worthy of investment, and able to shape their own futures.

Colonial context shaping aspirations and hope. Participants were clear that respect, strength-based practice, and high expectations do not occur in a vacuum. They are enacted within

a colonial context that has systematically undermined Indigenous families' confidence and opportunity. BLA located current struggles within "intergenerational trauma... oppressive policies... families struggling just to get files closed," suggesting that families are often in survival mode, with little space left to nurture long-term educational aspirations.

Several participants explicitly named colonialism as a project of producing self-hatred and hopelessness. BSK recalled being told by an Elder that "the worst thing the government did to our people was they made them hate ourselves... we have to get them secure within themselves." She added, "Our people were told for so long that they're nothing... so now our kids grow up thinking they can't be anything." For her, rebuilding self-esteem is inherently political: "Colonialism took away our confidence. Now we need to rebuild it piece by piece." MIC described the visible consequences of this history: "We're losing too many young people, either through suicide, addictions" they also provided an example "a 15-year-old who has no will to do anything because they know they're not going to have any rewards at the end." PUR linked this directly to policy, emphasizing that "kids catch up real darn quick if given another opportunity... but they get kicked out at 18... it's not fair," pointing to age-out rules as another colonial mechanism that curtails hope.

Participants also highlighted that hope must be fostered in the face of ongoing structural barriers. MIR asked bluntly, "How are my kids... ever going to get ahead?... the colonialism question is just like, it's too big. It almost seems like, what do you even do?" Yet she and others still articulated a commitment to breaking cycles. EMI observed, "I think there's a will for change that's bigger than when I was growing up... my hope is that... in my career... some of this changes." LIS stressed the need to "start looking at the individual child and quit looking at them as a number," tying hope to a move away from bureaucratic, dehumanizing treatment.

Across these narratives, healing education was understood as both relational and structural. Participants' efforts to show respect, build self-esteem, and hold hopeful visions for CIC were framed as acts of resistance against a colonial system that has repeatedly sent the opposite message.

Table 15

CIC need to be shown respect and have their self-esteem built up to hope for their future.

Categories	Subcategories
Respect as the foundation for confidence and self-worth	• Low confidence resulting from past experiences • CIC require respect to feel valued and seen
Building children up through strength-based support	• Building hope and self-esteem • Mentorship as relational guidance • Providing tools for independence and future success • Helping children find their voice
Staff belief and high-expectations pedagogy	• Holding a vision for children's potential • High expectations delivered with empathy • Motivation and encouragement • Engaging CIC in learning through belief and relationship
Colonial context shaping aspirations and hope	• Oppressive policies limiting opportunity • Intergenerational trauma and loss of hope • Facilitating hope in the face of colonial barriers • Breaking cycles of marginalization

Chapter 8: Discussion: presenting a transformative theory

This exploratory study set out to address the research question: How can Indigenous education teams and school social workers' perceptions contribute to building an ecology of knowledges that helps understand the EN of CIC? This study explored the educational experiences of CIC, uncovering the complex ways in which structural, relational, and pedagogical factors intersect to shape learning, wellbeing, and agency. Three overarching themes emerged here including colonization, neoliberalism, and power, repairing education, and healing education. Embedded within these themes are nine theoretical categories, collectively illustrating the mechanisms through which education can either perpetuate harm or function as a transformative space for CIC. Collectively, these themes and codes (depicted in Table 16) foreground the critical structural lens of the study, illustrating how historical and contemporary power dynamics produce EN, highlighting the urgent need for systemic reflection and change.

Table 16

Theme	Theoretical code
Colonization, neoliberalism and power	1. Managerialism and capitalism have rendered a value for service model resulting in CIC being commodified, staff being overworked and professional relationships being adversarial 2. CIC are left powerless with little to no control over their lives 3. Colonization shapes educational neglect
Repairing education	4. Gaps exist in education and teacher training to address the needs of CIC 5. Better communication and collaboration is needed between CW and education 6. Supports are needed to address trauma and mental health for CIC
Healing education	7. Children need to be seen as individuals 8. Belonging and attachment are important for the education of CIC in both community and school 9. Children need to be respected and built up to have hope for their future

Findings from the study indicate that the educational needs of CIC are not consistently being met, highlighting systemic gaps in both CW and education. These findings point to the emergence of a systemic space of limbo for CIC within the education system, reflecting the ways in which structural and institutional dynamics can leave children falling through the cracks and going unnoticed. As one participant noted, “It’s just like we’re setting them up for failure” (MIC2). This sentiment underscores the urgent need for coordinated, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed approaches that bridge the divide between CW and educational systems, ensuring that CIC are supported rather than marginalized.

The methodology and methods selected required the researcher to immerse themselves in the data to produce an outcome that would not have been possible from another methodological standpoint. The ecology of knowledges that will be presented below is derived from study findings and presented within the context of educational needs and child development perspectives from DCN and Indigenous knowledges. This knowledge will be presented through a CTC analysis to situate the knowledges within the Canadian context. The legacy of colonization (Sinclair, 2017), combined with the current neoliberal educational context, further entrenches inequities and marginalization, leaving children with minimal control over their own learning and life trajectories (Janzen, 2023).

Building on these themes, the discussion will introduce a theory grounded in the data, presenting an overview of the proposed Transformative Care-Education Theory (TCET), which seeks to conceptualize how educational and CW systems can collaboratively foster the wellbeing, agency, and resilience of CIC. The chapter will also summarize a reflective analysis of the study’s strengths and limitations, highlighting methodological considerations. By situating

the findings within both theoretical and practical frameworks, this discussion aims to bridge empirical evidence with actionable insights for transforming educational experiences for CIC.

Colonization, neoliberalism, and power

The first theme being discussed underscores the structural and historical forces shaping CIC experiences. As depicted in Table 16, the first theoretical code highlights the ways in which managerialism and capitalism have commodified CIC and overburdened staff, producing adversarial relational dynamics. The findings illustrate how historical and structural forces shape the experiences of CIC, with neoliberal managerialism commodifying children, overburdening staff, and prioritizing efficiency over relational care (Lynch, 2014; Martins, 2022). Children's agency is often diminished, reflecting Freire's (1970) concept of oppressed populations, while colonial legacies perpetuate systemic inequities, particularly for Indigenous children affected by intergenerational trauma (Browne, 2017; Sinclair, 2017; Smith, L., 2012, Smith, J., 2023). As one participant noted, "It's like they expect parents to just fit the system, instead of the system adapting to the family" (LIS3), highlighting bureaucratic rigidity. Neoliberal cost-cutting and scarce resources further shift practitioners' focus from relational support to record-keeping and accountability, reinforcing inequities (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2015; Dunlop, 2018; MacKinnon, 2024). Overall, historical oppression, systemic bureaucracy, and managerial imperatives converge to shape CIC's educational and social experiences.

Managerialism and capitalism: children as commodities

Participants described how neoliberal and managerial logics have transformed education and CW into systems preoccupied with efficiency, accountability, and metrics, often at the expense of relational care. Several recounted experiences of bureaucratic overload and cost-cutting that reduced meaningful support for CIC: "Everybody is so concerned about filling in

forms... but while they're doing that, what's happening with the children?" (MIC2). Another reflected, "When I first started... [CIC] had really robust access to counselling supports... then about five, six years ago, restructuring meant they weren't able to access those things anymore" (BLA7). These accounts reveal how neoliberalism commodifies childhood, positioning CIC as "units of service" rather than learners with rights and needs (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2015, Martins, 2022).

Participants further noted that managerial systems often foster adversarial relationships between educators and CW workers stating, "The relationship is often adversarial from the start... that makes it very hard to work together and support kids" (ERI6) yet also expressed empathy for colleagues facing similar institutional pressures: "I just feel for them" (BLA19). Overall, the findings suggest that practitioners operate under the dual strain of meeting institutional demands while striving to preserve care-centered, culturally responsive practices, reflecting the moral and emotional tensions of neoliberal governance in education (Allen-Meares, 2013, Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2015).

Colonization: historical and ongoing impacts on education of CIC

A second core finding highlights the enduring influence of colonization on the educational and care experiences of CIC, particularly Indigenous children. Participants emphasized that the intergenerational trauma of residential schools continues to shape distrust and disconnection in contemporary education: "I think the family history and the distrust of the educational system plays a very big role... they're not going to be open to really being themselves" (RUT17); "My husband was last generation residential school...it's only two generations ago...They don't have trust in the school" (BSK5). Others noted how colonial legacies remain embedded within schooling itself: "At its core, Western education is a colonial

system” (EMI19); “We know that the majority of children in care are Indigenous... clearly ... we are still a system of colonization that is not meeting their needs” (ERI22).

These reflections align with scholarship identifying education as a key site of ongoing colonial reproduction and epistemic violence (Collins, 2009, Forcione et al., 2023). For Manitoba, roughly 90% of CIC are Indigenous as discussed in chapter two. These demographic considerations are particularly consequential, contributing to persistent inequities and some of the lowest graduation rates in the province. Addressing EN therefore requires more than policy reform; it demands a transformative approach that exposes and disrupts colonial power relations, making space for Indigenous knowledges, relationality, and self-determination within education. Without this transformation, EN persists as both an outcome and a symptom of ongoing colonial and neoliberal systems.

Powerlessness: CIC rendered invisible

A third key finding reveals the profound sense of powerlessness experienced by CIC within intersecting systems of colonization and neoliberal managerialism. Participants described how children are often denied agency in decisions affecting their education and lives reporting a student shared: “I don’t know, whenever they decide, I guess” (MIC17). Another educator reflected on bureaucratic detachment, stating, “By the time it gets up to managers and their managers, that child becomes just a number” (LIS7).

This exclusion not only reinforces feelings of invisibility but also reflects deeper structural dynamics in which neoliberal systems prioritize measurement and efficiency (Allen-Meares, 2013), while colonial systems perpetuate control and assimilation (Haight et al., 2022, Sinclair, 2017). As one participant summarized, “You’re put into a system... none of it is including you” (J17). Within these overlapping logics, CIC are simultaneously commodified and

marginalized objects of policy rather than subjects of care. Addressing this disempowerment requires reconfiguring educational relationships to center children's voices, agency, and self-determination. Without such transformation, educational structures risk perpetuating neglect rather than fostering healing, leaving CIC constrained within the very systems designed to support them.

Repairing education

The study revealed persistent educational gaps for CIC, compounded by limited teacher preparedness and insufficient trauma-informed support. Repairing education requires collaboration, communication, and professional understanding, alongside targeted supports for mental health and wellbeing. As a result, the second theme reflects the practical and relational mechanisms through which education can counteract systemic harm. Theoretical code four from Table 16 highlights the persistent gaps in teacher preparation and educational provision for CIC, echoing research demonstrating the inadequacy of standard teacher training to meet the needs of vulnerable populations (Jopling & Zimmerman, 2023). The fifth and sixth theoretical codes emphasize the need for trauma-informed support and enhanced collaboration among educators, carers, and professionals. These findings align with the growing literature on trauma-informed pedagogy and relational approaches to care in education that are calling for universal and organizational level approaches (Culshaw, 2024, Koslouski et al., 2023, Watson & Astor, 2025).

The theme of repairing education captures participants' shared recognition that systemic disconnection, institutional rigidity, and unaddressed trauma have contributed to the EN of CIC. Participants described how fragmented agency and interagency relationships, inconsistent support, and insufficient teacher preparation perpetuate cycles of marginalization, leaving many CIC without the stable, caring educational environments necessary for learning and healing.

Together, these categories illustrate the ways in which education can become a site of repair — a place where systemic harms are addressed through care-informed, relational, and trauma-sensitive practices.

Gaps in education and teacher training

Participants identified persistent systemic gaps in the educational provision and teacher preparation for CIC, expressing frustration that these inequities remain unaddressed despite long-standing awareness. “I think we’re aware there’s an issue... but I don’t think we’ve explicitly identified what the issues are” (BLA28). Many described moral distress stating, “We’re letting a lot of young kids down” (MIL17) and attributed ongoing challenges to policy ambiguity and neoliberal governance that prioritize efficiency over equity (Allen-Meares, 2013, Browne, 2017).

Educators frequently felt unprepared to meet the complex needs of CIC. “The first time I worked with a student in care, I didn’t really know what I was doing” (RUT9) and critiqued the superficial implementation of trauma-informed training, noting that “Nothing ever gets followed up with” (DAW8). Such patterns illustrate what Noddings (1984) describes as a failure of institutional care ethics, where care is valued rhetorically but rarely operationalized in practice. Regional inequities further compounded these issues, with northern educators citing limited access to assessments and credits, and urban schools reporting resource shortages that left CIC “at a disadvantage academically” (LIN9–10). Participants emphasized that sustained leadership and accountability are essential to address these structural inequities, and to create inclusive, trauma-informed school cultures (Garcia et al., 2023, Stokes & Brunzell, 2020).

Collaboration, communication, and collegial understanding

The findings highlight significant fractures between education and CW systems, with strained communication and adversarial relationships directly undermining support for CIC.

Participants described systemic barriers that led to unmet needs and delayed interventions, increasing risks for vulnerable learners. When collaboration occurred, outcomes improved: “Once they switched workers... we were able to get them into counseling... to meet their potential as a learner” (ELL7). This coincides with the findings from Jopling & Zimmerman (2023) highlighting the importance of relationships which also translates to professional relationships.

Professional dissonance, inconsistent accountability, and procedural confusion were illustrated by concerns such as, “Do CFS workers understand our responsibility to children and all the options?” (ERI6)—reflect tensions documented in previous research (Jackson & Cameron, 2014; MacKinnon, 2024). Despite frustration, participants expressed empathy for overburdened CW staff, noting burnout and turnover: “Workers that have been around for a while... [have] more burnout” (JAN16). These insights underscore the need for systemic coordination, structured liaison roles, and clearer communication to bridge gaps and enhance support for CIC (Jopling & Zimmerman, 2023).

Trauma and mental health supports for CIC

Participants highlighted that being in care is inherently linked to trauma, with children experiencing loss, instability, and disrupted attachments: “Kids shut down very quickly... because they are in crisis mode. So, they don’t trust very well” (MIC8). This aligns with research showing that chronic stress and attachment disruption may impede self-regulation and learning (Hambrick et al., 2019, Perry, 2009, van der Kolk, 2014). Educators noted that many school environments are overwhelming and “not trauma sensitive” (ERI21), emphasizing the need for safe, flexible, and responsive learning spaces. Strategies were reported such as soft starts and non-traditional classroom setups “we don’t have desks... it doesn’t feel so institutional”

(EMI19). These reflect trauma-informed approaches that foreground connection, regulation, and empowerment (Jopling & Zimmerman, 2023).

Participants also stressed structural deficits in mental health supports, noting, “Giving that one-on-one time with the student... is extremely important. But there’s only one of me” (MIL3) and advocated for school-based clinicians and multidisciplinary teams consistent with wraparound care models (Ding et al., 2023, Singstad et al., 2024). Finally, the abrupt termination of support at age 18 was described as profoundly harmful: “There needs to be more in place because if you’re emotionally stunted... how can you hold down a job?” (PUR20), highlighting the necessity of continuity in educational and therapeutic support beyond formal care (Sielaty et al., 2025).

COVID-19

Additionally of note when considering repairing education is the residual harm that lingers from the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants highlighted how this worsened many existing challenges, with some CIC disconnected from school for years: “we still have children...who haven’t been in school since the pandemic started” (BLA17). Mental health and support services were strained, and education is still “recovering” (LIN4), with one participant warning, “things [are] getting worse and not better” (LIS20). Participants strongly advocated for more collaboration between schools, CW, clinicians, and Indigenous community members to better support CIC recover from the effects of COVID-19 “I would love to see...CFS system, school system, clinicians, Elders...all coming together” (LIS15).

Healing education

The third theme situates education as a site of transformative potential. Theoretical codes seven to nine (in Table 16) highlight the critical importance of belonging, recognition, and

respect for CIC. These findings resonate strongly with Noddings' (1984) ethics of care, which emphasizes relational attentiveness, validation, and reciprocity, and with Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory, which positions critical reflection and empowerment as central to meaningful learning. This theme encapsulates participants' vision of education not merely as academic instruction, but as a deeply human and relational process capable of mending the fractures created by trauma, instability, and colonization. Healing, in this context, is both a personal and systemic undertaking—requiring that schools become spaces where belonging, respect, and hope are intentionally cultivated.

Participants described education as more than academic instruction, framing it as a relational process capable of addressing trauma, instability, and colonial legacies. Through consistent relationships, cultural connection, and genuine recognition, schools can help children rediscover trust, self-worth, and possibility, acting as a bridge between care and learning. As one participant highlighted, transformative education involves acts of love and courage (Freire, 1970), underscoring that healing requires both personal and systemic commitment. Collectively, these insights illustrate how belonging and respect function as essential conditions for learning and recovery, reinforcing education's restorative and moral potential.

Belonging and attachment as foundations for healing and learning

The findings highlight that belonging and attachment are central to the wellbeing and educational success of CIC. Participants emphasized that connection to peers, adults, culture, and community forms the foundation of engagement. Conversely, disrupted attachments and frequent placement changes create barriers to learning. As one noted, "If you cannot satisfy or fulfill that basic need of just belonging, you're not going to want to excel" (PUR1). This aligns with Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory and Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, positioning belonging as

essential for development and self-actualization, and with research showing relational continuity predicts resilience and academic persistence (Myat Zaw, 2022).

Participants described schools as potential “safe spaces,” (BLA26) where consistent, caring relationships and culturally responsive practices such as engagement with Elders and cultural mentors enhanced attachment and learning. Overall, belonging is both relational and cultural, representing a critical condition for educational engagement, healing, and resilience.

Seeing and Hearing Children as Individuals

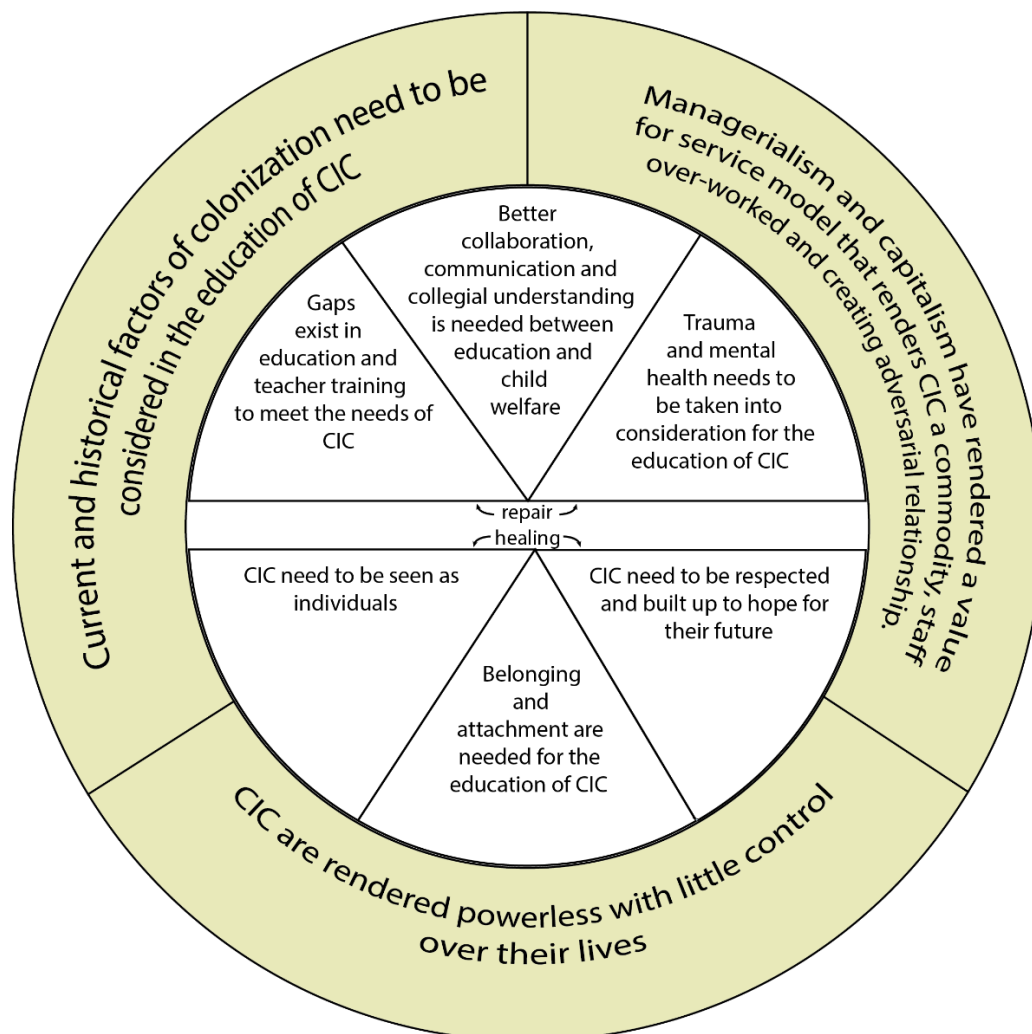
Participants consistently called for CIC to be seen and understood as individuals, not as a homogenous group defined by their care status. “We have to teach the education system that our needs are different, and our needs are individual” (BSK6). Many described how standardized education systems often overlook children’s unique experiences, histories, and capacities, resulting in alienation and disengagement. As one participant observed, “There’s no one right way to teach a child literacy and numeracy, because something different is going to work for every child” (LIS7). This critique reflects broader calls within educational research for personalized and relational pedagogies (Frøyland, 2024), and challenges deficit-based approaches that frame CIC primarily through risk or pathology.

Participants emphasized that authentic engagement begins with knowing each child personally— “You’ve got to actually talk to the child” (BSK10). Participants stressed that educators must be flexible and empathetic, meeting students where they are at rather than imposing rigid academic standards. This finding advances existing literature by highlighting how relational attunement where educators recognize and respond to each child’s individual circumstances is not only an ethical practice but a pedagogical necessity in trauma-affected contexts (Joplin & Zimmerman, 2023).

Respect, empowerment, and hope as transformative forces

Respect and empowerment emerged as core conditions of healing education. Participants viewed respect not merely as courtesy but as the moral foundation of all interactions with CIC. “If we don’t have respect for one another, it’s going to fail” (BSK13). They emphasized that CIC need to experience respect from others and develop self-respect to envision positive futures: “We have to first of all build their self-esteem, so they can have dreams” (BSK8). These insights resonate with empowerment frameworks in education (Freire, 1970; Paterson-Young, 2024) that view respect, dialogue, and hope as transformative acts.

For CIC, empowerment involves rebuilding a sense of agency and possibility often eroded by trauma and systemic disempowerment (Heyman et al., 2024). Participants observed that many children “don’t think they can achieve anything” (BSK2). Educators saw belief in students’ potential as both an ethical stance and a pedagogical practice: “It takes having a vision, and a vision that sees these kids successful as grade 12 graduates” (EMI26). This aligns with Freire’s (1970) notion of education as the practice of freedom, where belief and dialogue are central to transformation. Participants also linked empowerment to combating colonial legacies of dispossession and deficit: “We have to work twice as hard as any other nation in school to make them feel like they can dream. They can have a dream” (BSK9).

Figure 14*The wheel of theoretical codes****Connecting to research***

From the findings theoretical codes can be seen as interacting with each other through an ongoing process as depicted in Figure 14 above. Barriers (depicted on the outer ring in Figure 15) have been presented within education and CW that make it challenging to move forward to a transformative space for CIC to succeed in their educational endeavours. Many scholars are exploring the effects of neoliberalism on education. For example, through a neoliberal lens Janzen & Herrerger (2023) critique the policy of education identifying how this lens constructs

the “student” as an object with their value attributable to the monetary value they bring to the school site. Most other studies focus on the loss of expertise and resources through neoliberalism like that of Tucker & Fushell (2021). Neoliberalism is not alone in creating barriers as has been previously discussed colonization is alive and well in education and works to delegitimize Indigenous knowledges (Louie, 2024).

Currently, there are many authors discussing ways towards resurgence and reclaiming Indigenous pedagogies within education from the perspectives of their nations’. George (2019) calls for decolonizing education and then “Indigenizing” pedagogy through incorporating Indigenous knowledges and teachings to circumvent the compartmentalized colonial approach. The importance of incorporating considerations of land, belonging and place in education have also been put forward (King et al., 2024) Finally, Louie (2024) talks about avoiding the pitfalls of devaluing peripheral knowledge systems and moving toward reclamation and reconciliation with empathy and honour.

The findings of this study illuminate areas to explore for repair and healing as well as areas that coincide with what is in Indigenous scholarship and DCN research findings. According to Heck et al. (2023) and Pazderka et al. (2014) learning as early as possible is seen as important for children. This is in keeping with research on neuroplasticity that also recommends prevention be started as early as possible to coincide with optimal plasticity in the brain (Herzberg et al., 2025). Perceptions of participants seem to feel that there are gaps currently in education where CIC are not able to engage in the same learning opportunities as their peers.

Additionally, findings bring to light the trauma and mental health issues that CIC have to cope with while trying to obtain an education. As discussed in chapter three CIC have experienced some form of trauma and therefore mental health needs to be considered. These

earlier experiences can have a detrimental effect on CIC's educational success (Myat Zaw, 2022). These experiences also place CIC at risk of poor mental and physical health outcomes (Cohodes, 2021, Hambrick et al., 2019, Huffman et al., 2023). Participants in the study felt adequate resources were not available in schools and the CW system to address the trauma and mental health concerns of CIC.

Findings in DCN studies have identified supportive relationships as a protective factor for ACEs and stressors (Cox et al., 2021, Hambrick et al., 2018, Magnuson & Schindler, 2019, Miskolczi et al., 2019, Yu et al., 2024). Many Indigenous scholars also speak to how they believe relationship is central to identity (Barker, 2021, Best Start, 2011, Makokis, 2021, Pazderka et al., 2014). Despite this knowledge the study participants consistently reported gaps in the connection of CIC to their schools and communities. This often occurred through bureaucratic policies, moves and lack of funding to participate in community and school events.

Experiences of isolation are something to pay attention to post COVID-19 pandemic. As noted above participants discussed the importance of belonging for CIC within schools, homes and communities. Recent research in neuroscience has been looking at the effects of isolation on development and the brain. Isolation has been linked to socioemotional and behavioural challenges in early life (Xiong et al., 2023) and elevated rates of depression and anxiety in later life (Almeida et al., 2021, Xiong et al., 2023).

Almeida et al. (2021) has brought forward the increased need for attention in this area after the COVID-19 pandemic as isolation was experienced by a majority of the population. Additionally, Doheny et al. (2023) looked at remote communication (social media, online video games, virtual meetings) may lead to incomplete sensory processing and less activation of mirror neurons. This is another consideration post-pandemic. Isolation has also been found to increase

the release of the stress hormone cortisol and may have a negative effect on cognitive development and physical health (Almeida et al., 2021). Lastly, social rejection was found to have a potential link to lower levels of gray matter in regions associated with social anxiety and rejection sensitivity (Bach et al., 2019, Quadt et al., 2020).

Participants echoed their concerns over the lack of belonging and potential isolation of CIC with one commenting: “when kids aren't connected, when their needs aren't being met. Obviously, we see that in behavioural issues, but for sure, we see it in academic performance” (MAU7). Another participant echoed this “I saw lots of high-risk behaviour... they’re moving and then all of a sudden they're running away... getting into drugs... they just stop caring, because they felt like people around them stopped caring” (SOP9). Another participant brought up the dangers and vulnerabilities with loss of support they have seen for CIC:

They’re removed from their family circle. They have really no social supports when they're here. So, they latch on to whoever, and most times that whoever person doesn't have very good activities. And then the next thing you know, our children are involved with gangs and drugs and alcohol... it's a vicious circle. (MIC5)

Finally, one participant discussed isolation bringing “that sense of being different, right, or maybe not belonging... I'm not the same, or I'm less than” (JAN).

There was a lot of reference by participants to culture being healing and examples provided of land-based learning. Land-based learning is an educational approach that centers Indigenous understandings of the land connecting learners directly with the land through relationship, experience, and responsibility (Styres, 2017). Some Indigenous scholars believe that connection to the land and an individual’s environment is important for identity and overall wellbeing (Ciofalo et al., 2022, Pazderka et al., 2014). Advances in environmental neuroscience

also make these connections citing some benefits in attention, memory, and mental health. Cognition, specifically attention and memory as well as affect were found to improve with exposure to nature in the form of walking through a natural landscape for participants experiencing depression (Berman et al., 2012). Visuospatial memory was found to improve as well for participants after spending time in nature when they were tasked with completing a memory task (Gonzalez-Espinar et al., 2023). Further of note, the sounds of nature alone have also been found to improve cognition (Van Hedger et al., 2019).

It is important to remember and value the individuality of children (Cox et al., 2021). However, Hambrick et al. (2018) identifies how CW usually focuses on universal approaches due to cost constraints. This is unfortunate as Barker (2021) argues taking time to see things through the perspective of a child can be beneficial. Overall, participant responses appear to coincide more with how Hambrick et al. (2018) saw CW interventions tending to be universal.

Evaluation and limitations

Strengths

This study demonstrates several notable strengths that enhance its methodological integrity, ethical rigor, and theoretical contribution. Foremost, its alignment with critical and constructivist paradigms provides a robust foundation for exploring the under-researched and politically sensitive issue of EN among CIC. The use of CCGT aligned well with the study's aim, as it foregrounds reflexivity, multiple realities, and participant voice—key elements for interrogating power relations and systemic oppression within education systems (Charmaz, 2014; Hadley, 2017). The study's intentional inclusion of diverse perspectives reflects a commitment to fostering an ecology of knowledges, thereby advancing epistemic justice and challenging dominant narratives that often marginalize certain experiences (Zaidi, 2022; Levitt, 2021).

Ethical and reflexive practices constitute another significant strength. Given the sensitivity of the topic and potential professional risks for participants, the study's adherence to ethical standards helped to minimize these risks. Reflexivity was deeply embedded throughout the research process through the use of a research journal, member checking, and analytic memoing, all of which enhanced the credibility and confirmability of the findings (Ahmed, 2024; Charmaz, 2014). Additionally, the researcher's professional positioning was transparently acknowledged and critically examined, fostering trustworthiness and authenticity in interpretation.

Methodologically, the sampling strategies employed demonstrate both rigor and responsiveness. The study's transition from purposive to theoretical sampling ensured that data collection remained iterative and grounded in emerging insights (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Birks et al., 2019). Particular care was taken to avoid tokenism in the inclusion of Indigenous participants, reinforcing both ethical integrity and respect for Indigenous methodologies (Baird, 2021). In addition, multiple measures were implemented to enhance data trustworthiness, including peer debriefing, the maintenance of an audit trail, thick description, and extensive memoing—all consistent with established qualitative research standards (Charmaz, 2017).

Finally, the study's emphasis on transferability rather than generalizability aligns with the principles of grounded theory and ensures that findings are meaningfully situated within their social and geographic context (Charmaz, 2014). Together, these strengths position the study as a methodologically sound and ethically grounded inquiry that not only contributes novel theoretical insights but also offers practical relevance for improving educational equity and systemic responsiveness for CIC.

Limitations

Despite the study's efforts to include diverse perspectives, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample was demographically limited, with 88.3% of participants equally identifying as either White/Caucasian or Indigenous. While Indigenous perspectives were intentionally sought, the underrepresentation of other racialized groups constrains the broader applicability of the findings, as experiences of educational marginalization may vary significantly across racial and cultural contexts (Collins, 2019).

Recruitment also presented challenges, relying primarily on the PI's existing networks and word-of-mouth referrals. This approach may have introduced selection bias, as individuals predisposed to engage in critical reflection may have been more likely to participate, thus shaping the data in specific ways. Furthermore, the geographic concentration of participants within Manitoba restricts comparative insights that might have emerged through inclusion of other provincial or regional contexts, where differing policy landscapes could influence experiences in meaningful ways (Hunting, 2014).

The exclusive reliance on virtual interviews over Zoom, although practical given the context of data collection, may also have affected rapport-building and the depth of disclosure, particularly around emotionally charged or sensitive topics (Seitz, 2016). These factors may have influenced the richness and nuance of the data obtained.

In line with evaluative criteria for CGT (Charmaz 2006, 2014; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020)—credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness—the study demonstrates a conceptual contribution and practical value but remains constrained by a limited scope and participant diversity. The potential influence of researcher positionality and subjective interpretation further underscores the need for reflexivity to mitigate bias. Given its focus within Manitoba and a

relatively small sample spanning rural, First Nations, and urban contexts, the findings should not be viewed as broadly generalizable but rather as contextually grounded insights offering a foundation for further exploration. While these limitations do not undermine the study's contribution, they do delineate its boundaries and highlight opportunities for future research to expand representativeness, methodological transparency, and comparative breadth.

While the study's limitations delineate the boundaries of its findings, they also underscore the deliberate and rigorous choices made throughout the research process. Acknowledging constraints such as sample composition, recruitment challenges, and methodological scope highlights the complexity inherent in conducting constructivist grounded theory research on politically and emotionally charged topics (Charmaz, 2016). Importantly, these limitations do not diminish the study's overall credibility or contribution; rather, they provide a transparent account of the contextual realities that shaped the inquiry. In parallel, the study's strengths—rooted in its critical-constructivist orientation, ethical integrity, and methodological reflexivity—serve to reinforce the trustworthiness and value of the findings. Together, these factors reflect a balanced and reflective research design that remains both theoretically robust and ethically sound, offering a nuanced understanding of EN within systems of care.

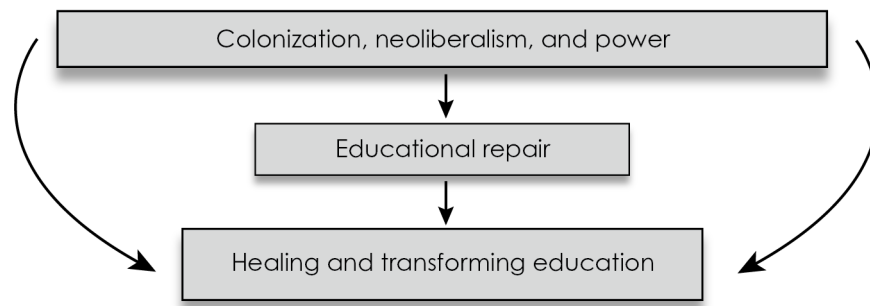
Building a theory: The Transformative Care-Education Theory (TCET)

The main goal of this study was to provide a contribution to an ecology of knowledges for CIC that provided some insight into their education. This contribution was hoped to align with the two main tenets of CTC: firstly, analyzing and deconstructing dominant discourses and secondly, identifying and forming a new episteme to “liberate” non-dominant knowledge (Martins, 2022). Overall, the study findings revealed the existence of systemic gaps between CW

and the education system in their abilities to support the educational needs of CIC. These gaps need to be addressed so that CIC are not left vulnerable to neglect in the education and CW systems. To achieve this outcome a transformative process needs to take place to facilitate healing within the education system for CIC. Therefore, the proposed theory derived from this CCGT study is the Transformative Care–Education Theory (TCET), which focuses on healing and positions education as a transformative bridge between care and learning for CIC.

This theory conceptualizes the space of education as a transformative bridge connecting the domains of care and learning. Through this bridge, as seen in Figure 15, education becomes a mechanism for repairing harm, restoring belonging, and enabling CIC to flourish as learners and as individuals. TCET provides a critical, process-oriented framework that explains how education can move from being a site of systemic harm to one of relational, cultural, and pedagogical healing. The TCET is grounded in three interrelated phases that are centered around the themes derived from the findings as depicted in Table 16 (colonization, neoliberalism, and power, repairing education, and healing education). These are underpinned by nine theoretical codes that map the progression from oppression to transformation.

The term ‘transformative’ situates opportunities for growth outside of the conventional Westernized settler colonial systems of education in Manitoba. This leaves space to look towards alternative knowledges that hold both explanations and solutions to this social phenomenon. Through this transformative process guided by the work of Ermine (2007) the TCET can also provide an equitable space for diverse knowledge systems to co-exist. In keeping with the aim of this study through a transformative process the TCET can carve a space to allow those from marginalized groups a voice in creating an equitable space for knowledge sharing and transformation within education and CW.

Figure 15*The TCET transformative bridge connecting care and learning****Situating the TCET within CTC***

The TCET is grounded in a critical understanding of the enduring relationship between education, power, and coloniality. To situate the theory within a broader philosophical tradition, it is aligned with Paulo Henrique Martins' CTC, which as described in chapter 2 extends the Frankfurt School's critical theory by centring the colonial matrix of power as constitutive of modernity rather than peripheral to it (Martins, 2022). He contends that coloniality persists not merely through political subjugation but through the internalization of hierarchies of knowledge, being, and value. Within this frame, education becomes both a key site of colonial reproduction and a potential arena for decolonial transformation.

The first phase of the TCET — colonization, neoliberalism, and power — directly corresponds to Martins' structural critique of modernity. Martins (2022) describes neoliberalism as a recolonizing force that extends market rationality and managerial logic into every sphere of social life, commodifying both knowledge and subjectivity. This resonates with TCET's first three theoretical categories: (1) managerialism and capitalism, which have commodified CIC and exhausted the caring labour of professionals; (2) the neglect of historical and colonial contexts in shaping educational practice; and (3) the consequent powerlessness of CIC. From a CTC perspective, these categories expose how education operates within a colonial-capitalist

epistemology that privileges control, measurement, and utility over human dignity and relational care. TCET therefore adopts Martins' insistence that critique must reveal how coloniality survives within modern institutions. In this case, within the education and care systems that purport to protect and empower children.

Martins' (2022) framework also provides a normative dimension that moves beyond critique toward emancipatory reconstruction. He calls for a pluriversal critical theory, one that validates diverse epistemologies and ways of being, especially those silenced by Eurocentric models of knowledge. TCET's second and third phases including repairing education and healing education strive to operationalize this emancipatory movement within the field of education. In the repairing phase, TCET envisions education as reconciliatory action re-centering trauma-informed practice, recognizing historical harm, and reconstructing relationships between teachers, carers, and children. This aligns with Martins' emphasis on critical praxis as a collective project of re-humanization that transcends technocratic reform.

The healing phase advances this further by conceptualizing education as a space of epistemic and relational healing, in which belonging, voice, and respect displace the hierarchies of colonial power. In this sense, TCET offers a concrete pedagogical expression of Martins' decolonial ethics a practice of "undoing coloniality" through the relational transformation of educational environments.

Finally, Martins' (2022) advocacy for epistemic pluralism underpins the methodological stance of TCET itself. Constructivist grounded theory, as employed in this study, resonates with Martins' call to recognize knowledge as co-constructed, situated, and intersubjective rather than universal or hierarchical. TCET thus embodies an epistemological stance consistent with the CTC as it values the lived experiences of CIC as legitimate sources of knowledge and frames

their narratives as counter-discourses to the dominant neoliberal script. By positioning the voices of children, carers, and educators as co-producers of theory, TCET enacts Martins' vision of border-thinking or knowledge that arises from the margins and contests the epistemic authority of the centre.

In summary, situating TCET within Martins' CTC deepens its critical and transformative foundations. TCET translates Martins' philosophical insights into a pedagogical framework that exposes the colonial-capitalist logics underpinning EN while offering a decolonial pathway toward repair and healing. Through this synthesis, education is reconceptualized not as a neutral institution but as a contested space capable of reproducing or dismantling coloniality. The TCET thus contributes to the broader project of critical decolonial thought by illustrating how care and learning, when grounded in relational ethics and epistemic plurality, can become instruments of collective healing and social transformation.

Connecting to the data

The findings of this study informed the development of the TCET, a framework that reimagines education for CIC as a relational and reparative process. TCET situates EN within intersecting systems of colonialism, neoliberalism, and bureaucratic power, showing how these structures perpetuate disconnection, commodification, and exclusion. The data revealed that CIC are often managed rather than nurtured—treated as cases or data points within efficiency-driven systems that prioritize accountability over care. This dynamic reflects what TCET identifies as the harm phase: when education and CW reproduce disempowerment and invisibility instead of fostering growth and belonging.

Building from these insights, TCET conceptualizes repair as an intentional, systemic response to educational harm. Participants described fractured communication between

education and CW, inconsistent trauma-informed practice, and inadequate cultural responsiveness. Within TCET, these are understood as sites for systemic repair—processes of rebuilding trust, restoring safety, and embedding collaboration across institutions. Repair is the phase through which institutions transition from perpetuating harm to fostering healing. Collaboration rebuilds trust between systems, teacher education closes gaps in professional capacity and trauma-informed, mental health–integrated practices restore the conditions for learning. Repair, therefore, is not merely intervention — it is transformation in motion. It requires policy alignment, professional accountability, and the humanization of education for CIC. Repair involves transforming professional practice from procedural compliance toward relational engagement, consistent with the ethics of care (Noddings, 1984) and trauma-informed care that emphasize connection as a prerequisite for learning (Joplin & Zimmerman, 2023, Culshaw, 2024, Watson & Astor, 2025).). When educators and social workers collaborate effectively, CIC begin to re-engage in education, demonstrating that relational coherence is foundational to transformation.

The third theme, Healing Education, represents the culmination of TCET's transformative process that conceptualizes education as both healing and emancipatory. Healing is understood as both a personal and collective endeavor that allows for a reclamation of belonging, identity, and agency. Participants described how CIC thrive when they are seen and understood as individuals and how belonging fosters motivation and hope. These findings align with Indigenous and decolonial scholarship emphasizing relationality, cultural continuity, and respect as essential to wellbeing and learning (Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2020, Makokis, 2021, Barker, 2021). Whereas repairing education illuminated the systemic ruptures that marginalize CIC healing education shifts the focus toward restoration, relational repair, and

empowerment. As such, healing education within the TCET framework reimagines the role of educators as co-constructors of hope—individuals who engage in practices of seeing, listening, and believing in the potential of every child.

Overall, the TCET challenges neoliberal notions of education as service delivery, proposing instead a model grounded in care, reciprocity, and respect for human dignity. The synthesis of these theoretical codes moves from harm to transformation illustrating the transformative potential of education when it functions as a space of healing and humanization. Demonstrating how education can evolve from reproducing inequality to cultivating connection, belonging, and hope. Within the TCET, healing education reframes the purpose of schooling for CIC as both pedagogical and therapeutic: to restore trust, rebuild identity, and reignite hope.

Conceptualizing TCET

The TCET is a process theory with three interrelated phases comprised of nine categories that were constructed from the themes and theoretical codes from this study's data in Table 16. The TCET explains how education can function as a transformative bridge between care and learning for CIC as depicted in Figure 15. The interplay of these codes underscores a critical narrative: EN of CIC emerges from systemic structures, not individual deficits. Theoretically, TCET reframes systemic change as both a moral and pedagogical process:

- Harm exposes the structural and epistemic roots of neglect.
- Repair mobilizes relational and institutional mechanisms of accountability and collaboration.
- Healing restores dignity, belonging, and agency through culturally grounded and trauma-informed practices.

Managerialism reduces children to service units, colonization undermines trust, culture and belonging and children's voices are silenced within these systems of power. A framework is needed that illustrates how transformation occurs when education is reimagined as relational, culturally grounded, and agency-oriented. For policy and practice, these findings demand that educational systems supporting CIC must:

- Explicitly engage with colonial histories, Indigenous perspectives and cultural continuity.
- Move beyond outcome-based, market-driven metrics toward relational, contextualized support models.
- Embed children's voices and agency into systems of care and education, recognizing them as active participants rather than passive recipients.
- Ensure that funding, staffing, and curriculum approaches reflect a commitment to the relational and cultural dimensions of learning, not just academic achievement.

By doing so, TCET's proposition that education can serve as a transformative bridge between care and learning becomes operationalized in practice. Below is a discussion on a TCET framework that can be seen in Figure 16.

Phase 1: critical colonial analysis. In phase one education can, be seen as creating harm through the reproduction of structural inequities that marginalize CIC. Here information will be gathered to assist in identifying the colonization, neoliberalism, and power forces at play within education and CW systems that may be operating. The three categories that define the phase include:

1. How are managerial and capitalist practices affecting workload, relationships and are there forces or practices that are rendering CIC into a commodity?

2. What are the current and historical colonial factors influencing your educational and CW system? How are these affecting staff, families, and CIC?
3. What forces and practices are or can render CIC invisible and powerless?

Phase 2: enacting processes for education reform. In phase two education can be seen as an intervention where it can become a site of repair through changes in practice, policy, and relationships. Repair begins when educational systems recognize trauma, decolonize their practices, and re-establish relational trust. Mechanisms of repair will need to be identified in phase two. The three categories that guide this phase consist of:

1. What are the areas of improvement needed for your education system and staff?
What steps can be implemented to address these now and in the future?
2. What are identifiable barriers to communication between CW and education in the system you work in? How can you improve these at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels within these systems to increase collaborative efforts?
3. How can the trauma and mental health needs of CIC be addressed? What are these needs and how can education and CW work conjointly to address them?

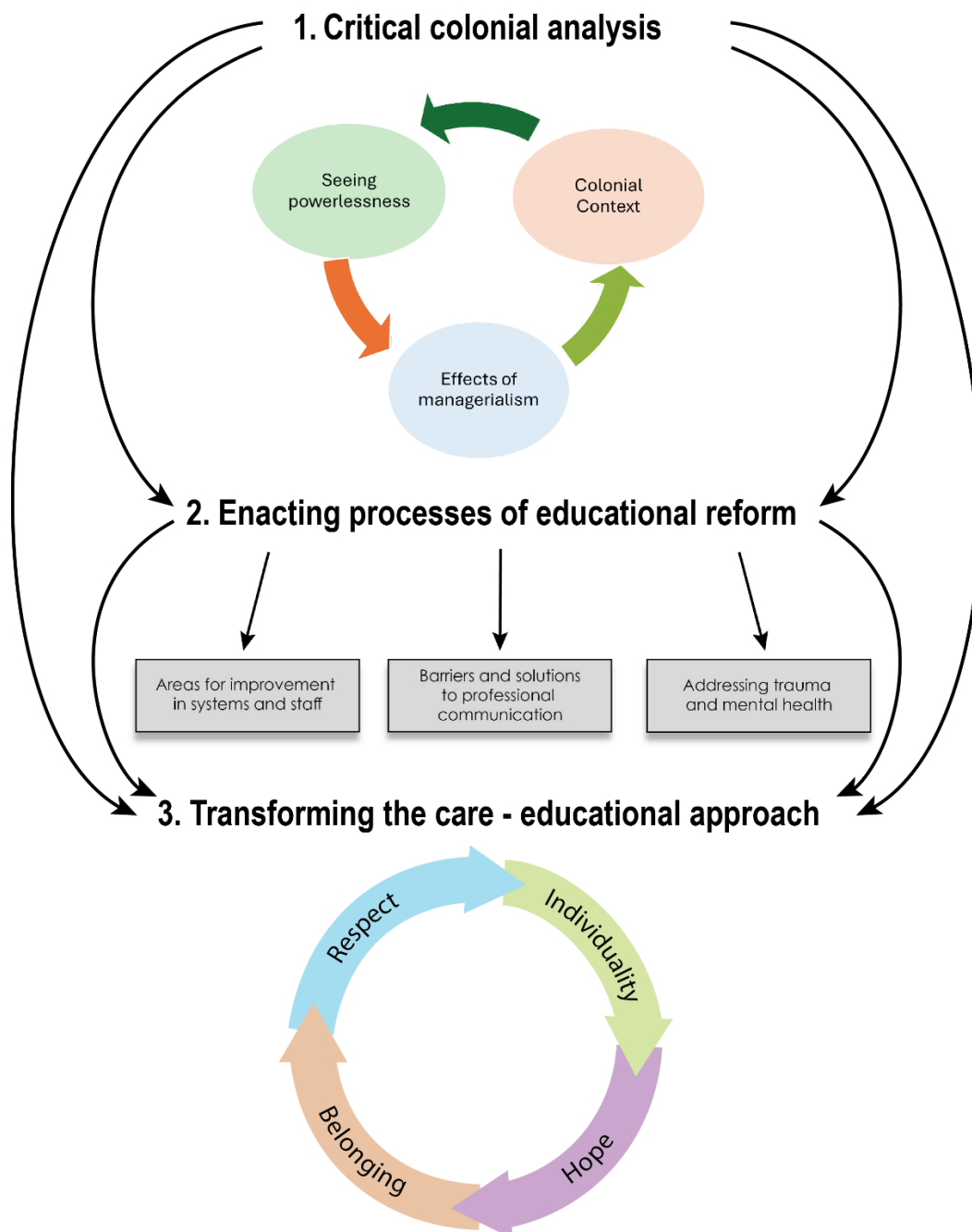
Phase 3: transforming the care-education approach. In phase three education is seen as having a transforming ability. When education is repaired, it becomes a transformative, healing force. Healing education empowers CIC to reclaim identity, agency, and hope, bridging care and learning as interconnected domains. This phase embodies and puts into practice the actionable items identified in phase two.

1. How can belonging and relationship building be integrated into the education experience of CIC within both communities and school? How can this be addressed at micro, mezzo, and macro levels across systems?

2. What steps can you take to recognize the individuality of CIC within education?

Have you identified their strengths and interests to incorporate into an education or case plan?

3. What steps can CW and education take together to ensure respect is paramount in the education of CIC and that hope for the future is restored for CIC both externally (within systems) and internally (within themselves)?

Figure 16*The TCET framework*

Theoretical contributions

The TCET offers a novel conceptual framework that advances theoretical, pedagogical, and policy understandings of education for CIC. It provides an original contribution to knowledge by reimagining education not solely as a mechanism for academic achievement, but as a transformative bridge between care and learning that is capable of repairing systemic harm and fostering healing. The theoretical contributions of TCET can be articulated across three interrelated domains: critical re-framing of harm, processual understanding of transformation, and extension of care ethics into educational praxis.

TCET extends existing educational theory by situating the learning experiences of CIC within a critical analysis of colonization, neoliberalism, and power. Whereas prior models often focus on individual deficits or resilience, TCET exposes the structural and historical roots of EN. By integrating the CTC (Martins, 2022), the theory reframes educational exclusion as a consequence of systemic inequity rather than individual pathology.

This reframing challenges deficit-based discourses instead, allowing the TCET to identify how managerialism, capitalism, and colonial legacies shape the very conditions of schooling that marginalize these learners. In doing so, TCET contributes a theoretical language for understanding education as harm, extending the critical work of Freire (1970) by applying it to the context of CIC. This critical re-framing marks TCET's first significant theoretical contribution: the articulation of education as both a site and a structure of power.

The second major contribution of TCET lies in its processual theorization of transformation. Drawing on Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory and trauma-informed educational frameworks, TCET conceptualizes transformation not as a singular cognitive event but as a relational and systemic process. The theory identifies two distinct but

interconnected phases (repair and healing) through which education transitions from harm to empowerment.

In the phase of repair, education becomes an intervention that reconstructs trust, relational safety, and belonging through trauma-informed, collaborative, and culturally responsive practices. In the phase of healing, education functions as a space of empowerment promoting visibility and agency for CIC. The TCET therefore advances transformative learning theory by embedding it within the lived realities of trauma, care, and systemic inequity while expanding its application beyond adult learning to the socio-educational experiences of CIC. Through this, TCET contributes a model of transformation-as-repair, offering a new theoretical understanding of how education can actively participate in the healing of individuals and systems.

The third contribution of TCET extends Noddings' (1984) ethics of care into the domain of educational theory and practice for CIC. TCET situates care as both an epistemological stance and a pedagogical method. It argues that learning and care are inseparable processes — each requiring reciprocity, attentiveness, and respect. In doing so, the TCET bridges the traditional divide between care (the community domain) and education (the academic domain), proposing a unified framework in which care itself is transformative. This reconceptualization contributes theoretically by positioning education as an act of healing care that cultivates belonging, respect, and hope. TCET thus advances care theory beyond interpersonal ethics to encompass institutional transformation, offering a practical and theoretical roadmap for embedding relational and restorative practices within education systems.

Taken together, the TCET contributes a comprehensive model that unites critical theory, transformative learning, and care ethics under a constructivist paradigm. It provides a vocabulary

for describing how education can evolve from a mechanism of control to a process of collective healing. The theory's originality lies in its capacity to conceptualize education as a transformative bridge that spans structural, relational, and pedagogical divides. By articulating the phases of harm, repair, and healing, TCET offers an actionable and humanizing framework for educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to support CIC.

As a starting point to the translation of this theory into practice a check list for CW and education has been created (see Appendix XII) to help assist practitioners provide a more successful environment for CIC within the education system. The investigator acknowledges that creating more paperwork is contrary to the study participants' responses related to managerialism. However, it does address participants' desire for guidance and direction in addressing the EN of CIC. The checklist is an attempt to provide a guideline for practitioners to follow that is minimally invasive while also serving as an accountability reminder in their busy work environments. As participants described, it can be easy to be overwhelmed and have tasks overlooked.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the TCET offers a critical and process-oriented framework that reimagines the role of education for CIC as a site of both healing and transformation. Grounded in the principles of CCGT and situated within Martins' (2022) CTC the TCET moves beyond critique to provide a pathway for relational and structural operationalizing. It acknowledges that the enduring effects of colonization, neoliberalism, and systemic inequity have positioned education as a mechanism of exclusion and control while simultaneously recognizing its capacity for restoration and hope. By framing education as a transformative bridge between care and learning the TCET invites educators, policymakers, and practitioners to re-envision their roles not as

agents of system maintenance, but as co-constructors of healing environments where belonging, respect, and dignity are actively cultivated.

The practical implications of TCET extend beyond theoretical contribution, offering tangible strategies for embedding relational, trauma-informed, and decolonizing practices within educational and CW systems. The accompanying checklist for education and CW (Appendix XII) represents an initial translation of this theory into action. It is meant to be a minimally invasive, yet meaningful tool designed to foster awareness, accountability, and consistency across care and educational contexts. While modest in form, this checklist symbolizes a broader commitment to systemic attentiveness and ethical responsibility, reminding practitioners of the small, everyday acts through which transformation begins.

Ultimately, the TCET contributes not only to academic discourse but also to the ongoing pursuit of epistemic justice and social change, demonstrating how education, when grounded in care and critical reflexivity, can become a vehicle for collective healing and empowerment for CIC. The following chapter extends this discussion by outlining the implications and recommendations derived from this study for practice, policy, and research.

Chapter 9: From knowing to transforming: implications for transformative change

This chapter interprets the findings of this CCGT study to outline their broader implications for practice, policy, education, and future research. The research explored how teachers, SSWs, and IET members perceive and respond to EN among CIC. Guided by the TCET, the analysis moves beyond individual or behavioural explanations to consider EN as a relational and structural phenomenon shaped by colonialism, neoliberalism, and systemic fragmentation.

The chapter begins by situating the implications of the study within the social, political, and professional landscapes of CW and education. Accordingly, the following sections translate the study's findings into practical and theoretical directions. The chapter first considers implications for social work, focusing on the need for decolonizing and deterritorialized approaches that challenge Western epistemic dominance and support relational, trauma-informed practice. It then turns to education, examining how trauma-informed, culturally grounded, and relational pedagogies can promote wellbeing and belonging for CIC. The chapter also discusses implications for policy and governance, emphasizing structural reform, Indigenous-led decision-making, and collaborative accountability frameworks. Finally, it outlines implications for research and professional education, calling for interdisciplinary, community-engaged, and ethically grounded knowledge inquiry that continues to advance the goals of the TCET.

Together, these implications aim to bridge the gap between critique and action—translating the study's insights into pathways for transformation across social work, education, and the academy.

Implications for the TCET

The TCET holds significant implications for both social work and education, offering a critical and process-oriented framework through which these systems can move from reproducing harm to enabling healing and transformation for CIC. The TCET positions education as a transformative bridge between care and learning, inviting both fields to reconceptualize their roles not as separate service systems, but as interconnected domains of relational and ethical knowledge and practice (Noddings, 1984; Freire, 1970).

For social work, the TCET highlights the need to shift from procedural and managerial approaches toward relational, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive engagement with schools and educators. The findings of this study revealed persistent fragmentation between education and CW, resulting in inconsistent support and relational breakdowns—a pattern well documented in literature critiquing neoliberal and bureaucratic governance (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2015; Lynch, 2014; MacKinnon, 2024). The TCET reframes these disconnections as structural rather than interpersonal, emphasizing that repair must begin with systemic collaboration and shared accountability (Sinclair, 2017).

Social workers are thus called to act as mediators and advocates who bridge institutional silos—facilitating communication, aligning goals, and ensuring that children’s educational needs are treated as integral to their wellbeing. In education, the TCET challenges neoliberal models that privilege efficiency, measurement, and outcomes over relationship, belonging, and dignity (Janzen & Herringer, 2023; Dunlop, 2018). It calls on educators to reimagine their practice through an ethics of care—recognizing that learning is inseparable from safety, connection, and hope (Noddings, 1984; Watson & Astor, 2025).

At the system level, the TCET underscores the necessity of policy and practice reform that embeds collaboration, cultural safety, and relational accountability across education and CW. Effective implementation requires structural repair—coordinated communication protocols, shared training, and joint accountability measures that bridge professional boundaries. It also necessitates funding models that value relational and cultural dimensions of learning, not solely academic performance.

Ultimately, TCET reframes both education and social work as transformative processes rooted in care, reciprocity, and respect. The implications extend beyond service delivery toward cultivating systems capable of healing rather than managing trauma. When enacted collectively, TCET's phases—critical colonial analysis, repair, and healing—offer a practical roadmap for how professionals can co-create conditions that restore trust, rebuild identity, and reignite hope for CIC.

Theoretical implications

This study extends theoretical understandings of EN by situating it within broader social, political, and relational contexts that shape the lives of CIC. The findings demonstrate that EN is not an isolated or incidental occurrence but a predictable outcome of systemic forces—particularly colonial legacies, neoliberal governance, and institutional fragmentation (Lynch, 2014; Martins, 2022; Sinclair, 2017). These insights contribute to social work theory by reframing neglect as a structural and relational phenomenon that reflects failures of recognition, belonging, and accountability across systems of care and education (Allen-Meares, 2013, Browne, 2017).

This study challenges such interpretations of EN by revealing how EN emerges through the hegemony of organizational ontologies rooted in neoliberalism and colonialism—systems

that prioritize efficiency, control, and compliance over relationship and care (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2015, Dunlop, 2018). In social work theory, this reconceptualization aligns with critical and anti-oppressive perspectives that interpret neglect as structural violence rather than personal failure (Collins, 2019, Haight et al., 2022).

Findings consistently highlight that meaningful education for CIC depends on relationships grounded in recognition, empathy, and reciprocity. For social work, this represents a return to relational practice as a moral and political act—an assertion that care and relationship are not only techniques but forms of resistance within bureaucratic systems (Watson & Astor, 2025). Theoretically, this aligns with critical relational and care ethics traditions that position human connection as a foundation for both individual and systemic transformation (Barker, 2021, Cox et al., 2021).

This study also exposes the tension between practitioners' relational intentions and the structural constraints that limit their ability to act. This finding advances social work theory by positioning practice as both constrained and creative, bridging macro-level critique with the everyday relational work through which systemic repair begins (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). Additionally, the findings contribute to decolonial social work theory by foregrounding the ongoing influence of settler-colonialism on CIC's educational experiences, particularly for Indigenous children. Theoretically, the study calls for reimagining education as a site of relational, cultural, and epistemic care—consistent with Indigenous worldviews that link learning to belonging, identity, and land (Makokis, 2021, Pazderka et al., 2014, Ciofalo et al., 2022).

This perspective challenges dominant Eurocentric paradigms, urging epistemic justice through the recognition of diverse knowledges and relational ontologies. In sum, these

theoretical implications extend beyond the confines of education or CW to re-envision social work's role in addressing systemic neglect.

Practical implications

The findings of this study highlight the pressing need for relational, trauma-informed, and culturally grounded practice across the CW and education systems. Improving educational outcomes for CIC demands a shift from procedural compliance to relational engagement that centres belonging, safety, and empowerment (Watson & Astor, 2025; Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2020). Social workers and educators alike are positioned to either reproduce or resist the conditions that perpetuate EN. Trauma-informed practice, therefore, must be seen not as a technical intervention but as an ethical stance that recognizes the long-term effects of systemic and relational trauma (Porges & Dana, 2018; Joplin & Zimmerman, 2023).

Collaboration between CW and education professionals emerged as a critical practice need. Fragmented systems and siloed communication frequently lead to gaps where CIC are left unsupported. Additionally, culturally responsive and decolonizing approaches must also be embedded across practice. As discussed, Indigenous children remain vastly overrepresented in CW, a reality rooted in colonial disruption and systemic racism (Sinclair, 2017). Decolonizing practice requires genuine partnerships with Indigenous communities—centering language, ceremony, and land-based learning as integral to healing and education (Browne, 2017; Barker, 2021; Makokis, 2021). Engaging Elders and community members in co-designing supports for CIC not only promotes cultural safety but also disrupts epistemic hierarchies, returning authority to those most affected.

Broader Implications for Systemic and Liberation-Based Practice

The broader implications of this study extend beyond professional practice to the philosophical and political foundations of social work and education. As Wilson-Raybould (2022) asserts, “it is through action that we address the harms, injustices, disadvantages, and lack of opportunity that are part of the colonial legacy” (p. 279). Liberation must therefore be positioned not as an abstract goal but as the driving force of ethical and systemic transformation. Liberation has long been criticized as the missing element in critical theory—a concept overshadowed by linguistic complexity and academic insularity (Paraskeva, 2022). Deconstruction of colonial discourses, as Martins (2022) cautions, is not synonymous with liberation; dismantling oppression requires rebuilding new, life-affirming systems of thought and practice.

In practice, liberation calls for a decolonial praxis that actively resists neoliberal and capitalist dominance. Browne (2017) and Calhoun (1995) both highlight the challenge of achieving liberation within societies governed by concentrated power and entrenched inequality. Returning to Fanon’s (1968) call for accountability and critical education, social workers and educators must foster the conditions for collective awakening—enabling individuals and communities to recognize, critique, and transform oppressive systems (Garcini et al., 2021). Social work, positioned between the state and the community, has a unique mandate to confront neoliberal structures while nurturing empowerment from below (Martinez, 2022).

Sands (2018) identifies three principles that guide such liberatory approaches: responsibility to community, honest and open dialogue, and prioritizing new knowledge systems while remaining vigilant against appropriation. These principles align directly with the study’s emphasis on relational and decolonial praxis.

In this light, liberation is not a metaphor—it is a method. It demands that practitioners, scholars, and institutions act with courage, humility, and accountability. By centering relational ethics, integrating diverse epistemologies, and resisting the commodification of care, social work and education can move toward genuine transformation. Ultimately, the path forward requires collective action: to dismantle colonial legacies, resist neoliberal capture, and reconstruct systems around care, reciprocity, and justice.

Policy implications

The findings of this study underscore the urgent need for systemic policy transformation across education and CW to repair the long-standing disconnection between care and learning for CIC. Current policies within both systems are heavily shaped by neoliberal logics that privilege measurement, efficiency, and cost-containment over relational care and cultural belonging. Educational policy emphasizes performance outcomes and accountability frameworks, while CW policy often centres procedural compliance rather than the child's lived experience (Brownell et al., 2017). This technocratic orientation perpetuates invisibility and disempowerment for CIC. Policy must therefore shift from bureaucratic coordination to relational coherence (Watson & Astor, 2025; Dunlop, 2018).

A central policy priority should be the formalization of cross-sectoral collaboration through legislation, funding mechanisms, and shared governance. Education and CW agencies must operate within a unified framework of shared responsibility. Equally vital is the embedding of decolonizing and culturally grounded approaches within all policy design. Policy must enact the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action by supporting Indigenous self-governance in CW and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems into education (Osmond-Johnson & Turner, 2020).

Within this ethical space, Indigenous authors such as Kovach (2009) have proposed the notion of strategic alliance, exemplified in the Nehiyaw concept *Weechiseechigemitowin*—“willfully doing an act together for deeper meaning” (Osmond-Johnson & Turner, 2020, p. 63). This concept provides a guiding principle for reconciliation where policy must facilitate partnerships rooted in reciprocity and shared intent, creating genuine alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous systems of care and education.

At the same time, the neoliberal context cannot be ignored. Fiscal considerations remain a dominant discourse within public policy, shaping decision-making through cost-benefit rationalities. However, rather than rejecting this outright, strategic concessions can be used to engage the neoliberal system in service of transformative goals. For example, as previously mentioned Bellis et al. (2019) found that ACEs cost North America approximately \$748 billion annually, while a 10% reduction could save \$56 billion. Positioning trauma-informed, relationship-based policy as a cost-effective strategy may therefore gain traction in fiscally driven environments. In this sense, integrating data from neuroscience and developmental studies with Indigenous and relational knowledge systems—bringing periphery knowledges toward the centre—can both challenge and transform dominant paradigms.

Research implications

Social work

Findings from this study have some implications for both research and professional education in social work. The TCET reveals how colonialism and neoliberalism intertwine to shape EN among CIC. Within social work, merely acknowledging the colonial foundations of the profession is not enough; transformation demands deliberate opportunities for diverse voices to occupy equal places of influence within policy, research, and education (Ermine, 2007,

Yellow Bird, 2013). This requires “deterritorializing” (Paraskeva, 2022) social work from its Western epistemic core and grounding it instead in plural, relational, and decolonial frameworks (Hart, 2009, Asimeng-Boahene, 2018, Guzman-Valenzuela & Gomez, 2018).

Future research in social work must therefore extend beyond individual and micro-level practice to interrogate the structural and epistemic systems that perpetuate inequities. This involves adopting critical and constructivist approaches that foreground reflexivity, power, and relationship as central analytic tools. When applied in inquiry, this may ensure that community members, practitioners, and knowledge-keepers co-create research questions, analysis, and dissemination. This ethical and participatory stance can counteract extractive research practices and foster mutual accountability.

Social-work education also requires transformation. Despite widespread discourses of decolonization, Western paradigms of individualism and evidence-based managerialism continue to dominate curricula and accreditation standards (Mbembe, 2016; Clarke, 2022). To cultivate practitioners capable of engaging with complexity and injustice, professional programs must integrate critical reflexivity, Indigenous epistemologies, and community-engaged learning as core pedagogical practices. This entails embedding anti-colonial and anti-neoliberal critique within coursework, field placements, and evaluation frameworks. Research exploring how students internalize and operationalize decolonial and relational ethics in practice would contribute meaningfully to the profession’s ongoing redefinition.

Education and interdisciplinary research

In the field of education, this study highlights the urgency of reconceptualizing learning as relational, collective, and healing-oriented rather than transactional. Friere (1970) discussed how this was a superior form of learning from that of what he termed the ‘banking method.’ The

TCET suggests that belonging, attachment, and cultural continuity are not peripheral but foundational to learning. Research should examine how trauma-informed and culturally responsive pedagogies can be sustained within neoliberal educational systems that prioritize performance and efficiency. Longitudinal studies could explore how these pedagogies impact retention, academic outcomes, and psychosocial wellbeing among CIC.

Interdisciplinary collaboration between social work, education, and DCN offers a promising frontier for research. As Weems et al. (2021) argue, transdisciplinary inquiry can illuminate how environmental, relational, and neurological systems interact to shape learning and development. By integrating Indigenous worldviews, such research can reframe resilience not as an individual trait but as a relational and ecological process. Land-based and culturally grounded programs provide natural laboratories for examining these intersections—offering data on how belonging, attachment, and environmental connection influence cognitive and emotional regulation (Berman, 2012; Gonzalez-Espinar et al., 2023).

Educational research must also address the professional learning of teachers, social workers, and allied practitioners. Findings from this study indicate that current teacher education and professional development programs inadequately prepare educators to meet the needs of CIC or to navigate the complexities of interagency collaboration. Research that evaluates models of cross-sectoral training—bringing together educators, social workers, clinicians, and community leaders—could yield valuable insights into fostering shared language, relational competence, and trauma-informed practice. Furthermore, evaluating how these collaborative approaches influence classroom climate, educator wellbeing, and student engagement could inform system-level policy.

Academia and knowledge production

The findings also underscore the need for critical reflection on academia as a space of epistemic and political reproduction. Higher education institutions are deeply embedded in neoliberal economies that commodify knowledge, measure productivity through quantifiable outputs, and marginalize knowledges that do not fit market logics (Laurili & Carey, 2022; Matapo et al., 2022). This “knowledge economy” privileges Eurocentric perspectivism (Martins, 2022) and reinforces epistemic inequality between the Global North and South (Rouleau-Berger, 2021).

Social-work and education researchers can resist these hierarchies by developing alternative research economies grounded in reciprocity, narrative co-construction, and community partnership. Methodologies that incorporate Indigenous and marginalized epistemologies—such as storytelling, community-based participatory research, and relational accountability—can democratize knowledge production and reposition research as a collective good. As Said (2004) reminds us, the scholar holds power in representing others; thus, ethical research must continuously question how it constructs subjects, identities, and truths. Overall, universities, as sites of public good, have the responsibility to cultivate ethical spaces (Laurili & Carey, 2022) where diverse knowledges coexist and shape the next generation of scholars.

Future directions

Future research should extend the TCET to examine how *Weechiseechigemitowin* and decolonial alliances can be operationalized across institutional contexts. Comparative studies between provinces, nations, and Indigenous governance systems can reveal how different policy environments enable or constrain transformative care and education. Additionally, participatory

research exploring youth voice—particularly the perspectives of CIC themselves—can offer essential insights into agency, belonging, and self-determination.

Research on professional education should also focus on evaluating pedagogical interventions designed to decolonize learning environments in social work and teacher education. For example, studies could assess how integrating Indigenous epistemologies, critical reflexivity, and land-based learning into curricula influences students' readiness for relational and ethical practice. Cross-national research comparing how social-work and teacher education programs navigate the tensions between neoliberal accountability and decolonial transformation would further inform international efforts toward equitable professional training.

Finally, longitudinal and mixed-methods research should investigate how transdisciplinary collaboration—linking social work, education, and neuroscience—can advance relational healing for children exposed to trauma and systemic neglect. This would strengthen the evidence base for trauma-informed and culturally grounded policy, offering new pathways toward systemic reconciliation and wellbeing.

Conclusion

This dissertation advances a relational, decolonial, and systems-oriented response to EN among CIC. This study attempted to address the two main tenets of CTC identified by Martins (2022) to help deconstruct dominant settler-colonial knowledge making space for peripheral knowledges to help form new ways of thinking. Central to this contribution is the TCET, a theoretically robust and praxis-oriented framework that synthesizes three overarching themes. The TCET illuminates how education operates simultaneously as a site of harm and as a mechanism for transformation. In doing so, it bridges critical, decolonial, and care-informed perspectives with actionable implications for pedagogy, policy, and professional practice.

In alignment with the objectives of this study, the findings and development of TCET fulfill each aim through both theoretical innovation and practical significance. First, by constructing an ecology of knowledges that integrates critical, Indigenous, and care-informed perspectives, this research reframes EN as a structural and relational phenomenon rather than an individual deficit. Second, through its examination of neoliberal and colonial contexts, the study illuminates how managerialism, commodification, and historical oppression shape inequities in education for CIC. Finally, the application of TCET provides a transformative framework for social work and education, translating critique into actionable strategies for collaboration, professional learning, and policy reform. Collectively, these outcomes advance the overarching purpose—to generate knowledges that not only explains but transforms the conditions perpetuating EN for CIC.

For social work, the findings affirm that merely acknowledging colonialism is insufficient; transformation requires the deliberate creation of opportunities for diverse voices to occupy equal positions of power. Guided by Weechiseechigemitowin (Osmond-Johnson & Turner, 2020) social work must separate itself from Western individualism (Hart, 2009; Guzman-Valenzuela & Gomez, 2018) toward relational, pluralistic, and decolonial praxis. Yet, as Chambon et al. (2011) note, the profession remains constrained by its historical discourses and neoliberal pressures that limit its capacity to enact meaningful change. The hegemony embedded in social work education and practice continues to marginalize peripheral and Indigenous knowledges while privileging dominant Western paradigms. Without confronting these epistemic hierarchies, social work risks stagnation—failing to evolve into the twenty-first century or to meet the needs of those most affected by systemic harm.

Repositioning the profession requires embracing knowledge integration as a dynamic, relational process. Building on the TCET framework introduced in this study, transformation depends on mutual respect, reflexivity, and continuous dialogue between multiple systems of knowing. Creating horizontal communication across CW, education, and community contexts enables the co-creation of liberatory practices that respond to both historical and contemporary injustices. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the fragility of social systems, trust in institutions, and the deep divides within public life—underscoring the urgency of cultivating new utopias of knowledge (Martins, 2022) that centre care, accountability, and collective action.

For education, TCET challenges neoliberal paradigms that privilege efficiency and measurement over belonging and care. It calls for a pedagogical shift toward trauma-informed and healing-centered practice, where educators act as co-constructors of belonging and identity rather than deliverers of curriculum (Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2020; Watson & Astor, 2025). Embedding relational ethics, cultural safety, and reflexivity within teacher education and policy frameworks is essential to bridging systemic divides and transforming schools into sites of restoration.

At the policy and systemic level, TCET underscores the necessity of ethical collaboration and shared accountability. Policy reform must move beyond rhetorical decolonization toward structural change that embeds Indigenous self-determination, equitable funding, and trauma-informed practice (Wilson-Raybould, 2022). As Bellis et al. (2019) demonstrate, investment in early, relational interventions is not only ethically imperative but economically sound.

The dissertation's broader contribution lies in reimagining research itself as an ethical and transformative act. Scholars must remain vigilant to the power of representation (Said, 2004) and to academia's complicity in reproducing neoliberal and colonial hierarchies (Laurili &

Carey, 2022; Matapo et al., 2022). Integrating DCN, Indigenous knowledges, and social work ethics can build a new ecology of knowledges grounded in relationship, humility, and reciprocity. This ecology invites the university—and the professions it shapes—to move beyond the proverbial ivory tower, toward accountable engagement with communities.

Ultimately, the TCET framework invites scholars and practitioners alike to become co-constructors of ethical spaces where care and learning intersect. Transformation, as Freire (1970) reminds us, requires both reflection and action. By embedding relational ethics, decolonial praxis, and interdisciplinary collaboration into systems of education and care, we can move from managing children's survival to nurturing their self-determination. In this collective work—rooted in alliance, respect, and hope—the promise of liberation becomes a lived reality rather than a distant aspiration. Through *Weechiseechigemitowin*, the care–education nexus can become a site of genuine reconciliation, belonging, and justice for all CIC.

As Fanon (1968) wrote “the colonial world is a compartmentalized world” (p. 3) and so “we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking” (p. 239) to move forward in healing education to support CIC.

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Appendix I: Participant consent form

Study Title: Contributing to an ecology of knowledges for understanding the education neglect of children in care: Perspectives from school social workers and educators

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Contributing to an ecology of knowledge for understanding the education neglect of children in care: Perspectives from school social workers and educators

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This consent form, [a copy of which has been given to you] or [a copy of which you can download or print], is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, feel free to ask any of the people named above. Please take the time to read this document and any accompanying information carefully. It is very important that you understand:

- what is being asked of you,
- what the risks and benefits of participation are, and
- how the information you provide will be used and stored.

Purpose of the study

This study seeks to explore what is happening within the context of education neglect for children in care within Manitoba. This critical constructivist grounded theory study seeks to answer: How can the perceptions of teachers, Indigenous education teams and school social workers' contribute to building a knowledge base that helps to understand the education neglect of children in care? Little research and attention are currently being paid to education neglect within child welfare and this population has been reported to have the lowest graduation rate in Manitoba. At present, the graduation rates are not currently published for children in care within Manitoba.

As this study is attempting to develop a knowledge base to assist in addressing and understanding the education neglect of children in care this study may uncover other areas of research to explore. Your responses may help assist future research in this area. As a result, at the end of this document you will be asked whether you consent to have your anonymized data used for future research by the principal investigator.

Study procedures

Should you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to complete a participant demographic form. Completing all or any part of this form is completely voluntary. Your name will not appear on this form. A code will be applied to the form and only Nicole Scott and David Delay will have access to the codes. This information may be reported generally stating "25% of participants were from this profession" or "11 out of 15 participants had over 5 years experience."

One on one interviews will be used to collect data on the research question. A brief orientation to the interview structure will be provided to you at the beginning of the interview. You will have the opportunity to ask questions before, during and after the interview. During the interview you will be provided a private space, either virtually or in-person, where you can speak and share your responses openly. You will attend a private office that is not associated with your place of work.

The meeting will be scheduled for 90 minutes to allow sufficient time to process the research questions. You may be contacted for clarification or further information by the researcher after the interview has been completed. However, you have the right to refuse participation.

Further, you will be contacted for the opportunity to review the transcripts from your interview within 2 weeks of the interview's completion. Nicole Scott will contact you to offer a private one on one meeting for you to go over transcripts and you will have the opportunity to change or remove any of the information you provided in the data. If you do not respond within 1 week of the second contact attempt from Nicole Scott it will be assumed that you do not want to review your interview transcript. Transcripts can be reviewed either in-person or virtually with Nicole Scott.

Interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder to ensure that all of your responses are accurately collected.

Study risks

Although the researcher will do everything possible to ensure risks are minimized during this research study the following brings attention to possible risks you could be exposed to by participating within this study. There may be a possibility of discrimination for participating if the study is viewed negatively by peers and colleagues should it be discovered you participated. Additionally, due to the nature of the topic on child welfare you may experience distress based on your experiences of colonialism, child welfare and education. You will be advised of this again verbally at the start of the interview so that you may seek help or debrief. The researcher will also provide you with a resource list of available community resources to address these needs should you require them.

Study benefits

Direct benefits to you may be the opportunity to be heard and contribute your ideas on how to further your profession and the academic success of children in care. This may also provide an opportunity for you to develop insight from this interview. Overall, the positive implications of the study findings could help improve the academic success of children involved within the child welfare system, increasing their graduation rates and improving their adult lives. It could also help to build a knowledge base on this topic area while bringing attention to this issue. Currently, little research exists on this topic and so exploring what education neglect is for children in care and what professionals involved in their education are seeing within this field may help children

and youth in care, be more successful in school while informing future areas of practice, policy and advocacy work both in education and the social welfare system.

Compensation

A \$50 honorarium will be presented to you at the beginning of the one-on-one interview. This honorarium will be in the form of a \$50 gift card to Amazon.ca (and will be presented to you electronically when one-on-one interviews are virtual). Should you decide to withdraw you will keep the entire honorarium. You will also be offered refreshments during the one-on-one interview when it occurs in-person.

We may collect additional personal information from you to record giving you an honorarium. The researcher will keep this information separate from any research information. This information will be kept in a secure location for 7 years in case the University of Manitoba has to account for the money during a financial audit.

Storage and use of data

All the information you provide as part of this study is confidential. This means that only members of the research team will see your information. Nicole Scott and David Delay will have access to all data generated from this study. Additionally, the PhD committee Dr. Michael Yellow Bird and Dr. Ryan Guillianio will have access to anonymous data as described in the above paragraph that will be referenced in a PhD dissertation and presentation. We will destroy any information that identifies you (name, email address) by August 2032. The anonymized data will be kept indefinitely by only the principal investigator. This information will be kept, by the principal investigator, to inform future areas of research and knowledge generation within this topic area.

All data provided by you will be stripped of any identifiable information and coded before data analysis begins (for example, names and work location). When reporting findings narratives from interviews will be presented generally indicating: “one participant reported...” or “five participants shared a common response of...” with no indication of any particular participant. All interview data will be coded with pseudonyms (fictional names) attached to all of your responses so that you cannot be identified.

We will do our best to keep your personal information safe. However, it is not possible to guarantee confidentiality. For safety, your information will be kept on a UM-approved secure platform. All data collected will be placed directly into a locked filing cabinet after the interview, in the researcher's locked office. The data will be transferred to a password protected OneDrive file used specifically for this research study on a password protected computer and hard copy data will be shredded and/or erased immediately after it has been transferred electronically within five days of the interview ending. The UM Zoom application will automatically record both audio and visual. You will have the option to turn off your camera during the interview. Only audio recording will be uploaded to OneDrive and UM Zoom video files will be permanently deleted.

Withdrawal from study

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You can choose to do only the activities and/or answer only the questions that you are comfortable with and may withdraw from the study for any reason with no explanation. The researcher will honour your decision without trying to coerce or change your mind.

You may withdraw from the study until January 1st, 2025. Should you withdraw, all gathered responses will be destroyed. After this date, we will start to analyze the information so it may not be possible to withdraw your information. To withdraw, please contact Nicole Scott at the email on the first page of the consent form.

Additionally, you may choose to withdraw from the study and still allow the researcher to keep your data to include in the study results.

Questions or Concerns:

You are encouraged to contact Nicole Scott should you have anything that needs to be discussed related to this study. You can find Nicole Scott's contact information at the beginning of this form.

A designated University of Manitoba auditor may check that this study is being done safely and properly. To do this, they may visit the study site or review the research records. We will tell you if someone outside the research team will be there while you are participating. If this makes you

uncomfortable, please tell the Principal Investigator, who will ask the auditor to return at another time.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Research and Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. However, this does not mean that participation is risk-free. If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study, you may contact any members of the research team listed on the first page or the Office of Human Research Ethics at humanethics@umanitoba.ca or (204) 474-7122.

Limits to confidentiality

A note on confidentiality. There may be instances where the principal investigator will have to break confidentiality. This will include:

- **Duty to Warn and Protect**
 - If you disclose intentions or a plan to harm another person, I am required to warn the intended victim and report this information to legal authorities. In cases in which you disclose or imply a plan for suicide, I am required to notify legal authorities.
- **Abuse of Children and Vulnerable Adults**
 - If you state or suggest that you are abusing a child (or vulnerable adult) or have recently abused a child (or vulnerable adult), or a child (or vulnerable adult) is in danger of abuse, I am required to report this information to the appropriate social service and/or legal authorities.
- **Prenatal Exposure to Controlled Substances**
 - I am required to report admitted prenatal exposure to controlled substances that are potentially harmful.

Notice Regarding Collection, Use, and Disclosure of Personal Information

- Your personal information is being collected under the authority of The University of Manitoba Act. The University of Manitoba is committed to preserving your right to privacy. The information you provide will be used by the University to support our research. Your personal information will not be used or disclosed for other purposes, unless permitted by The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act or The

Personal Health Information Act. If you have any questions about the collection of personal information: Ph: 204-474-9462 or Email: fippa@umanitoba.ca

Consent:

By signing this document, I have read the above information and have had the opportunity to ask and have answered any questions I may have. I understand that:

- I will be taking part in a research study.
- I may freely leave the research study activities at any time.
- I do not waive my legal rights by participating in the study.

Please review the following statements. For each statement, please check if you agree or do not agree.

I agree to participate in this study.	☐ YES ☐ NO
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I agree to be audio-recorded in this study.	☐ YES ☐ NO
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I agree to have: ☐ a pseudonym (fake name) used when the results are shared for this study. I would like my pseudonym to be: _____

I agree that the information I provided to the research team can be used for future research purposes by the principal investigator.	☐ YES ☐ NO
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Name of Participant	Participant's Signature	Date
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For oral consent:

I read and explained all of the information in this consent form to the participant before receiving the participant's consent, and the participant had knowledge of its contents and appeared to understand it.

Name of Participant	Researcher's Signature	Date
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Summary of results

A brief (1-3 pages) summary of results will be provided to all participants by March 2025. The researcher will make themselves available to participants should they have any questions or concerns regarding this summary.

Research findings will be outlined in a PhD dissertation at the University of Manitoba. Research findings may also be presented to decision and policy makers within Academia, education departments and any other relevant Government Departments worldwide. Findings may also be published and outlined in academic journals. No identifiable participant information will be included in any of the research findings.

Please provide an email address below if you would like to be sent a summary of the study results and/or my individual results.

Email address: _____

Appendix II: Advertisement poster**Share your voice on:****The education neglect of children in care****The Study**

The study seeks to explore what is happening within the context of education neglect for children in care within Manitoba. This exploratory study seeks to answer: How can the perceptions of teachers, Indigenous education teams and school social workers' contribute to building a knowledge base that helps to understand the education neglect of children in care? Little research and attention is currently being paid to education neglect within child welfare and this population has been reported to have the lowest graduation rate in Manitoba. At present the graduation rates are not currently published for children in care within Manitoba.

Your participation in this study could assist in bringing much needed awareness and advocacy to the area of education for children in care. It is hoped that the benefits of this study may include:

- Contributing toward a knowledge base that creates context for understanding how to view the education neglect for children in care;
- Creating potential findings that contribute toward a transformative approach to practice, policy, advocacy and training of professionals within this area; and
- Contributing to the future academic success of children in care

To Participate

If you are interested in participating and:

- Are or have been employed as a school social worker, resource teacher or Indigenous education team member within a Manitoba school division;
- Have had at least 2 years experience in 1 of these positions; and
- Have been involved in academic or program planning for a student involved in the child welfare system

Honorarium

Participants will receive a \$50 Amazon gift card for their participation in this study that will be provided at the start of the interview. Participants interviewing virtually will be emailed an electronic gift card.

Time and Location

Interviews will be held between October and December 2024 as arranged based on participants' schedules. Participants can choose to participate in a one-on-one 90 minute interview either in person or virtually.

Contact

To participate in this study or for further information please contact Nicole Scott:

Email: umlamo02@myumanitoba.ca.

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba.
Protocol #: HE2024-0261

Primary Investigator: Nicole Scott umlamo02@myumanitoba.ca

Research Advisor: Dr. David Delay

Appendix III: areas of exploration

Study Title: Contributing to an ecology of knowledges for understanding the education neglect of children in care: Perspectives from school social workers and educators

Researcher: Nicole Scott

Researcher Supervisor:
Dr. David Delay
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba

Areas of exploration and potential prompts:

1. Biggest barriers observed to the education experience of children in care.

Potential prompts:

- “Have you ever witnessed anything that gets in the way of the academic success of children involved with the child welfare system?”
- “What do you think the effects of this are?”

2. Steps taken to address barriers to the education of children in care.

Potential prompts:

- “In your professional experience what have you seen implemented for children in care?”
- “Tell me more about that.”

3. How does systemic oppression and colonization impact the success in school of children in care?

Potential prompts

- “What is your understanding of systemic oppression and colonization in a school setting?”

- “How do you see systemic oppression and colonization having an effect on the success of children in care within the school?”
4. Perceived student and family needs to succeed in school setting for children in care.

Potential prompts

- “What do you think children involved with child welfare need in schools to succeed?”
 - “What do families need to help children in care become successful in school?”
5. Thoughts and ideas moving forward to improve connection to education for children in care.

Potential prompts

- “What are some ideas you have that might help children in care succeed in schools?”
- “Who do you think would need to be involved in these changes and what would their roles be?”

Appendix IV: Interview Schedule

Study Title: Contributing to an ecology of knowledges for understanding the education neglect of children in care: Perspectives from school social workers and educators

Researcher: Nicole Scott

Schedule for one-on-one interviews:

0:00 – 0:03	Introductions Review of audio-recording and study purpose
0:04 – 0:05	Advise of right to withdrawal at any time
0:06 – 0:10	Participant questions
0:11 – 0:22	Area of exploration #1
0:23 – 0:34	Area of exploration #2
0:35 – 0:46	Area of exploration #3
0:47 – 0:56	Offer participant a break
0:57 – 1:08	Area of exploration #4
1:09 – 1:20	Area of exploration #5
1:20 – 1:30	Conclusion of interview and opportunity for participant to contribute any information they deem important

Researcher Supervisor:
Dr. David Delay
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba

Appendix V: Pre-Interview Script

Study Title: Contributing to an ecology of knowledges for understanding the education neglect of children in care: Perspectives from school social workers and educators

Script for potential participants (Telephone or In-Person)

Researcher: Nicole Scott

Hello,

My name is Nicole Scott, and I am a doctoral student within the faculty of social work at the University of Manitoba. I am conducting a research study examining the education neglect of children in care. This study is looking to recruit professionals, within the field of education, who have experience related to the education of children involved with the child welfare system. If you have experience as a school social worker, resource teacher or as a member of the Indigenous education team and have worked with child welfare involved students you are eligible to participate in this study. Should you decide to participate, you will be invited to take part in a one-on-one interview where you will be able to share your experiences, observations and opinions related to the education neglect of children in care.

The interview is anticipated to take no more than 90 minutes and you will have the option to complete the interview in-person or virtually over zoom. This interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and you will be able to view the transcript produced at any point upon request to make corrections or remove information.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will be kept confidential in the reported data. Your name will be removed from all data and a pseudonym (a fictitious name) will be assigned. All study data will be stored on a password protected OneDrive file that can only be accessed by the primary researcher Nicole Scott and the research supervisor Dr. David Delay. More information on confidentiality is available in the participant consent forms. I will be happy to go over the consent form in detail and address any confidentiality concerns you may have.

Would you like to go over the participant consent form with me now?

Do you have any questions or concerns for me?

If you decide to participate or have any questions, please contact me, Nicole Scott at umlamo02@myumanitoba.ca so that the study information and consent forms can be sent to you.

Thank you for your consideration.

Researcher Supervisor:
Dr. David Delay
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba

Appendix VI: Recruitment Script for Organizations

Study Title: Contributing to an ecology of knowledges for understanding the education neglect of children in care: Perspectives from school social workers and educators

Script for Organizations (Telephone or In-Person)

REB Protocol number: _____

Researcher:

Nicole Scott

Umlamo02@myumanitoba.ca

Research supervisor:

Dr. David Delay

David.delay@umanitoba.ca

Hello,

My name is Nicole Scott, and I am a doctoral student within the Faculty of social work at the University of Manitoba. I am respectfully requesting the assistance of [organization name] in the recruitment of participants for a research study examining the education neglect of children in care. This study is looking to recruit educational professionals who have experience related to the education of children involved with the child welfare system. Specifically, participants who have experience as a school social worker, resource teacher or as a member of the Indigenous education team and have worked with child welfare involved students are being sought to participate in this study. Should they decide to participate, they will be invited to take part in a one-on-one interview where they can share their experiences, observations and opinions related to the education neglect of children in care.

The interview is anticipated to take no more than 90 minutes with the option to complete the interview either in-person or virtually over zoom. This interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and participants will be able to view the transcript produced at any point upon request.

Participation in this study is voluntary and anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained in the reported data. Names will be removed from all data and a pseudonym (a fictitious name) will be assigned. More information on confidentiality is available in the participant consent forms which will be reviewed with all potential participants.

I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have at this point.

Should any questions arise please feel free to contact me, Nicole Scott at umlamo02@myumanitoba.ca.

I understand this request may require approval. Can I follow up with your agency in a week to see if a decision has been made? Or can you suggest a timeline I can follow up?

I would like to thank you for your consideration. Please find a copy of the advertisement poster attached below for your consideration.

Appendix VII: Participant Demographics**Study Title: Contributing to an ecology of knowledge for understanding the education neglect of children in care: Perspectives from school social workers and educators**

Researcher: Nicole Scott

Researcher Supervisor:
Dr. David Delay
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba

Participant demographics:

Demographic Profile**Skip any questions which you do not wish to answer**

1) Please enter the pseudonym (fake name) you entered on your consent form:

2) Age Group: (Select One)

☐ 18-29 ☐ 30-39 ☐ 40-49 ☐ 50 +

3) Preferred Gender Identity: Write in if willing

4) Racial Identity: Write in if willing

5) Highest Education Level Achieved (do not include degree in progress):

☐ High School diploma or equivalent ☐ Certificate/diploma ☐ Bachelor Degree
☐ Master Degree ☐ Doctorate Degree

6) Professional Development/Training related to child welfare (select all that apply):

☐ None ☐ 1-2 workshop/seminars ☐ 3-5 workshop/seminars ☐ 5 > years workshop/seminars
☐ Formal certificate/diploma/degree training ☐ specialization at the graduate level
☐ Other Certification

7) My primary professional identification is:

☐ Social Work ☐ Indigenous Education Team member ☐ Management ☐ Learning support/Resource Teacher

8) Years of experience working with children/youth involved with child welfare:

☐ None ☐ Under 2 years ☐ 2 > 5 years ☐ 5 > years

9) My previous employment position(s) included (please do not include your employer only your professional title):

10) Years of paid employment in my primary professional identification:

☐ Under 2 years ☐ 2 > 5 years ☐ 5 > years

Appendix VIII: Participant Resource List

Study Title: Contributing to an ecology of knowledges for understanding the education neglect of children in care: Perspectives from school social workers and educators

Researcher: Nicole Scott

Researcher Supervisor:
Dr. David Delay
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba

Participant Resource List:

Participant Resource List

This list is being provided should you feel you need some support after this interview. This resource list will help you access community resources that provide mental health services within Manitoba. You are encouraged to contact and make use of any resources that you feel may be helpful to you. If you feel you may need support beyond the resources listed please contact Nicole Scott at: umlamo02@myumanitoba.ca to discuss your needs.

Region	Agency	Contact
Winnipeg	Klinic Drop-In Counselling	167 Sherbrook St 204-784-4090 Hours: Mon-Thurs 12-8pm Fri & Sat 12-4pm
Manitoba	Klinic virtual Counselling	1-866-367-3276 www.supportline.ca
Manitoba	Manitoba Suicide & Prevention Line	1-877-435-7170 www.reasonolive.ca
Manitoba	Klinic Crisis Line	1-888-322-3019 204-786-8686 (Winnipeg)
Manitoba/Canada	First Nations & Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line	1-855-242-3310 Online chat: www.hopeforwellness.ca
Manitoba	First Nations & Inuit Health Branch MB Region (mental health services)	1-800-665-8507 204-983-4571 (Winnipeg)
Winnipeg	Wa-Say Healing Centre (support for individuals and families impacted by residential schools)	204-774-6484
Winnipeg	Jewish Child & Family Counselling Services (all faiths and cultures welcome)	204-477-7430

Winnipeg	Klinic Trauma Counselling	Intake line: 204-784-4059 counsellingintake@klinik.mb.ca
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Appendix IX: Checklist

Addressing the Educational Neglect of Children in Care (CIC)

(Practical reflection and action tool for education and child welfare staff)

Instructions on how to use this checklist

This checklist is meant to be an ongoing evaluation tool that is revisited at least quarterly in agency or department meetings. When completing you will check off what is already in place and highlight what needs action. After the list is completed, you will choose 3–5 next steps per review and assign responsibilities. Progress will be updated after each quarterly review to reflect the current context within your workplace, department or agency. Ensure that you are including the voices of children, youth and families through requesting their feedback on whether change is observable to them.

Phase 1: Understanding Harm — Seeing What’s Not Working

Goal: Identify how current practices or systems may unintentionally harm or overlook children in care.

A. System Awareness

- We review policies and paperwork yearly to remove unnecessary tasks that take time away from direct support.
- School and agency staff share essential information instead of repeating assessments or forms.
- Time is protected for relationship-building with children and families (not just case management).
- Meetings include both child welfare and education staff so information flows both ways.

- Staff can describe how current procedures may limit flexibility or human connection — and suggest alternatives.

B. Colonial and Historical Awareness

- Orientation and training include honest discussion of residential schools and colonial impacts on Indigenous families.
- We invite local Elders, Knowledge Keepers, or Indigenous educators to guide learning and decision-making.
- Classroom and school spaces include visible representation of Indigenous cultures and languages.
- Staff reflect on how school policies (e.g., attendance, behaviour, discipline) may disadvantage children in care.
- We maintain active partnerships with community organizations to support children and families.

C. Voice and Power

- Children in care are asked about their goals, interests, and feelings — and their input shapes education plans.
- Each child in care has at least one adult advocate responsible for ensuring their views are heard.
- Family, caregivers, or cultural supports are invited to all key education meetings.
- Youth feedback is reviewed regularly and leads to changes in school or case practice.
- Staff receive guidance on how to share power with children and families in planning decisions.

Phase 2: Repairing the System — Building Connection and Trust

Goal: Move from identifying problems to taking concrete steps that rebuild relationships, collaboration, and trust.

A. Communication and Collaboration

- We have clear, shared communication tools (e.g., secure platform, joint notes, shared forms).
- Education and child welfare teams meet monthly to coordinate support for children in care.
- Each child has an updated education plan accessible to both systems.
- Staff know exactly who to contact in the partner agency for updates or emergencies.
- Cross-agency training or case conferences happen at least twice a year.

B. Trauma-Informed Practice

- All staff receive yearly training on trauma-informed and culturally safe care.
- We use restorative and relational approaches instead of punishment when behaviour challenges arise.
- Schools have calm, welcoming spaces for students who feel overwhelmed or unsafe.
- Staff practice consistent, predictable routines to reduce anxiety and promote safety.
- Teachers and social workers share strategies for responding to emotional distress in children.

C. Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Children in care have access to in-school mental health or counselling supports, including Indigenous wellness programs.
- Regular emotional “check-ins” are part of the weekly routine at school or in care.

- Teachers and caseworkers collaborate to recognize early signs of stress or withdrawal.
- Adults model calm, supportive responses when children show distress.
- Mental health and wellbeing are discussed in all team planning meetings — not treated as separate from learning.

Phase 3: Creating Healing Environments — Fostering Belonging and Hope

Goal: Transform schools and care systems into spaces where children feel seen, valued, and hopeful.

A. Belonging and Relationship Building

- Each child in care has at least one consistent, caring adult who checks in regularly.
- Schools and agencies celebrate children’s achievements and growth publicly and positively.
- Activities include culture, art, sports, and community events that build belonging.
- Staff intentionally greet and connect with children in care each day to strengthen trust.
- Programs include peer or mentorship opportunities to help children feel included.

B. Recognizing Each Child

- Every education plan highlights the child’s strengths, interests, and cultural identity.
(staff can identify strengths and interests of children in care)
- Teachers and workers use these strengths to motivate and plan learning activities.
- Small successes (attendance, effort, kindness) are acknowledged consistently.
- Children are invited to set personal goals and reflect on their own progress.
- Staff celebrate the individuality of each child — not just academic outcomes.

C. Restoring Hope and Dignity

- All staff use respectful, strength-based language when talking about children in care.
- Children in care are asked regularly how supported and hopeful they feel and encouraged to set goals for their future.
- System and school policies are reviewed to ensure they build dignity and trust.
- Adults openly express belief in each child's potential and future.
- The team reflects on and shares stories of healing, progress, and restored hope.