

**Supporting First Nations Students in First Nations Schools: Perspectives of Manitoba
Inclusive Indigenist Educators**

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Abstract

Academic studies and publications related to inclusive education typically exclude the history, development, funding, and experiences related to the provision of special/inclusive education in First Nations schools and communities in Manitoba. The intersections of Critical Theory, more specifically Critical Race and Critical Disability Theory, provide convergence to ground this qualitative study. In this study I examine the experiences of Indigenous inclusive educators, clinicians and non-Indigenous allies in relation to the structural/systemic issues affecting learners in First Nations communities. I also investigate Indigenist perspective and practice on special/inclusive education. Documenting the experiences, insights, and recommendations of educators who work within Manitoba First Nations education is an important step in improving educational outcomes for First Nations students with and without dis/abilities and/or other special needs who attend schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. The stories of strength and hope documented in this study reveal the tenacity and resilience of the Indigenous educators, Indigenous clinicians and non-indigenous allies who work within education systems within First Nations communities throughout Manitoba.

Keywords: Critical Pedagogy, Inclusive Education, First Nations Dis/ability, First Nations Education, Critical Race Theory, Critical Disability Theory, Post/anti-Colonialism, Intersectionality.

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As a final offer of respect and appreciation I will provide a written copy of this publication to all participants in this study. I will provide a feast and a giveaway (a time where one gives away items to the collective in honour of a particular milestone, event or occasion) and invite all who participated and or assisted in the completion of this study.

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Chapter 1: First Nations Special/Inclusive Education

The history of, and current conditions for, many First Nations people in Canada, particularly within the public education system, is still greatly influenced by a systemic and persistent Eurocentric ethos of colonization and long standing attempts at cultural assimilation and genocide. In most regions in Canada, the delivery of education is the responsibility of the provincial or territorial governments. For First Nations¹ communities,

The delivery of education through schools on reserve is the responsibility of the First Nations and the federal government. The federal government is financially responsible for the education of First Nations students living on reserve, whether these students attend [band run] First Nations or provincially operated schools. (Auditor General of Ontario, 2012, p. 129)

According to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC, 2012, p.1), “In Manitoba there were 57 band-operated elementary and secondary level schools. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) funded education for approximately 21,200 First Nations students that live on-reserve in Manitoba.” Partly because of the policies of “Indian control of Indian education” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972), the vast majority of First Nations communities in Manitoba (currently 40 of 49) assume the operation of all education programs within their community. In the remaining communities, local authorities have engaged provincial school divisions such as Frontier (7), Park West School

¹ For the purpose of this research I generally use “First Nation”, as opposed to Indian, Aboriginal, Native, or Indigenous as this is the term used by most First Nations to define both their school and their education systems in Manitoba. Cree, Ojibway, Dakota, Dene, and Island Lake Dialect (Oji-Cree) are the names of the five linguistically based tribal groups that exist within the Province of Manitoba.

Division (Wawayseecappo First Nation) and First Nations education organizations such as the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC), (Roseau River First Nation), to administer and/or jointly administer some or all of the education services offered within their community (MFNERC, 2010a).

Although some improvements in academic outcomes have been noted over the past 40 years of band operation of First Nations schools (Kirkness, 2013), the current system of education in First Nations remains fraught with numerous inadequacies. Chronic underfunding (Assembly of First Nations (AFN), 2012, Oct. 1-3), very low graduation rates (AFN, 2012, Sept. 27), systemic high staff turnover (AFN, 2010; Kirkness, 2013), and little system wide improvement of education outcomes for most First Nations learners, are all well documented in the current published literature. First Nations communities who have transferred independent local control of their education system to provincial and/or regional jurisdictions/organizations now receive substantially more funding by the Federal Government of Canada than those who continue to administer their own education programs for their own community (Kirkness, 2013).

The search for cultural and linguistic relevance for First Nations learners within education systems is of paramount importance for many (Fitznor, 2002; O'Connor, 2008; Brayboy, 2009; Battiste, 2013; Kirkness, 2013). The desire and call for self-determination of education, and adequate resourcing and legislative protection for First Nations education, based on inherent treaty obligations, remains strong and vibrant (Brayboy, 2009; AFN, 2012; Kirkness, 2013; Battiste, 2013). The positive self-identity, well-being, and economic success of current and future generations of First Nations people will, in part, depend on a collective desire and ability to understand how race, culture and dis/ability has been constructed within Canadian society to further marginalize and disadvantage specific groups within our society. An examination of the

provision of education for all First Nations students attending schools in First Nations communities is the focus of this research. I situate this study at the intersections of Critical Race and Critical Disability Theory (Brayboy, 2006; Liasidou, 2013).

Whether directly or indirectly, there is a tendency to blame the First Nation student, family, community and/or entire culture as the primary, and often, only cause of the negative aspects and outcomes for First Nations learners in First Nations and non-First Nations education systems. Acknowledging the responsibility of the individual, family, and community, effective solutions to the current educational attainment crisis for First Nations learners must also include analysis of factors such as how race and dis/ability, based on Eurocentric notions of what is considered normal, and of value, have been used to exclude, marginalize, and oppress.

According to the Canadian Council on Learning (2007),

Most research on Aboriginal learning is directed at the learning deficits of Aboriginal people and does not recognize or address the impacts of economic, health and social challenges on aboriginal people's opportunities for lifelong learning and most research does not report on the experiential learning of Aboriginal people or on traditional education activities that occur outside of the classroom. (p 4)

Issues relating to pedagogies used, the funding of, and the outcomes of education systems for First Nations students, particularly those with special education needs and/or dis/abilities (SEND), are the topic of this academic research. I use this research to highlight issues related to First Nations education in Manitoba. Documentation of perspectives and practices within First Nations education, more specifically special/inclusive education, is crucial. The study of the perspectives and practices of First Nations educators and clinicians who are providing

special/inclusive education supports within First Nations communities is an important aspect of this conversation.

In far too many First Nations and provincial schools, educators continue to report that many First Nations students function academically far below grade level curricular expectations (AFN, 2012) and then place blame on the individual (at times dis/ability status), family or culture of origin. In addition, there is often little reference to, discussion of or published literature on the academic and social or emotional outcomes for students with special needs and/or dis/abilities attending First Nations schools in Canada (Philips, 2010a).

Despite being born in a rural Manitoba farming community in southern Manitoba, to parents of European ancestry, for as long as I can remember, I have felt an affinity and closeness towards First Nations people. I focused a portion of my undergraduate post-secondary education on First Nations studies and entered into the counselling field with my first career position working in rural mental health and addictions in northern Ontario with an Indigenous and non-Indigenous clientele. I relocated back to Winnipeg in 1994 and have been working serving Indigenous communities throughout Manitoba since that time.

I began my work at the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre in 1999 supporting First Nations schools working with children affected by FASD and their families, and then broadened my work to other areas of special inclusive education and mental health service and support provision. As time went by, I became deeply concerned about the lack of non-mandated, culturally relevant and community based services and supports for children with special needs residing in First Nations communities in Manitoba, particularly those from northern remote and isolated communities. Spending more time in First Nations communities I

became increasingly aware of the apparent lack of funding provided to First Nations local and regional authorities to operate their own education systems. The lack of legislative framework to support such structures, and the uneven distribution of funding and resources between First Nations throughout Manitoba and between First Nation and non-First Nations communities remains increasingly problematic. These observations and the apparent injustices fueled my passion about advocacy and deepened my understanding of structural and systemic issues affecting First Nations students, families and systems.

I then decided to pursue my graduate work in Disability Studies focusing my research for my Master's thesis (Shackel, 2008) on the experiences of First Nations children with dis/abilities and their families. I then began my Ph.D. in Inclusive Special Education and focused course work and research on First Nations special/inclusive education within the context of First Nations communities and culturally relevant practice. Since returning to graduate school I have continued to work full time facilitating the development of First Nations practice and infrastructure capacity while pursuing doctoral research with those who work most directly with these students with special needs and or dis/abilities and their families; Indigenous educators and clinicians and non-Indigenous allies.

In this qualitative study, I conducted semi structured interviews over time to examine the experiences of Indigenous inclusive educators, clinicians and non-Indigenous allies in relation to the structural/systemic issues affecting learners in First Nations communities. I also investigated Indigenous perspective and practice on special/inclusive education and documented the structural, systemic and practice issues study participants recommend to improve student centered programming and positive educational outcomes for all students in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

To ground this research, I examined the perspectives of First Nations educators and clinicians to investigate how race intersects with dis/ability and/or perceived dis/ability status. Intersectionality, according to the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) (2004), is “an analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege” (p.1). Within the study, I use intersectionality both as a theoretical base and analytical tool for understanding how identities and issues of race intersects with dis/ability as I investigate the experiences of those providing special/inclusive education supports and services in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Theorists suggest researchers use intersectionality to engage with structures and systems of power and political engagement (Morris and Bunjun, 2007). By attempting to understand differing elements of both race and dis/ability at the same time, and how these elements interact with each other, in this research I use intersectionality to contextualize the issues affecting the lives of all First Nations students, including those with SEND, and those who provide service to these students. For example, how have rates of dis/ability (and perceived dis/ability) been affected by the colonized experiences of First Nations in Canada? How has the history of, and current issues within First Nations education, affected the ability of First Nations schools to meet the needs of all First Nations students with and without SEND? As summarized by Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013), using intersectionality in theoretical framing and analysis is an, “adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power” (p.786).

Identities are socially constructed and socially understood. Intersectionality is about embracing the complexities of context. Neither First Nations people nor people with dis/abilities

living in Manitoba are homogeneous groups. In intersectional analysis I respect similar and common experiences but at the same time also honour the diversity and plurality within people who may have some common experiences and/or characteristics. Using intersectional theory leads to understanding that social identities of race, and ability/dis/ability, among others, are not mutually exclusive and do not operate in isolation from one another. I use intersectionality to engage with the complexity of lived realities. Intersectional practice is about “examining our own beliefs and how we are caught up in systems of power and privilege in complicated ways” (Morris and Bunjun, 2007, p. 1). Intersectional practice, whether in research or education practice, is about resisting the challenge of fixed binary positions and acknowledging that our understandings and ways of knowing, being and doing are fluid and continuously emerging.

According to Hankivisky (2014),

Intersectional analysis seeks to understand what is created and experienced at the intersections of axes of oppression. For example, according to this perspective, gender, race, sexual orientation, geographic location, immigrant status, ability and class, among other factors, converge to produce a social location that is different than just the sum of its parts. (p. 255)

Intersectionality, as an analytic tool, helps make clear the important areas of inequality and how these inequalities [at times multiple and layered] manifest (Deborah Stienstra, personal communication, September 16, 2015). Within this specific context, examining policy and structural issues such as factors affecting for First Nations students with and without SEND attending schools in first Nations communities is the focus of this study. How the politics, policies and practices of different levels (Federal, Provincial and Local First Nations) and departments (Health, Education, and Family and Social Services) of government contribute to

resource inequality was critical in the data collection and analysis of this study. As Hankivisky, (2012) suggests, “As scholars search for alternative orientations to rethink societal organization they are attuned to the complex and interdependent dynamics of domination, oppression, and resistance, care ethics and intersectionality across disciplines” (p. 282).

I use intersectionality to inform my understanding of the complex social locations, to resist static and binary representation of identity and to encourage enhanced understandings of the interacting systems of power, thus allowing the naming and reimagining of the systems or structures that contribute to and/or elevate social inequality. According to Morris and Bunjun (2007), intersectionality is “a way of thinking about power, thinking about who is excluded and why, who has access to resources and why, over periods of time, and between places” (p.1). In this study, I interviewed participants to enhance understanding of not only how issues of race intersects with, and is related to dis/ability, but will also how other inequalities such as class, gender and gender identity might influence social location(s). I am not only interested in these separate identities but in examining the nature of the relationship between these identities. For example, how education related, race specific issues such as jurisdiction and inherent treaty rights affects all students, particularly those with SEND in First Nations schools in Manitoba.

In this study, I investigated the relationship between the advantaged and disadvantaged within the different strands of inequality. In one area of analysis, I seek to understand how western and First Nations construction of “dis/ability” might overlap or differ, thus affecting the practice within inclusive/special education within First Nations contexts by First Nations practitioners in Manitoba.

In this study, I examined the nature of the ontology of the social inequality in order to make visible the extent of diversity and inequality within this praxis. “When a deep rather than

shallow ontology is used, identifying the range of institutional domains (economy, polity, violence and civil society) that make up each regime of inequality (class gender, ethnicity , etc.) the extent of the diversity becomes more visible ” (Walby, Armstrong & Strid, 2012, p. 455). Multiple facets of intersectional analysis is necessary to frame the recommendations of the research participants regarding what measures need to be in place to address the inequalities experienced by students with and without SEND attending, and not attending, school and living in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

As intersectionality scholars Zinn and Dill (1996) suggest,

People experience race, class, gender, sexuality and disability differently depending upon their social location in the structures of race, class, gender, sexuality and disability. For example, people of the same racialized group will experience discourses of race differently depending on upon their location in the class structure as working class, professional managerial class, or unemployed; in the gender structure as female or male, in the structures of sexuality as heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. (p. 321)

It is my hope that illuminating the differing understandings of First Nations and western constructs of race and dis/ability informs this inquiry into the practice of special/inclusive education within First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Intersectionality, as both an analytical tool and a lens allows me to be inclusive of, and necessitates ongoing self-reflection and analysis. My own life, due to my gender, my visibly able bodiedness (or relative able bodiedness at the present time), resources, experiences, education, and the language I am proficient in, has afforded me, for the most part, multiple layers and intersections of privilege. With the multiple layers of privilege comes multiple and intersecting dimensions of responsibility. I, like Dossa (2006), in her work with immigrant

Muslim women in Vancouver who have dis/abilities will use intersectionality to, “show that the margins are not merely territorial, they are sites of practice that point to the making of a just world” (p. 345).

In this study, I drew upon two distinct, yet converging theoretical perspectives. I relied on Critical Race Theory, more specifically Tribal Crit (Brayboy, 2005) and Critical Disability Theory (Liasidou, 2013) to situate the contextual framework, the points of inquiry, and the data analysis of this study related to the provision of special/inclusive education supports and services within schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Strength, Resilience, and Renewal

From my experience, and relationships with First Nations people, and people living with dis/abilities, I have come to appreciate the diversity, strengths and challenges experienced by many First Nations, particularly those living with the experience of dis/ability. I note several of these. First, it is evident to me that the collective is often valued and supported within First Nations. First Nations often represent cultures of caring and sharing with heritages and ways of knowing, being, and doing that are rich and enduring (Wilson, 2008). I see much evidence that children are valued within First Nations families, organizations, and communities and respected as both individual and spiritual beings. I see and hear First Nations individuals demonstrating gentleness and respect in their teachings and child rearing practices. Within many First Nations communities, the strengths and bonds of extended families are evident. Learning, teaching, and child rearing are often multigenerational, including practices that are non-directive, allowing the child to learn from experiences and natural consequences. Modelling is often very important in First Nations teaching/child rearing practices. Gradual release of responsibility and promoting

independence; and letting students make their own conclusions is evident in the teaching styles of many First Nations parents and educators (AFN, 2012; Battiste, 2013; Kirkness, 2013).

Second, I have come to know that the respect for diversity and plurality is evident within many First Nations contexts. In my work as a Special Education Facilitator, now a Manager of Special Education, within the First Nation education system, I hear gentle reminders that ‘everyone is equal within the circle’, that ‘everyone has a right to contribute and feel of value’. I see that the practice of non-interference, of not imposing one’s beliefs or will on others, is important. I also see, often through the modelling of others, that there is no one ‘right way’ to see the world and that respecting the self-determination of others is very important. As stated by Battiste (2013),

Any [education] reforms must take into account the fundamental diversity of Indigenous knowledges, and must create structures and guidelines that are capable of accommodating this fundamental concept, keeping in mind that no single Indigenous experience dominates another perspective, no one heritage informs it, and no two heritages produce the same knowledge. (p. 66)

I have come to know that First Nations communities in Manitoba, the Dakota, Cree, Anishinaabeg, Island Lake and Dene communities, represent a diversity of cultural and linguistic epistemologies, ways of knowing, doing, seeing, and being in the world. I also see common threads and strong similarities amongst people in these communities. First Nations cultures and people are resilient and have endured through centuries of attempts to annihilate their cultural and linguistic practices, their epistemologies, and their relationships within families and communities.

Third, within many First Nations there is respect and reverence for Elders. I see that Elders are most often included within formal and informal systems within community, and the knowledge and experience they carry within them is valued and highly regarded. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN, 2012) notes that people within First Nations cultures seek the guidance and input of Elders to a far greater degree than is done within western, non-Indigenous cultures and systems.

Fourth, First Nations people have taught me that reciprocity and respect for giving and receiving the gift of knowledge is extremely significant. Knowledge transmission within this culture is often considered a sacred process (Dan Thomas, personal communication, September 3, 2015; MFNERC, 2016, p. 3).

Fifth, I have come to understand that many First Nations people in Manitoba are spiritual; meaning relational and/or soulful, and have rich heritages and languages with values, practices, and ways of life, which have sustained them over time. According to O' Connor (2006, 2008, 2009), many First Nations people feel a part of, have lived off, and have spiritual connections to the land. First Nations people in Manitoba have extensive oral histories and literatures, among them are master storytellers, and those who have a sophisticated knowledge of how to survive in the harsh Northern climates of Canada.

After over a century of colonization of First Nations, many are on a process or journey of healing, re-discovery and renaissance, repositioning themselves in relation to the oppressive factors and forces imposed upon their languages, cultures, heritages and the intergenerational transmission of culture. As reflected by Battiste (2013),

There were many silences to my questions, which, as the years went by; I realized were related to the layers of oppression of the Mi'kmaq people had lived under. It was about

the politics of knowledge production, their intersections with power, race, poverty, and gender, and the processes of colonization, including the patriarchal government and Indian agents. (p. 15)

Education, self-determination, and efforts towards the decolonization of First Nations education systems are playing a pivotal role in processes and conversations of reflection and renewal. Over the past three decades, I have observed, as cited in curriculum framework documents such as *Our Gifts: A First Nations Curriculum Framework*, (MFNERC, 2016), the importance of the revitalization of traditional ceremonies and spiritual practices, of traditional land based activities, and including language and cultural practices within First Nations education systems throughout Manitoba. People living with dis/abilities are also challenging oppressive and colonial factors impeding their independence and negatively affecting their quality of life.

People living with dis/abilities including First Nations people living with dis/abilities, have tremendous strengths, are resilient and demand their rightful and valued roles in community and society. Persons with dis/abilities have a range of cultural and linguistic differences and distinct cultural identities. For example, some members of the Deaf community often iterate that their deafness provides them with a distinct cultural identity. Some people with intellectual impairments, also true of some Deaf people, do not consider themselves disabled at all (Loughran, 2013, p. 3). Dis/abilities can be both visible and non-visible, adding to the importance of an individuals' right to self-declare and self-determine the process (es) they choose to live meaningful lives, however they may define this to be.

Some people living with dis/ability propose that differences in sensory, physical, and/or psychological and intellectual functioning, may in fact not amount to deficits at all, rather

opportunities to see and experience the world in different and diverse ways. For example, Garland Thomson (2011) writes about the distinct advantages of ‘misfitting’, meaning that the experience of living with dis/ability can, and often does provide people with enriched vantage points providing greater dimensions to experiences and situations.

People living with dis/ability are also resilient. Many have survived despite decades of institutionalization, marginalization, and exclusion from community and family support systems. Many persons living with dis/abilities are tremendous advocates, as are their families, as they navigate societal barriers within ableist attitudes, systems, and structures within their communities.

From my experiences over the past 30 years, I have come to know that many First Nations people living with sensory, physical, intellectual or psychological impairments have reported that they do not feel, nor perceive themselves as ‘dis/abled or dis/advantaged’, until they are within non-First Nations settings, systems, structures, and/or communities. This is consistent with the perception of the contemporary dis/ability rights movement.

The dis/ability rights movement has created opportunities for people with dis/abilities to claim citizenship, also interrogate, and analyze barriers to community involvement, participation, and meaningful inclusion. Individuals and groups of persons living with dis/ability are empowering themselves, against the oppressive social barriers that have, and often continue to limit access to equal participation and full citizenship. People with intellectual dis/abilities in North America, Australia and Europe have initiated “People First” movements, informing others that they are citizens first. Although they live with dis/ability, they state that their dis/ability should not solely define who they are (Kaplan, 2000, p. 360).

The social model of dis/ability pays specific attention the socially constructed barriers, such as the attitudes and beliefs of others, as major systemic barriers to full participation (Hansen & Philo, 2006). People worldwide are using international mechanisms such as the United Nations Convention of Persons with Disabilities, to raise the critical consciousness and promote collective advocacy. People with dis/abilities have proposed increasing their participation through more ‘universal design’ of places and spaces, and have also proposed more universal design of systems such as education (CAST, 2012) to create broader access and more meaningful participation of all citizens, not just those who live with a dis/ability.

Worldwide, many people living with dis/ability have been devalued (Wolfensberger, 2013). The participants in this study often iterate that, due to the dual identities as a First Nations person, and a person living with a dis/ability, First Nations individuals living with dis/ability are often doubly devalued. This study is an opportunity to investigate the intersections of race and dis/ability to create points of critical discourse. A belief in the strengths of, and a deeply held respect for First Nations and people living with dis/abilities, grounds this study.

Definitions and Key Terms

Prior to defining the central research question, and the scope, relevance and limitations of the study, I now provide definitions of a number of key terms used throughout this manuscript.

I use the term student with a ‘special education need and/or dis/ability’ (SEND) as person centered language to refer to students who have been identified as having sensory, cognitive, behavioral, or physical impairments, which may occur within any school aged population. SEND also refers to those students who have remedial and social/emotional related learning needs who may or may not live with dis/abilities.

I use ‘dis/ability’ to indicate that people living with a dis/ability should not be defined solely in terms of their impairments and deficits. The *abilities* of all people, and the supports and adaptations that should be in place for everyone should be the focus. This term denotes that problems are not inherent to the individual person, but in society’s response to that person.

The special/inclusive education program, at times referred to as the ‘Resource Program’ is a department within a school in place to provide services and supports for students with dis/abilities, remedial, and social emotional learning needs. Educators working within this department often have the title Resource Teacher, Special Education Teacher or Inclusive Education Teacher, however, for the purpose of this study I use the term ‘Resource Teacher’ to refer to educators in any of these positions.

The term ‘inclusive education’ is a philosophical practice of education, defined by Lutfiyya and Van Walleghem (2001) whereby,

the regular education class, with appropriate supports, is the first option considered [for all students, including those with disabilities]. Students are educated in classes with their age appropriate peers and where the number of those students with and without special learning needs is proportional to the local population, e.g., typically 10-12% will have disabilities [the percentage of students with disabilities is 2-3 times higher for First Nations populations than for non-First Nations populations]. (p. 79)

In this study, I use the term ‘First Nations Educators’ to refer to the research participants. Within this group there are five specific subgroups including; resource teachers who are of First Nations ancestry who are currently, or have been, employed within a First Nations education setting for a minimum of five years. The second group is First Nations Special Education

Specialists who are, or have been in consulting positions providing support and ongoing training related to special/inclusive education in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Third, are the Elders who work with students with SEND in First Nations schools in Manitoba. Four, are First Nations clinicians (Educational Psychologists and Speech and Language Pathologists) who participated in this study. Five, are a small number of resource teachers/consultants/clinicians who are not of First Nations ancestry, but do have considerable experience (a minimum of 20 years) working with First Nations children with and without SEND in First Nations schools in Manitoba. In this study, I provided an opportunity for these Indigenist allies to participate, as I follow the principles of First Nations inclusion throughout this research.

I use the word Indigenist throughout this study. I define Indigenist, similar to the word feminist, to describe a person of any gender or racial background. An Indigenist person is one who may be Indigenous or non-Indigenous, but addresses inequality and the inherent power imbalances and injustices between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples while challenging any notion of cultural or racial superiority. As defined by Battiste (2013),

Some scholars are now calling it an “Indigenist” agenda that is not confined to those who are Indigenous. Rather, “Indigenist” is a term that operates in the same way that the feminist movement was facilitated, not only by women but also by men who claimed proudly to be feminists. Indigenist, then, speaks to a movement, much like the thrust of Idle No More movement that works collaboratively toward Indigenous people’s goals for sovereignty, self-determination, and treaty and Aboriginal rights and reconciliation with the provinces, territories and the federal government. (p. 74)

Research Question

The problems of special education are the problems of education writ large (Blatt, 1987). In this study, I examine the perspectives and experiences of those who practice within special/inclusive education to better understand the education provided to all First Nations students in First Nations communities operating under First Nations jurisdictional structures in Manitoba. In this study, I engage First Nation educators in an in-depth investigation/exploration of issues related to the delivery of services and supports for students with SEND attending schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. This is one way to explore the intersections of being dis/abled and a member of a First Nation community.

The central question for this study is: what are the perspectives and experiences of First Nations educators related to supporting all First Nations learners in First Nations operated schools in Manitoba? The findings of this research have significant implications for both First Nations and non-First Nations education systems alike.

Scope, Relevance and Limitations

This study originates out of my interest, compassion, and respect for all children and families, particularly those who have SEND, living in First Nations communities in Manitoba. I believe strongly in the inherent sovereign treaty right to community based and defined education and dis/ability related supports and services. I also believe that processes of self-determination create the basis for social, emotional, intellectual, community, and spiritual wellness.

Unique insight into the delivery of primary and secondary education systems within First Nations communities in Manitoba is provided in this study through the analysis of First Nations special/inclusive education and dis/ability related issues as perceived by individuals directly involved. The investigation and documentation of the history of First Nations and special/inclusive education, by those who live and work in First Nations communities, provides understanding of the intergenerational issues that have affected the health and wellbeing of First Nations individuals, families, and communities.

A number of participants in this study, having been raised in, and spending the majority of their careers teaching students with SEND, commented on the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure on some children in First Nations communities in Manitoba. As someone who has worked with many hundreds of pregnant Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women struggling with substance abuse issues, and birth families impacted by the effects of prenatal exposure to alcohol, I have never met a woman who intentionally set out to harm her unborn child. While there are many determinants of substance abuse during pregnancy for First Nations women, such as traumatic histories, social and economic struggles, cultural identity and spiritual shame, guilt, mental health issues and the lack of access to supports resources and services for aboriginal women (Shahram, 2015), many participants noted that the effects of prenatal exposure has had a significant effect on special/inclusive education in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

The use of “labels” within the practice of First Nations, and mainstream special/inclusive education, by both myself as the researcher, and by the research participants themselves, related to cultural and or dis/ability status remain contentious; a contention situated at the intersections of both racial and dis/ability identity and praxis. As suggested by Retzlaff (2005, p. 620), in *What’s in a name? The politics of labeling and Native identity constructions*,

Refusing to wear externally constructed and imposed labels is one form of resistance and thus one form of resisting hegemonic power structures. Cultural qualifiers are not merely names applied to a group of people. They help shaping the groups to which they are attached. Consequently, language and the power of attaching labels to identify people is very much an ongoing political issue.

Issues of labeling, within these intersecting identities, are both political and inherent within the scope and parameters of this study.

This study is significant for many reasons. First, this research documents a very important component of the history of education within Manitoba. Second, the issue of First Nations education, and more specifically First Nations special/inclusive education, is important because it is a matter of social justice. The treatment of, and response to, First Nations people, particularly those living with dis/abilities, especially in First Nations communities, has been, and continues to be less than adequate (Shackel, 2008). The experiences of First Nations students with dis/abilities, and the lack of access to services and supports, both within First Nations schools, and within broader First Nations communities, represents historical and ongoing contemporary human rights violations (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2014).

Many First Nations persons with dis/abilities living in First Nations communities, particularly children, continue to be subjected to high rates of removal from their communities and often, unnecessary involvement in child welfare agencies (Shackel, 2008). For those First Nations children living with a dis/ability who remain in First Nations communities, they often live without the necessary supports and services. The perpetuation of policies and practices within education, health, government and social systems in Canada, creates ongoing barriers for

many First Nations individuals, especially those who live with one or more dis/ability (AFN, 2012).

Third, far too many students, including those with SEND, do not achieve success within the current education system in First Nations communities, nor are they adequately prepared to function within the mainstream education system, once they leave their communities. Parents of First Nations students often reiterate that they want their children to be competent and successful in both worlds: within their First Nation community and culture, and within the wider Manitoban and Canadian society (MFNERC, Elders Roundtable, 2013a; Kirkness, 1999). It is imperative that the education systems within and outside of First Nations provide relevant, inclusive, and meaningful education to meet the needs of all students, particularly those students with SEND. The findings from this study contribute to the conversations regarding what aspects of education must change to improve educational outcomes for all students in First Nations schools in Manitoba.

Apart from the moral and social justice issues, there are serious and significant economic implications of not addressing the inability of existing systems to meet the needs of learners with and without SEND attending schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Manitoba First Nations represent the largest segment of the population of the future workforce in Manitoba.

According to Busby (2010),

The upcoming decade will see Manitoba's available workforce – the population aged 18-64 – expand by 26,000 persons. Nearly all of this net increase will come from young Aboriginals who enter the pool of potential workers as older Non-Aboriginals retire. [Even with a] high immigration scenario, Aboriginals represent about one in three new additions to the available workforce in Manitoba over the next 10 years. (p. 4)

Low rates of academic achievement and poor educational outcomes of First Nations learners contribute to higher rates of unemployment, higher rates of involvement with the justice system, and an over-representation of First Nations children in child welfare systems. Students who do not finish high school are more likely to use social services such as social assistance, and have poorer health outcomes resulting in an increased use of both primary and secondary health services (Busby, 2010, p. 5). According to Drummond and Watts (2012) in their article entitled, *Untapped Potential; Education and Aboriginal Youth*,

Our society values education for the benefits it holds not only for individuals but also for communities and society as a whole; it is a necessary tool to survive in modern life.

A recent study by the Centre for Study of Living Standards reported that closing the education gap between Aboriginals and other Canadians would result in saving of 115 billion over 15 years and that 401 billion would be added to Canada's gross domestic product if Aboriginal education and labour market outcomes were to match those of the non-Aboriginal population. (p. 1)

An electronic search of scholarly articles on Google and all databases for Ph.D. and Masters Theses at the University of Manitoba on January 07, 2017, revealed there is no published research to date on the experiences of teachers educating students with SEND attending schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. This research provides the first opportunity to publish First Nations perspective(s) on various aspects of special/inclusive education using First Nations practices and pedagogies.

Education, and more specifically special/inclusive education, within First Nations communities represents a balance and convergence of individual and collective human rights.

Canada has a legal responsibility to honour the treaties signed between those who came from other regions of the world to displace and colonize the original inhabitants of Turtle Island (North America). In addition, Canada is a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), acknowledging Canada's legal and moral responsibility to ensure that the rights of these two, at times overlapping populations, are both guaranteed and safeguarded. In Canada, there is need to redress historical and current wrongs from both legal and rights based perspectives.

There is a lack of First Nations perspective within existing education/special education published literature and a lack of dis/ability perspectives within First Nations education related literature. There are many reports, commissions, and consultations on the state of First Nations education, and the state of First Nations special/inclusive education programs in Canada. These reports have been initiated by initiated by the Federal Government of Canada (RCAP, 1996; First Nations Education Council, 2009; Senate Canada, 2011), regional or federal First Nations political bodies such as the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood (1971) and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN, July 2010, Sept 27, 2012, Oct 1-3, 2012, 2012, Jan 14, 2013). There is little literature on the perspectives of First Nations professionals who work with First Nations students with and without SEND in Manitoba. This study was an opportunity to investigate the nature of the perspective in First Nations communities in Manitoba on dis/abilities.

All research projects have limitations related to the scope and nature of the proposed study. The same was so for this study. First, I did limit this study to special/inclusive education within the context of the delivery of education within First Nations schools operating in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Although there are First Nations special educators and

clinicians working outside of First Nations communities in Manitoba, this study only included those who currently work in, or have worked in, schools or education related organizations serving First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Second, in this study I did focus on the provision of inclusive education in Manitoba. Many First Nations across Canada have similar experiences such as state imposed residential schools, and the assimilationist education policies and practices of the Federal Government of Canada. The reader may generalize some of the findings to special/inclusive education experiences of other First Nations communities in Canada due to federal funding criteria; however, due to regional and provincial differences, similar studies in other regions of Canada may be a focus of future research endeavors.

Third, in this study I focused on the perspectives and experiences of First Nations educators (resource teachers, including allies, Elders and clinicians) working within First Nations education systems in Manitoba. Additional research documenting the perspectives and experiences of students (and their parents/primary caregivers), classroom teachers, and educational assistants related to students with and without SEND would provide additional and valuable insights into this inquiry. The insights and perspectives of students with dis/abilities and their parents living in First Nations communities was the topic of previous research (Shackel, 2008), and may also be a component of future research endeavors. Individuals involved in the current and evolving systems within First Nations may also be a topic of future research.

Four, it is important to note that this study does not represent all First Nations educator perspectives on dis/ability and/or inclusive education practice, but rather only those of the study participants, interpreted through my lens as constructed in this study.

In the following section, I will elaborate on the intersections of the theoretical frameworks I employed for this study.

Theoretical Frameworks

The aforementioned theoretical frameworks provide the epistemological and ontological grounding for this study.

Critical race and critical disability theory. In this study, I examined the intersections of the experiences of First Nations people within the context of the delivery of inclusive education supports and services in First Nations communities in Manitoba. This required situating theoretical frameworks at the intersections of relevant theoretical constructs. The intersections of Critical Race Theory/Tribal Crit, (Brayboy, 2005) and Critical Disability Theory, (Liasidou, 2013) provide the theoretical foundation to position this study relating to the education of students with and without SEND attending First Nations schools in Manitoba. An intersectional analysis (Liasidou, 2013) allows a researcher to look at both the convergence and divergence of the interrelationship of constructs of race, and dis/ability, and other related identities, in order to provide a more contextualized and meaningful understanding and analysis of the lived reality of those who experience multiple, intersecting, and overlapping levels of marginalization and oppression in their lives. Liasidou (2013) explains the reasons for, and benefits of, the application of an intersectional analysis of critical race and dis/ability theory.

Given the entangled histories of racism and ableism embedded in the construction of mental deficiency (and normalcy), as well as the legacies of this history (Ferri, 2010, 1), it is necessary to provide a convergent, analytical framework concerned with exploring and eliminating the contextually contingent ways in which the ‘deviant other’ is

constructed and reified on the basis of particular racial and biological characteristics. (p. 725)

First Nations people in Manitoba and persons with dis/abilities have many things in common. Both individually and collectively, society has devalued and subjugated First Nations people and people with dis/abilities to roles that diminish their presence, their abilities, and their potential. Both groups have been classified, counted, and controlled, and have often been seen and characterized as deficit laden, in need of fixing and even eliminating. Socially constructed attitudes and actions of racism and ableism have greatly influenced and affected the lives of many First Nations people and people living with dis/abilities.

Both First Nations people and persons living with dis/ability have come to understand their common situations are grounded in the colonized experiences inherent within racialized and ableized (preferencing able bodiedness and whiteness) inherent within western societies. Academics in dis/ability studies, (Hansen, 2009) apply intersectional analysis and making connections between and amongst groups of marginalized peoples in society.

It would seem that disability is often equated with a lack of development. There would appear to have been a *colonizing* approach adopted toward those individuals with disabilities in Western society. In the possible belief that the appropriation of certain degrees of able-bodiedness can turn disabled people into something approaching the norm, *normalizing* or *corrective* are measures are often *presented* as a ‘civilizing’ influence ostensibly for the betterment of the individuals toward whom it is directed. This is another manifestation of disabled people being perceived as sub-human in much the same way as Aboriginal People in Canada have in the past been regarded as sub-human ‘savages’ in need of the Western ‘civilizing’ influence. Here ‘civilizing’ equates with

being able to fit in with the expected time-space routines of respectable Western society.

(p. 30)

Society has subjected First Nations people and people with dis/abilities to inhumane treatment and social actions aimed at making them invisible to the rest of society (Kirkness, 2013; Hansen, 2015). Canadian society has relegated First Nations people to reserves, out of sight and out of mind of the mainstream white society (Battiste, 2013). Society has also segregated persons with disabilities through institutionalization or within special schools or segregated classes within schools, so not to interrupt or inconvenience able-bodied peoples' experiences in school and community settings (Goodley, 2007). Both groups have had their individual and collective rights to full citizenship denied, resulting in limiting their access to economic resources, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of ongoing dependency (Liasidou, 2013).

According to Annamma, Connor and Ferri, (2012), Critical Disability Theory is a lens that emphasizes that it is the “social constructions of race and ability, recognizing the material and psychological implications of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of western cultural norms” (p. 11). The “collective” has denied First Nations people and persons with dis/abilities to the materials, services and supports, and economic resources required to achieve or maintain the benefits afforded to white middle classed non-dis/abled citizens and communities. For example, it can be argued that the perpetuation of inadequate funding for First Nations band operated schools, resulting in low graduation rates, is yet another mechanism to keep First Nations individuals, particularly those with SEND, dependent on health, social welfare, child welfare and justice systems within mainstream and First Nations communities alike.

The racialized and ableized gatekeeping inherent within educational, social welfare, and medical systems results in the perpetuation of the dependency of First Nations and dis/abled people alike, and in particular, for First Nations people who live with a dis/ability. First Nations persons, particularly children with living with dis/ability, have experienced this oppression and marginalization in multiple and overlapping ways (Shackel, 2008). This results in an even greater division of economic resources between First Nations and non-First Nations and people with and without dis/abilities. First Nations people who live with a dis/ability and reside in a First Nations community have amongst the highest rates of unemployment and experience greater barriers than most other Manitobans (Elias and Demas, 2010).

The implications of intersecting both critical race and disability theory for this research are numerous. The following is a summary of how this intersectional analysis will underpin this study. Intersectional frameworks privilege marginalized populations, facilitate the examination of further marginalization within marginalized populations, work towards social justice agenda(s), enable understanding the multiple layers of colonization of poly-marginalized individuals and groups, and engage in and welcome pluralism and contextualized discourse (Lepinard, 2014).

Critical theory. Critical theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Safa Dei, & Singh Johal, 2005) provides an important functional base to enter into the analysis of power relations related to First Nations people and the education of students with and without SEND. Seeking to understand marginalization, oppression, and power imbalance amongst and within groups and individuals in society, critical theory, related to critical social science, requires radical thought, careful to avoid constructing new truths that are merely recreations of existing power structures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) also note that, “the transformative

paradigm is activist, critical and constructivist, embedded in social justice and human rights agendas” (p. 94).

I use critical theory to problematize colonially oppressive practices acknowledging the asymmetrical power relations that form the structures around difference, in this situation, racial and corporeal diversity. The lens of critical theory provides myself and the research participants an opportunity to name and reclaim power within society. Critical theory research is transformative in nature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 171), providing hope and the possibility of setting the stage for change by helping to develop critical consciousness within those who may be oppressed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 74). From a critical theory perspective, Tuhiwai Smith (2006) provides five conditions to frame the Maori struggle for decolonization including, a critical consciousness; re-imagining the world and our position within it; intersectionality; challenge to the status quo; and struggle against imperialist structures. I use critical change theory to counter western knowledge production by creating points of critical resistance to established western ways of knowing, being, and doing. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) states,

It is because of this relationship with power that First Nations have been excluded, marginalized and ‘othered’. In this sense, history is not important for Indigenous people because a thousand accounts of the ‘truth’ will not alter the ‘fact’ that Indigenous people are still marginalized and do not possess the power to transform history into justice. (p. 35)

Critical theorists seek to understand forms of domination, explore the intersections of multiple layers of oppression, and critically challenge the role of education, medical, political, economic, and social structures that perpetuate and maintain the continuation of marginalization of racialized and differently abled minorities through unchanged or unchallenged power

structures. Many promote critical theory as an effective theoretical grounding for both indigenous and non-indigenous and dis/abled and non/disabled researchers alike (Safa Dei, & Singh Johal, 2005; Goodley, 2007; Kovach, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Questioning perspectives and dynamics of power within the research process, and within the politics of knowledge creation within the academy, I use critical theory to engage in different and at times difficult conversations and levels of analysis in order to move beyond simply analysis of power structures into areas such as my own self-reflexivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 168).

Tribal Critical Race Theory/Tribal Crit (Brayboy, 2000, 2009, 2010; McKinley and Brayboy, 2006) is an Indigenous defined theoretical and analytical lens used to explore, evaluate, and critique issues related to past and contemporary experiences of Indigenous peoples. The tenants of Tribal Crit, as stated by Brayboy (2005), include;

1. Colonization is endemic to society, 2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain, 3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities, 4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification, 5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens, 6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation, 7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups, 8. Stories are

not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being, and 9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change. (p. 429)

I believe these tenants are also relevant to the Canadian First Nation experience.

Critical Disability Theory (Liasidou, 2014) problematizes the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in special education programs within all school settings. Adding the additional intersections of Critical Disability Theory to Critical Race Theory widens our lens adding additional layers of context and analysis to facilitate understanding of how issues of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often invisibly, upholding notions of normalcy related to the experiences of racial majorities and of non-dis/abled people (Liasidou, 2013). As suggested by Liasidou (2013), “Insights from Critical Race Theory can reinforce the field of Dis/ability Studies so as to “create ‘a coalitional politic’ (Ferri, 2010, p.1) to address power inequities and social injustices that impact upon certain peoples’ lives and educational trajectories” (p. 725).

The use of Tribal Crit and Critical Disability Theory, as theoretical constructs herein, is an attempt to privilege the voices of marginalized populations who are often ignored or simply invisible within most academic research. The absence of the voices of First Nations people and persons with dis/abilities in academic research and publications within the field of special and inclusive education, and the absence of dis/ability perspective in First Nations literature are such examples. Using Tribal Crit and Critical Disability theory allows one to confront hegemonic attitudes and perceptions of “the other”, and the unequal distribution of power and resources within, between, and amongst First Nations and non-First Nations populations and people who are and are not dis/abled. Sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous people and persons

living with dis/abilities centers a critical intersecting analytical lens. Specifically applied to education, Brayboy (2005) suggests, “CRT (Critical Race Theory) [and Tribal Crit] in education posits that racism is endemic in society, and in education, and that racism has become so deeply engrained in society’s and schooling’s consciousness that it is often invisible” (p. 428).

There is an assumption when one uses both Tribal Crit and Critical Disability Theory that action towards social justice must exist to reverse the marginalization of racialized and ableized others. “Scholars utilizing CRT in education explicitly argue that their work must move toward eliminating the influence that racism, sexism, and poverty has in the lives of students and faculty” (Brayboy, 2006, p. 428).

Using Tribal Crit and Critical Disability Theory enables one to privilege Indigenous and dis/ability positive epistemologies and ontologies. These lenses acknowledge and value Aboriginal worldviews and the perspectives and experiences of people with dis/abilities, challenging western and non-dis/abled ways of knowing as the only way. When utilizing Tribal Crit and Critical Disability Theory exploration of worldview and positionality is encouraged, noting that, particularly within standardized curriculum, western and non-dis/abled worldviews and epistemologies are often the only paradigms presented, are largely uncontested, therefore seen as the definitive and only “right” way to see or be in the world (Brayboy, 2009, p. 4).

Tribal Crit and Critical Disability theorists (Brayboy, 2006; Liasidou, 2015) suggest that attitudes and approaches towards Indigenous peoples, particularly those living with dis/abilities, have largely been situated within endemic experiences of colonization, and attempts to eliminate people with disabilities and First Nations people, either directly or indirectly. Historical accounts and contemporary analysis, such as the interim report of the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Canada (2012), reveals multiple layers of attempted cultural genocide. As McKnight (1996, p. 30) suggests, people who are marginalized and devalued are often turned into commodities. Tribal Crit and Critical Disability Theorists suggest that challenging questions must be asked and that privileged members of society must carefully and critically reflect upon their positions of privilege and power.

The convergence of Tribal Crit and dis-Critical Disability Theory. “Dis Crit considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens” (Annamma, et al, 2012, p. 11). When I analyze at the intersection of Tribal Crit and Critical Disability Theory I search for a balanced acquisition of the collective and individual rights of First Nations people and persons with dis/abilities, particularly First Nations people living with dis/abilities. Action, therefore, must honour any movement that contributes to a more just and fair society. Syracuse Cultural Workers (2012) uses the poster, “same struggle, different difference” to acknowledge this convergence.

There are many implications for the use of the intersection of Tribal Crit and Critical Disability Theory within current research contexts in order to examine educational practices. I use Tribal Crit and Critical Disability Theory to call attention to the need to build, restore, reinforce, and maintain the positive self-identity of indigenous children and youth, especially those with a dis/ability, as they live, learn and work within and outside of First Nations communities in Manitoba. According to Brayboy, (2006), “In order to be successful as both academics and as Indigenous people, individuals must maintain a strong sense of the Indigenous identity as distinctive and as a source of pride” (p. 437). For this study, I focused on the gifts, abilities, and resilience of all research participants.

Proponents of Critical Disability Theory, (Annamma, 2012; Liasidou, 2013; Hansen, 2009) critique practices of mainstream education. When applied within a First Nations education setting, such mainstream education practices may actually frame linguistic and learning differences into learning dis/abilities, resulting in an over representation of the number of First Nations considered to have a dis/ability. Tribal Crit proponents (Kirkness, 2013; Brayboy, 2007) suggest that education, from an Indigenous perspective, happens all of the time and is all around us, not just within the “book learning” within most “formal” school settings. A critical dis/ability perspective suggests that students are diverse, they learn in different ways, and all have the right to be included in regular classroom learning environments and processes. This notion dramatically shifts the definition of what meaningful and relevant education might look, sound, and feel like, where it should happen, and what the responsibilities of the educators should be. For example, a critical question may include; what are there additive effects of living with two (or more) marginalized statuses? Bringing together two critical theories (Critical Disability Theory and Tribal Crit) allows us to more completely analyze, understand and interpret complex experiences and how they are manifested in schools and schooling.

The following are the key questions that arise from this theoretical framework. I used these questions to guide who I approached to participate in this study, how I selected my participants, and how I collected and analyzed the data within the research process.

1. How do perceptions of understanding of, and issues related to, race and/or dis/ability influence the provision of special/inclusive education supports and services in First Nations schools in Manitoba?

2. What are the perspectives of First Nations educators, clinicians and consultants, as well as Elders and Indigenist allies who work within First Nations special/inclusive education, on disability and difference, and the provision of supports and services for students with and without SEND attending schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

3. Do First Nations and dis/ability perspectives inform contextualized understanding and practice related to inclusive education in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

4. How do issues within First Nations education such as history, colonization, jurisdiction, and the rate and flow of funding affect the ability of schools in First Nations communities to provide special/inclusive education supports and services?

5. How can First Nations schools balance the individual rights of First Nations students with dis/abilities and the collective rights of First Nations to enhance the quality of life for students living with and without SEND in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

6. How can First Nations schools frame and deliver special/inclusive education from First Nations perspective and practice in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

7. What approaches to funding of special/inclusive education (assessment vs. intervention) best meet the needs of students with and without SEND in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

8. From the intersections of critical race and disability theory, one tension between inclusive education and First Nations education is that integration and inclusion is a goal for one group and potential assimilation for another. What are the implications of this tension for

students who are dis/abled and First Nations attending schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

From the intersections of Tribal Crit and Critical Disability Theory, I can now situate myself within this proposed study.

Role of researcher: (Re) positionality and reflexive practice. Defined as “positionality”, exemplary qualitative research begins with a review and interrogation of one’s own place in relation to the proposed research. It is necessary, if not imperative, for Indigenist and dis/ability allies to spent considerable time and effort to reflect on our own positionality in order to account for the perspectives we bring to our work.

Originating from one’s family or culture of origin, world experiences, and/or professional training or current places of employment, all researchers bring a range of personal and professional biases, perspectives, and assumptions to their research. As a researcher, I not only have to interrogate my own worldview/position but I must also name, challenge and try to suspend or put my own biases, perspectives, and assumptions aside in order to be open to hear and collect the perspectives, beliefs, and ideas of the research participants. Suspending what I know to be valid or true allows me to be more open to the perspectives, beliefs, and thoughts of others. It is for this reason that I offer the following self-reflection.

Rosemary Garland Thomson (2011) in her article titled, *Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept*, states,

Like the dominant subject positions such as male, white, or heterosexual [and able-bodiedness], fitting is a comfortable and unremarkable majority experience of material anonymity, an unmarked subject position that most of us occupy at some points in life

and that often goes unnoticed. When we fit harmoniously and properly into the world, we forget the truth of contingency because the world sustains us. When we experience misfitting and recognize that disjuncture for its political potential, we expose the relational component and the fragility of fitting. Any of us can fit here today and misfit here tomorrow. (p. 597)

For most of my life, I have admittedly occupied the role of “fitting into”. Looking and sounding like, often benefitting from what society values, preferences and gives privilege to; white, well-educated, visibly non-disabled and heterosexual males. For the past 15 years I have chosen to situate myself in a space where I am not in the majority – A non-Indigenous front line employee in a First Nations education organization positioned to assist First Nations schools improve the quality of education in First Nations communities throughout Manitoba.

My work at the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre is the primary reason I chose this research topic. In my role, I am one of the relatively few non-First Nations people working within this second and third level education system supporting band operated First Nations schools in Manitoba. I began as a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum of Disorders (FASD) Specialist, and because of my interest in dis/abilities, and my background in individual, family and group counselling, First Nations asked me to provide assistance and training related to other dis/abilities and the social and emotional issues faced by students attending band operated schools in Manitoba. My role within the MFNERC morphed into addressing other issues related to special/inclusive education supports and services, including those related to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention, which is at epidemic proportions in many First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Over the past 18 years, I have visited every First Nation community in Manitoba with a band-operated school, most multiple times during a school year. My visits consist of spending a number of days in the community working primarily with resource/special education teachers, classroom teachers, and with students with special needs and their parents. When I am in a First Nations school/community, I provide training on topics related to educational strategies, such as use of standardized assessment tools, Individual Education Plan (IEP) development, inclusive instructional practice, Response to Intervention (RTI), and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Katz, 2012). I also provide dis/ability related advocacy workshops and training on topics such as Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorders, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum of Disorders, and Autism Spectrum of Disorders, just to name a few. My role includes supporting and facilitating advocacy efforts of families with various local First Nations, Provincial and Federal governments in relation to creating access to community based services and supports for students with dis/abilities. Such support is based in education through the MFNERC in Manitoba. Working under First Nations jurisdiction allows me to design my work in relation to real, identified, and community based needs and requests.

I have enhanced my work within First Nations special/inclusive education at the local, sub regional and provincial levels through my ongoing masters and doctoral level studies and research for the past 10 years in Disability Studies, and Special/Inclusive Education at the University of Manitoba. The MFNERC supports and enables the continuation of this research in a variety of ways such as providing consent for me to do this research and allowing me to conduct this research in off work hours while I am travelling to First Nations throughout Manitoba.

At the time of the data collection and analysis phase of the study, I was not in a supervisory position over any research participant. The MFNERC is a voluntary service delivery organization, that does not have jurisdiction over the education in First Nations, nor has authority for funding schools in First Nations communities. Although my role does provide me with the necessary relationships, background information and contacts to implement such a research project, at the time of the study, I did not see myself in a position of authority over potential research participants nor my role at the MFNERC as creating a conflict of interest. I do know some of the potential research participants personally, however I do not feel this represents power over within the context of this study.

In order to minimize the possibility that potential participants may feel any undue influence in the study I employed a number of strategies. I maximized the possibility that a potential participant can say no to participation through the following ways: First, I did not approach any person who worked within existing First Nations education systems directly, rather I relied on others to distribute letters of invitation to participate. Second, the clinicians and consultants working within special/inclusive education in First Nations schools at the time of the study were at the same level of authority as me. In fact, some of the participants in this study were in positions of power and authority over me, either in a supervisory position or in some way able to restrict my access into specific schools. Another way that I avoided any potential for undue influence was to exclude current staff of the Roseau River First Nation to participate in this study, as they were the only school, my employer; the MFNERC had any direct authority over.

Although this, my work at the MFNERC, is the first, might I say “visible” form of misfitting, I must also admit that I often feel that I do not “fit in” to the norm. For my entire life I

have often situated myself outside the circle, and in most mainstream settings, I feel that I see the world around me quite differently than most others. I feel strongly and deeply, am very passionate. I am very sensitive and any type of injustice that I experience or come to know about affects me deeply. This provides me with a strong sense of fairness, good intuitive abilities, a tremendous empathy towards others, and an abundance of passion. However, it also causes tremendous emotional intensity within me, and ongoing sadness, loneliness, and self-isolation. Admittedly, sometimes I have difficulty with such intense emotions. I feel my own emotion pain, and the pain of others, very deeply. For this, I am both deeply grateful and resentful. It is a tiring and emotionally draining journey. I often feel like an “outsider” looking in, and admittedly, I often take the non-traditional route in most of what I do.

I am not a member of any First Nations band, nor do I identify as a person living with dis/ability. Given the history of colonization, marginalization, and continued oppression of First Nations people and persons with dis/abilities, I am deeply aware of the methodological, positional, and power related issues inherent with someone like me doing this type of research. I must remain conscious of who I am, what has influenced me, how I am privileged, and how I personally position both First Nations people and persons living with visible and non-visible dis/abilities, both historically and in contemporary contexts.

In this qualitative research there may be a power differential between myself and some of the research participants. I can attribute a component of this power difference to the power inherent with the role of researcher along with the power granted to me as a special education specialist/consultant working with First Nations schools. I also have power due to my race, socio-economic status, my education level, and the types of employment opportunities that have been available to me due to these attributes. As suggested by Stone & Priestly (1996),

This is particularly important for non-disabled [and non-Indigenous] researchers because the inherent power relationship between researcher and researched is accentuated by the unequal power relationship which exists between disabled people and non-disabled [and Indigenous and non-Indigenous] people in the wider world. (p. 672)

Establishing, maintaining, and sustaining a reciprocal and relational approach to research is one way to address power with research involving First Nations communities. This requires ongoing, critical, and self-reflective analysis and practice. For this study, I followed the ethical guidelines of “respect for person, concern for welfare, and justice” (TCPS 2, 2014, p. 6), as established in the guidelines for research involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Metis People of Canada. The National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) (2007) outlined that the four principles of ownership, control, access, and possession must forefront any research with Aboriginal People in Canada. These are the minimal guidelines established for conducting research within Indigenous communities in Manitoba.

In addition, some researchers have identified additional responsibilities while conducting research in Indigenous communities. Scholars in Indigenous research and education (Atleo, 2009; Kovach, 2009; Aveling, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) suggest that specific principles, practices, and ways of being, knowing, and doing must guide research with Indigenous communities. Respect, relevance, reciprocity, relationality, resistance, reflexivity and representation are reoccurring themes in scholarly works in this area. Aveling (2012) suggests that a “pan Indigenous research” agenda ensures that research includes the following practices and adheres to the following protocols:

Research is grounded in an Indigenous epistemology, research privileges Indigenous voice, research design demonstrates an explicit decolonizing aim, research honours and respects sacred knowledge(s), researchers observe cultural protocols, research emphasizes collaborative research and should benefit Indigenous peoples, research utilizes Indigenous methods such as storytelling, research gives back to the communities being researched, and research reports include a space for self-location. (p. 207)

Tuhiwai Smith (2012) outlines seven guidelines for Maori research including;

Aroha kit e tangata (a respect for people), Kanohi ketea (the seen face that is present, yourself to people, face to face). Titio, whakarongo...kerero (look, listen...speak), Manaaki e tangata (share and host people, be generous), Kia tupato (be cautious), Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata (do not trample over the mana of people), and Kia mahikai (don't flaunt your knowledge). (p. 124)

Situated within, *Nehiyaw* knowledge(s), Kovach (2009) states that (Ojibwa) research should be guided by the following characteristics; “(a) tribal epistemologies, (b) decolonizing and ethics aim, (c) researcher preparations involving cultural protocols, (d) research preparation involving standard research design, making meaning of knowledge(s) gathered, and (f) giving back” (p. 45).

Atleo (2009) in *Understanding Aboriginal Learning Ideology Through Story work with Elders* notes that, “This [her] work is informed by a conceptual framework of Kirkness and Bernhardt (1981) and grounded in principles of Coast Salish First Nation Elders (reverence, respect, reciprocity, wholism, interrelatedness, and synergy (Archibald, 1997, 2008)” (p. 454).

Tuhiwai Smith (2012) suggests those Aboriginal communities hold researchers interested in

Aboriginal communities to the following criteria; “Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us? Can they fix our generator? Can they actually do anything?” (p. 10) The aforementioned ways of being, knowing and living a good life form the basis for how I strived to be within this relational research context.

Given who I am, where I come from, and what I represent, I acknowledge that the best place to situate myself and characterize my role in First Nations education is “walking beside, and at times behind”. As a researcher, I have an additional responsibility to provide research leadership in this study. In my work, First Nations have asked me to listen, to learn, to think deeply and critically, and to take direction from Indigenous people and persons living with visible and non-visible dis/abilities. First Nations expect that I demonstrate self-awareness and respect towards all others, that I act with honesty, integrity, and genuineness, and that I work hard and be of service to others. It is only through my own self-awareness, my own positioning (and repositioning) that I can gain understanding of new and community based knowledge(s). As this journey emerges and unfolds, I continue to deepen the path towards the demonstration and practice of *epistemic humility* (Wilson, 2008; O’Connor, 2009). This is difficult, likely impossible to ever fully achieve, yet necessary to do in order to proceed.

This shift requires a monumental realignment of my first ‘gaze’. I, like most white, visibly able-bodied men, have been socialized to fix, to mediate and under the auspices of neoliberalism, to save, at times thinking that “I” have the power to emancipate. This socialization has resulted in the practice of focusing on the ‘other’. Convenient, safe and comfortable as long as the gaze and attention deflected away from me, the result has been well intentioned, but at times, misguided attempts to resolve, change or fix things/those around me. Even more subtle are the times when I advertently or inadvertently imposed my worldview on

others. As Max (2002) writes about her positionality as a non-Indigenous scholar, “While important to avoid re-centering whiteness, Dei (1996) maintains that the entry point for white allies to join the anti-racism debate is around the interrogation of whiteness and white privilege” (p. 29). From within a critique of whiteness, what does it mean to be an ally in Aboriginal Education (Max, 2002, p. 14)? Max (2002) acknowledges that knowing one’s own worldview and interrogating that worldview, provides a vehicle to be open to see the worldviews, experiences, and realities of others.

I, unlike many First Nations and/or visibly dis/abled friends and colleagues I know, who are continuously asked to represent all First Nations people or all persons with dis/abilities, have never been asked to speak on behalf of all white people. Nor have I had any of my personal attributes such as my chronic lateness, my procrastination, my intensity nor any other emotional quality attributed to my race or dis/ability related status. I can blend in; I do not have to declare, or be classified, nor deconstructed, for I am what is perceived as ‘the norm’. I am what those who have been deemed as “less than” continue to be compared to.

A shift from focusing entirely on ‘the other’, to greater self-reflexivity, represents a monumental shift in my journey. In essence, it is a process of self-re-(dis)covery, leading to a (re)construction of my position as ally. While this work focuses on the reflexivity of able bodiedness and white privilege, there is also heterosexist, class, and gender privilege affecting the complexities of the intersections illuminated/compounded at every juncture of my ongoing journey.

Goodley (2007) recommends the following guide cross cultural/dis/ability scholarly research: “Reposition the centrality of race in contemporary society (race as a defining factor in

the constitution of society); reject West-European/modernist claims of neutrality and objectivity (turn to the subjective); rely upon the experiential, situated and subjugated knowledge's of people of color; and embrace interdisciplinary intersectionality" (p. 6).

As an Indigenist dis/ability research ally, I must question myself: whose worldviews are being preferenced in this study and how indigenous and dis/ability specific ways of being, knowing, and doing ground the processes of this study. I must also consider key issues such as representation, identity, and authority within this study. In this study, I bring many years of experience of ally work and engagement with both the dis/ability and First Nations communities and an ongoing commitment to holistic exploration and understanding of community and culture.

Somerville (2007) defines this as the space of *postmodern emergence*. "In particular, the search to find the 'third space', the space in between the self and other, the space of 'becoming other', born of the space in-between, is, I believe, the condition for generating new knowledge" (Somerville, 2007, p. 234). Becoming an ally means living with the ambiguity of not knowing, and the fear of making mistakes (Max, 2002, p. 62).

On many levels, others see me as 'the authority'. I am afforded many layers of privilege because of the way my body moves in space, the way I look, my gender, my education, and my access to material, social, political, vocational and educational resources. It is the same spaces, systems, and structures privileging me, which continue to marginalize and oppress Aboriginal people and people with visible dis/abilities. I must reflect on how the decisions I make, on an ongoing basis, might continue to reinforce or challenge such systems.

Until now, I did not know that my story really mattered. Like Butler (2005), "giving an account of oneself, establishes the essential relationality through which we come into existence

as the basis of continuing emergence as selves” (p. 40). This account is tentative, related to the time and space I am in at this moment. “My account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I can devise no definitive history, I cannot explain why I have emerged in this way” (Somerville, 2007, p. 234).

When I am in the intersections, within the margins of the margins - existing along the borders, floating between two (or more) worlds, navigating these waters, I will remain open, stay vulnerable and hopeful, for it is in this space where deeper meaning, significance and knowledge is developed and transmitted.

My story, and how I continue to live out my story, is ultimately about power; who has power, how this power is used, and how I choose to use the power that I have for the good of humanity. Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie (2009) in *The Danger of a Single Story* states,

All stories are defined by the principles of ‘*encalie*’. *Encalie* is a noun meaning to be greater than another. How they are told, who tells them, when they are told, and how many stories are told really depends on power. If I were to fall guilty to the single story held about Africa I might think that Africa was only a place of incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, people all dying of AIDS and poverty, unable to speak for themselves, waiting to be saved by a kind white foreigner. (Tedtalk, October 7, 2009)

Understanding *encalie*, is a necessary requisite for counter-hegemonic and anti-colonial engagement. I cannot have but a single story without relationship, trusting myself and others and a commitment and willingness to work together and resolve conflicts as they emerge.

Through this study, my objective has been to practice self-reflection and intersectional analysis using ‘epistemic humility’ to both guide and ground this journey.

The issues faced by both Indigenous and dis/ability communities alike are often systemic, multigenerational, and layered within the histories of lived experiences. As I strive to maintain relationships and connectedness, floating amongst and between cultures, worldviews and paradigms, I think that wherever I am, I, like most others, am just trying to find some belonging, to fit in, and to have the chance to contribute towards something greater than myself. From an Indigenous perspective, no one is less or greater than another, everyone has a gift to give and I, like everyone else, will continue to make mistakes. I “acknowledge that I am non-Indigenous, yet I have a story that includes an Indigenous context and lived experiences with Indigenous people” (O’Connor, 2009, p. 24). As O’Connor (2009) also states, “I am also cognizant that I am a product of the colonial forces that have traditionally dismissed Indigenous methodologies in exchange for the dominant Western paradigm” (p. 24).

The journey I am on is neither comfortable convenient or popular, nor should I suppose that it be! My journey is evolving, expanding, and ever deepening. Ultimately, this cross-cultural work for me is now a journey towards wholeness. I have concluded that this is a journey of spiritual awakening rather than a journey of changing others or of fixing the world around me. As Stienstra and Ashcroft (2010) note, “Each individual has depth and breadth. Each individual is a tapestry of experience, roles, physical, mental and emotional aspects interwoven into a fabric of culture, society, politics and interactions that bends, grows and changes in and through time” (p. 193). It is through this journey that I hope to work on the last and hardest teaching of all, which is humility.

I end this self-reflection with the wisdom of Elder Robert J. Sterling;

I have learned:

Not just to look – but to see!

Not just to talk – but to say something!

Not just to dream – but to do something!

Not just to take – but to give!

Not just to exist – but to be!

If life in the future seems to challenge me, change me, depend on me, use me,
hurt me, laugh at me, criticize me, tempt me, complicate me, then I am ready!!!

(Elder Robert W. Sterling [Nlaka'pamus Nation], in Kirkness, 2013, p. 169)

Conclusion

In summary, the intersections of how racism and ableism, framed from within both Tribal Crit and Critical Disability Theory, shapes the conceptual framework, the points of inquiry, and the ways in which I collect, analyze, interpret, and present the findings of this study. Used together, I apply Tribal Crit and Critical Disability Theory to strengthen and reinforce the individual and intersecting rights based movements which provides for greater analysis of how the intersections of race and dis/ability are conceptualized and contextualized within First Nations education settings within Manitoba. For example, what does it mean to have two devalued sets of roles? This intersectional conceptual framework provides points of convergence that enriches conversation and dialogue providing a bridge to connect experiences of dis/ability within First Nations education settings. I now use this theoretical base to understand how and why we structure education for students with and without SEND, attending First Nations schools and what might need to change to improve or enhance the education opportunities for all learners.

Critical Disability Theory and Tribal Crit provides a foundation for a unique way of interpreting experiences of research participants. By situating this study at these intersections, this research not only fills a gap within the existing literature, but also provides ongoing dialogue and conversation enabling a deepening of understanding of the experiences of providing special/inclusive education supports and services within schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – First Nations and First Nations Education in Manitoba

In this chapter, I review literature related to First Nations and First Nations education in Manitoba. From the intersections of Tribal Crit and Critical Disability Theory, I understand and interpret contemporary issues, particularly those related to the delivery special/inclusive education, within the context of the history and evolution of First Nations and First Nation education in Manitoba. In this study, I use intersecting critical theories to contextualize colonization, normalized ableist and racialized stereotypes, mass interference from the outside, rights based analysis, First Nations and dis/ability positive epistemology, and the history of the jurisdiction and funding of First Nations education. A review of the literature on the historical and policy context of First Nations, First Nations education, and First Nations and non-First Nations special/inclusive education in Manitoba situates this study.

History of First Nations

Through the mass interference of “outsiders”, colonization has affected various aspects of the lives of First Nation people, including the educational experiences of many First Nations learners in Manitoba.

Impacts of colonization in First Nations in Manitoba. Historically, First Nations peoples in the Canadian prairies, prior to European contact lived nomadic/hunter-gather lifestyles following the migration of the animals that provided sustenance for daily living and survival (Dickason & McNab, 2009). First Nations people on the Canadian prairies had valued roles and often lived according to the seasons following the geographic cycles of the fish and game they depended upon. In the late 1800s, and well into the early 1900s First Nations cultural and linguistic groups in Manitoba, affected primarily by the immigration and migration of French and English European settlers, were relegated to reserves, often on the poorest quality of land.

These places of residence and forced confinement replaced the valued social roles and opportunities once seen and experienced by many First Nations people of the prairies.

Through the forced imposition of the reserve system, the Canadian government replaced traditional forms of governance with oppressive forms of social control wielded through enacted legislation of the Government of Canada and the newly developing provincial governments. Mass poverty, state facilitated dependence on social and child welfare systems, and the mass removal of children through the residential schooling system, replaced traditional and historic independent and functioning social roles. Based on hegemonic perceptions cultural superiority, church and state organization removed generations of First Nations children from their families, cultures, languages, and ways of knowing, being, and doing, all under the guise of proselytizing, Christianizing, and/or civilizing the “savage”. Manifest and latent forms of cultural marginalization promoted the social invisibility of First Nations in the midst of an emerging western economy and society.

The reserve system of containment, along with the removal of children and placement into residential schools, and the introduction of the social and child welfare system resulted in the disintegration of healthy systems of functioning within many First Nations families and communities. The fractured identities of many First Nations individuals, families, and communities in Manitoba are the outcomes of the intergenerational effects of such actions. This interruption of the intergenerational transmission of culture resulted in layers and decades of internalized feelings of insecurity, self-loathing and beliefs of inferiority. The continued cycles of abuses, dependency, and marginalization are, at times, reenacted and reproduced within First Nations families, organizations, and communities through various forms of internal and lateral violence directed within.

The colonial experiences of First Nations within Canada, particularly in relation to experiences within education systems, are documented (Kirkness, 1999, 2013; RCAP, 1996; Senate Canada, 2011). The imposition of church and state run Indian residential schools resulted in devastating intergenerational consequences for First Nations individuals, families, and communities. The introduction of the Federal run day school system in First Nations, designed to replace Indian residential schools, resulted in little improvement in the educational outcomes for First Nations learners and the further disintegration of First Nations languages and cultures in Manitoba (Kirkness, 1999).

Poverty, and a myriad of socio economic conditions such as poor and inadequate housing in First Nations communities, continues to affect most students attending First Nations schools in First Nations communities today. “Unless they [governments at federal, provincial and First Nation level] rise to this challenge, the living conditions may continue to be poorer on First Nations reserves than elsewhere in Canada for generations to come” (Canadian Press, 2011, p. 2). Today, in most, if not all First Nations communities in Manitoba, there is limited opportunity for economic participation, resulting in high unemployment, poverty, and poor health and education outcomes for many.

The context, for Aboriginal people in Canada, is laden with third world poverty conditions, isolation, unemployment, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and racism, (both individual and systemic) as evidenced by run-down schools, inequities in funding, assimilation to English language and Euro centrism that is now normalized in all schools. (Battiste, 2013, p. 94)

There is not only inequality between First Nation and non-First Nations communities, but also inequality across and within First Nations communities. Grasping for access to the limited resources between and within First Nations creates competition and exclusion as the demand for scarce resources climb and governments/communities distribute these resources within these third world conditions of First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Current Situation in First Nations Communities

It is important to consider poverty related issues, the determinants of health and issues related to mental health and suicide as they affect First Nations education and special/inclusive education in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Poverty and dependency. People living in First Nations communities in Manitoba experience some of the highest rates of poverty and unemployment in the province. According to a recent study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA),

The outrageous reality is that the majority of children on First Nation reserves in Canada live in poverty and their situation is getting worse. This report includes poverty rates on reserves and in the territories, something never before examined using the 2011 National Household Survey data. The most recently available data show that child poverty rates for status First Nations children living on-reserve rose to a staggering 60% in 2010. By contrast, poverty rates among Indigenous children living off reserve have improved somewhat, while non-Indigenous children have seen little change to their circumstances since 2005. (2016, p. 5)

This report suggests that government jurisdiction plays a critical role in the poverty rates and suggests an increase to the federal child benefits but also says the key is to remove barriers to education, training, employment and entrepreneurs.

The rates of poverty in First Nations community have detrimental effects on the schools operating within these communities. Teachers report that many students come to school hungry. A myriad of poverty related social conditions such as overcrowding in housing, inadequate access to clean water for drinking and sanitation, the lack of mental health services at the local level and the lack of community and systems infrastructure also effects many learners in First Nations communities. These issues are even more prevalent, pervasive and pronounced for children and adults living with dis/ability in First Nations communities in Manitoba (Shackel, 2008).

The incidence of illness has a dramatic effect on school attendance and the outcomes for many learners in First Nations communities as well. According to the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (2010), “First Nations suffer from ‘third world’ diseases such as tuberculosis at eight to ten times the rate of Canadians in general” (p. 2).

Documents obtained from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada state, “Manitoba First Nations also have the highest social assistance rates in Canada, the documents show. In some communities, 80 per cent of the population is on welfare. Just less than two per cent of the population has come off social assistance and moved on to education or employment.” (APTN, 2015) With the introduction of, and mass reliance on social assistance/welfare, many ways First Nations historically provided for their families such as gardening, hunting, fishing and trapping dramatically decreased or ceased all together. The high

unemployment rate in all First Nations continues to result in most families living on social assistance, contributing to the ongoing intergenerational erosion of the independence.

Determinants of health. According to the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCAH), education, which is a component of socio economic status, determines health through a number of avenues. By way of example, inadequate education often includes poor literacy, which affects one's ability to acquire information about proper nutrition or health food preparation. Insufficient education diminishes the skills one might have to offer the labour market, often resulting in low paying jobs. The ensuing poverty and social exclusion, both disproportionately experienced by Aboriginal people in Manitoba, increases the risk of family instability, which can manifest in divorce and single parenthood (Reading & Wien, 2013, p. 15). According to Davison and Hawe, (2012), studying school engagement among Aboriginal students in Northern Canada,

High rates of educational disengagement are worrisome, especially given what is known about schooling and its link to health. Alienation from school is a significant predictor of negative health behaviors among students. People with more education have higher levels of self-reported overall health and are able to achieve higher socioeconomic status. They have lower levels of morbidity, disability, and early mortality. (p. 65)

Other challenges on First Nations communities such as inadequate drinking water and inadequate nutritional intake continues to plague many First Nations learners, families and schools. Teachers in First Nations communities in Manitoba often report that many learners come to school hungry, unable to focus or concentrate on learning. According to Sheila Fraser, in the 2011 Auditor General report on the state of First Nations communities in Canada, "I am

profoundly disappointed to note...that despite federal action in response to our recommendations over the years, a disproportionate number of First Nations people still lack the most basic services that other Canadians take for granted” (CCPA, 2016).

Mental health and suicide. The rate of suicide of First Nations children and youth in First Nations schools is alarming and continues to rise. “The suicide rate for Canadian Aboriginal people was twice the rate of non-Aboriginals; the youth Aboriginal suicide rate was six times the number of non-Aboriginals” (Martin, 2011, p.1). According to the AFN (2012, Oct. 1) “The suicide rate among First Nations youth is between 5 to 7 times higher than any other cultural group in Canada” (p. 2).

In Manitoba, in most First Nations schools, staff and students do not have access to the resources or supports to properly address or prevent these traumas. The effects of social and emotional trauma on learning are well established (Katz, 2012). The lack of resolution of suicide and trauma, and unresolved mental health issues, remain amongst the greatest of concerns for educators working within First Nations communities in Manitoba. (Kevin Kipling, personal communication, January 20, 2015).

Commodification of child rearing. Historically within many First Nations families and communities, the raising of children was a collective responsibility, with immediate and extended family members often caring for children, biologically and non-biologically related, without being paid for providing this childrearing/care by the government. Today, more than 30,000 children are in the care of child welfare agencies throughout Canada. More than one third, over 10,000, of these children lives in Manitoba (Canadian Centre on Policy Alternatives, 2016). Of the 10,000 plus children in the care of child welfare agencies in Manitoba, over 90%

are of First Nations ancestry. With over 9,000 First Nations children in state care, means that the Province of Manitoba has deemed as high as 18,000 First Nations parents as incapable of being able to care for their children (Manitoba Child Advocate, CBC Interview, June 14, 2015). The rate of First Nations children in care today now exceeds the number of children in residential schools at any one time in the history of the Province of Manitoba (Chartier et al, 2016).

According to Fuchs, Burnside and Marchenski, (2008, p. 5) “In Manitoba one third of children in care qualify as meeting a broad definition of disability”. This is most likely due in part to the absence of a community-based continuum of disability supports and services for families living in First Nations communities in Manitoba (Shackel, 2008).

The commodification of child rearing in this way, with all of the good intentions of a well-meaning welfare state, has contributed to the erosion many intergenerational family bonds and extended family members providing care for children and ensuring the well-being of children in First Nations communities.

Family separation - interruption of the intergenerational transmission of language and culture. For decades Manitoba First Nations families have been affected by the intergenerational effects of residential schools, the “60’s scoop” whereby the Manitoba Government forced the adoption of many First Nations children into non-First Nations homes within Manitoba but mostly beyond, and the mass removal of children from through Provincial and First Nations operated child welfare agencies (Timpson, 1993). These movements, along with the lack of opportunity to attain their education in their First Nations language, based on First Nations worldviews, has resulted in a dramatic loss of First Nations linguistic and cultural practices. One of the most efficient ways to weaken or eradicate a culture is to interrupt, reduce, or eliminate the ability of grandparents and parents to pass on their culture, often through their

language, from one generation to the next (Feuerstein, R., Klein, P. S., & Tannenbaum, A. J. (Eds.). 1991). The ensuing loss of positive self-identity and self-concept is one of the deepest pains carried by many First Nations Manitobans today.

Internalized colonization and lateral violence. Once communities or groups of people with similar identities such as First Nations people, or people with disabilities, have been subjected to oppression, marginalization and devaluation, often for long periods of time, there is a possibility for that oppression or ill treatment, and the associated feelings, to be directed internally. Self-destructive behaviours, or emotional physical or sexual violence directed laterally to those within the family, community or those with similar identities, can result in poor self-concept, depression and even self-harm. According to Maracle (1996), “Lateral violence amongst Native people is about our anti-colonial rage working itself out as an expression of hate for one another” (p. 11). This might help to explain the high rates of suicide, child apprehension, and substance misuse within some First Nations communities in Manitoba.

History of First Nations Education in Manitoba

I have divided the history of First Nations education in Manitoba into the following categories: pre-contact, education after European contact, residential schools, integration/assimilation, and ‘Indian Control of Indian Education’.

Pre contact. Contextualized within the fabric of the community, many First Nations based traditional education, prior to contact with colonial influences, on a naturalistic, holistic approach (Kirkness, 1999; 2013). Connected to the land, educational processes, through various aspects of daily living, comprised of preparing the child to be a functional and contributing member of the family and broader community. Traditional First Nations education was, and still is, about observation, practicing skills at developmentally appropriate stages, and then applying

these skills contextually in real life situations. Looking, learning, listening, and living are the four L's that characterize First Nations educational practice. "First Nations education is about learning in relation to one another, the entire community taking responsibility for the learning of all children, teaching values such as sharing, caring and being of service to others" (Kirkness, 1999, p. 2).

Indigenous knowledge systems include learning processes that are social, inter-generational, holistic, oral/narrative-based, and experiential (Battiste- Youngblood-Henderson, 2000; Canadian Council of Learning, 2009). "As Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) explain, education processes [in First Nations] were carefully crafted around observing natural processes, adapting modes of survival, obtaining sustenance from the plant and animal world, and using natural materials to make their tools and implements. (Hare, 2012, p. 392)" (p. 10). As stated in *The Journey of Hope: Manitoba First Nations Education*, presented to the AMC Chiefs in Assembly, "The education system [pre-contact] also passed on values and normal ways of living to each generation. In this way there was continuity in how people interacted with other people, and other living things around them. As nations, they wanted to make sure that the children learned how to live within the laws and rules of the nation. This is what education is about" (MFNERC, 2014, p. 3).

European contact. Following European contact, the Government of Canada worked to ensure that jurisdiction and legislative authority for First Nations education, "lie within federal authority for matters dealing with Indians and lands reserved for Indians, including education, [which] stems from section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867" (Senate Canada, 2011, p. 9).

Signed by the federal government and Aboriginal Nations, numbered treaties (1-11) exist and include education as an inherent treaty right. "The numbered treaties, established

between 1871 and 1921, commit the federal Crown to maintain schools and provide educational services to signatories [First Nations] as part of its ongoing treaty obligations” (Senate Canada, 2011, p. 10). Sections 114-122 of the current Indian Act, still governing Aboriginal education today, have remained virtually unchanged since 1951, the era of residential schools. Section 114 of the Act enables the federal government to “establish, operate and maintain schools for Indian children and to make agreements with provinces, territories, and religious institutions for the education of First Nations children”. Notably, there is no provision for entering into agreements with First Nations for the education of First Nations children. Section 115 of the Indian Act “enables the federal government to provide for and make regulations with respect to standards for buildings, equipment, teaching, education, inspection and discipline in connection with schools”. First Nations suggest repeal of the current Indian Act as an important initial step towards improving the quality of education for First Nations children in Canada (AFN, July 2010).

Residential schools. By the mid-17th century, European missionaries, along with the establishing non-Indigenous governments, began the establishment of residential or boarding schools for Indian children. Oppressive in nature, characterized by the mass removal of First Nations children from family, cultural, and linguistic foundations, these schools represent the epitome of colonization and hegemony (RCAP, 1996). With mortality rates as high as 50%, many children forced to attend these institutions never returned home (Kirkness, 1999, p. 3). Representing one of the most, if not the most heinous crimes against humanity in Canadian history, these schools left a legacy of negative effects, with significant consequences for the intergenerational transmission of culture and way of life for many Indigenous people throughout Manitoba and beyond. Not only for the survivors, but also for their children and grandchildren,

the loss of language, spiritual practices and family bonds has resulted in negative self-identity, poor educational outcomes, and mental health issues such as depression, addictions, poverty, and even loss of life. According to Kirkness (1999), “The weakening of Indian society as a whole can be attributed to boarding schools. Cultural conflict, alienation, poor self-concept, lack of preparation for jobs and for life, in general, derives from this deplorable experience” (p. 4). Through residential schooling, “the government determined that education in the white man’s school was the only means of dealing with the problem of “wandering” natives, if only they could get them to accept this option” (Battiste, 2013, p. 47). Indigenous scholar Battiste (2013) notes that,

Residential schooling was intended to root out and destroy Indigenous knowledge, languages, and relationships with the natural family to replace them with Eurocentric values, identities, and beliefs that ultimately were aimed at destroying children’s self-esteem, self-concept and healthy relationships with each other and their families. (p. 56)

Many forms of forced assimilation and removal of children, beyond residential schooling occurred throughout Canada at this time. In Nova Scotia, “planting out” was common practice. Aimed at disconnecting First Nations children from family and culture, these programs operated in Canada throughout the first decades of the 19th century. “In Sussex Nova Scotia, thirty five Mi’kmaw parents were given a weekly allowance for staying away from their children. This practice resulted in rampant exploitation through child labour and sexual abuse” (Battiste, 2013, p. 54).

Since 2009, the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission documented the effects of the Indian residential school system in Canada. After interviewing thousands of residential school survivors, the final report of the commission stated,

Since 2011, three major reports on First Nations education have concluded that the status quo is unacceptable and that there is a need for a complete restructuring based on principles of self-government, a culturally relevant curriculum, and stable funding. All three reports agree that Aboriginal peoples themselves must lead and control the process of change” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report, 2015, p. 156).

Commission Chair, Justice Murray Sinclair also wrote, “The education system itself must be transformed into one that rejects the racism embedded in colonial systems of education and treats Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian knowledge systems with equal respect.” (TRC, 2015, p. 290)

Integration and assimilation. Noted as the integration and assimilation phase of First Nations education, the mid 1940’s through to the late 1960’s has resulted in many negative consequences for many First Nations learners in Manitoba. “In 1948 came the official policy of integration; one of the policies that led to today’s deplorable statistics” (Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, 1971, p. 115). Run by government and religious organizations, attempting to both ‘civilize’ and Christianize people of First Nations ancestry, by the mid-1950s, day schools became prominent in First Nations communities throughout Manitoba. Although many of these schools allowed the children to remain with their families, the integration movement, lacking any cultural, linguistic, or spiritual relevance, did little to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students, again contributing to the deterioration of positive self-identity and negative educational outcomes in First Nations communities in Manitoba. “Studies on the effects of

integration have shown that Indian children reveal patterns that can be identified as alienation and identity conflict. The Indian child is caught between two cultures and is therefore, literally outside of and between both” (Kirkness, 1999, p. 6). Little parental input, a lack of cultural content, and a persistent Eurocentric ethos characterized this time of Aboriginal education.

The resources typically found in schools were foreign to our children. This has been the case ever since formal education was introduced to us. The reader being used at the time [the mid-1960s] was *Streets and Roads*, and it was mostly about streets, cities, and huge houses made of brick or lumber with a mom who wore a white apron, a dad with a suit, and little children decked out in clothes not found in many of our communities. When speaking of the problem, I referred to it as ‘teaching Native kids a foreign language using foreign materials.’ How did we expect them to learn? (Kirkness, 2013, p. 57)

Prior to 1970, much of the education for First Nations children residing in First Nations communities in Manitoba has been characterized as attempts at cultural annihilation (Indian residential schools), or institutes of cultural assimilation (federal government run day schooling) resulting from hegemonic perceptions of cultural superiority (Kirkness, 2013).

By the mid-1960s, training of First Nations teachers began in Manitoba through programs such as Brandon University Native Teacher Education Program (BUNTEP) and Program for the Education of Native Teachers (PENT) at Brandon University. These newly trained First Nations teachers demanded change to the education systems for their children and grandchildren.

“Indian Control of Indian Education” (*National Indian Brotherhood, 1971*). By the late 1960s, and into the early 1970s, with massive protests by First Nations teachers and parents, community leaders, national, and regional chiefs demanded their sovereign right to exercise

jurisdiction over their children's education through First Nations control of First Nations education. In response to the federal government White Paper (1969), demanding their right for jurisdiction over education in their own communities, the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood released a position paper, *Wahbung our Tomorrows* (1971) and the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations of Canada) released a policy paper called *Indian Control of Indian Education* (1972).

Although First Nations did achieve "Indian Control of Indian Education" in the early 1970s, Federal-First Nations agreements/negotiations at the time did not include a statutory guarantee for adequate funding nor legislative protection to enable the establishment and ongoing maintenance of stable, community based, culturally, linguistically relevant and academically responsive systems of education for First Nations communities in Manitoba. "The lack of Indigenous cultural knowledge and perspectives in the school curriculum has been identified as a significant factor in school failure amongst Indigenous students" (O'Connor, 2009, p. 2). Add to this, that under local control since 1970, most funding for education provided to First Nations is inadequate and not targeted. This allows First Nations local governments the discretion to use what limited education funding that does exist for other purposes such as housing, the delivery of social assistance programs, or to cover historic band debt, just to name a few.

Scholars such as Kirkness (1999) have noted some improvements since local control of First Nations education. Reflecting on over 40 years of local control of First Nations education, most First Nations communities in Manitoba (45 of 52) still today remain steadfastly committed to maintaining First Nations control of First Nations education. First Nations educators debate, discuss, and acknowledge that local control of First Nations education, as negotiated in the early

1970s, did not include a system of support for local First Nations schools. Local control resulted in the development of many small independent school systems with these schools not being able to use economies of scale for school division programs and services. In addition, adequate funding did not keep up with inflation, staff salary increments or the cost associated with technology (Nora Murdock, personal communication, July 10, 2015).

Current Issues in First Nations Education in Manitoba

Education is a primary means of transmitting culture. Unfortunately, for many First Nations learners this has not been possible. Almost 45 years after *Wahbung* and “First Nations Control of First Nations Education”, many issues, strengths, opportunities, and challenges exist today within First Nations education systems in Manitoba.

I will now review the literature on First Nations treaty right to education and the graduation rates, the current academic functioning within First Nations schools. I will highlight literature citing the importance of linguistic and cultural relevance, First Nations school improvement, and the lack of legislative/statutory protection for First Nations education and special/inclusive education in Manitoba.

Education as an inherent treaty right. Education for status First Nations people in Manitoba is an inherent treaty right. There are 11 numbered Treaties in Canada. Manitoba First Nations are signatories to Treaties 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10, with each numbered treaty containing education as an inherent treaty right. The Federal Government created a Treaty Right to Education for all First Nations in Manitoba excluding the Dakota Nations in Manitoba. Many First Nations interpret that this right is based on an understanding of the provision of an education system by the Government of Canada as an “inheritance” for all status First Nations

citizens for the acquisition of historic and traditional lands. The Dakota Nations in Manitoba have never signed treaties with the Federal Government of Canada. According to Battiste (2013), “The central concepts of the Aboriginal and treaty right to education were an enriched education of First Nations that supplemented the learning system that is integral to the transmitting of knowledge, identity and life skills to First Nations children” (p. 24). The National Indian Brotherhood (1972) stated, “Our education system is not a welfare system. We have free education as a treaty right because we paid in advance for our education by surrendering our lands...we expect that the promises made when we signed the treaties will be honoured” (1972, pp. 14-15). The Elders of Treaty 7 noted, “Education systems have so far failed to honor a treaty vision in which European-Canadian forms of education would coexist and be integrated with indigenous cultural traditions” (Assembly of First Nations 2005:2–3; Elders of Treaty 7 1996:120–9).

In 2013, the Assembly of First Nations, in *Jurisdictional Principles in First Nations Education*, identified the development of transfer of legislative authority of Aboriginal education as an important facet of future development. According to the AFN (2013), “the goal of First Nations education, articulates the premise for a mandate in education based on jurisdiction over education for First Nations governments constructed on Treaty and inherent rights” (p. 5).

The position on of the National Assembly of First Nations on jurisdiction and the treaty right to education for First Nations is clear.

First Nations expect the Crown, not only to recognize their jurisdiction to lifelong learning, but also to fulfill their Constitutional, Treaty and international obligations to First Nations people by supporting the design and implementation of First Nations

comprehensive learning systems with adequate and sustainable resourcing. (AFN, 2012, p. 5)

Failure of existing education system(s). There are many examples of First Nations peoples who have succeeded within the current education system in Manitoba and in Canada, however most First Nations students have not done so. Rather than viewing First Nations student's lack of successful participation in Canadian education systems, education scholars (Fitznor, 2002; Atleo, 2008; Wilson, 2008; Battiste, 2013) ask why, and how education systems are not offering successful learning experiences for most First Nations learners.

Although the publically accessible statistics on high school graduation rates for First Nations learners, both on and off reserve, vary somewhat, there is overwhelming consensus that First Nations learners, compared to non-First Nations learners, have much lower high school completion rates both nationally and within Manitoba. The Assembly of First Nations (2012) reports, "The graduation rate of First Nations children in Canada is 39% compared to over 87% for non-Aboriginal people in Canada, and that a First Nations child in Canada is more likely to end up in jail than to graduate from high school" (p. 2). Richards (2009), states that British Columbia's high school completion rate of all First Nations students is twice as high as that of Manitoba.

According to the Government of Manitoba (2013), "Manitoba's high school graduation rate for June 2013 was 85.3%. This rate represents an increase of 1.2 percentage points from 84.1% in June 2012 and continues the upward trend over the past decade. Between June 2002 and June 2013, Manitoba's high school completion rate has increased by 14.2 percentage points" (p.1). According to the National Household Survey (NHS) of the 2011 census, "In Manitoba, the

incomplete graduation rate among young Indian/First Nations adults living on reserve is 12.3 points (70.3%) above the national average (which is 58.0%); the BC rate is 17.3 points below the national average – a 30 point range” (Richards, 2014, p. 1).

These statistics reveal the gaps and inability of existing publically funded education systems, both within and outside of First Nations communities, to meet the diverse learning needs of most First Nations students in Manitoba.

It should be noted that for the 2014/15 school year, the federal government only funded less than 20 high schools in the over 60 First Nations communities in Manitoba. Students in the remaining communities still have to leave their communities, most often at grade nine, and attend residential schools or live in private home placements in order to complete their secondary education. Sadly, most do not meet this milestone. The lack of supports and difficulties associated with leaving nuclear families, communities, languages, and cultures of origin, and the lack of cultural relevance within many education settings, continues to affect the learning outcomes of many.

The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) reported that, “The majority of Indigenous youth do not complete high school and rather than nurturing the individual, the present schooling experience typically erodes identity and self-worth” (p. 434). The Honourable Gerry St. Germain, P.C., Chairperson of the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal People, almost 20 years later in a 2011 report entitled, *Reforming First Nations Education: From Crisis to Hope* states,

For over a century, Canadian policies have eroded the traditional, social, and political systems of Aboriginal peoples. Systematically, Aboriginal nations have been

undermined and effectively “detrribalized”. Once great nations, they have been relegated to reserves too small to sustain prosperity and way of life, reserves that ‘ghettoized’ First Nations communities, separating them from the rest of Canadian society. Canadians are coming to understand the traumatic impacts of the residential school system, an assimilationist system that failed to educate Aboriginal children and deliberately disconnected them from their languages, cultures and traditions, ripped them from their homes and in far too many cases, brutalized Aboriginal children. Government after government continued this vicious cycle...killing the spirit, the heart, and soul of Aboriginal people. Against this onslaught, Aboriginal peoples were eventually “welfarized”. (Senate Canada, 2011, p. v)

The current state of education in most First Nations communities in Manitoba is less than adequate. The 2011 report of the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples stated, “In some First Nations communities a staggering 7 out of 10 First Nations students will not graduate from high school. In far too many others, countless First Nations children will never attend a school equipped with libraries, science and technology labs or athletic facilities. And incredibly, in a country as rich as ours, some First Nations children will never set foot in a proper school” (Senate Canada, 2011, p. 1).

In most First Nations schools, many teachers report that most students continue to function across subject areas well below grade level expectations, resulting in a very high number of remedial students in each classroom. Attendance issues remain problematic with the rates of student drop out dramatically increasing beginning at grade six. Due to inadequate base instructional funding provided for band operated schools in Manitoba, Vocation, Music, Art, Trades and Technology and many university entrance courses such as Applied Mathematics and

Pre-calculus are simply not offered to most students attending secondary education programs in First Nation communities in Manitoba.

Most initiatives aimed at improving education outcomes are, and have been, imposed on First Nations from the outside. Hegemonic beliefs that outsiders, often located within government and/or academia, are able to fix the educational crisis within First Nations have not only proven unsuccessful, many have been disastrous. Without providing First Nations with sufficient resources, and statutory and legislative protection, most First Nations continue to struggle as they attempt to offer an academically responsive, culturally and linguistically relevant education system based on the needs of the learners in their communities.

Rate and flow of funding. Despite many challenges, issues and shortfalls with the First Nations education systems in Manitoba, First Nation children continue to attend school, and many parents continue to send their children to their community school hoping that they receive the very best education possible. Underpaid teachers, educational assistants and instructional leaders continue to teach and lead in schools facing tremendous challenges (Stobo-Sniderman, 2012). In many First Nations schools, staff and students often face deplorable working, learning, and living conditions and most staff receive much lower than average financial compensation compared to neighbouring provincial school divisions, even those also funded by the Federal Government of Canada.

According to the National Panel on First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education for Students on Reserve, recent research has demonstrated a number of factors that correlate strongly with First Nation student success including: 1) increasing attendance rates through enhancing student engagement, 2) improving school functioning and instructional leadership, 3)

reducing staff turnover, 4) promoting positive peer relationships, 5) increasing time spent on building literacy skills, 6) providing course options at all levels such as trades programs for secondary students, 7) and including sport, art and music in school programming (Haldine, Lafond, & Krause, 2011, p. 43). Most, if not all recommendations, require a stabilization of First Nations base instructional funding levels of band operated schools in Manitoba.

The Government of Canada continues to fund almost all First Nations band operated schools in Manitoba at remarkably lower rates than non-First Nations schools (Kirkness; 1999; 2013; AFN, 2012). The underfunding leads to high staff turnover and inadequate and inconsistent instructional leadership. Most First Nations communities do not have adequate resources to maintain existing school buildings or teacher accommodations, nor do they have the money/resources to provide the necessary classroom based resources to meet the academic needs of all students. First Nations schools “are unable to offer compensation at a comparable level to their neighboring school districts and many of the schools experience difficulty in offering benefit and pension plans to their employees” (Heydon & Stooke, 2012, p. 12).

Education funding, adequately determined based on actual need to address community defined education priorities, aligned with comparable and equitable salary grids with neighboring Provincial school divisions, might be one of the first steps required to stabilize First Nations schools throughout Manitoba. According to AFN (2012),

Funding provided by the Federal Government of Canada to First Nations schools is now more than 50% lower than funding provided for First Nations students who attend provincial schools. A funding cap of 2% for on reserve schools has been in place since the mid 1990's, resulting in an on average gap of over 3800 dollars per student compared to the lowest funded provincial schools in Canada. Forty seven % of First Nations report

they are in dire need of a new school, some now waiting over 25 years in states of crisis, and over 74% of on reserve schools are said to be in a state of needing significant and major repairs. (p.2)

High staff turnover within First Nations schools results in a continuous need for retraining of school staff and relying on very inexperienced educators, often lacking the knowledge, skill and experience to address the instructional challenges typically found within a First Nation classroom. The culmination of these issues results in many teachers in First Nation communities providing educational instruction to the ‘lowest common denominator’, with an over reliance on repeat and/or remedial instruction. Many students with dis/abilities attending schools within First Nations communities continue to experience a lack of school based supports and services and there is little documented evidence based research to show the effect of the current approaches used to fund, implement special/inclusive education supports and services in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

In one of the few studies with teachers working in First Nations communities, Wotherspoon (2006) notes, “one respondent, a non-Aboriginal woman teaching in a rural band-controlled school, indicated that the failure of federal funding to keep pace with inflation has meant that schools are falling behind because of rising costs in supplies, utilities, and wages of teachers and support staff” (p. 400). In this study, most study participants, especially teachers working in smaller and more remote communities, cite the absence of adequate textbooks and up-to-date materials while working in schools in First Nations communities in Saskatchewan.

In 2012, writing about the funding for First Nations schools provided by the Federal Government of Canada, Supreme Court Justice MacPherson proposed,

the quality of education provided to the minority should in principle be on a basis of equality with the majority ... It should be stressed that the funds allocated for the minority language schools must be at least equivalent on a per student basis to the funds allocated to the majority schools. Special circumstances may warrant an allocation for minority language schools that exceeds the per capita allocation for majority schools. (AFN, Oct. 1, 2012, p. 7)

Cultural and linguistic relevance. Many scholars in this area (Battiste, 2013) cite the importance of providing linguistically and culturally relevant education for First Nations learners. According to Battiste (2013),

The challenge also continues for educators, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal, to be able to reflect critically on the current education system in terms of whose knowledge is offered, who decides what is offered, what outcomes are rewarded, who benefits, and more importantly how those are achieved in an ethically appropriate process. (p. 28)

With the resurgence of interest in the use of language and culturally relevant programming within First Nations schools, many educators express interest, and are beginning to provide programming using First Nations languages and cultural practices as a pedagogical or instructional base. Some teachers are using programs such as Cree Immersion and land-based activities in some classrooms as a primary instructional practice. Many teachers are exploring place-based pedagogies, and are seeking to determine how local community values and cultural ways of knowing, being and doing can ground the education programs delivered in their classrooms.

Language/linguistic issues create both challenges and opportunities for educators in First Nations communities. Some teachers report that phonemic awareness in English is very weak for many Cree students due to the different structures and limited number of sounds in the Cree language (J. Tait, personal communication, June 15, 2014). Battiste (2013) suggests, “Being aware of the differences that verb based (Aboriginal) and noun based (English) languages have within worldviews, thoughts and consciousness, is important in addressing a major cognitive gap in learning” (p. 150).

Indigenous writing systems are in either roman orthography or syllabics; symbols which represent the 20 plus sounds of the various Indigenous dialects. For First Nations students to master the English based curriculum educators need to expose them to the full range of sounds (forty-four in total) of the English language, repeatedly, particularly throughout the early years.

There is no published literature on the issues related to First Nations students with dis/abilities who are learning English as an additional language and are educated in primarily English based education settings. This study was an opportunity to explore such issues and document the perspectives of First Nations educators working with First Nations students with dis/abilities, some who first language is their ancestral language.

Louis and Taylor (2001) demonstrated that a strong foundation in an Aboriginal language in the last year of an elementary school Aboriginal language education program was the best predictor of success in the subsequent year of education in English or French. “Wright and Taylor (1995) found that kindergarten instruction in an Aboriginal language was associated with increases in personal self-esteem at the end of the year, whereas kindergarten instruction in

English or French had no such benefit for Aboriginal children” (Guezremont & Kohen, 2012, p. 3).

The call for enhanced cultural and linguistic relevance and response does not mean a complete abandonment of existing western, mainstream, or Eurocentric forms of knowledge within public education systems. Rather it is a call for a repositioning of knowledges where there is a base of Indigenous knowledges complemented by other worldviews.

Statutory and legislative protection. For students who attend school outside of First Nations communities in Manitoba, or those attending provincial schools operating within First Nations communities in Manitoba, the Public Schools Act provides statutory protections that regulate the standards and quality of education for provincial schools in Manitoba. No such legislative or statutory protection exists to regulate and ensure the standards and quality of education in First Nations band operated schools in Manitoba. The call by First Nations for a statutory guarantee and legislative protection of First Nations education under First Nations jurisdiction remains constant. Providing safeguards for First Nations education through First Nations defined and determined legislation, grounded in statutory law, remains a priority.

In 2012, the Federal Government of Canada proposed the *First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act (FNCFNEA): Bill C-33*. Aimed at improving educational outcomes and providing legislative and statutory protection for the delivery and funding of First Nations education, this act fell short in gaining support from many regional First Nations political leaders and many experts in First Nations education throughout Canada.

In 2013, the National Chiefs passed a resolution rejecting the FNCFNEA, outlining five conditions for success including the following: one, First Nations jurisdiction and respect for

Treaty and Aboriginal rights, two, a statutory guarantee of funding, and three, funding to support First Nations education systems that are grounded in Indigenous languages and cultures. In addition, the Chiefs called for mechanisms to ensure reciprocal accountability, no unilateral oversight by the government, and ongoing meaningful dialogue and co-development with First Nations.

Another critique of Bill C-33 came from the First Nations Education Council (FNEC). According to *A Review – Bill C-33 – The First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act (FNCFNEA)*,

There is no content in the FNCFNEA to remove the Minister of Indian Affairs from exercising authority over First Nations education... There is no provision to enable First Nations to offer education programs for children four or five years of age... There is an apparent contradiction in the funding provisions of the Act. On the one hand, it provides a guarantee of funding to provide services reasonably comparable to those offered in a neighboring jurisdictions, but on the other hand, section 45 (1) appears to leave the allocation subject to the annual discretion of the federal budget process. The funding guarantee is not really a funding guarantee. (FNEC, 2014, p. 6 and p. 9)

In summary, if Canada does not enact First Nations determined legislative and statutory protection education, and the lack of cultural and linguistic relevancy and inadequate fiscal resources for Aboriginal education persists, Canada will continue to compromise the future of First Nations education. Under/unemployed, under/uneducated, unhealthy First Nations in Manitoba will continue to result in massive over-representation of First Nations peoples in health, child welfare, justice and social welfare systems in Manitoba and throughout Canada

(Busby, 2010, p. 5). The current situation and conditions within most schools in First Nations communities has led to higher than average suicide rates, disengagement from school, lowered expectations of both students and staff within First Nations schools, and school not seen, or experienced, as a relevant or meaningful activity for many.

School improvement and the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation (TRC)

recommendations. Fulford (2007) summarized common factors of successful First Nations schools in Canada. Although not separated by jurisdiction, (band operated versus provincially operated schools), and those operating within or outside of First Nations communities, the correlates identified are a helpful point of reference to begin this analysis. The common success factors identified by Fulford (2007) include:

- Strong Leadership including a strong governance structure (long tenure in terms of school leadership was deemed important),
- Multiple programs and supports for learners,
- Exceptional language and cultural programs,
- Secure and welcoming school climate for children and parents,
- Respect for First Nation, Métis and Inuit culture and traditions that make learning relevant,
- High percentage of First Nation, Métis and Inuit staff and quality staff development,
- Assessment linked to instructional and planning decisions (within yearly school improvement plans) and,
- Vigorous community partnerships and beneficial external alliances. (p. 10)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (T.R.C.) of Canada, Call to Action, (2015) recommendations specific to education, include the following:

We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

We call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.

We call upon the federal government to prepare and publish annual reports comparing funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves, as well as educational and income attainments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compared with non-Aboriginal people.

We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles: i. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation. ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates. iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula. iv. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses. v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems. vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children. vii. Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships.

We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education.

We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families. (pp. 1-2)

The current academic literature and the most recent summary of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission provide an important backdrop to consider the recommendations of the participants in this study for First Nations education transformation, which I will share in the study findings section of this dissertation.

Second and third level services – MFNERC and training initiatives for First Nations educators. Established in 1999 by the Education Directors from First Nations band operated schools in Manitoba, a second and third level education service delivery organization called the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC) was created to provide support to First Nations band operated schools in Manitoba. *According to First Nations Education: A Historical Overview*, (MFNERC, 2014, p.1), the mission statement for the MFNERC is “To help First Nations improve education for all learners to achieve minopimatisiwin”. The vision statement for the organization is “To support First Nations to develop and implement a comprehensive, holistic education system inclusive of First Nations languages, worldviews, values, beliefs and traditions with exemplary academic standards, under First Nations jurisdiction” (MFNERC, 2014, p.1). The MFNERC provides community and sub-regional education related supports and services within the areas of literacy, numeracy, school planning, instructional leadership, land based and cross-curricular education, assessment, early childhood

education, special/inclusive education and First Nations language and cultural education. In addition, this organization now operates a virtual high school, a number of instructional resource libraries and a publishing unit aimed at the production of First Nations literature, and is actively involved in First Nation education systems development.

In 2012, the MFNERC underwent a mandate change to transition from implementing the Provincial curriculum in First Nations schools through non-mandated second level support services to the providing school division services, community capacity building and a focus on curriculum development based on First Nations language and culture in order to build positive self-identity of all First Nations learners. The MFNERC has engaged in multiple partnerships with regional and provincial post-secondary institutions promoting the advanced training of First Nations educators in all areas of capacity development related to the delivery of primary and secondary education within First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a brief history of the literature on the effects of the mass interference of First Nations through colonization, and the history of First Nations education in Manitoba. In the following chapter, I provide a review of existing literature on the historical and policy context of special/inclusive education in Manitoba, paying particular attention to special/inclusive education supports and services offered in First Nations communities.

Chapter 3: Literature Review - Special/Inclusive Education and First Nations Special/Inclusive Education in Manitoba

Special/inclusive education is an attempt to bring about social justice and facilitate meaningful and relevant inclusion and participation of marginalized and/or excluded school populations, particularly for students with special education needs including those with sensory, learning, developmental and/or physical impairments. In this chapter, I will provide a review of the history and policy context special/inclusive education in Manitoba and will then focus on special/inclusive education provided within First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Special/Inclusive Education in Provincial Schools in Manitoba

Lutfiyya and VanWalleggem (2001), in the journal *Exceptionality Education Canada*, provide a comprehensive history of special/inclusive education legislation and policy in provincial schools in Manitoba. The authors update this publication in 2013 in the Manitoba Education Research Network (MERN), Monograph Series.

Often driven by parents of students with dis/abilities and/or individual teacher advocates, the special/inclusive education movement within the provincial education system in Manitoba has evolved considerably over the past five decades. According to Lutfiyya and Van Walleggem (2001), “Children with sensory, physical or cognitive impairments most often were not allowed to attend public school in Manitoba until the mid-1960s. Such children either stayed at home with their families or attended a residential asylum/school or a private, parent run school” (p. 80).

In Manitoba, the Public Education Act of 1958 stated that everyone in Manitoba between the ages of 6 and 21 had the right to attend school, however excluded children thought to be “mentally defective” (Lutfiyya & Van Wallegem, 2001, p. 79). Although this legislation cited the right for all to attend public school, what appropriate, relevant, meaningful or inclusive education had yet to be defined nor fully implemented. As is the case with special education services and supports in First Nations communities in Manitoba, the provision of inclusive special education services within the Manitoban provincial education system/context has been, and is still often reactive rather than proactive.

By the 1970s, the provincial Department of Education in Manitoba operated special schools (i.e., The Manitoba School for the Deaf) and classes for students with special needs. Still largely segregated from age appropriate peers without cognitive or sensory impairments, by the 1970s many students with ‘special education needs’ were able to attend education programs within their school or division of the public education system. By the mid-1970s, the Province of Manitoba initiated funding for special education coordinators and resource teachers.

The lack of regulation or legislation to protect the rights of students with special education needs meant that schools and school divisions were not required to meet the needs of students with diverse learning needs in any specific manner nor in regular inclusive classroom settings. During the 1950s, 60s and 70s, a number of commissions and legislative frameworks, (MacFarlane, 1956/57; Christianson, 1963; Bill 16, 1965; Bill 58, 1978), all recommended increased supports for students with dis/abilities attending provincial schools in Manitoba.

Constitutional requirements of statutes such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms also acknowledged the rights of minority populations within the Canadian context in

the early 1980's. At this same time, organizations and lobby groups such as the Manitoba Teachers Society reinforced the advocacy efforts of parents of students with SEND.

The mid 1980s and into the 1990s, was characterized by the lack of legislative protection for students with dis/abilities within the Manitoba education system. As Lutfiyya & VanWalleggem (2001) note,

As there is no legislative basis in Manitoba for special education services, and there are few regulations, it is not surprising that Smith (1994) determined that "Special Education in Manitoba" is a "...policy document which is not deemed to be a part of the regulatory framework". (p. 86)

From 1993 to 1999 the Manitoba Department of Education continued its commitment to special/inclusive education by facilitating the development of education related documents specific to; differentiated instruction, modification, adaption, accommodation, and individualized programming, and working intersectorally to support students with dis/abilities. Additional provincial documents on many other aspects of special/inclusive education have been the focus of developmental work of the Manitoba Department of Education over the past two decades. Over the next two decades, the Province of Manitoba collaboratively developed support documents for students living with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), (2001), Fetal Alcohol Spectrum of Disorders (FASD), (2005), students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH), (2009), Blind Visually Impaired (BVI), (2011). Educators in both First Nations and non-First Nations education settings use these documents to support the academic, social and emotional growth, and the inclusion of students with diverse needs attending primary and secondary education settings throughout Manitoba.

The 1978 Provincial Review, the 1995 formative review of special education programming, and the 1998 Manitoba Special Education Review led to discussions, resolutions and the formation of the “Philosophy of Inclusion” (2001) later to be formally adopted by Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth. In October of 2005 Bill 13, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Appropriate Educational Programming), came into effect. Outlining dispute resolution mechanisms and providing guidelines for developing individual education plans, this legislation now requires that all provincial school divisions have policies, supports and services for students with diverse learning needs attending provincial, publicly funded schools in Manitoba.

Through Appropriate Educational Programming (Bill C-13), an amendment to the Public Schools Act (proclaimed in October of 2005), Manitoba Education (2006) now defines inclusion as,

A way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued, and safe. An inclusive community continuously evolves to meet the need of its members.

Through recognition and support, and inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship. (p.1)

Many educators use terms/concepts such as participation, wellbeing, belonging, interaction, acceptance, citizenship, reasonable accommodation, human rights, value, and safety to navigate the building of inclusive educational environments and opportunities for all students regardless of dis/ability, gender, ethnic origin and sexual orientation. The struggle to build acceptance, opportunity and participation of all, free of devaluation, requires on-going acceptance of self and others and is a fluid, constantly changing process. This Bill C-13 provides

a platform of ideals, ways, and the statutory/legislative protection to build more inclusive, fair and just communities.

Efforts to support inclusive education such as the Student Services Advisory Committee (2001-present), of the Special Education Review Initiative, both efforts of the Provincial government to review and enhance/improve services for students with SEND attending provincially affiliated schools, continue to contribute to the development of special/inclusive education supports and services within provincial education settings in Manitoba.

The Province of Manitoba, and the Government of Canada (for provincially operated schools in First Nations communities) provide funding for special/inclusive education supports and services using two categories based on the *assessment model* of special education funding. First, both levels of government provide low cost special education funding, for the provision of resource staff, remedial supports and school based clinical supports, at \$581 per year for every student listed in on the nominal role. Additional ‘high cost, application based’ funding for students with severe to profound dis/abilities, is also available. Through an application based process, every provincially affiliated school is edible to apply for an additional \$9,220 for a student identified as severely dis/abled and an additional \$20,515 for a student identified as profoundly dis/abled. Although there have been intermittent pilot projects to investigate special education funding processes in Manitoba (VanWalleghem and Lutfiyya, 2013, p. 4), special education funding has remained assessment-based, student specific and largely unchanged since its inception. “Thus the student specific funding application process continues unchanged in many aspects, although the department has lessened its negative impact somewhat, primarily by lengthening many approval periods so that applications occur much less frequently” (VanWalleghem & Lutfiyya, 2013, p. 6). As cited in the 2015 Report to the Minister of

Education, from the Special Education Task Force, the special education funding mechanism is now in a transition period as the department of education considers other options such as block funding special education for Manitoba public schools (Province of Manitoba, 2015).

The provision of inclusive education means the inclusion of students with dis/abilities in educational setting with age appropriate non-disabled peers with supports provided to teachers. These supports might be in form of education/information about the impairment, adaptations, accommodations and, at times, modification to enable full and equal participation.

Educators in provincial schools are encouraged, both in their pre-service training and through divisional planning processes and initiatives, and through their daily experiences in the classroom, to consider what a good education is for all students, including those with SEND. Promising practices, such as differentiated instruction and assessment, dis/ability awareness and diversity training, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), (Katz, 2012), Response To Intervention (RTI), collaborative Individual Education Plan (IEP) development, and divisional inclusive education policy development, are available to assist teachers to better prepare and meet the needs of all students in their classrooms. The use of these practices does vary from division to division and at times, classroom to classroom.

The evolution of services and supports for students with SEND attending provincial schools in Manitoba has benefited from the sustained advocacy efforts of parents and educators (VanWalleghem & Lutfiyya, 2013). The availability of resources, supports through education, health and social services for students with SEND is also evident. In contrast, First Nations families and communities have not had the same access to resources nor opportunities to build collective advocacy movements as those parents, teachers, and students living in non-federal

jurisdictions in Manitoba. In the following section, I will discuss the history of, and policy implications for special/inclusive education in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Special/Inclusive Education in First Nations Communities in Manitoba

Apart from two articles on special/inclusive education programming in First Nations communities in Canada, both published by Ron Philips in 2010, no other published academic research exists on the provision of special/inclusive education supports and services within First Nations schools and communities in Manitoba. Apart from the author's Master's thesis (Shackel, 2008), as previously stated, there is also no published peer reviewed literature on the experiences of educating students with SEND attending First Nations schools in Manitoba.

One reason, provided by Phillips (2010b), for the omission of academic literature on First Nations special/inclusive education, is that education for First Nations is a federal responsibility. Phillips (2010b) also suggests another reason for this omission is that the provincial education sees the provision education of First Nations students on reserve as having little relevance to their education system. Phillips (2010b), in *Forgotten and Ignored: Special Education in First Nations Schools in Canada*, states,

The editors of these two issues (Canadian wide reports of special education initiatives) and the authors of articles either forgot or ignored the special education programs, policies, procedures, and support available to First Nations students. This forgetfulness or ignorance is consistent with past and current thoughts regarding who has constitutional responsibility for the education of First Nations students in Canada. (p. 2)

I also believe that reasons for this omission may lie at the intersections of Critical Race and Dis/ability Critical theory. Due to unchallenged and/or perpetuated power imbalance(s), and the continued marginalization of both First Nations citizens and students with dis/abilities, it is clear that we often neglect to consider race-based perspectives within the special/inclusive education literature and we often ignore disability perspectives within First Nations education literature. The intersections of these similar yet distinct theories help us to consider and understand the multiple and differing layers of marginalization, which has compounding effects for individuals within differing segments of society. This study represents growing attention to all aspects of education within First Nations communities in Manitoba and the intersections of critical theories across and within education policy and practice analysis.

To proceed with a review of the history and policy context of special/inclusive education within First Nation communities in Manitoba, I begin with an examination of First Nations perspectives on dis/ability.

First Nations perspectives on dis/ability. In recent academic work (Shackel, 2008), I characterize Indigenous response to dis/ability as normative, transformative, and relational. Within a spiritual context, I have come to understand that many First Nations often see people with disabilities as closer to the Creator, here on earth to teach others about the importance of the relational teachings of sharing, humility, and respect. The discourse around dis/ability and First Nations perspectives is ultimately a journey that moves into the spiritual realm.

From a First Nations linguistic perspective there is no word in Cree (Inuu –the Cree word often used by language speakers to refer to the Cree language) for dis/ability, nor is there a word for dis/ability within the Island Lake dialect representing a combination of both Cree and

Ojibway language and culture. A self-described “traditional Island Lake woman” suggests that, the word for dis/ability in her language is a,

General term never used to refer to another person. Rather the term is used to refer to a generalized condition needing acceptance, rather than needing further defining, classification, or treatment. (J. Flett, personal communication, September 28th, 2004)
(from Shackel, 2008)

According to Huakau and Bray (2000), publishing one Indigenous perspective on dis/ability, there is a “view of total acceptance of Pacific people with dis/abilities by their community” (p. 25).

“Inclusion is not new for First Nations people” (Jennie Tait, personal communication, January 18, 2015). This study is a documentation of First Nations educators’ perspectives on dis/ability, impairment and difference and on culturally relevant methods and practices used to educate students with and without SEND in Manitoba. This research is an opportunity to forefront non-Western worldviews on inclusive instructional practice, which can inform western paradigms about transformative, normative, and relational practices within family, education, and community settings.

In a recent publication, another Canadian dis/ability scholar, Dr. Deborah Stienstra (2015, p. 638), cites Canadian Inuit perspectives of disability and inclusion. She states,

In Labrador Inuit, the phrases used refer to disabled people as unconditionally accepted as who they are (pigialavi Kangituk), and as a gift from the Great Spirit (Aninnik Ajunginimmut Kaijausimajuk) (Baikie, 2012). This use of language reflects deeper values around disability – inclusion, acceptance and value.

There has been much work and increasing attention towards the issues facing Indigenous people who live with dis/ability in Canada, and worldwide (Cross & Blackstock, 2012). In 2012 the United Nations established a joint working committee with representatives from every continent to review the linkages between the CRPWD and the UNDRIP and to explore issues faced by Indigenous people living with dis/ability worldwide.

In 2013 Dis/ability Rights International published *Giinawind bigo ji wiiiii'iweyang (Nothing about Us without Us) Understanding Our Rights: First Nations People with Disabilities Engage In Human Rights Education*, a manual written by this author and First Nations Dis/ability advocate Doreen Demas to assist First Nations families in their advocacy efforts in accessing community based services and supports. Strategies, such as using the sacred teachings in relation to First Nations understanding of dis/ability, are proposed as a culturally relevant framework and perspective.

In 2013, the United Nations published the *Study on the Situation of Indigenous Persons with Disabilities, with a Particular Focus on Challenges Faced with Respect to the Full Enjoyment of Human Rights and Inclusion in Development*. This report outlined the challenges faced by Indigenous persons in accessing services and supports and mechanisms which may be used to increase participation towards inclusion. According to this United Nations report,

In some places, the perception of what was once seen as a gift, a source of wisdom or a welcome contact with the spirits or the spiritual or philosophical life has changed because of the rupture of social systems resulting from a Western model of development. It is extremely important to strengthen Indigenous institutions to regain build this inclusion. Just as disability is an evolving concept, Indigenous cultures

and worldviews are also not static and can affect persons with disabilities positively or negatively (UN, 2013: 6).

As is the case with some black students in the United States of America, one of the issues related to the identification of dis/ability within First Nations communities, and the racialization of First Nations through special education, is consideration of who may have actual impairments versus how disabilities may be perceived (or identified or diagnosed) within First Nations communities, and by whom. This issue will be repeatedly discussed throughout the findings section of this manuscript.

Rates of dis/ability. The Assembly of First Nations (2010, October 1-3) reports the rate of disability to be two to three times higher for First Nations than in non-First Nations communities, resulting in significant gaps in students learning. When referring to rates of dis/ability within First Nations communities and schools, using caution is prudent. It is not clear whether these numbers are based on diagnosed dis/ability, assumed dis/ability or impairment or conditions(s). Differing, at times opposing, worldviews may also be a play when defining or identifying disability or difference within a First Nations context. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum of Disorders (FASD), both visible and non-visible, the effects of poverty, stress, trauma, and drug use during pregnancy, Autism Spectrum of Disorders (ASD), and sensory impairments (primarily hearing) are some of the primary causes of learning and behavioral challenges in First Nations schools in Manitoba.

According to the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), the education officer responsible for the allocation of fiscal resources for special/inclusive education within band operated schools in Manitoba stated, “In 2014 First Nations schools in Manitoba identified approximately 3,100 of the total 15,000 students (approximately 20%)

attending band operated schools in Manitoba as severely or profoundly disabled” (Don Scott, personal communication, January 15, 2015). The experiences of First Nations students with dis/abilities attending schools within and outside of First Nations communities in Manitoba, and those who provide the education supports and services, is largely absent within the literature on both First Nations education and on special/ inclusive education in Manitoba.

Citing just one of the many other regional comparisons available, in British Columbia, the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNEESC) of British Columbia (2010) reported that 29.8% of all First Nations students attending First Nations schools in British Columbia “have moderate to severe special needs, 16.7% formally identified and 13.1% informally identified” (p. 10).

Funding, identification, and programming for students with SEND in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Due to the lack of published literature on First Nations students with SEND, and on Special Education within First Nations schools in Manitoba (VanWalleghem & Lutfiyya, 2013), and the invisibility of students with SEND, the following information is obtained from my direct experience over the past twenty years providing supports and services to First Nations schools in Manitoba. For First Nations schools funded by the Federal Government, but operated solely, or in partnership with a provincial school division, the policies and practices of special/inclusive education follow the guidelines of the provincial education system in Manitoba. The Federal Government provides special education funding using an assessment based funding framework based on the completion of individualized diagnostic assessment/testing and the development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

First Nations band operated schools have experienced some similarities to provincial schools, yet have a uniquely different historical and policy context affecting the provision of

special/inclusive education services and supports within their schools and communities. Not documented in existing published literature, prior to 1990, in First Nations band operated schools, students who “did not learn as fast as others were a part of our classes, schools and our communities, however we did not see a lot of children with disabilities or special needs. Maybe that is because they were taken away and put into institutions” (M. Scott, personal communication, July 20, 2014). By the mid-1980s First Nations band operated schools in Manitoba began to receive additional funding for students with dis/abilities and/ special education needs. At this time, educational psychologists began consulting in First Nations schools in order to identify students with SEND.

By 1995, with increasing awareness of dis/ability and special education issues, the Federal Government formally adopted the provincial ‘application based model’ of funding for students with special education needs. The Federal Government provided both low and high cost funding for special education using the assessment-based model to all First Nations band operated schools in Manitoba.

As is the case with base instructional education funding, the Federal Government provides low cost special education funding to First Nations band operated schools at \$581 per student; however, this funding is flexible and non-targeted. Under the guise of promoting self-determination, which may be the case if equitable and adequate funding was provided, First Nations are able to be use this money for whatever the First Nations community desires. In the late 1990s some northern and isolated communities lobbied and received an additional adjustment factor to add to this base amount of low cost funding to accommodate for higher cost factors associated with operating in more remote and isolated locations in Manitoba.

This low cost funding is ‘intended’ to enable First Nations communities to hire special education teachers, clinicians, and to provide material and resources for students with special needs (Rising to the Challenge, AANDC, 2014).

Table 1 shows the comparison of clinical services provided in 2014/15 in First Nations operated schools compared to similar services provided to a comparable group of students attending provincial schools in the city of Winnipeg. The Clinical Student Support Services (formerly the Winnipeg Child Guidance Clinic), provides services to a student population of approximately 30,000 within three school divisions over a 464 square kilometer radius in the city of Winnipeg, has 130 full time equivalent (FTE) clinical positions. Comparably, First Nations operated schools, with a rate of dis/ability 3 times higher than off reserve populations (Canadian Census National Household Survey, 2011), have less than six (FTE) clinicians providing support for 15,000 students over a 649,947 square kilometer radius.

Table 1

Manitoba First Nations Operated Schools	Clinical Student Support Services (serving three schools divisions in the city of Winnipeg)
15 000 students	30000 students
square km: 649,947	square km: 464
Rates of disability: 3 times the rate outside of First Nations communities (Canadian Census National Household Survey, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011)	
3.5 FTE SLP (minimal community based contracts)	28 FTE SLP
1.4 FTE Reading Clinicians	16 FTE Reading Clinicians
1.0 FTE School Psychologist (minimal contracts community based 1.5 FTE)	31 FTE School Psychologists
2 FTE School Social Worker: Suicide Rate 5-7 times higher for First Nations youth (AFN, 2012) (1 FTE community based)	32 FTE Social Workers
0 Occupational Therapists/Physiotherapy	10 FTE Occupational Therapists/Physiotherapy Provided by Rehabilitation Centre for Children)
0 Audiologists	2 Audiologists 1 Audiometric Assistant
.15 FTE BVI consultant	5 BVI consultants
1 DHH(Cree students have 5 times rate of hearing loss) (All other First Nations have 3 times higher rate of hearing loss compared to other non-First Nations populations) (Collida Peters, Audiologist, January 15, 2015)	5 DHH consultants
Total clinical positions currently in place: 9 FTE	Total clinical positions currently in place: 130 FTE

(Tim Thorne Finch, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

By 1999, the Federal Government of Canada funded 100 of the nearly 15,000 students attending band-operated schools in Manitoba as severely or profoundly disabled under the assessment/application based, high-cost funding formula (Don Scott, personal communication, January 15, 2015). Completion of an assessment by a certified psychologist, and an application and Individual Education Plan (IEP) resulted in the First Nation community receiving an additional 8,900 for every student with a ‘severe’ disability, and an additional 19,500 for every student with a ‘profound’ dis/ability (Rising to the Challenge, AANDC, 2002).

By 2002, the number of students funded as severely and profoundly dis/abled rose to nearly 250 students (Don Scott, personal communication, January 15, 2015). The approach used in the identification of these students mirrored the efforts and approaches of the provincial schools with clinicians using assessment tools and strategies that lacked cultural relevance and appropriateness for First Nations learners. This process continued in First Nations schools. Clinicians/specialists/educators often worked without considering issues related to Indigenous language learning issues, the lack of cultural relevance in current education curriculum, the lack of standardization of school and clinical assessment tools on First Nations populations, and the lack of understanding of the systemic and structural deficiencies within First Nations schools due to chronic underfunding. Within this deficit based, individual application model of funding for special education, school staff were encouraged to describe and characterize students with

disabilities in the worst possible light in order to present the need for assistance, funding and additional support (Harry & Klinger, 2007). This process is counter indicative and intuitive to ways in which First Nations people typically see students with and without dis/abilities, and contradicts the aforementioned strengths based approach to difference within many First Nations contexts.

Representing an over 800% increase in high cost special education funding, the rates of students in First Nations communities identified as severely and profoundly dis/abled again rose to almost 1,600 students by the 2006 school year (Don Scott, personal communication, May 1, 2013). By this time First Nations schools, and many of the psychologists, used the high cost special education funding process to generate additional revenue in order to gain much needed material and human resources for severely underfunded First Nations schools. In some cases, this was the first time that students who lived with a disability such as Autism, FASD, or a sensory or physical impairments were able to access additional school based resources.

Due to performance gaps on tests, not standardized for First Nations populations, clinicians and educators identified many students as having ‘a cognitive impairment’ and typically categorized them as having ‘symptoms of ADHD’. Without further medical diagnosis or confirmation of an organic based impairment, many clinicians labelled these students as severely or profoundly disabled. During these years, some educational psychologists billed First Nations communities over \$1,000 per assessment, assessed between six and eight students in one day, often not even meeting with parents nor providing follow up for further diagnosis or school or community based intervention.

By 2006, some First Nations operated schools identified up to 50% of their student population as severely or profoundly dis/abled (Don Scott, personal communication, May 1, 2013), even though many of the students had not received any formal medical diagnosis confirming a specific disorder or recognized dis/ability. Under the assessment model of special education, the more students assessed and labelled, the greater likelihood the schools could increase the fiscal resources for their school.

This pattern represents a long and well-established history of First Nations communities put in positions to have to use other ways in order to gain access to much needed base education tuition funding for their students. Rather than being based on a system of adequate, culturally relevant identification of needs along with the provision of adequate resources to enable First Nations to meet those needs, the assessment-based funding model used represented a piecemeal, compartmentalized approach initiated from outside of the community primarily by Federal Government decision makers.

By 2007, First Nations operated schools increased submissions to the high cost special education funding program of the Federal Government to over 1,800 applications from within the Manitoba region. With the increasing demand for high cost special education funding based on the assessment model, the Federal Government, fearful of the mounting and steadily increasing demand for more money, proposed an “intervention funding model for high cost special education” (AANDC, 2005). As outlined in the *Rising to the Challenge* (AANDC, 2006) document, the Federal government of Canada changed high cost special education funding from the individual assessment model to block intervention funding. This has resulted in the essential capping resources for all special education for First Nations schools from 2006 until the present time.

No matter how the school population changed, or whether the school validated the currently identified students, changing the funding to a work plan/block funding model, essentially removed any ability for a school to change the amount of special education funding a band-operated school could access. For reasons not identified in any public documentation or literature, it is the same federal government department that provides individual assessment based high cost special education funding, and a much larger base tuition funding for First Nation schools operated by a provincial school divisions such as the school in Norway House First Nation (Frontier School Division), that block funds special education and provides band operated schools a much lower rate of base tuition funding.

Analysis from other regions in Canada (Curtis Mallet, personal communication, September 15, 2014) confirms the unequal distribution of high cost special education from region to region within Canada. For example, while working as a Special Education consultant with the Assembly of First Nations in Ottawa, Mr. Mallet reported that, despite near one third of the population of First Nations students living in First Nations communities in Manitoba, in 2012/13, the region of British Columbia received more money for special education than the region of Manitoba. This again is reflection of the lack of consistency in the policies used by the Government of Canada and the lack of legislative or statutory protection required to safeguard the supports and services for students with and without SEND attending schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Since 2007 all First Nations band operated schools are required to submit work plans on the specific number of students identified with special needs and on met and unmet needs at the community level. Future research and study needs to take place in order to determine the outcomes of transitioning from assessment based to intervention based finding to support

special/inclusive education for First Nations schools in Manitoba and throughout Canada.

Unsuccessful to date, I have made ongoing formal requests to access this information from AANDC. Citing privacy issues at the community level, government officials state it is unlikely that requests to access this non-identifying data will be possible (Don Scott, personal communication, November 15, 2016).

Rather than funding programs and services based on the culturally defined needs and responses, and rights of students with and without SEND and their families, or seeing dis/ability and special/inclusive education supports and services as a basic human right, the Federal Government of Canada continues to use a funding model that represents an economic approach of cost containment. According to Philips (2010c), the Special Education Program (SEP) is a “policy of containment rather than a program funded based on the needs of students in any meaningful way” (p. 78).

Although not yet documented within published academic literature, First Nations special education programs throughout Manitoba continue to be plagued with staggering high staff turnover rates. For example, from the 2013/14 to the 2014/15 school year, the 13 First Nations communities I worked in had a turnover of over 90% of community-based special education teaching staff.

Continuous high staff turnover dictates the need for ongoing retraining of special education personnel in most First Nations communities throughout Manitoba. Since 1999, through the MFNERC, each First Nations operated school has had access to the services of a Special Education Specialist to assist school staff implement special/inclusive education services at the community level. In 2002 and in 2005, the Resource Inclusive Special Education (RISE)

program created two cohorts of teachers from First Nations communities, enabling them to access their post baccalaureate in Special Education through a partnership with the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. In 2016, along with other First Nations Special/Inclusive education training cohorts such as the Masters of Education in Inclusion, Language and Literacy, and the First Nations clinical training programs in Speech and Language Pathology, School Psychology, Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy, 2 additional RISE cohorts started with an enrollment of over 80 students. Other special education training programs already completed, such as the First Nations speech and language-training program facilitated the certification of First Nations clinicians, some bilingual in both English and Cree, who are now working in First Nations schools in Manitoba. Since 2002, MFNERC has provided ongoing training of educational assistants and school counselors, in partnership with various post-secondary institutes in Manitoba.

For the past 15 years, the MFNERC has promoted a capacity building and collaborative approach to building special/inclusive education supports in First Nations band operated schools in Manitoba. MFNERC facilitates collaborative networking through regular resource teacher meetings held in Brandon, Dauphin, Winnipeg, and Thompson throughout the school year. Support documents such as the First Nations Special Education Policy and Practice Handbook (FNSEPPH) is available to First Nations schools, to help guide all aspects of special/inclusive education programming in band operated schools in Manitoba, and is updated annually by the Special Education Unit (SEU) of the MFNERC.

In 2014, technicians and First Nations Education Directors established the Manitoba First Nations Special Education Working Group (MFNSEWG). With a mandate to gather and provide relevant information related to special education to inform the development of a culturally-

relevant model of special education for Manitoba First Nations, the MFNSEWG now provides rationale/justification for increased federal funding for special education, to enable First Nations leadership to lobby the Government of Canada for appropriate support for special education. This structure uses a rights-based approach that recognizes First Nations jurisdiction over education, treaty rights to education and the fiduciary responsibility of the federal government to fund First Nations education (MFNSEWG, 2015, p.1).

The provision of special/inclusive education supports and services within many First Nations communities in Manitoba remains fraught with many challenges. Phillips (2010c) proposes four reasons for the lack of resolution or stabilization of special education programs in First Nations communities including,

The lack of willingness on the part of the Federal government to honour constitutional obligations and financial responsibilities in special education, INAC's [now AANDC] focus on provincial systems or templates for special education, (sighting there is no evidence that these systems are appropriate nor meet the needs of First Nations students), INAC's limited funding for special education and, "the [total] lack of respect showed for First Nations expertise in special education. (p. 77)

The identification of First Nations language learners, educated in chronically underfunded schools, as being "cognitively impaired" or "behaviourally disordered" requires further investigation and analysis from the intersections of critical race and disability theoretical lenses.

Despite good intentions, standardized tests can be problematic when used to evaluate First Nations learners, particularly when it comes to the identification of special education needs

and/or dis/abilities. According to Johnston and Claypool (2010), “Standardized tests are critiqued because norm-referenced testing is believed to make unfair comparisons between indigenous and non-indigenous students, for they do not consider the cultural and linguistic barriers that inhibit indigenous success (Bell, 2004). Norm-referenced tests are also believed to be incapable of measuring learning” (p. 121).

Legislative and statutory protection. In 2005, in the Province of Manitoba, Bill 13 Appropriate Educational Programming (AEP), received royal assent. Based on Manitoba’s philosophy of inclusion, Bill 13 “provides the regulation to guide policy and programming for all students, particularly those with special needs, in receiving the appropriate educational programming they require. The regulations confirm in legislation that all students in Manitoba are entitled to receive appropriate educational programming that fosters student participation in both the academic and social life of the school” (Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth, 2015, p. 1).

Although most First Nations special/inclusive educators and clinicians are aware of its contents, Bill 13 does not apply to First Nations band operated schools in Manitoba. First Nations education programs, and in particular, programs and services for students with SEND attending band-operated schools in Manitoba, remain without any legislative safeguards or statutory guarantee to protect their rights.

Conclusion

In conclusion, paying particular attention to the evolution of special/inclusive education supports and services within First Nations, this chapter provided a review of literature on the history of special/inclusive education throughout Manitoba. The following chapter outlines the

methods I used to investigate the perspectives and experiences of First Nations educators and their allies, related to their work with students with and without SEND attending school in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Chapter 4: Methods

In this chapter, I provide a review of the methods used to examine the provision of education supports for First Nations learners in First Nations schools in Manitoba. In this study, I also examined how the perpetuation of ableized and racialized norms affects the professional practice of educators in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Throughout this study, I was particularly interested how First Nations and dis/ability perspectives inform contextualized understanding and practice related to special/inclusive education for students with and without SEND in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

A theoretical framework situated at the intersections of Tribal Crit and Dis Critical not only provided the grounding necessary to situate this study, but also informed and guided the methods I used to address the ethical considerations of the study. The ways in which I collected, analyzed, interpreted, and presented the data gathered, and how I positioned and carried myself through this research process, were informed by the convergence of principles of self-determination/representation, working towards a decolonizing aim, and privileging Indigenous and dis/ability positive epistemologies and ontologies, inherent within Tribal Crit and Critical Disability Theory.

Qualitative Methods

I used a qualitative research design for this study. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), qualitative research is descriptive, naturalistic, has concern with process, and is inductive. The inquirer is “interested in how different people make sense of their lives” (p. 7). Through open-ended, in-depth interviews with a representative sample of First Nations educators, I documented their perspectives and experiences related to educating students with and without SEND attending schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

In this research, I used a qualitative design for a number of reasons. First, I believe it is important to study various aspects of First Nations education systems from the perspectives of First Nations educators who have worked, or currently work within these systems. First Nations educators have answers, expertise, and experience to provide the recommendations to build, implement, maintain, and sustain First Nations inclusive education systems in Canada. These skilled professionals tend not to be included in mainstream special education research, nor in the literature on First Nations education, and are untapped treasures of knowledge from which to enhance our understanding of relevant, meaningful, and effective education practice in Manitoba and beyond. These professionals know the issues, challenges, and solutions needed to remedy existing problems within their local community education systems. I believe that with the opportunity, jurisdiction, and appropriate legislation, along with the adequate and targeted resources, they will implement the solutions needed to improve education for all learners in First Nations communities in Manitoba. “Qualitative researchers in education can continually be found asking questions of the people they are learning from to discover what they are experiencing, how they interpret their experiences, and how they themselves structure the world in which they live” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002, p. 8).

The knowledge and perspectives of those who practice within, between, and amongst western and Indigenous worldviews can add insight related to relevant and meaningfully inclusive education. The knowledge(s) of the research participants in this study does contribute to the field of special/inclusive and First Nations education research and applied practice. Reflecting on traditional/First Nations/tribal knowledges, along with mainstream western pedagogies, practices, and trainings provides a rich, contextualized, and fresh approach to invigorate the special/inclusive and First Nations education discourse(s) alike.

In this study, I documented the history, strengths, challenges and opportunities in providing special/inclusive education in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. According to Creswell (2013), “we also conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes and places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature (p. 48).

Qualitative research often happens in natural settings and builds the relationships necessary to gain a more accurate understanding of issues affecting people’s lives. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative methodologies, to a much greater degree than a solely quantitative approach, allows and engages with multiple (and intersecting) subjective meanings and interpretations. Examining issues, from multiple perspectives and presenting/publishing the multiple solutions and strategies of the study participants, is consistent with Indigenous epistemologies that reflect and respect the diversity within and amongst First Nations families and communities. This is shown often in community settings where one might hear, ‘this is what I know, but it is only what I know is true for me. If you want to find out about what someone else thinks, you have to go over and speak with her.’ This show of respect for the self-determination

of, and non-interference with others, is often seen as many First Nation people express only what they know to be true for them, at this time in their lives, while also carefully pointing out that others may have different understandings and/or perspectives, which are also of equal value and consideration. Knowledge, from this perspective, is emergent, fluid, and ever evolving, building upon the memories, experiences, histories, and ways of knowing and being in the world.

I framed and built this qualitative research project upon the base of established relationships I have with First Nations communities, schools, resource teachers, Elders, clinicians, and special education specialists/consultants throughout Manitoba. Through the data collection and analysis phases, I looked for common themes but also distinct differences and particular silences that did occur from within the data of this research process.

As the inquiry into special/inclusive education and the experiences of educating students with SEND in First Nations communities is a relatively new area of study, I use a relatively high number of ‘personal communications’ in my work. In addition, due to storytelling nature of this quantitative research methodology, and the importance I give to ‘first hand perspective and account’, I use extensive research participants’ narratives in the presentation of the study findings.

Research Design

The research is a descriptive study. A descriptive study (Sandelowski, 2000) is one that describes a social phenomenon, explains relationships and the situations within the studied phenomena. Within descriptive studies, researchers identify themes and patterns using words can produce detailed and full interpretations of the phenomenon (Thyer, 2001).

An intersectional theoretical framework of critical theories centered this descriptive study. As outlined by Hankivsky et.al. (2012) the guiding principles for Intersectional Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) includes focusing data collection and analysis at the intersections of the identified variables (dis/ability, race, socioeconomic status, gender, place and location). This work engages in multi-level analysis of the relationships, power structures, similarities and differences, and the access to resources between and across populations. Paying particular attention to power, I honoured self-representation, sought diverse perspectives, and practiced ongoing self-reflexivity. I think that any one of the identities of race, dis/ability gender and others, without including the others, leads to incomplete, possibly incorrect assumptions and/or conclusions about varied lived experiences. Intersectionality, in this sense, means that we cannot truly understand the reality of First Nations students with and without SEND, or the First Nations educators, clinicians and consultants who work closely with them, in isolation from other factors that affect First Nations communities and First Nations education in general. Such factors include the history of colonization of First Nations and the structural inequalities that exist within First Nations education such as low and inadequate base tuition funding provided for First Nations bands to run their own schools. First Nations people and people with dis/abilities must have a real say in their own lives and the lives of their children.

Intersectional framing of this inquiry leads to questions and considerations such as why and how students with dis/abilities, or perceived dis/abilities have been, or continue to be, used to generate resources to support chronically underfunded education systems in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Inquiry related to the overrepresentation of racialized students within special education programs in general centered questions, discussion, and consideration of the complexities associated with the identification of dis/ability and special needs within

‘segregated’ First Nations schools. I also considered the significance of perspectives of participants related to the provision of culturally relevant and meaningful special/inclusive education supports and services by First Nations clinicians, consultants, educators and their allies. Participants in this study were able to define what a First Nations culturally safe and appropriate special/inclusive education practice might look, sound, and feel like, and then what training, methods and structures need to be in place to achieve this. The participants in this study identified that most of their formal training originates within a western clinical framework of special/inclusive education and then provided critical reflection about the challenges, opportunities and adaptations of their work as they practice within their cultures of origin.

According to Lepinard (2014), “oppression is not experienced in a segmented rather than a unified way because social relations are interlocked rather than simply added upon one another” (p. 878). The participants in this study identified that they are not just fighting for inclusion within the education system, but that their fight also includes advocacy for equity in overall funding for schools in First Nations communities. The participants also stated that understanding the marginalization of students with dis/abilities requires one to take into account the marginalization of the entire First Nations education system as a whole and vice versa. The study of services and supports for students with SEND, in schools in First Nations communities, is also the study of multiple, intersecting, and complex social relations and multiple dominant/subordinate locations.

Ethics approval. The Education, Nursing Research and Ethics Board (ENREB) of the University of Manitoba approved the ethics proposal for this study on October 15, 2015. I then submitted an amendment to the proposal on January 28, 2016, in order to interview more participants than initially planned, which they approved on February 3, 2016. Ethics approval

was renewed on April 10, 2017. The main issues regarding research ethics includes ensuring informed consent, protecting the privacy of individuals, and ensuring that there was no coercion or undue influence used to engage people to participate in the research. Examples of undue influence might include a potential research participant feeling that they need to participate in research in order to please a person in a position of authority. I was also concerned that potential research participants may fear that refusal to participate in a study might jeopardize their current or future career advancement. A detailed description of how I avoided this, and the ethical processes I used for this study, is in the ENREB ethics application located in Appendix C.

In this study, I strived to ensure and protect the confidentiality of all research participants. I reassured study participants that I would make every effort possible to protect their confidentiality. I did not use or share individual names, current positions, disciplines, communities or identifying specific cultural backgrounds with anyone at any time. I offered participants the option of using their own name and waving confidentiality however, no one choose this option. Finally, I was clear with participants that even with all of the efforts made to protect their confidentiality, there still may be a small risk of someone identifying their involvement due to the small number of potential study participants such as First Nations clinicians practicing in Manitoba. I also assured all participants that they could withdraw from study without any negative effects for them, their school, or community in any way.

Proposed research participants. The following section, I identify how I proposed to gain access to, and select, the First Nations educators who will participated in this research.

Gaining access. For this study, I first developed a list of First Nations educators who currently work, or have worked, in special/inclusive education in schools in First Nations

communities in Manitoba. To be eligible to participate in this study, educators had worked in a special/inclusive education related capacity in a Manitoba First Nation school or service delivery organization for a minimum of five years of full time service. I also invited non-First Nations, Indigenist allies, who met the same criteria, to participate in this research. The practice of not excluding anyone is consistent with the philosophy of inclusion, which I have come to know is a cornerstone of First Nations dis/ability and inclusive education perspective and practice. Eligible clinicians included First Nations Educational Psychologists, Audiologists, Reading Clinicians, Speech and Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, and Physiotherapists.

Once I received approval from ENREB, I planned to send a letter to all First Nations Education Directors/Principals/Education Portfolio Counsellors responsible for band operated schools, the Superintendents of Provincial School Divisions operating or co/operating schools in First Nations communities, and the Executive Director of the MFNERC. In the letter, I asked for their approval of the study and for them to approach staff from their community, division or organization to participate in the research. The list of all First Nations Education Directors/Principals/Education Portfolio Counsellors responsible for band operated schools, the Superintendents of Provincial School Divisions operating or co/operating schools in First Nations communities, and the Executive Director of the MFNERC is publicly available online.

The process I planned to use was consistent with the recommendations of Tri Council research guidelines for research with First Nations communities in Canada. Other First Nations scholars conducting education related research in First Nations communities in Manitoba (Murdock, 2016; Okemaw, 2016; Scott, 2016) have used similar processes. In the consent letter, and in subsequent conversations, I reminded all stakeholders that this study was neither an evaluation of any specific school or education organization, rather an opportunity for participants

to reflect upon, and share their general experiences related to the provision of special/inclusive education in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

For those individuals who met the eligibility criteria, but were not currently employed by a school in a First Nations community, provincial school division, or a First Nations educational service delivery organization, (an independent First Nations clinician, or retired First Nations Resource Teacher), I planned to send them the information directly about the study.

In order to protect the anonymity of participants I advised all stakeholders, including the potential participants that I would not send individual school, divisional or organizational summaries related to this study. Instead, I offered a summary of the entire study to all communities, divisions, organizations who agreed for their staff to participate in this research.

Selection criteria. In this study, I utilized maximum variation sampling. According to Helms et al, (2001, p. 1) maximum variation sampling “is a method which provides for identification of wide variations in the experiences and processes related to policy development and implementation.” In choosing the project participants, I considered the following factors:

1. Cultural representation. In the study, I strived to select at least one representative from each of the five First Nations cultural/linguistic groups in Manitoba including Cree, Ojibwa, Island Lake dialect, Dene and Dakota.

2. Clinical representation. I attempted to select at least one First Nations speech and language pathologist, psychologist, special education specialist/consultant, and reading clinician to participate in the study.

3. School size. I wanted participants in this study to come from small (0-99 students), medium (100-499 students) and large (500-1000 plus students) First Nations schools in Manitoba.

4. Geographic representation. I also wanted participants in this study to represent a balance of northern, southern, isolated and non-isolated schools operating in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

5. Jurisdictional representation. In the selection process, I attempted to include representation from band operated, provincial, and special project status schools in this study.

In determining the study design, I felt that the broad representation of study participants strengthened the quality of the data I collected.

Once selected, I planned to contact the participants directly and sent them additional information including a list of questions prepared in advance for the in depth semi structured interviews and also encourage them to provide any additional information they felt might be relevant to the topic of this inquiry.

During the study, I strived to work towards minimal or no disruption in the lives of the participants and the schools/organizations within which they work. Again consistent with the guidelines and recommendations of the Tri council guidelines on research involving First Nations, I employed a number of methods, which I will highlight in the next chapter, to instill the ownership of this study within First Nations communities in Manitoba and within the staff committed to the development and delivery of education for all learners. I also informed participants that I am open to co-presenting and disseminating the research findings in peer-reviewed journals and/or at local, regional, and/or national First Nations or special/inclusive education gatherings.

For participants who agreed to become involved in the study, I planned, and will, offer a small gift of either tobacco or something hand made in appreciation of their participation. First

Nations often offer this type of gift not as an attempt to coerce participation rather as a customary exchange as a sign of respect and appreciation for sharing.

Consent forms are located in the ENREB ethics application located in Appendix C. Along with a guarantee of confidentiality, all consent forms clearly indicate the right of participants to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. I included the central theme of the research in these forms, along with any known or anticipated risks and benefits to the research participants. I also informed participants that when I am not able to guarantee maintaining confidentiality, I would inform the community and participants of this and would gain written consent before I distribute such information to a wider audience. I planned to tell participants that if they did not grant consent, I would not include that data in the results of the research.

I ensured all participants that the written and electronically recorded data they shared with me while participating in this research will be accessible only to my transcriptionists who will know people's names. The four transcriptionists were also required to sign a confidentiality pledge. Through the letters of participation and informed consent, I advised all participants that my academic advisor, research assistant and critical friend would only have access to the data in anonymized forms. Throughout this study, I kept all written and electronic data until the time of final publishing at which time I destroyed all written data by shredding. I informed all participants that I would destroy all electronic data by deleting the data from computer and electronic devices and wiping the tapes of interviews clean.

Plan for data collection. In this study, I planned to conduct two separate in-depth interviews with each participant. I anticipated that each interview would last approximately one hour.

In depth, individual interviews. In the study, I encouraged the participants to choose a comfortable, accessible, and inviting space to share their thoughts, ideas, and perspectives on the questions that I provided them in advance of the interview and suggested the interviews be conducted at a mutually agreed upon times and locations. As some of the participants were from more northern and/or isolated communities, I offered the use of Skype to conduct and face-to-face interviews meeting via technology over the internet. Wherever possible I planned to meet the study participant in person. I informed participants that the face-to-face and Skype interviews would be audio recorded for future transcription.

During the data collection phase, I planned to write in the margins of field notes and transcriptions, and began the inductive process of the preliminary identification of codes, themes, and categories for consideration. I also planned to keep a researchers notebook/journal where I would note methodological issues and/or content that occurred during the data collection phase of this study. Both, I thought, would be excellent sources of data for this study.

Plan for data analysis. The analysis of the data within this qualitative study adhered to a number of best practices embedded within the literature by eminent qualitative researchers. According to Yin (2014), the following four principles underlie data analysis processes within qualitative research. They include:

First, your analysis should show that you attend to all the evidence. Second, your analysis should address, if possible, all plausible rival interpretations. Third, your analysis should address the most significant aspect of your narrative inquiry. Four, you should use your prior, expert knowledge in the research process. (p. 168)

The following techniques/processes of relying on theoretical propositions, thematic analysis, and examining rival explanations framed the analytic elements of this study.

Relying on theoretical propositions. For this study, I constructed a number of theoretical assumptions, guided by the intersections of Tribal Crit and Dis Crit Theory, which led to the creation of the overall research question, the sub questions, and the direct questions for the interviews/sharing sessions (Yin, 2014, p. 136). They include:

1. The study of the experiences of those who work closely with students with and without SEND in First Nations communities, know both First Nations and mainstream education settings and approaches and have access to these students over time. I did not interview students themselves as they are under the age of majority and although they understand their own perspective, they may not have had the opportunity to see *across* people.
2. There is a need to understand the reality of special/inclusive education from the perspectives of the First Nations educators who work within these systems.
3. The experiences of racialized and ableized students provide intersecting sites of resistance to create dialogue to expose marginalization based on race and/or dis/ability.
4. Categorical ascriptions of difference based on race and perceived or actual experiences of dis/ability may contribute to the over-representation of students of First Nations ancestry in special/inclusive education programs in First Nations schools in Manitoba.
5. For First Nations control of First Nation education to produce substantial improvement in outcomes for students with and without SEND, sufficient and

targeted resources, culturally and linguistically responsive practice, and statutory and legislative protection is required.

6. The success of First Nations inclusive/special education programs depends on the ability to stabilize the general education system in First Nations communities in Manitoba and conversely the problems in special education are a depiction of the overall problems in the First Nations education system as a whole.
7. Analysis of First Nations education and special/inclusive education systems from the intersections of both critical race and critical disability lenses provides contextual understanding of the lived experiences of students with SEND.
8. Those who provide services and supports for students with SEND contribute valuable insights into the special/inclusive and First Nations education discourse(s) and debate(s).
9. The intersections of critical race and disability theory provide a conceptual framework to understand unequal and discriminatory treatment of students with SEND both within and outside of First Nations schools and communities in Manitoba.

Thematic analysis. For deeper analysis, I planned to search for, and identify recurring patterns and consistent themes within the data. In this study, I wanted to explore particular silences, contradictions, and dichotomies within the data. I tested emerging themes through examining their reoccurrence from one and multiple participants. Reoccurring themes verified the consistency of these themes across participants.

Examining rival explanations. Through the review, analysis and re-analysis of the data, along with testing predetermined theoretical assumptions, I planned to propose and examine

possible rival explanations and then review and interrogate these explanations with my academic advisory and research assistant (Yin, 2014, p. 140).

Validation Strategies. Validation refers to the accuracy of the findings of the inquiry. This is one of the strengths of qualitative research (Cresswell, 2014, p. 201). To ensure the validity of the data, and that the interpretation of the data is accurate, I planned to collect data from several appropriate sources over time. I wanted to ensure that the data reflected what the research participants did report. I knew that trustworthiness of this study would be in the quality of my analysis.

Scholars have used the image of the crystal to represent validity in qualitative data analysis in postmodern literature. According to Richardson and St. Pierre (2005),

The central imagery is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionality, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change and are altered but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves creating different colors, patterns and arrays casting in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of response- not triangulation but rather crystallization. (p. 963)

For this study I did use the following validation techniques of triangulation, member checking, peer review and debriefing, and clarifying researcher bias to ensure the trustworthiness and validation of the research findings.

Triangulation. Triangulation refers to collecting information from different data sources and/or data sources with differing characteristics. This is done in order to gather multiple viewpoints or perspectives. Triangulation serves to strengthen the confidence of the findings of

the data (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012, p. 154). For this study I collected data from people who work in more than one type of community (size, geographic location) and selected participants from more than one discipline (education, psychology, speech and language pathology, and educational consultants) providing different roles in different First Nations schools. Multi or polyvocal discourses provide insight into the complexity of the dynamics of the provision of special/inclusive education supports and services in different First Nations communities in different geographic locations, from varied jurisdictional affiliations and from different linguistic and cultural regions, thus enhancing the validity of the research. In addition, in my analysis I apply the theoretical intersection of Critical Disability Theory and Tribal Crit.

Member checking. Member checking consists of engaging the research participants in verifying the accuracy of the transcribed interviews and materials. I planned that after I had the interviews transcribed, I would send the transcriptions to each participant for their review. As noted by Cresswell (2013), “This technique is considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as the most critical technique for establishing credibility (p. 314)” (p. 252). This would be an opportunity for participants to determine if what they intended to say is what they said, and if the information they shared, had been accurately recorded and transcribed. This would also be an opportunity for the participant to modify any previous shared information. In order to enhance the accuracy of the information collected I decided I would ask participants if there was anything that needs to be added, removed or edited, or if there is any information provided that may compromise their identity in any way.

In addition, I also planned to check for accuracy while I was conducting the interviews. For example, on an ongoing basis, I used paraphrasing to check and reconfirm the accuracy of my understanding of the information provided. For example, I said, “this is what I think you

mean when you talk about this subject, is that correct?” This was another opportunity for participants to reconfirm the content and accuracy of shared information.

Peer review and debriefing. Peer review and debriefing was another strategy I planned to use to add validity to the research (Cresswell, 2013, p. 255). This involved having an additional person, with expertise in this area of inquiry, to review the findings and ask questions so that “the account will resonate with people other than the researcher” (Cresswell, 2014, p. 202). For this study. In addition, I planned to use two levels of peer review, first, my academic advisor and second, a colleague with a PhD in Special/Inclusive Education. I informed participants that my academic advisor and second reader would have access to my anonymized raw data as well as my initial preliminary data analysis. Along with adding richness to the analysis of the data collected, I felt this level of analysis would result in a higher level of validity for this research.

Clarifying researcher bias. I have, and continue to acknowledge my positionality and my biases by naming them and through review and reflection with other researchers, particularly within the field of First Nations and special/inclusive education. Throughout this study, I have attempted to account for my biases by having my academic advisor read anonymized case notes, review data analysis summaries and through ongoing formal and informal review of the data analysis. Additional readers, in addition to my advisory committee, also checked the progressing analysis.

First Nations validation strategies. Above are the minimum standards suggested to ensure validity of both data collection and analysis within qualitative research. Researchers such as Wilson (2008) and Tuhwia Smith (2012) suggest additional methods to ensure validity for research within First Nations communities. They include following established community based

cultural protocols and building, maintaining, and sustaining ethical and reciprocal relationships with First Nations systems and communities. As outlined in the following chapter, I did adhere, to the best of my ability, to the ethical and relational protocols used within First Nations schools and communities.

In the next chapter, I will share how I used storytelling to build upon and enhance the relationships and reciprocity between myself and the individuals who participated in this study. I will also share how I did select study participants and how I collected and analyzed the data. The stories represent the strength, hope and resilience of educators, clinicians and allies working within First Nations education systems in Manitoba.

Chapter 5: Research Participants/Partners – Stories of Strength, Hope and Resilience

Each human being is fragile, interdependent, at times silly, at times even wonderful, often weak when it does not matter, and sometimes strong when it does matter. People are people. There is always the “glass half empty” – “glass half filled” decision to be made. This is the most important decision to be made about people. We can improve the world immeasurably if we would but look for the best in each other. (Blatt, 1987, p. 353)

In this chapter, I outline the research methods I used, and how the participant recruitment, selection, and data collection and analysis processes unfolded in this study. I provide a detailed description of the program participants I selected, followed by a summary of the related themes emerging out of the stories told by these remarkable people and arising from the time spent with them.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Following receipt of approval of the ethics application submitted to ENREB (Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board), I compiled a list of all known individuals who met the criteria for participation in this research project. I identified potential study participants from my own personal knowledge of current and former staff within First Nations education systems, from publically available staff lists such as the First Nations school directory from the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC), from school and divisional websites, and from contacting all First Nations schools/organizations in Manitoba. At the time of participant recruitment, there were 54 First Nations operated schools in Manitoba, five First Nations schools operated by two different provincial education authorities and one First Nations school operating jointly between the local First Nations band council and a regional education service delivery organization. Through this process, I identified approximately 90 individual teachers/clinicians

who meet previously established inclusion criteria for the study. Due to my current employment status, and the guidelines outlined in the Tri Council Policy Statement (TCPS) (2014), to avoid a perceived or potential conflict of interest, I did not approach the one First Nation School operated jointly between the local Chief and Council and the regional educational service delivery organization of MFNERC.

Following the identification of potential research participants, I sent emails to all First Nations Education Directors, Executive Directors and Superintendents responsible for the delivery of education and educational supports services in First Nations communities. This email advised them of the nature of the project and requested their consent for current school/organizational staff to participate in the project. Adhering to the Tri Council guidelines on ethical research with Indigenous communities in Canada, I contacted Directors of Education/School Superintendents and the Executive Director of the regional education service delivery organization as they are all selected and/or granted responsibility for education by, thus representing, local Chiefs and Councils of each First Nations community in Manitoba. In the email, I also asked that they disseminate information about the project to eligible staff members and inform their staff to contact me if they were interested in being a participant in the study.

The MFNERC has an established internal research ethics committee. I left it to the discretion of the Executive Director of the MNFERC to decide if he would like me to approach the internal MFNERC education research committee for their review prior to the participant selection of the study. He indicated that for this study, adhering to the guidelines of the University of Manitoba was sufficient.

Of the 54 Education Directors/Education Portfolio Councilors, Superintendents, and the Executive Director of the regional service delivery organization approached, 53 granted

permission for their staff to participate in the study while one did not. Of the 53 schools/divisions that provided consent, over 10 schools and/or divisions did not have staff who met the criteria to participate in the study. Those authorities who did provide consent were more than helpful in disseminating information to their staff about the nature and purpose of the proposed research.

In addition, I contacted and invited the participation of a number of resource teachers/clinicians/allies I had worked with over the past 20 years within First Nations education systems, who met the inclusion criteria for the study, but due to retirement and/or moving to other positions or jurisdictions, no longer worked within the system.

Of the list of (n=90) eligible participants, (n=45) contacted me to indicate their interest in participating in the study. Of the 45 potential participants who contacted me, some did not have the minimum amount of experience required. Based on a desire to have a cross section of individuals representing different roles, cultural, linguistic and geographic diversity, I selected (n=18) individuals who met the inclusion criteria to participate in the study. The initial intent of the project was to invite participation of approximately 10 individuals, however due to the large number of people interested I decided to increase the number of participants to (n=18). This allowed me to collect more data and to ensure a more complete representation of this inquiry. ENREB approved an amendment to increase the number of participants outlined in my original proposal.

Although the recommendations in this study do have implications for both First Nations and non-First Nations operated schools within and outside of First Nations communities in

Manitoba, this study focused solely on the First Nations band operated education system in Manitoba.

Project Participants: First Nations Educators, Clinicians, and Allies

Individuals selected for participation in the research study (n=18) comprised First Nations educators (n=11), First Nations clinicians (n=3), and ally educators (n=4). Along with their undergraduate teaching degrees, First Nations educators (n=11), all reported attaining specialized training in special/inclusive education at the Post Baccalaureate (n=9), Masters (n=1) and Doctorate (n=1) levels. All reported certification in special education through the Province of Manitoba. In addition to their training, all participants reported working a minimum of five years in a resource/special education teaching or consulting position within First Nations schools in Manitoba. The average number of years of education related experience was (n= 33.5 years) with numbers ranging from 23 to over 43 years of experience working within various aspects of First Nations education in Manitoba. The total number of years of experience of the First Nations educators was (n= 369).

All First Nations educators identified as status First Nations citizens with seven of them reporting to be of Cree ancestry. Three First Nations educators self-identified as of Ojibway ancestry and one as of Ojibway-Dakota ancestry. Six First Nations educators reported they are fluent in their First Nation language as well as English. Along with a desire to (re)learn their First Nations language all other participants reported having either a “working or conversational understanding” of their ancestral First Nation language. Those not fluent, largely due to inter-generational cultural disruption, reported losing their language or not being given the opportunity to learn and /or use their First Nations language in home, community, and/ or educational settings.

All three participating First Nations clinicians are members of their professional certification bodies, licensed to practice their profession within the Province of Manitoba. The First Nations clinicians (n=3) who took part in the research reported practicing within the disciplines of clinical psychology and speech and language pathology. All three reported to be of Cree ancestry having between 20 and 23 years of experience within First Nations education settings in Manitoba. The total number of years of experience of the clinicians was 66 years, with over 40 of these years as practicing certified clinicians. One clinician reported fluency in their First Nation language, while the others reported having a “working or conversational understanding” of their ancestral First Nation language, lost or not learned due to inter-generational cultural disruption within their immediate and extended families. The three clinicians who participated in the study all identified as status First Nations citizens, and were raised in their First Nations community by their parents. All three attended band operated schools for their primary and most of their secondary education. At the time of the interviews, two of the three clinicians were living in their home communities while one resided in an urban center in Manitoba.

All three clinicians reported working within the education field prior to attaining their certification at the Masters and Ph.D. level within their clinical fields. The three clinicians reported a total of 30 years of experience within the education system either as teachers, school counselors or education assistants prior to attaining their clinician certification. The three clinicians reported a total of 33 years of experience providing clinical supports to First Nations students in First Nations operated schools at the time of the interviews. All three clinicians talked about increasing rates of identification of dis/ability and special education needs within First Nations schools in Manitoba.

I also selected four allies, non-First Nations resource/special/inclusive education teachers/specialists, who met the requirements to participate in the study. In addition to their undergraduate degrees in education, the education levels of the allies ranged from two with post baccalaureate certification in special education, to one with a Master's degree in Education to another near completion of a Ph.D. in Special/Inclusive education. The years of experience in First Nations education for these teachers ranged from 25 to over 40 years. The total number of years of experience of the allies was over 101 years. All allies reported active membership with the provincial education certification branch of the Province of Manitoba.

All of the allies shared deeply personal reasons for entering, and continuing their work within First Nations education systems in Manitoba. One participant shared stories of being “looked after” by his First Nations community at a time of grave illness. He reported feeling a part of the community, being a part of the community, and despite the many challenges within the school system, and the inadequate pay, that he just “feels that this is just his community now”. He reported feeling accepted, nurtured and that the First Nations community was his family now.

Another ally spoke of the time when his child was gravely ill. Living on a limited teacher's income, he recalled being worried he would not be able to cover the costs of getting the extensive medical treatment his son needed, until one evening when there was a knock on the door. The families in the First Nations community he worked in had come together and raised money for him and his young family to travel to Winnipeg to receive the required lifesaving medical attention for his son. He, along with the other allies, talked about knowing they could make more money if they moved to teaching positions within the provincial system, and even after some had tried this for a short period of time, all of the allies returned to First Nations

communities to take resource, teaching or special education consulting positions despite much lower financial compensation. They reported, “a pull back to First Nations education.” All allies talked about feeling a part of the community and culture they serve, and how wonderful the children and families are to work with.

Rather than talk about inadequate housing, or deficiencies within families, communities or the individual students, the allies interviewed focused on what they get out of teaching within a First Nations community context. A common theme amongst the allies was that they felt that they would all most likely spend the rest of their working life within First Nations education rather than return to, or become a part of the provincial education system. Allies, as well as clinicians and teachers, reported that working within special education within First Nations was a better fit with their values. Despite the long hours, isolation and travel, and often working with limited resources, they felt being a part of the something bigger than themselves, part of a larger family, and as one participant stated, “being looked after” in more important ways than solely the monetarily compensation.

The total number of participants (n=18) in this research project reported having over (N=541) years of cumulative teaching/clinical experience in First Nations schools in Manitoba. The majority (n=12/ 18) of the participants indicated having an immediate or extended family member living with a disability.

In the following section, I will review how I collected data with the research participants.

Data Collection

Following the selection of the project participants, I contacted all selected individuals either by phone or email, some through their work institution, to schedule mutually convenient

times and locations for the interviews. I sent copies of the interview questions to each participant prior to each interview. Many respondents took this opportunity to write their answers out in length before meeting with me indicating they did not want to “leave anything out.” Some participants began to keep journals prior to, and between interviews and wrote extensive pieces of work outside of the interview context, which they gave to me. Many described the process of being involved in this study as a “healing time” for themselves as they took the time to write and reflect upon their personal and professional journeys within First Nations education. Some participants even took the questions to other people in the community to find the answers in order to more comprehensively and accurately document perspectives, ideas and thoughts of others who may have additional insight. The project participants initiated these activities themselves. Participants freely shared these additional documents, adding information to their interviews, which all became important and critical sources of data for further analysis.

Those involved did take their role in the study very seriously, citing the study as the first opportunity to document past and current First Nations education history and practice. They indicated the importance of providing recommendations about improving educational outcomes for First Nations learners in Manitoba and beyond. After thanking one of the participants for her participation in the study she responded, “You are welcome. And I hope that I was able to help a bit. That is my dream. We need something in paper. We need literature about what we do, how we do it, and what the needs we have in our First Nations communities.”

For this study, I completed 35 semi-structured interviews with 18 participants. Seventeen of the 18 participants took part in two semi structured, one on one interviews. Due to overwhelming and unplanned constraints of her work situation, one of the 18 participants was

only able to take part in one interview. The length of the interviews ranged from 1.5 hours to as long as three full days, with the average interview being between two and one half and three hours in length. Most interviews took place in a First Nations community, some at the local school, others at the participant's house or in a private section of a local hotel or restaurant. A number of interviews took place in Winnipeg, some at the MFNERC office, others in private spaces at local hotels or restaurants, often after meetings/conferences participants attended. Of the 35 completed interviews, 32 were face to face, one was over Skype and I completed two over the phone.

All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. The number of pages of the interview transcripts ranged from 10–35 single spaced typed pages, with the average being 27 single spaced pages in length. The total number of pages of all transcribed interviews exceeded (n=571) typed single spaced pages. Once transcribed, I sent the interviews to participants for their review, revision and editing. I then began analysis of the data

During the interview process, the sharing often continued long after I turned off the tape-recorder. This consisted of the times when participants just wanted to continue sharing aspects of their personal lives, often trauma related experiences from their past personal or educational lives as well as their hopes for enhancing the systems to which they have dedicated their lives. The conversations continued over meals, as part of ceremonies I participated in, and through visits and further discussions well into the evenings about their schools, students, and most often their own children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. This sharing and relationship building, I believe, is part of the hospitality within First Nations communities, and the reciprocity, that is such an integral part of doing research within First Nations community based contexts.

Data Analysis

To begin the data analysis phase of the study I removed any identifying information from the transcripts. I then provided a copy of the anonymized interview transcripts to both my academic advisor and my second reader. This provided my advisor with the necessary context to understand my analysis, and to comment on, and challenge my work at times. Having two people review my data was a way to help ensure the trustworthiness of my data. Through these conversations, I discussed summaries of participant perspectives on issues such as resource allocation, recommendations for improved education practice, and structural and systemic changes that could enhance linguistic and cultural relevance of First Nations inclusive education systems in Manitoba.

I began the data analysis by reading the member checked interview transcripts to identify broad and reoccurring themes within the data. I then re-read the interviews, coding and organizing the data into four broad themes including; stories of strength, hope and resilience, factors why systems are failing most First Nations learners, First Nations perspective and practice within inclusive education, and recommendations to improve educational practice for all First Nations learners. These themes emerged from the data with the last two directly related to the themes identified during the development of the interview questions. I then reviewed the data for the third time selecting various participant quotes and stories to use in the final presentation of this research. In the final phase, I reviewed the data one last time to check for accuracy and to ensure accurate identification of the themes in the data.

Throughout the data collection and analysis procedures, I sought opportunities for on-going review and debriefing with my advisor. My academic advisor read and re-read the analyzed anonymized data and summaries of themes and then advised on the revisions

throughout the research process. The academic advisory committee monitoring this study also reviewed the data collection and data analysis processes used in this research.

Storytelling

The educators and clinicians who participated in this study told stories. I place the stories from the participants' lives throughout this final presentation of the research. The way the participants answered the questions within the interviews was to tell their stories. Using stories, they also painted a picture of what they feel First Nations education transformation might look, sound and feel like in the future. According to Tofoya (1995) (in Wilson, 2008), "Stories go in circles. They do not go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen" (p. 127). As the reader, the one listening to my account of these stories, I encourage you listen with your heart, your head, and your soul, to think deeply, and let the stories told move you. The participants in this study told their stories with good hearts and for a purpose.

According to Thomas King (2003)," in *The Truth About Stories*, "All we are is our stories" (p. 6). Burton Blatt (1987), states, "Stories can kill people. We have to be careful about the stories we tell" (p.358). The story telling process did most definitely guide this research project, including the methods used, and the analysis of the data. Participants trusted me with not only the responses to the questions I asked, but also the stories of their lives and the lives of others in their family and community members as well. They told the stories about their work life, their educational histories, and their formative years growing up. I heard many happy stories and many stories of pride and the strengths of their cultural practices. I heard stories about the positive influences and gentle but strict teachings of their grandparents. I also heard far

too many sad, gut wrenchingly painful stories, things done to little children by the tearing apart of nuclear and extended families through the residential school system. Listening to the realities of being raised in institutional settings, the personal effects of the poverty in First Nations communities, the numbers of immediate and extended family members lost to suicide or other forms of unnatural deaths, and the consequences of working in under resourced schools in First Nations communities throughout Manitoba affected me deeply.

The stories told by the participants reflect ongoing, long-standing frustrations related to the lasting effects of the multiple forms of colonization through the interruption of cultural practice and disruption of the intergenerational transmission of culture.

Many of the participants in this research commented that this was the first time anyone ever asked them to share their stories. Participants reported appreciating that someone was “taking the time” to document the stories about their life and work, signifying to them that their perspectives were of value. The participants reported appreciating that First Nations inclusive education was a topic of contemporary doctoral level research.

First Nations have had a long and well-defined history of storytelling (MFNERC: Elders Courchene and Mason, 2016, p. 7). As an oral culture, storytelling is inherent within First Nations cultures/communities and teaching practices. The participants I spent time with in this study most definitely demonstrated their story-telling prowess. These stories shared were rich and varied, reflecting the diversity within First Nations communities and cultures in Manitoba. The stories told are of endless compassion, non-judgment and unwavering commitment towards others. According to Anishinabe Elders, teaching, or the transmission of/exchange of knowledge(s) is(are) a sacred process. From a spiritual perspective, knowledge is a gift from the

Creator and when one is receiving knowledge, or listens to another's story, one is to give thanks. I give thanks and am honoured to be a part of this sacred process.

The data collection phase of the study was an opportunity to listen to the experts, those who have been delivering education supports and services in First Nations communities in Manitoba for the past 40 years. This study represents a comprehensive look at First Nations education from the perspective of First Nations clinicians, educators and allies. Rather than just looking at issues such as education funding, cultural and linguistic relevance, jurisdiction and governance, or instructional leadership in isolation from one another, this study is an attempt to understand the complexities, and the layers of complexities, and how these factors are interrelated in the perceptions of the practitioners thus affecting the delivery of First Nations inclusive education in Manitoba.

This study is not an attempt to make sweeping generalizations or provide a "fix all" panacea. It is however, an attempt to stimulate critical thinking, to create conversation, to ask realistic questions and create opportunity for First Nations to engage in problem solving towards a better future. Participants in this study reflected on, and examined why education systems have not worked for most First Nations learners. They contemplated the possible reasons for the high levels of remedial learners in First Nations schools and offered suggestions about what might be done in order to provide more meaningful, relevant, transformative and effective educational opportunities for all First Nations learners in First Nations operated schools in Manitoba.

Carrying out this study has moved, challenged, shaped, influenced, defined and redefined me as a professional and as a person. I appreciate that part of the story I now tell includes the stories shared with me by the study participants. I am grateful to the Creator that so many

welcomed me into their lives at a much deeper level than I had ever expected and trusted me with their ‘sacred’ stories. It is both an incredible honour along with an enormous responsibility. I have tried to conduct this research so that First Nations people and communities know they are worthy, and that their stories really matter.

I can only describe the process of this research as a series of deep reciprocal relational experiences, more profound than I ever expected. I do not believe that I could have collected these types of stories without existing relationships with colleagues, friends, acquaintances, all my relations. From the number of Education Directors/representing community Chiefs and Councils who gave their consent for me to conduct this research to the teachers, consultants and clinicians who agreed to participate in this study.

First Nations members often use storytelling as a teaching tool to help First Nations learners develop critical thinking skills. As an Ojibway Elder once shared with me, *Na nan de we ge gay win*, (Ojibway) means preparing to go out on the land. It also means thinking about our thinking. As stated by Elder Marcel Courchene in Charbonneau-Fontaine (2006), “Some people tell you something and they tell you a story and you would have to figure it out. They do not tell you directly but, it is in there, it’s in the story. That is how they taught you things. You had to figure them out, like life” (p. 28).

I will now share an example of this, what I now call the “three day interview that never started”.

The story goes something like this...

On a cold windy Manitoba winter morning I got out of bed, still tired, thinking of all of the things I needed to get ready to make it to my plane in time. It was 5:30 am and I wondered

why they needed to schedule flights for the north so early in the morning. Did I need food or blankets? Did I have a room to stay once I arrived up north? Did I remember to make all of the arrangements when I landed up north? Did I remember to take care of everything at home for the four days I would be gone? Tired, but excited for the adventure, the anticipation of the journey a good antidote for the boredom I often feel with the mundane of everyday life. I felt a surge of motivation and energy. I was excited to not only to return to a community and school I love so much, but also because I was going “up north” to do an interview with an old friend and colleague who has agreed to be a part of my research. The adrenalin in my brain fueled my body into action.

As I de-boarded the plane in the northern Manitoba town, I was so excited with the anticipation of seeing the interview participant, a First Nations educator I will call Judy. After I picked up my truck from the rental agency, I proceeded to meet Judy at a local diner. She greeted me with a warm hug, declaring herself a “proud northerner”, more comfortable in the bush and happy to be “a proud trappers wife”. I sent her the interview questions beforehand and was anxious to tell her about the format I would use to record her answers. We did have some work to do in a nearby school, but I was anxious to set a time for “the interview”.

Together, we ate, drank tea and visited. Judy soon asked if I could drive her around town so she could attend to some unpaid bills. As she did not drive, one of the reciprocal ways I could always help was to be her chauffeur, a task I often performed while I was up north or when she was down in Winnipeg for work. As we drove around the community, talking about our kids, she repeating almost everything we said in English, in Cree. I thought that this might be a good time to start “the interview” but she requested that I take her home. She was tired and directly said that I should go to my room, get a good sleep and to pick her up early in the morning. I

rationalized that I would be with her for a few days, but I really wanted to get the interview done sooner than later. I went back to my hotel room and had a good rest.

As instructed, I picked her up at 7:00 am the next morning, grabbed a muffin and a hot cup of hot coffee from the local Tim Horton's. We then proceeded on the drive to her community of origin, about 80 kilometers down a road with more gravel and potholes than the remaining bits of pavement laid by the Provincial government decades ago.

From the moment she stepped into my rented truck, Judy stated every sentence to me in English and then effortlessly translated the words into Cree. She proudly pronounced to everyone we met that she was teaching me Cree and that I was catching on quite well. I said to myself 'not really' but then surprisingly, the more time I spent with her, the words began to make more sense to me. As we drove, she commented on the bush, she shared stories about what her mom and dad and grandparents had taught her. Although I have never met them, it was if they were in the truck with us. On the drive that morning she commented, "The bush has all of the sensory tools I need". I listened in amazement as she so effortless integrated her own worldview teachings into strategies and practices inherent within western special/inclusive education and occupational therapy.

Between verses of Hank Snow and Merle Haggard we found on a satellite radio station, she informed me with a laugh, that "children in First Nations do not have dis/abilities but it is the teachers who have dis/abilities". She recalled her decades of advocacy and the many times she would "pop up like a bad penny", at times threatening "drastic consequences" if she did get what needed for her students, or their families. With a laugh, she said she often got the things

she wanted because people got so sick of her they had to give her what she wanted just to get rid of her. She is indeed stubborn and I thought I would not want to have to say no to her.

She told me that the road we travelled on did not even exist when she was a young woman. As we drove on, she recalled the success stories and accomplishments of many of her students over the years. She reminisced about their strengths, and their achievements. As I had heard from her before she said “inclusion is not new for First Nations” and that the first time she heard about Universal Design for Learning she thought finally the white people have come up with a model and a name for what “we as First Nations have known all along.” She proclaimed, “All children are alright just the way they are, they are all normal, and they just need to grow develop the way they need to.” She said that her First Nation has always created a role for everyone in the community. She explained how her work was more complex than being a resource teacher in a non-First Nations setting, as she often had to negotiate between not just one or two, but three levels of government; Federal, Provincial and First Nations Chiefs and Councils. She proclaimed, “Being a good advocate is the key to this work in the north”.

When we arrived in the community, Judy introduced me everyone we met. She introduced me as her “white brother”, telling everyone how smart I was, that I was working on becoming “a doctor” and that she was so proud of me. I had the feeling, as I always do when I am in her community, that I belong, that I am welcome, that I am included and that I am special. She not only informed me that her community always accepts people, even outsiders, for who they are, but that her community and culture has always been inclusive. As I continued to her school to do some work she asked me to help her with, the feelings of being welcomed, even loved and renewing old acquaintances continued. At lunch we went to her house where her husband had a warm lunch was ready for us, fresh, just caught fish and boiled potatoes. At

school we visited certain programs and talked to teachers and specific students. She told me to just watch, listen and learn. After school, we drove around the community as she took the time to teach me the funny names of the different sections of the community. I met many of her relatives and different families and individuals within the community.

After a full day in the community, we travelled back on the quiet northern road to a nearby town where she had rented an apartment. After dinner, I thought we might rest for a while and “get to the interview”. Following a cup of tea, she pronounced that she was tired and that I was to pick her up early in the morning. I was not too worried as I still had time tomorrow or the next morning to get the interview done.

The following day we travelled that same quiet road again to her community. As we drove she commented where members of her community had died on that road. She shared about the sadness and pain of losing many friends, students and relatives typically to senseless deaths occurring far too early in their young lives. Judy would intersperse the stories with teachings like “everyone is a teacher in our community; everyone has something to offer and must be given an opportunity to contribute.” She would sing along to the radio listening to old country and gospel music, each song triggering some memory of an event or person in her life. I cannot remember laughing and feeling so comfortable in a long time. Her sense of humour and warm and generous heart came out in her hearty laugh. As we drove, she said that after she leaves this world I am not to mourn for her, as her spirit will always be with me.

She talked about how children in her school are often misunderstood and that there is confusion about issues related to learning in English. She shared her concern that so many teachers come into her community thinking the students have cognitive delays. She said they are

just stuck between two languages and informed me that we still do not have a good way of helping those children. She told a funny story about how she did an assessment on a psychologist who had come into her community. She said she conducted the assessment in Cree and then proclaimed she had diagnosed him, based on the assessment that he suffered from a cognitive delay. She laughed and laughed, all the while knowing how painful it was for her to see so many of her Cree speaking children diagnosed with just that, following administration of psychological testing in English with tools not normed for the children in her community. She talked about the effects of hydro on her traditional lifestyle and reflected about how poverty, addictions, and the welfare and the child welfare systems had ravaged her community. She said she and others in her family are getting sick. “We cannot even eat the fish close to our community anymore.” The one-hour trip seemed to fly by in what felt like no more than 10 minutes.

When we arrived, we walked through the school she would stop to tell me which students needed additional help. She said, “Don, do not spent time worrying about whose worldview to use, I use whatever works, from clinical to educational to traditional.” She said, “We need to embrace technology, like electronic templates to create individual education plans, but also use land based and cultural approaches to ground the strategies we use for our First Nation learners”. She said it is not either or, but both and. “Nothing is ever that simple Don, embrace the complexity.” With a hearty laugh, seemingly not possible to originate from this small woman weighting less than 110 pounds, she proclaimed, “Now that is one for your paper Don”. She showed me other students in her school saying, “do you know Don we are all both abled and dis/abled.” It was clear in the time with her that she not only needed to tell me, but she need to

show me, to provide me with opportunities to experience her worldviews, and to let me think about them and to feel them over time throughout multiple interactions.

As we travelled throughout our day, she kept referring to her Cree language. She said to keep speaking the language even if it is just one word. You give thanks to the Creator when you speak in the language, she proclaimed.

After a long day and a presentation to local school staff, we travelled back on the gravel road to the neighboring community where she now lived. I was tired but excited to complete the formal interview with her. After supper, she, again said she was tired and told me to go to my room and get a good sleep, as it would be a long day tomorrow. I wanted to do the interview, but knew not to be too pushy.

On the third day, we returned to help at the school. After time at the school, she said she wanted to take me to meet someone important. I thought to myself, “oh I might be going to meet the chief and could ask him some questions about the school in his community”. After driving around, we found a friend of hers, whom I will call Mary, at one of the local community gathering places. She gave Mary 20 bucks to “put in the machine” and instructed me to play along beside her on my own machine. As she left us, I smiled and said hello to Mary but she did not say anything back to me. I was a little uncomfortable and honestly thought that her friend was being a little rude to me. After a short while, Mary started to move her hands as if she was writing something in the air. I was confused and did not understand what she was doing so I just sat there hoping my friend, who was sitting on a couch visiting with other people, would come and rescue me. She caught my eye, I gave her a look of both panic, and confusion and then she proceeded over to talk to us. She told me about her friend who was born with the cord around

her neck. She said, “she prints the letters of her name with her hands in the air and that she cannot speak, read or write”. She said just sit and spend more time with her. I sat with her until we both ran out of money, which happened right away. We then sat down to visit.

Judy proceeded tell me about how the past and current schools in her community are/were set up. She asked me how the school could include her and what her educational story might be if she were a young child in the school today? She asked me what Mary’s strengths and accomplishment where. I was embarrassed to think that she probably lives on welfare, with family members looking after her. She probably had not worked in her life and most likely did not have children. I secretly [now ashamedly] wondered if she may have a problem with alcohol or was addicted to gambling. I remember kind of feeling sorry for her and that maybe I should offer her some money.

Judy turned to me and told me the real story about Mary, a remarkably successful fisher woman, feeding many people year round in her community. My friend said it does not matter that she does not communicate or learn things in the same way that others do but that she is just as capable as anyone else in the community. “She is a successful mother and provider and she even comes into the school to teach the children in her community how to clean fish. She informed me that she used to bring her friend in to her classroom to teach and demonstrate environmentally sustainable harvesting practices. “She is not disabled” she insisted and then said, “she is quite capable, is a valued member of our community and is a very good teacher”. On the way home that night, she told me about how she went to school with her when she was a young child but the “western methods” never included her and just made her feel bad about her abilities. She said it was better for her be out fishing anyway and that today, she would hope that a student like Mary could and would be a part of a First Nations education system.

On the way back to where I was staying, I realized that I had completely forgotten about my interview that I still had to do with her. I was tired but then remembered the main purpose of my trip was to get the interview! She continued talking to me in the truck saying there are many ways of doing things and that inclusion is not always about access to resources but is about a way of being with each other. She said with all the benchmark expectations and ridged non-differentiated ways of teaching, we are losing too many of our children. She challenged me to listen carefully, and to think deeply and to use this research opportunity to think of different ways that education could be more successful for more of the children in her community. Again, she told me how proud she was that I was documenting her story and that her story was now part of my story. She reminded me of the grannies in the school program, and old cabin behind the school for the “resource kids” where she took me fifteen years ago and laughed remembering the first time I used lard to spread over my hot bannock.

When we returned to where I was staying, I was so tired that I forgot about doing the “interview”. After a rest, I called her and asked if we could get together later in the evening for the interview. She said that she had company coming over and that we would not be able to get together with me that evening. Honestly, I panicked. I wondered what I would say to my wife when she asked me how the interview had gone. I reflected about spending days away from my family and then not accomplishing what I came here to do. I have to admit I was somewhat mad at her, thinking (from my Western, task oriented male perspective) that she was being somewhat selfish not taking the time to do the interview with me. I was so busy thinking and worrying that I did not know what was happening right in front of me.

As I sat in my hotel room reflecting that I needed to be patient and let go of control, I reluctantly texted her saying that it was ok and the interview would happen when it needed to

happen. She immediately texted me back saying, ok now you are ready for me to do the interview with you. She texted me again saying that she would do the “formal interview” over the phone with me once I returned to Winnipeg, but that I was to think and write about the past few days we had spent together.

As I lay on my bed, I began to realize that she had been doing the interview all along, that she was teaching me to be patient and to allow her to teach me from a more traditional/experiential way. Exhausted, I feel asleep, and had the best rest ever. I awoke early to catch my plane and on my way back to Winnipeg I wrote the answers to every interview question from the experiences she had provided me over the past few days. I added additional insights she provided during the phone interview that did occur within a few days of my return to Winnipeg. Even recently, months after the experience, I can still recall almost every aspect of those three days. I can vividly remember conversations, observations and insights as if it were just yesterday. As I think back, the sounds, smells and most important the feelings come flooding back. As I thought and reflected upon the experience and reread my field notes from those past three days, I finally got it. She had answered every question in my interview, but just did it in a way that was more authentic, more memorable and much more impactful than if I had just sat down with her for a few hours.

This, I believe is an example of the reciprocal relational process of doing research within a First Nations community setting. I helped her with something in her school, and was her chauffeur, and she spent that more than three days to carefully do the interview but in a much more experiential and meaningful way. She innately knew that for me to fully understand her responses to my questions about teaching and inclusion that I needed to hear it, see it, taste it, smell it, feel it, experience it, and live it. Most importantly, she wanted me to think deeply and to

apply the experiences and find the answers to the questions myself before she gave me the answers in a more formal 'western way'. From her perspective, for the learning to be truly authentic, I had to figure it out for myself. In those three days, she did not tell me any of the answers directly but provided me with the opportunities to come up with my own thoughts, to think about my thinking, and to challenge my assumptions, my own biases in order to deepen my cognitive processes. She allowed me to experience and practice my metacognitions skills, or "ne nan de wa ge ga win" as she called it.....

On the plane ride back to Winnipeg, I wrote, laughed, became sad, thought deeply and rejoiced. I returned only to receive her text saying that she felt I was now ready to do the interview, which took place over the phone in a factual concise manner, in order to satisfy the requirements of the academic institution and the process of academic research for which she had great respect. I came back feeling renewed, transformed, energized and at peace with myself. I was experiencing a feeling of safety, knowing that I am included, I am a part of something greater, and that I am "being looked after". I felt assured that the research process was unfolding the way it needed to. I had a feeling of letting go, of trusting in a higher power.

In reflection, she used my gifts in way that made me feel valued and appreciated. I realized that she had incorporated many aspects of Universal Design for Learning, Social Role Valorization (Wolfensberger, 2011), inquiry based learning, place based, project and land based learning, and that the western system of education is maybe just catching up to what First Nations have always known, that for learning to be effective it has to be contextualized, relevant and hands-on. I thought to myself, how can this approach be used to improve educational outcomes for First Nations learners within the context of the highly politicized western oriented education systems we are exposing First Nations children to?

In hindsight, it was during the three-day interview that ‘never started’ that I learned the most about inclusive education and the humanity inherent within First Nations families, communities and cultures in Manitoba. I am grateful for the three-day interview that never started and am glad it is a story that I can now tell.....

Many participants in this research suggested that using these First Nations practices, and building educational systems accordingly, would help First Nations learners succeed in both worlds. “Flood the children with written and oral language exposure in both English and Cree and let them experience what you are trying to teach them,” is what Judy stated, and so eloquently showed me.

Scholars (Kirkness (2013), Battiste (2013), Smith, (2007)) have made the link between storytelling and schooling. Dr. J. Weins, (personal communication, June 6, 2016), at a recent conference on First Nations education stated, “The schooling story is [or could be] a story of continuous development, achievement and competence in all aspects of literacy, numeracy, science and culture (including the arts) in its inherited and learned forms.”

As Dr. Weins states,

Each child must have a reasonable opportunity to, and a reasonably increasing role in and responsibility for, creating their own stories, one which is the initially the responsibility of, and told by his her parents, family, caregivers, elders and/or teachers. The stories or rather layers of stories have the individual person/child, at the center of the story, surrounded and embraced by series of ever larger encompassing and infinite concentric circles surrounding and co- surrounding the core like a vibrant dynamic and protective sphere around a life. (Dr. Weins, personal communication, June 6, 2016)

Dr. Weins also stated, “the educational story should never belittle, discredit or otherwise undermine the child’s story.”

In summary, as demonstrated by the participants in this study, storytelling permeated the data collection phase of this study.

Relationship and Reciprocity

Within First Nations culture, knowledge transmission; the teaching and/or the sharing of knowledge is a sacred reciprocal process. As stated by First Nations master educators, in the Manitoba First Nations Curriculum Framework (MFNERC, 2016),

Within First Nations worldviews are found the ways of doing things, for instance, always helping others. First Nations were always taught this in their homes and communities – “wechitoweyok”, acceptance (do not exclude anyone). In traditional First Nations worldviews, humanity is related to the world. Humanity has a direct relationship to the birds and the animals. These relationships must be taught in a way that they make sense to the students, such as when they see someone practice the offering of tobacco before he or she goes hunting. Students need to know that a person offers a prayer so he/she may be given something that will help provide life to one and one’s loved ones. This is the giving of thanks by prayer. (First Nations Curriculum Framework, MFNERC Research and Development Unit, 2016)

Thomas King (2003) talking about stories within an Indigenous context notes, “So you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories you are told” (p. 10). This research is another opportunity for me to walk beside and not in front of First Nations people, an opportunity to do with. The participants, through their sharing, offered and

trusted me with sacred parts of themselves. A number of participants stated that this was the first time they had shared certain aspects of past traumas, and the lasting pains of their forced residential schooling experiences.

Some participants indicated that through the course of their involvement with this project, they shared abuses they have never shared before. Participants also expressed deep and ongoing unresolved feelings of years of pent up frustration about the lack of attention and resources provided to First Nations inclusive education. They talked about ongoing trauma and loss and how they have been affected by the grief and loss experienced by so many in their families, schools and broader communities, and the affect this has had on them both socially and emotionally.

After many interviews, I was thankful for my background in mental health counseling but often felt extremely sad, troubled and even exhausted because of the content and the degree of pain shared by many of the research participants. The participants commented that their remembering and their sharing was largely cathartic and very healing. These experiences provide an additional awareness that I now carry myself, an unintended but understandable outcome of this type of research engagement.

Related to relationship and reciprocity, the practice of sharing food became a central element of most encounters related to this project. As a sign of respect and an offer of appreciation for the time participants agreed to take out of their busy schedules, during all first interviews I offered, and often did provide a meal during, or after the first interview. As is often the case within First Nations communities and settings, I found that the sharing of food represents an important aspect of connection and relationship. Eating together creates reciprocal

obligations and the bonds of metabolizing together. The words go deeper when people are eating together. In Nuu-chah-nulth tradition it is part of the feasting cycle...the conveyance of knowledge with the food (Dr. Marlene Atleo, personal communication, Feb, 26, 2017). This was not a planned aspect of the data collection process rather just happened naturally as sharing and caring are part of First Nations ways of doing. Interestingly during many of the second interviews, it was the participants who offered to buy or prepare a meal for me. This again lengthened the time spent with each participant and also provided many opportunities for sharing, reflection, laughter and expressing sadness that just became a “part of the process.”

One remarkable example of this reciprocity was when one of the participants, a woman I have worked with for years, contacted me prior to her interview asking me if I wanted some fish from her community. She was travelling down to Winnipeg to visit family in another part of Canada and said she would gladly meet with me in Winnipeg for the interview. Upon her arrival, she informed me that she had brought some fish with her; however, she did not bring it with her when she met me for the interview. I wondered about this but proceeded with the interview. She contacted me after she left our meeting telling me that the fish she had brought was in the freezer at the hotel she and her husband were staying. When I went to pick up the fish, I was expecting to receive a couple of fillets, a welcome treat from the cold waters of the far north. I was shocked when the hotel attendant gave me two full large boxes (at least 75 pounds) of freshly cleaned and filleted frozen lake trout and pickerel, enough to sustain me for the entire winter. Her generosity did sustain me and my family throughout the grueling data collection phase of the study; a project she stated she so desperately wanted to see published.

A common theme present in many conversations with participants was the importance and significance of relationships within the First Nations research process. The essence of this

research went far beyond the collection of data to include participating in feasts, taking part in ceremony, being a chauffeur, to helping a colleague with a paper, to helping another participant whose son was in crisis through arranging for services and supports for him in his time of need. For me, the process of research within a First Nations context is not just about collecting data, it is about being human and helpful in relation to one another. It is about both giving and receiving. It is about listening, sharing and helping others and accepting the help and the teachings of others. It is about building and strengthening relationships and about coming to know one other in deeper and more intimate ways.

The participants in this study all highlighted the importance of relationship within First Nations community based research and education processes. As one individual noted,

The parents are not willing to share with you on that first visit. The second visit or even the third visit. Relationships are so important. You give the relations time to develop and eventually those parents are going to confide. We find ourselves in a position to have meaningful relationships with these kids. Whether you are a teacher or a parent, our lives have become caught up in always doing that we never reach that state of being where things are ok. The adults are no longer visiting as they should.

Other participants cited the importance of building relationship between school staff and parents in First Nations communities. “So that would be the only area you will have to work on to develop a relationship. I always go back to that word rapport because it is so important. If you don’t have that then you won’t have... what you would say... the cooperation from the parents or other people involved.”

Reflection on Positionality

Due to existing relationships with First Nations educators, clinicians and consultants, engaging in this research process means I now occupy additional dual roles/relationships with many First Nations. This research, so closely related to my role as a consultant within First Nations education, and more specifically First Nations inclusive education, provided the relationships necessary to approach communities and professionals within this field of practice. My current employment position also enabled me to carry out the interviews, often alongside my work as a consultant in the field of First Nations inclusive education.

This dual role comes with both benefits and challenges. Working in and for First Nations communities/organizations enables me to have the trust and pre-established relationships needed to approach the participants and collect such data. Already established relationships seemed to also allow participants to share at much deeper levels than they might have if had they not known me prior to the study. As indicated, participants shared much beyond the questions posed, often recalling and sharing their own educational stories of which many were so negative.

Occupying the position of researcher, asking questions', listening and further probing, is different from the role of consultant/specialist, I am usually in. The data collection phase allowed me to listen and to reflect solely on the perspectives of the study participants. In the role of consultant or specialist, I am often asked to give advice, provide recommendations, give my opinion, and solve problems. Having to change to the role of researcher required that I quiet myself, and solely focus on the perspectives of others without offering my own opinions. This enabled, even forced me, to listen to First Nations experts in the field, to document their experiences, beliefs and knowledge. It enabled me to see many people, whom I have known for a very long time, through a different lens. I now find myself reflecting on the breadth of

knowledge, expertise and the remarkable strength of each of the participants. The opportunity to be in the role of “researcher” enabled me to see strengths and gifts in a much more pronounced way.

Completing this research was much more difficult emotionally than I had initially anticipated. The stories of mass imposition/interruption on First Nations families, communities and nations, the effects of residential schools, loss of spiritual practice (both traditional and contemporary) and the inter-generational effects of the social and child welfare, is overwhelming.

The dual role I occupied through this research that enabled the project also resulted in unanticipated challenges. I had not prepared nor anticipated the depth the interviews would reach, nor had I anticipated the emotional toil doing research would have on me, particularly with people I already know well. I conducted the first interview on November 4, 2015, with the final interview completed in April 20, 2016. During this time I conducted 34 interviews throughout Manitoba, all intertwined with my work in First Nations schools. I now know the participants in a deeper, more profound way. I now carry their stories with me and I am now a part of the story that they tell. I have changed, my relationships have changed, and, through this process, I have enhanced my connections with others. I also realize the immense responsibility to summarize, reflect upon, analyze and share these stories in a good way.

This research is not just ‘their’ story nor is it just ‘my story’. Rather, it is a story of the collective of the participants, of their students, their families, and communities. It is the recording of a movement, the struggles, resiliency, the often quiet but persistent resistance, and as a participant stated this research is a “testament to doing the best with what we have.” The

strengths and hope of those who shared their expertise, wisdom, teachings and their stories provided rich and contextualized understanding of factors affecting the education of students with and without SEND in band operated schools in Manitoba.

Strength, Hope and Resilience

All participants in the study displayed common characteristics such as being lifelong learners. “It [attaining a Ph.D.] is a lot of work but I love the learning,” stated one participant. Another participant shared,

I went back to school and got a bachelor of education and I have cousins that have special needs. I focused on that right from the beginning of my bachelor of education and then I went to summer school and got my certificate in special education and then my degree. And then my Master’s degree. I have spent about 15 years of summer school.

Another participant, after attaining her Master’s degree, adding that she has not received additional monetary enhancement to her salary for the past twenty years reported, “I just love learning and believe in lifelong learning.”

The stories of the participants exemplified many sacrifices endured to attain and maintain their positions and increase their skills and capacity while working within First Nations education. One participant stated,

Yes, I travel and it is tiring, really tiring. It is also like, when you go to the communities now, you have no choice but to relax after. So that is the good part of it. But being away from your families, it means missing out on a lot of stuff with families and that can get really annoying. But for the most part it is just tiring.

The same participant in her subsequent interview noted,

I took them [her children] to the States, right. There was only me who spoke the Cree language. I had no one to speak Cree with while I was there. They [her children] could speak the basics but I would always tell them, go and get this for me. Sit down. But when they answered me, they would speak in English. My nephew grew up in my community and he speaks Cree. He was always exposed to it, as well as everyone around him. My kids, no, because I could not converse with them. That was a sacrifice I had to make to get this far.

All research participants talked about working for dramatically lower salaries and with fewer resources in First Nations operated schools and service delivery organizations. “When I was teaching I had to buy my own materials.” One participant stated, “In a provincial school I would almost make double my salary, which affects pensions, which affects my ability to retire. It is not just me. It affects the kids more. And we should look to the future.” Another participant reported, “I would probably make about \$25,000 more than I am making now [if I worked in a Provincial school].”

Another respondent noted the lengths the staff in his school go to assist students.

I see the intense effort that people put in because they are painfully aware of the resource deficit. People go that extra mile to create. Teachers are more caring and will buy shoes out of pocket, get a child from their house and bring them to school, stay late to listen to a student who needs to talk or needs remedial support. The teachers forge much stronger ties with parents, caregivers and grandparents. The teachers give cell phone numbers to parents so they have a “hot line” to the teachers.

Most respondents, both First Nations and non-First Nations talked about practicing within and between two cultures. One participant shared, “you have to live in it you have to go back and forth and adapt between the two cultures. You have to live in it, like I had to live in it for 20 - 25 years to be able to function and adapt in both cultures.” Navigating the waters between western mainstream and Indigenous philosophy, practices, and environments results in being “strong like two people”, as one participant noted. “It is very important to know First Nations perspective on practices for our students versus the western protocol and to be able to practice both. We use both [Western and First Nations perspectives and practices]. We need to walk in both worlds, and it has been successful in my experience.”

Resilience was both a topic discussed, and a trait demonstrated by the study participants. As one participant stated,

First Nations communities and people are resilient. Sometimes there are hardships at home but they still make it to school and end up graduating, myself being one because I was brought in an alcoholic home. I got myself to school. I graduated. I had support from my classmates. They even helped me with math. If it were not for these two individuals, I would not have graduated because they helped me in that one area. It just depends on the support systems in place. Not necessarily given to you but what you go after. You have to be... I do not know the word, but survival of the fittest. You have to look for that support system you need. If you are resilient enough you'll make it through.

A story told by another participant highlights the resilience, strength and determination within not only herself, but also her family,

My dad worked as a fisherman. He was a commercial fisherman and he fished and then in his off-season he drove a big pulp truck. My mom, she was illiterate, because my grandfather used to run in the bush with them. He did not want to lose any more kids. He had four kids that went to residential school and he never ever saw them again. So the four kids that were left, he brought to the bush. One of the things when I became a teacher and I would send homework or send home a book for them to read with their children, they say, "Oh I never had much education, I won't be much help to my child". You know what I said, "My mom didn't know how to read". I said, she never did learn how to read much but I taught her how to write her name and stuff and few things like flour, sugar, milk, and what not. And they said, "How did she manage to help you then?" I said, "She used to listen to me read." I said, "When I came home and got my books out she would ask me to read to her". I said, "and as I got older she would bring me magazines and ask what does this mean, what does it say?" She was teaching me. Not once did she ever say I can't read so I don't know what this means. She would say what does this mean. And with me, maybe if I did not recognize the word or something, I would make it up. I would make a story. So I grew up to have a creative mind. I learnt to love story telling and reading. And that was all because of this lady [her mother].

Participants, particularly all of the clinicians and allies, shared stories and reasons why they stay working in First Nations education committed to First Nations learners. "There is an appreciation for information that is brought," stated one participant. Having flexibility and the opportunity to be creative were other reasons cited by participants as to why they stay within First Nations education. As one woman said, "I found the freedom within the boundaries. You say I think I would like to try this because I think it would help and it was always 'go for it', 'go

ahead'. I was always encouraged and was given the freedom. They [First Nations] were very caring and not tight on regulations. When my father was ill, had bypass surgery, I had to take three days. I phoned and said I needed to take the rest of the week and that was understandable". Another participant stated, "First Nations appreciate uniqueness, like they can see the beauty in uniqueness."

The allies in the research identified that, through their work, they feel part of a community, their relationships forming very strong bonds in First Nations communities. The participants also reported they felt appreciated for their contributions and the efforts they put into their work. "I was adopted in, not officially, but invited to homes, etc. Running the school bingos was the best way to get into the community as you got to meet the parents and work with them closely."

One particularly touching story shared by one of the participants is as follows,

I stay here because of acceptance, humor, I have the ability to shake off terrible things with a laugh and move forward and because of the community - because before I moved from [overseas] there was a great sense of community; that was missing when I arrived in Canada. When I hit the First Nations, I hit the ground running. They were willing to accept my lack of expertise, work with my mistakes. They supported me. They empowered me to empower the school, and I made amazingly good friends. A job was offered to me for \$14,000 more per year in the provincial system. I was a single parent with three kids, so I accepted. An elderly woman from the community came to visit me. She said, "You can go, or you can stay where you are supported and happy, where you can make a difference. Can you put a price on happiness?" I thought "No", so I broke the

contract and felt so good when I did it and I have not looked back. There are frustrations, but I haven't remembered a day where I haven't wanted to come to work. Here you have the capacity to try new things, you are not held down with red tape, every idea is considered. And I've been asked by a nearby college to teach some courses but the bottom line is this...what I thoroughly enjoy is being here, in the school, in my office, working under the radar, trying to improve the system, working with the kids and being in the "thick" of it every single day. The further I get from that the less happy I am.

In summary, the process of engaging First Nations leaders, gaining access to study participants, the participant recruitment, and the data collection phase of the research has been a life changing process. Engagement was deep, and relationships continue to change, evolve and even strengthen as the reciprocal and relational story telling process came to life. First Nations educators, clinicians and allies have tremendous strengths, demonstrate resilience and clearly articulate the reasons for their lifelong commitment to a "calling" of educating First Nations learners in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

In the next three chapters, I will provide a summary of the findings of this study. I have divided these findings in three broad categories including participant perspectives on the systemic and structural factors affecting learning in schools in First Nations communities, First Nations perspectives and practices on inclusive education, and finally, recommendations for improving the practice and delivery of community based education systems within First Nations communities in Manitoba. To begin, in the following chapter, I will present the perspectives, experiences, and insights of the participants in relation to the multiple, and often overlapping systemic and structural factors that affect the learning, growth and development of learners living in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Chapter 6: Key Findings Part 1: Structural/Systemic Issues Affecting Learners in First Nations Communities in Manitoba

Following the collection of the data, I analyzed the responses from the research participants into themes. The first set of issues emerging from the analysis of the data, which I will share in this chapter, are the structural/systemic issues affecting learning in First Nations communities in Manitoba. According to those who participated in this study, many complex and intersecting factors have affected, and continue to affect the learning, growth, and development of the students in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Inextricably linked to the history of colonization of First Nations in Canada, I will also highlight research participants' perspectives on the effects of decades of structural and systemic marginalization of First Nations within Manitoba. The respondents in this study provide not only critical analysis for consideration by both Federal and Provincial governments, but also for First Nations leadership, policy analysts, and education providers as well. Rather than seeing First Nations learners as failing, most participants identify it is the education systems, both within and outside of First Nations communities, which continue to fail so many First Nations learners. As one participant stated,

If we were to continue down that road, the education system that we have now, which I believe is often contrary to what our people need. Our people need an education but the way the system is designed, it removes us further and further from who we are. It is still an attack on our identity as First Nations because it says nothing about who we are. It is only recently that people are recognizing what are lies in the textbooks. I have had conversations with educated people who, they say, well, that is history. I say, that is your history, it is not mine. We tell a different story. So that system we talked about as being

education, if we continue down the road of clinical services provided we are probably going to need a lot of clinicians because the system, as it is right now, it is a system that fails our children.

Participants in this study identified interruption/interference with First Nations cultural practice from mainstream western perspective, chronic underfunding of education, service and support gaps, cultural and linguistic irrelevance, First Nations language loss, poverty and social-emotional/mental health issues as the most prevalent structural/systemic factors affecting learning in First Nations schools in Manitoba. In this chapter, I will begin with an examination of cultural interruption/interference as the first structural/systemic theme identified by participants to adversely affect learners in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Cultural Interruption/Interference

In their interviews, participants provided many examples of the interruption/interference of First Nations culture because of mainstream western colonial practice. Historically, prior to European contact, Elders say that First Nations education systems were inclusive and failure proof for everyone. (Lorne Keeper, personal communication, March 2016) It is often said by the Elders, that at the time of the residential schools, First Nations communities went ‘silent’ (emphasis in the original) when the majority, if not all, of the children were taken away at ages as young as age four, and placed in often far away in residential schools (Stella Neff, personal communication, June 22, 2016).

I have divided the cultural interference/interruption participants speak of in their interviews into the following broad categories including, Indian residential schools, provision of

and dependency on social assistance (welfare), and child apprehension and child welfare policies and practices.

Residential schools. Imagine if tomorrow, government officials took *all of the children* in city of Brandon, Manitoba away, placed them in residential schools, and forbid them to speak either English or French. Now further imagine that their parents and grandparents have no control over this. The children and families of Brandon would be devastated. If this continued repeatedly, generation after generation, the lasting effects would be catastrophic. Some in Brandon would become silent. Other parents and grandparents might start riots of protest, or turn their grief inwards demonstrating patterns of self-destructive behaviour. Imagine years later people telling them to, “just get over it, the past was the past, now just move on.” The education system in Brandon today might look inadequate, parents, many products of this history, not willing to, nor feeling adequate or worthy to engage in the current system of education. As one participant in his first interview stated, “Now parents that have had a bad time in school themselves through the system are really resistant to coming in and sitting down and talking. You have to really build that trust.”

The effects of the residential schools on the participants themselves, on their parents and on the parents of children in First Nations schools permeate the transcripts of the interviews in this study. As one participant stated,

Consider a residential school for example. In my dad's generation, the question I have always had, and I heard my dad say this at one time, “I didn't know what it was like to be loved by a mother.” When he came back, his mother was gone. He grew up with my grandfather. He grew up tough. He had to be tough because his siblings were all boys.

He talked about that and it made me think about what it did to that generation that nobody took care of. So, in spite of my dad's hardships, my dad was able to tell his children that he loved them, but I wonder how many other parents that went through that and were not able to tell their children that?

This story shared reflects the damage done to family systems, the loss of intergenerational connections and the pain and suffering so many First Nations families endured because of the Indian residential school experiences. Another participant in this study, also a residential school survivor shared about her residential school experiences and the additional interferences imposed on First Nations children over time in Manitoba. She stated,

I heard some good things about Portage that it was not a horrendous residential experience like I had in [name of residential school]. [name of school] was bad. It really eroded my self-concept. I had the greatest self-concept when I attended the [name] school. The principal was so terrible so I did not have a good experience there.

I suppose it was multiplied by the 60s scoop. Because of that, again the children were taken away by the provincial child and family services. I think they created a generation of people who were in danger of having no parenting skills. People just lost their way and, as a result, so many kids were not developed properly and so many kids were born with various intellectual disabilities from the addictions. I know the church has lost its influence on society. But I think it played a significant role back in the day. I honestly think it is related to our increase in special needs. Those interferences.

This participant highlighted not only the personal toll her residential school experience had on her own identity and the negative effects of residential schools on future generations including

the loss of parenting skills of successive generations of First Nations citizens. Loss of language and the interruption of the intergenerational transmission of culture remain some of the greatest challenges faced by First Nations due to residential school experiences.

Another participant and longtime educator, in one of her interviews, shared with so much sadness, the following,

Whether or not their parents went to residential school, that will have a big impact, a negative impact. Especially the experience in the school. For example, this one man, he said that he got beatings for speaking his language and he didn't teach his children. So his children ask him dad, "why didn't you teach us to speak Cree?" He said, "because I got a beating for it and I didn't want you to get a beating."

Many First Nations people whose parents attended residential schools, never got the opportunity to learn their language or practice specific cultural ways as their parents did not want their children to be hurt as they had been. Most residential school survivors did not teach their own children their First Nations language thinking they would have an easier time integrating into mainstream Canadian society if they became proficient at English and western ways. All of these interruptions and interferences, due to the legacy of colonization in Canada, still have profound effects on the lives of many First Nations citizens today.

Another veteran First Nations educator recalled a very personal story about the how residential schools affected members of her own family. She shared,

I feel that residential schools had an impact on family breakdowns. I notice that my aunt came from residential school and I noticed that she had a hard time to reconnect with her mother. Because she held it against her mother and said to her mother, "why didn't you

fight for me and keep me at home?” You know, things like that, right? So she had a difficult time connecting with her children. Now she is doing it after counseling so think about that. How would the French, the English, the Ukrainian or whatever deal with this? How would they like it if we went and stole their children and said we are going to teach them something different, right? You are going to stay away from your family for ten months of the year. How would you like it? Would your family break down? Yes, probably, right!

According to study participants, the imposition of forced removal of children from First Nations homes resulted in much conflict with long periods away from the day-to-day activities of the community severely curtailed the socialization of the child to the rhythms and structures and relationships of family and extended family life. This was the aim of the schools. Consequently, children often didn't know what the adults took for granted such the ongoing events and relationships in the community. Children did not develop linguistically, socially or emotionally in the context of community. Consequently, there were fewer shared assumptions in families, both within and between family members. The anger and resentment still palpable as participants reflected on the damage caused by such senseless actions of others.

The participants in this study clearly indicated that the legacy of those interferences is still felt today in most First Nations schools in Manitoba. As another participant, experienced in addressing the social-emotional issues faced by many First Nations girls and young women in First Nations communities shared,

The residential school has a generational effect. There is a lack of parenting skills from that. There are issues of neglect. Child and Family Services issues of involvement.

There are addictions: drinking, pills and drugs during pregnancy too, which is contributing to our special needs student population and other than that. And also even trauma, toxic stress during pregnancies, the genetics and all those factors. There is maternal depression. So there are all kinds of associated mental health issues that grew out of these and physical disabilities then came about you know. There are different ranges of disabilities that you see in the school because of all of this.

Although the residential school experience was not the focus of this research, when asked questions about factors affecting learning, many participants began to remember, share and even re-live very painful aspects of their own lives, many themselves survivors of the residential school experience in Canada. Sharing that they felt safe to share during the individual private interviews with me, a number of survivors talked openly and later recalled that their interviews were opportunities for their own healing. For example, in her first interview, one participant stated,

That is something when the child has never been hugged or kissed. We don't... even for me it's hard, it gets easier as times goes on, but you know to give a compliment to my people. And now it is getting easier but there was a time when anybody hugged me at the end of a meeting I would stiffen up. I am not used to people touching me. Nobody ever held me.

Welfare/social assistance. During the interviews, a number of participants suggested that use of, and dependency on welfare/social assistance was, and still is, another critical aspect of the interruption of, or interference with, First Nations ways of life. Sharing about her life prior to the

introduction and community wide use of/dependency on welfare/social assistance, one participant noted,

When I was a child, we were poor. But you know what, we always ate. And you know, because of the gardens we always ate a pretty well balanced meal in the spring, summer and fall. Maybe not so much in the winter, but my grandmother would can, you know, berries and that. And we didn't even know. There weren't even health guidelines then. We just did. And there were so many that way.

As the availability, and mass use of social assistance became more prevalent in First Nations communities in Manitoba, many First Nations parents and grandparents began to live more unhealthy lifestyles, abandoning practices such as gardening, travelling away for work and even ceasing traditional practices such as hunting, trapping, and fishing. As one participant stated,

I only know of one lady who had diabetes way back. They [First Nations] were poor but they could feed themselves. They were able to keep fed and no one was starving on the reserves. Then, and I didn't know this at the time, but I found out this at university, that in about 1969, the welfare system came into the communities and I think it totally disrupted a way of life. I guess it was meant to help the communities. But it created a lot of problems because so many then didn't see the need to plant gardens anymore and so they weren't eating healthy. They didn't eat a balanced diet. People even stopped going hunting and, if I am not mistaken, around that time, the people started having more diabetes in the years that followed.

Participants repeatedly noted that the grinding poverty, and the subsequent dependency on social assistance in almost every First Nations community in Manitoba, is one of the greatest factors affecting learning in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Child welfare. Participants in the study also reported that rates of child apprehension are a prevalent cause of cultural interference/interruption for many First Nations learners.

According to the literature (Brownwell et al, 2015), today, Manitoba has the highest rates of child welfare apprehension and placement in all of Canada, even throughout North America.

While Manitoba residents account for approximately only three percent of the total national Canadian population, over one third of all children in care in Canada reside in the Province of Manitoba (Brownwell et al, 2015), with the vast majority of these children being from First Nations ancestry. According to a recent study on the educational outcomes of children in the care of Child and Family Services in Manitoba, the authors, (Brownwell et al, 2015) stated,

The number of children in care in Manitoba increased substantially over the past decade; according to the Manitoba Family Services Annual Report, there were 10,293 Manitoba children in care on March 31, 2014 (Manitoba Family Services, 2014 a). There is an over-representation of Indigenous children in care (First Nations, Metis, Inuit); they compose approximately 26% of the child population in Manitoba, yet they accounted for close to 90% of children in care on March 31, 2014 (Manitoba Family Services, 2014 a).

(p. 13)

This over-representation results in historical social and health inequities and injustices experienced by Indigenous communities of Manitoba.

Most participants in this study discussed the effects of child welfare involvement on the educational experiences of many children in their schools. Research participants from First Nations communities throughout Manitoba repeatedly referenced child welfare involvement as a primary factor that has, and continues to affect many First Nations learners and their families. Every participant in this study shared at least one story about how child welfare involvement affects children they work with. One participant shared,

But you know that the emotional issues as observed have been there, especially it happens to the children who are in foster care. Some of them are moved from one home or they return home and again they are apprehended. That instability there leaves a lot of emotional issues.

One veteran educator and foster parent outlined the connection between Indian residential schools and the overrepresentation of First Nations children in the child warfare system. She stated,

You know when you read in the media on what is happening here and what is happening. There is so many [First Nations children] in care. That is a big, big factor why our students are struggling. First Nations have the highest rate of child apprehension. My goodness when you think about child apprehension what does it remind you of? To me it reminds me of residential school's coming and grabbing the kids instead of coming and starting different programs for the child so that the child can stay with the families and so the family and child can be supported. When you have child apprehension, what do you have? Child runaways.

The rate of child apprehension within First Nations communities, along with the scarce to non-existent supports within these school systems to address not only the academic but also the social emotional consequences of such traumas, remains a widely contested issue for most of the participants of this study.

The cultural interference forced upon many First Nations citizens in Manitoba through the inter-generational effects of the church and state run Indian residential school system is well documented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The “common experience” payment, is defined as, “a lump-sum payment that recognizes the experience of living at an Indian Residential School(s) and its impacts. All former students who resided at a recognized Indian Residential School(s) and were alive on May 30, 2005 were eligible for the CEP. This includes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit former students” (INAC, 2017). This is an acknowledgement by the federal government of their liability. The introduction of welfare on reserves as economic opportunities disappeared, and subsequent mass dependency on it occurred with increasingly high rates of child welfare involvement. These are some of the forces that contribute the introduction and then mass dependency on welfare and high rates of child welfare involvement contributes to the challenges faced by many learners and their families in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

In the following section, I will share the perspectives of the research participants about how funding of First Nations education, and the resulting lack of service and supports within First Nations schools and communities, affects the learning in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Chronic Underfunding of Schools in First Nations Communities

Every participant in this study reported that chronic inadequate funding provided by the Federal Government of Canada, and the lack of targeting of educational funds, are amongst the greatest factors negatively affecting learning in First Nations communities throughout Manitoba. Band operated First Nations schools in Manitoba do receive substantially less funding than provincially operated schools in both provincial and federal jurisdictions throughout the Province of Manitoba. According to study participants, this does have a significant effect on learning, forcing many parents to either watch their children suffer with less or leave their community. One participant stated, “And funding was and still is substantially lower than provincial students. And if a parent wanted their child to receive assistance, like a provincial fund, then they would have to relocate. It was hard to move off reserve, like leaving their families. And that was due to Federal government policies and guidelines. It was always a problem with jurisdiction, both federal and provincial.”

From past professional practice, I have come to know that when First Nation communities give control and operation of their schools to provincial divisions, such as Frontier School Division, they receive substantially more funding from the Federal Government of Canada compared to the majority of communities who choose to remain operating the school systems within their own communities. One participant in this study confirmed, “Well, with Frontier it is an entity on its own but the government [federal] funds them like they would a provincial school. Frontier gets more funding for the same kids.” When asked about funding comparability between band-operated and provincially affiliated schools another participant, who has worked in education and clinical services both within and outside of First Nations schools stated, “Definitely not, you can see the difference between a provincial school system and First

Nation board or education directed. There is a difference in dollar value.” According to the Assembly of First Nations 2010 report on education funding,

INAC’s chronic underfunding of First Nations schools has created a First Nations education funding shortfall across Canada. For INAC’s entire First Nations elementary and secondary education budget (totaling \$1.56 billion in 2009-2010), there is A funding shortfall of \$620 million in 2009-2010, beyond the 2% cap, and A cumulative funding shortfall of over \$3 billion since 1996. This funding shortfall does not include costs needed to support the educational components of a 21st century school system that are currently missing from INAC’s funding. This includes such basic services as: School libraries; Technology (computers, connectivity, data systems); Sports and recreation; Vocational training; First Nations languages; and School board-like services. (AFN, 2010, p.1)

Another teacher, with over 35 years of experience in her community band operated school commented,

The main difference [between First Nations operated and all other schools, even those run by provincial division in First Nations communities] I see is the lack of funding. And, I also see the lack of availability of specialists such as speech language, occupational therapists, educational psychologists, reading clinicians, certified educational assistants, and programing. Funding dropped as soon as it was band controlled.

Participants also reported that when managed or co-managed by third party managers, the already substantial lower amounts of education funding is further reduced as education dollars are used for other expenses. Some study participants report that education funding for First

Nations communities, which is largely untargeted, is at times, used for purposes other than education or special education. Many feel that the lack of regulation and First Nations determined legislation also contributes to this problem. One participant with almost 40 years of experience commented,

Well for one thing, I heard that it is hard to recognize in the moneys that are divvied out, that they do not target the funds. And so it is not used as such. And with the intervention based model with the money they are paying for special education coordinators, and when there is a need for money, they don't give it to that school. What is disappointing is the money, even though it is supposed to be targeted for special needs it is not really happening that way.

Research participants described that historic and long-term caps on education funding by the Federal Government of Canada, and the piecemeal processes used to fund various components of First Nations education, such as proposal driven funding mechanisms, adds to the inefficiencies and lack of consistency within education systems within First Nations communities in Manitoba. One administrator stated, "I have challenged them...INAC (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada), and they say they imbed special needs funding in the budgets of all entities involved, from housing to community living. But the budgets are so substandard compared to provincial counterparts that it's like saying, pony up more money from a budget that is already inadequate."

A topic of much discussion during my interviews with study participants was both the history of, and the current realities and challenges of the funding processes and mechanisms used for general and special/inclusive education for band operated First Nations schools in Manitoba. When asked about this issue, one participant shared, "The instructional funding is not protected

and often used elsewhere so then special education funding has to cover a lot.” Participants talked about their frustrations that the block, intervention funding for First Nations special/inclusive education, capped since the 2006-07 school year, remains inadequate to address true needs. This cap has continued despite the increase in identification of severely and profoundly disabled students from 1500 in 2006 to more than 3500 in 2016 (Don Scott, INAC Special Education funding officer, Personal Communication, July, 2016). “The disadvantage to this type of model [intervention based, block funding] is that it is a set amount of funding so there is no opportunity for that funding to be increased,” shared one participant. Another research participant, with great frustration, stated,

If we had say an influx of 20 students we would be scrambling and I honestly don't know what I would do. I have a student with brain trauma. He has to be watched all the time because he could be walking down the highway and he could fall and the medical needs would be right away. I have another little guy who has Down syndrome and he is at an age of 14 but his ability age is 3 or 4 so he goes out in the hallway and he went up to one person one day and he jumped on his back and so the person automatically reacted and the little guy went flying. OK. So he needs to be watched. I have a girl who is in a wheel chair. And, no, I don't have enough resources for that.

Another participant said, “We had huge misgivings on block funding, we're one of the few schools that stated this in a big meeting in Winnipeg. Because INAC in 2006/07 increased the funding but then they capped it. What a dirty trick. Obviously, the number of special needs kids was on the rise and our school population grew. We started off with 640-680 kids and we're at 1021 now.” Participants shared that the ongoing lack of funding has resulted in many parents choosing to home school their children with special education needs and/or moving out of their

communities into provincial jurisdictions in order to access much needed resource supports and services. In exasperation one participant in this study stated,

Some members of my community feel overwhelmed though due to the lack of support in First Nations. We just had a meeting with the parents and you could just hear how frustrated they were, that they weren't getting the support for their kids and that was because there was no support in regards to the financial aspect from the Federal government.

Also related to funding, participants reported that the lack of funding for First Nations schools results in inadequate pay provided to staff resulting in extremely high staff turnover and an inability of First Nations to attract and retain good teachers. In her second interview one veteran First Nations educator stated, "If you pay your teachers poorly you don't get a good class of teachers. So that's one of the things we need more money to be able to afford good teachers."

In addition to high staff turnover, other participants noted that this lack of funding results in inadequate resources to properly attain or maintain schools buildings and adequate infrastructure. The lack of resources to maintain school buildings includes insufficient funds to build and properly maintain school teacherages (housing for teachers). It should be noted that Teacherages are required for over 70% of band- operated schools that are located in remote/isolated First Nations communities throughout Manitoba. Due to the funding inadequacies, participants report inadequate or non-existent clinical, counselling or remedial education supports and limited course and program options to support the diverse range of student needs in First Nations schools throughout Manitoba. One participant stated,

For instance, the funding that Indigenous students receive and the amounts the schools receive in terms of support and supplies, those things are all different. I know that with First Nations schools there is always an attempt to catch up. There is that feeling that you always have. There are never enough funds to go around and the community is a system that cannot respond adequately to what our students, our children need.

Due to inadequate funding, participants in this study also reported that First Nations schools are unable to offer any meaningful First Nations language supports or technical or vocational skills development.

From past and current professional experience I do know that education personnel, unlike health care providers, such as nurses and physicians working in First Nations communities, do not receive comparable or enhanced salary remuneration compared to those within provincial school settings, nor do they have access to the adequate housing provided to health professionals working in First Nations communities in Manitoba. With much frustration, another educator reiterated these concerns stating,

As far as I am concerned [First Nations] schools have been underfunded so long. How can the Canadian government project itself on the international scene as being equal and what not? Successive governments say we will do this and we will do that and it never happens. The kids are the innocent ones and they are not getting it.

Another participant, a longtime advocate for First Nations inclusive education stated, “The biggest challenge is lack of access to provincial resources and inadequate funding. There is such a disparity in funding in comparison to provincial jurisdiction it is ludicrous. That affects our ability to provide comprehensive supports. The things you would like to do become harder to

do and it all boils down to funding inequity.” This reality makes it difficult for educators as provincial standards is the benchmark for practice in First Nations schools in Manitoba.

The requirement for provincial standards is the benchmark for academic practice within First Nations schools in Manitoba. The provincial standards for inclusive educational practice should also apply as the benchmark for inclusive education practice. As the resources available for First Nations band operated schools, particularly in the area of base instructional dollars, are completely inadequate, it is difficult for First Nations students to achieve on par with their provincial counterparts.

Related to this inadequate provision of resources, I will now share the perspectives of study participants specific to service and resource gaps they feel are largely due to the funding disparities for First Nations schools in Manitoba.

Service Support Gaps

The participants in this study reported overwhelmingly that, due to the inter-generational effects of the history of the colonial legacy, and the ensuing poverty and intergenerational traumas, the academic and social emotional needs of students in First Nations schools are extremely high. It is my experience that the grossly inadequate funding and non-targeting of existing fiscal resources, has resulted in dramatically lower levels of supports and services provided to First Nation learners attending band operated schools throughout Manitoba, particularly those with and without SEND.

Study participants reported numerous gaps in the services and supports for learners in First Nations schools in Manitoba, largely created by inadequately provided, capped, non-

targeted education funding, Participants shared that this results in an ever widening of the educational gap for students in First Nations schools, particularly those with SEND.

Access to services and supports for individuals with dis/abilities and their families within First Nations is more complex due to the jurisdictional offloading and wrangling, the lack of overall community based systems of resource support within First Nations in Manitoba (Shackel, 2008). The lack of services and supports is amplified by the remoteness and isolation of these communities. This often results in unnecessary involvement with mandated Child and Family Service agencies. As one inclusive education coordinator stated, “So I guess, due to living on reserves and band operated schools we don't have access to resources and services the same as provincial schools and these students need support and end up needing to go through CFS to access to services. It becomes an area of neglect because that is the only way they are able to get services, right.”

I have categorized the education related service and support gaps identified by study participants into the following categories: a) in class supports, b) school clinical support gaps, c) resource/student support services gaps, d) school based counselling and mental health supports, e) school to community transition and adult community based dis/ability related supports and services, and f) classroom based materials for multi-leveled learners, including resources for alternative programming and specialized equipment.

Study participants noted that the in-class supports lacking in First Nations schools include inconsistency in teaching staff. According to a participant, “I think it started from salaries and that. You know, teachers are not paid what they should be ...and that can cause a high turnover, as it can be hard to retain staff that is paid less. And, of course with that, salaries, what is left for

programing doesn't amount to much either. We are trying to be innovative with what you do have left there.” Another participant stated, “Staff turnover is the issue affecting student learning the most because kids build a rapport with their classroom teacher; if they leave every year that is not really established.”

Most participants identified the need for additional and adequate learning spaces. One teacher stated, “Well where we are right now we don't have space. That is one of our big issues. We have a population that has outgrown a 38-year-old school and more since it has been built and it does not look like in my lifetime, whatever I have left, it will ever happen. We are starting to get more and more kids.” Participants who have worked in both First Nations and provincial education settings also reported that class sizes in First Nations schools, on average, are much larger in First Nations schools, than those provincial settings.

Every respondent in this study identified the need for adequate clinical services to support the diverse learning needs of First Nations students in First Nations communities. One participant, with experience in both on and off reserve education settings stated, “I think Winnipeg School Division is comparable to ours...student size wise. I think there is like 60 clinicians and then there are some that are on contract so maybe a rough 70 clinicians. What do we have? Three.” Another respondent reported, “Occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychological assessments, counseling, even psychiatric assessments because there is a lot of mental health issues, are needed. And academic resources for the different programs and even support programs because there is a lot of family support needed.” One of the clinicians who participated in the study stated, “There is actually one community where there is about a 32 students on a waiting list [for speech and language assessment and intervention] and that is within the parameters of nursery to grade 6. We haven't really opened it up to grade 12.” Every

participant stated that the unmet needs for clinical services most definitely affect learning in First Nations schools throughout Manitoba.

One participant, an inclusive education consultant, reported that services gaps in areas of occupational therapy, play therapy, art therapy, physiotherapy and lack of reading clinicians makes it almost impossible for her to perform the duties of her job. Another participant noted that the services they do receive from clinicians are inadequate, in terms of both time, and actual supports for students and their parents. She indicated that this leads to inadequate and ineffective interventions. In frustration, she commented, “I have no idea why the Federal Government is not putting this [clinical services for First Nations] into place. Are they avoiding it? Sometimes I wonder if they are just trying to keep First Nations back.” A teacher from a northern, geographically isolated First Nation community stated, “We do not have any reading clinicians and I would like to see one in our community.” Many educators noted that hiring contract clinicians is often the only option current funding mechanisms allow for. This is not only cost ineffective but does little to enhance programming and interventions for struggling students.

A number of participants in this study reported that the only students in First Nations who currently do have access to adequate clinical support are those who receive support through the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation if their dis/ability was caused by a motor vehicle accident with an insured driver. “We need physiotherapists, occupational therapists. But if it is an accident with MPI (Manitoba Public Insurance), the support is constant.” Another participant, talking about her brother, stated,

Well he had some money. Guess where he got the money from? From Autopac. If he didn't have money from Autopac, God knows where he would have been today. We

would not have had any support from anybody else because we tried to get support from other governments and other agencies but there was no support. So, only the money he gets from Autopac and that is what he used to pay his workers. He has to get that from Autopac. Oh my goodness, I know of one that didn't get that from Autopac and he is a quadriplegic as well and he is in my First Nation and all he gets is a little social assistance and three times a week someone will go and ...you know.....

This feedback was consistent from teachers and clinicians from northern and southern, isolated and non-isolated, and large and small First Nations communities throughout Manitoba.

Lack of resource supports was the third most common type of service gap for First Nations schools. Participants from First Nations communities throughout Manitoba reported inadequate numbers of resource, support and specialized teachers in areas such as reading and numeracy recovery and special/inclusive education intervention. This was reported consistently across teachers, consultants, and clinicians from all geographic locations. One teacher said, “I am the only resource teacher supervising 16 educational assistants who work through the resource program. We have a total of 82 special needs students in a school of over 400 students and there is a higher number if you include speech.” Another teacher stated, “There is not enough funding for E.A.s (Educational Assistants) and so some students with special needs cannot come to school. We are finding funding by writing proposals, or looking everywhere as to where we can get money.” Another teacher reported,

They [the high school] have a student population in the core area with over 500 kids with one resource teacher who is pulling her hair out. And I'm in the same situation. Around 500 people in the school, 1 resource teacher and people are saying to me help me adapt

this lesson, help me modify this, help me modify that. And I do, that's my job. I am literally, along with all the documentation I have to do, and with all the other coordination and planning, the TA supervision, the assessment, I am at full stretch. I am on 12 hour days, sometimes more.

Study participants identified the lack of education related parental supports as a consistent and reoccurring gap. Given the history of residential school involvement, and the historic lack of engagement of First Nations parents within the school system, educational reformation must engage parents using creative and innovative approaches. Study participants report that lack of resources for parents of children and adolescents with SEND to be an even more pronounced gap in First Nations communities. As one First Nations educator stated,

There are no supports in place for families. I am going to be blunt about it. Because I just went to a meeting about it and you could actually hear them say it. They are crying. Literally crying because they do not have those supports. My child is dying. What is going to happen with them? The students get nothing really. They really do not get any services generally. We need services to help them. Ideally, it would be good to have a set of programs to try and visit the home and stuff like that.

Despite the alarming rates of suicide and social emotional trauma, all study participants report access to in school mental services in First Nations communities to be either nonexistent or woefully inadequate. One participant, whose school had just experienced a number of recent suicide attempts and completions, reported, "We have no guidance counselor at the school I am presently at and I just do not know what to do!"

Supports for transition from school to community and adult, community based dis/ability supports services was the next most prevalent service gap identified by the vast majority of study participants. All participants in this study reported nonexistent adult community based dis/ability supports within their First Nation communities. The lack of adult community based disability supports and services continues to create undue hardships and, at times, drastic consequences, such as severe isolation, neglect and even death, for individuals living with dis/abilities and their immediate and extended family members. Examples of such service gaps reported by study participants, regardless of the community, include:

“Even transition planning into schools and out of schools, like a lot is needed to help with young people going out into the community and living with special needs. There is nothing in place for them for services for our young people in that area.”

“There is nothing in place for him [my adult brother who has a disability]. Absolutely nothing. Despite our attempts for at least finding him some meaningful work, he can't get that.”

“In my community they don't see that those supports as a real need. Unfortunately, a lot of time what happens in our schools is that these kids are pushed through and when they are out of the education system and out in the community there is nothing for them. Nothing worthwhile. Nothing productive.”

“There is no supportive living assistance other than the care home.”

“After school nothing is available for them. We just went to a community and talked to a parent who was upset because there was nothing for his son. And his son was 22 years of age.”

“People are so empowered within the school system, then fall off a cliff. Once a parent said this phrase, “after my daughter graduates with a specialized diploma, I do not want her to become a walking welfare zombie”. That quote stuck with me like glue.”

Other participants told similar stories, resulting in countless pages of anecdotal reports citing inadequate access to adult, community based dis/ability related supports and services in First Nations in Manitoba.

Research participants also cited that in First Nations communities there is a lack of materials/equipment available for educators, as well as for the students and families they work with. “Definitely, of course the funding is way too low. And the materials and stuff that we have, they don’t have. We provide for them. We’re not even scratching the surface and we are doing what we can with what we have but we need more.” Another educator/consultant shared, “I can't think of any student who requires it who has projected note taking or a backup set of hearing aids or a personal FM system.” Another teacher shared, “There is this one student I just met. He is 18, autistic with no communication skills. He is in CFS care to top it off. No one has ever demanded any kind of augmentative communication program or device whatsoever.”

Related to identity and positive self-concept, participants reported cultural and linguistic irrelevance within the First Nations education system as the next most prevalent systemic/structural theme affecting learning in First Nations schools.

Cultural and Linguistic Relevance

Most respondents in this study shared that many First Nations students struggle with a lack of positive self-identity. The lack of linguistic and cultural relevance, both historically and within current education systems, is another factor negatively affecting learning in schools in

First Nations communities in Manitoba. Indigenous scholars such as Kirkness (2013), Battiste (2013), and Brayboy (2010), contend that First Nations education must promote identity reclamation and recovery. The importance of self-determination and self-representation, and the politics of representation entered into almost every conversation throughout the data collection phase of this research. As one clinician so eloquently stated, “When those systems are taken and transplanted within a First Nation context, they aren’t going to work because the foundation of those systems is based on different values, systems, and world views that are contrary to what First Nation people see or feel. They [the First Nations learners] have the sense that something is not right.”

Elders in the study highlighted the link between cultural competency and First Nations language use. Knowledge of a First Nations language, or lack thereof, then affects how First Nations children adolescents and adults see and interact with the world around them. One participant Elder stated that the lack of attention to First Nations languages in First Nations schools is just one factor that magnifies the learning gaps of First Nations students. She stated,

We run the risk of losing our language because of the focus on the English language and its development. And the English language skills. All these things that I have mentioned about being tied to the English language, even the instruction. That becomes the focus and a measure of what success is. That becomes relevant to the lives of our people because anything tied to culture is not seen as being useful.

Cultural and linguistic relevance relates to the curriculum used, the situated-ness of First Nations content within that curriculum, and the worldviews and philosophies of those who developed the curriculum. Relevance also relates to the language used to teach the curriculum,

who teaches the curriculum, the resources available for schools, and the connection and /or relevance to the place or culture the student comes from. Participants in this study noted that education transformation, through rewriting of curriculum and providing supports and resources for language revitalization and retention, would result in enhanced linguistic and cultural relevance for First Nations learners in Manitoba. One participant stated,

The system we are currently forced to operate in has to be thrown out, we need to operate with a system based on the culture of the people, and then we find places where math and science can be taught. We can infuse the things needed to survive in today's world, rather than having it the other way around. When you think about the survival of Indigenous people, it is not the math and sciences that are going to ensure our survival, it is our culture.

Almost all respondents in this study reported they support the enhancement of linguistic and cultural relevance as an essential aspect of education reformation. In contrast, two respondents, both First Nations, also fluent in their First Nations language, felt it was not the role of school, but the responsibly and purview of the home and parents to address and teach both First Nations language and culture. They felt the school should focus only on academic skills in English so that First Nations learners can be successful when they interact and compete within the broader society of Canada. One of these participants stated,

Do they [First Nations students] feel success if they have language and culture versus academics? I don't believe so. We all just kind of have that idea that it is academic based institution. How many times have we done this activity in the classroom when you ask a child "what makes you smart?" We all know what their responses are going to be,

like if you can read, if you can write. Does knowing your first language or culture, does that make you smart? Not necessarily.

While one participant may believe culture must be foundational to formal education another believes that academics such as reading, writing and mathematics are foundational. Thus, dissent and opposing views are a part of this conversation. From critical analysis it appears as though the effect of the colonial agenda is apparent within these polarized attitudes of First Nations educators. Consequently, on-going dialogue needs to occur within First Nations communities as curricular relevance and student centered practice is discussed and debated as those within systems work towards education transformation to meet the needs of future generations. Such polarization and the need for dialogue is a critical aspect of the decolonization processes within many First Nations communities in Manitoba.

The next major structural/systemic theme participants identified to affect learning in First Nations communities in Manitoba relates to First Nations languages. Participants in this study identified the loss of First Nations languages, and the lack of understanding of the structural/grammatical differences between First Nations languages and the English language as a primary factor affecting learning of First Nations students.

Language

In this section, I provide a review of participant perspectives on how language issues within First Nations communities affect learning in First Nations schools. The issues of language and learning, related to students with SEND, creates confusion and/or misunderstanding regarding differentiating between educational gaps related to English based learning, and/or the perception, and, at times, a misdiagnosis of a dis/ability and/or learning

impairment. I do not intend for others to see this review as providing a complete set of answers regarding the resolution of language related issues for First Nations schools. It is however intended to highlight and organize issues raised by participants related to language and learning, and pose critical questions so that others might focus future research on the effects of language and learning within First Nations schools in Manitoba.

From my experience, most First Nations educators and clinicians identify the link between First Nations language and identity. Language brings pride, enhances culturally relevant expression, and promotes values within a culture. First Nations language is the vehicle that conveys cultural values and morays from one generation to the next. The purposeful attempts to annihilate Indigenous languages, and the deliberate prevention of language retention/revitalization through inadequate education funding, are central factors that affect learners in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Participants in this study identified First Nations language loss as a significant factor affecting learning in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Referred to by a number of participants as “being stuck in the middle between languages”, the lack of understanding of issues related to First Nations language loss has a significant effect on student learning. The structural differences between English and First Nations languages and the lack of resources to support First Nations language retention and revitalization also affects learning in all First Nations communities in Manitoba.

According to the Assembly of First Nations (2011), learning is rooted in Aboriginal languages and cultures. Landmark documents on Aboriginal learning, including *Indian Control of Indian Education* (1972) and the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996), affirm the pivotal role that languages and cultures play in successful Aboriginal learning.

Through language, Aboriginal Peoples transmit cultural knowledge from one generation to another and make sense of their shared experience. Aboriginal languages reflect the unique worldviews of Indigenous Peoples' toward their land, contains the knowledge of that specific place, and is linked to the survival of the peoples from that place.

From past experience I have come to know that language connects Aboriginal people to their cultural values about how they ought to live and relate to each other. As Aboriginal languages encode unique ways of interpreting the world, they are inseparable from issues of Aboriginal identity and the maintenance of Aboriginal knowledge systems.

From published literature on the subject, and personal accounts from residential school survivors, it was the formal education system in Canada that took; even beat the First Nations languages out of First Nations learners in Manitoba. How formal education systems now respond to English as an additional language and language revitalization affects all First Nations learners today. In this section, I will report on the perspectives of the respondents related to language learning, retention and First Nations language revitalization amongst learners in First Nations schools in Manitoba.

According to Assembly of First Nations publication, *First Nations Languages and Culture, Impacts on literacy and student achievement outcomes; a review of the literature* (2011),

Language is the outward expression of an accumulation of learning and experience shared by a group of people over centuries of development. It is not simply a vocal symbol; it is a dynamic force which shapes the way a man looks at the world, his thinking about the world and his philosophy of life. Knowing his maternal language helps a man to know himself; being proud of his language helps a man to be proud of himself. (p 3)

Article 13 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) calls upon the Canadian government, “to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing system and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.”

The respondents in this study indicated that despite the pervasiveness of the loss of First Nations languages that there is still very little funding for Manitoba First Nations schools for either bilingual or First Nations language immersion programming. From my extensive experience working in First Nations schools, with the rare exception of one Cree immersion program, First Nations education systems in Manitoba have primarily English only learning. Some schools teach First Nations language as a subject; however, the respondents in this study state that this programming has little effect on actually learning or revitalizing a second/First Nations language. The majority of participants in this study noted, often with much anger and resentment, that they felt their schools have never produced any fluent First Nations language speakers.

Along with the desire for enhanced linguistic relevance within First Nations schools, many participants spoke in great lengths about the language loss within most First Nations communities in Manitoba. One educator stated, “I would definitely say intergenerational transmission of residential school damage has a big impact [on First Nations language loss].”

I contend that this component of the study highlights the need for those who work within education systems in First Nations communities to understand the implications of second/additional language learning issues for First Nations learners in Manitoba. Participants suggested that issues for First Nations learners might differ from other English as Additional Language (EAL) learners in Canada. Many participants felt that the role of First Nations

language revitalization must take a renewed priority in the midst of broader discussions of First Nations education reformation in Canada. First Nations language scholars identified that that the most recent 2016 announcements of enhanced resources for First Nations schools for First Nations languages remain woefully inadequate for meaningful language preservation and revitalization. (Shirley Fontaine, personal communication, July 20, 2016)

Participants in this study repeatedly noted the link between language, culture and identity. Many First Nation language speakers who participated in this study indicated that the English language has significant limitations, affecting their ability to communicate with others using the English language. When asking one of the respondents if the interview I was conducting would be any different if I did it in Cree, and if so how, she responded; “Yes, I think it would be different. The words would be more meaningful for me. There are sometimes things I want to say in Cree but there are no right words for it in English. It just doesn't have that kick.”

The bilingual participants who participated in this study felt that speaking their First Nations language was a definite asset when building connections with children and families in the communities they work in. “You know, working in a First Nations community and speaking the language, I could communicate better with the parents. Being bilingual also assists me with my ability to better assess and understand their students as well as navigating the learning between two or more languages if necessary,” stated one participant.

Many participants in this study cited that First Nations students often enter and continue in school without a solid grasp of either their first language (i.e., Cree) nor of English, the language of instruction within the formal education system in almost all First Nations schools in Manitoba. Some participants reported that they themselves, are “stuck between two languages”,

having neither mastered their first language nor fluency in the English language. One experienced educator, grandmother and great grandmother stated,

As a First Nations person, I have not really mastered my mother's tongue of the first language and I haven't mastered my second language which is English so therefore I am stuck in the middle. I call the language Creenglish. I have always discussed the language because it does affect the learning. You know, it took me awhile to transfer information onto paper. It was beyond me. I knew what I was trying to say but it would not come out that way. It took a while. I had to use different strategies. So that is an area of need and I still feel that there should be a curriculum for students that haven't mastered either language. The first language, the second language and therefore they are stuck in the middle.

The loss of First Nations languages and the troubled history within the education system inter-generationally has affected parents and grandparents of many First Nations learners.

According to one participant,

Now take the parents within the First Nation education system, a lot of them did not have the opportunity, so the language they learned would have been very simple conversational language. It is not the same type of language and there is a big difference between conversational language and academic language in both Ojibway and English. I know this affects the learning of many I have taught.

Many participants reported that the structural differences between the First Nations language of Cree and the English language, still affects many learners today. One bilingual special education teacher stated,

I feel it is the language. If you look at my language, I have limited sounds in vowels. We don't make up rules and go and break up the rules like the western language. I have trouble pronouncing words because they do not come naturally for me. There were times that I would get you to pronounce or repeat after me where with my Cree word it is not going to come out the right way. And you are learning also. And our words are very long.

Many other participants also stated the differences between the structure and grammar of the English and First Nations languages significantly affects learning within First Nations schools. The structural/grammar differences also contribute to an increase in the identification of learning challenges within education systems of First Nations students in Manitoba. A First Nations clinician, who has assessed many children living in First Nations communities in Manitoba, explained,

I think we have to understand and acknowledge that our practices/approaches and tools we use in any assessment have limitations and we have to consider how those things are applied, where they are applied. You take a northern community for example, the First Nation language within the home, and moving within a setting with English language proficiency is used and expected, there is a shift there. What happens is many of the kids are caught between the language at home, and think in that language, and go into school and use English language, follow instruction, reading and writing. That needs to be taken into account with the education assessment in the school, there are two things going on.

Many participants in this study identified that the speech sounds (phonology) within First Nations languages are different from the speech sound in the English language. In her interview, a First Nations speech and language clinician stated,

For certain [First Nations] languages they don't use all the sounds. So there are only specific sounds in the Cree language and so I find that students come in with a lot of errors that are influenced by their First Nations language. Devoicing specific sounds, so naturally those are the errors that will be coming up in the assessment reports. For example in Cree the voiced sound such as "j" is substituted with the "ch" sound which is voiceless. So the T becomes a D and could be vice versa. The P could become a B and vice versa. And the K and the G, those could be reversed. There are different dialects for the Cree language. Some of them use the TH sound, some of them don't.

A long time resource teacher and literacy specialist, fluent in both Ojibway and English, speculated further about the differences between the structures of the English and First Nations languages, the lack of exposure to "high level language in either Cree/Ojibway and English" and the subsequent effects on First Nations learners she has worked with. She also noted that many learners come to school with conversational versus academic skills in one or both languages. She stated,

I have always believed that English as a second language is a factor in the success of First Nation children. I 100 % believe it, because when you take a look at our students today, that is a major issue. I will talk about myself and my experience with education. I attended the public education system and I had access to people that had the ability to use

the English vocabulary. I was able to learn vocabulary because I was surrounded by people with [academic based English] vocabulary since grade one.

Further comparing the structures of English and Ojibway languages, and the fact that Ojibway was historically primarily an oral language, this participant explained,

Within the English language arts curriculum has six components: reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing. Now to be literate, we want all students to be able to read and write and be competitive in the 21st century, self-sustaining, and independent. Now take a look at the Ojibway language we only have four strands; speaking, listening, viewing, and representing. There is no reading or writing. What defines literacy besides reading and writing? If you were to ask the general population, what is ELA? They would say reading and writing and quite often do not mention the other language arts components.

Because our culture is oral, the reading and writing in the Ojibway language is more recent. To tell you the truth, for me to be able to read an Ojibway word I have an extremely difficult time decoding it and reading it. But I am fluent in the language. I naturally want to just decode it the way I decode an English word. The phonemes are very different from Ojibway to English so I have an extremely difficult time doing it. I could spell phonetically according to the English language, because Ojibway is largely not a written or read language.

So when you think historically, you think about the students in the school, their parents, and grandparents, how much exposure did they have to reading and writing in their original language if they didn't have English in the home. And if there is no exposure to

English, there is no reading or writing, even if they had some exposure to English, it was conversational.

Reflecting about non First Nations learners who may have English as an Additional Language, she stated,

Take another EAL student from Thailand. Now he comes here and learns how to speak English. He is going to continually learn the English language forever. I believe as First Nation learners we are as well, but I also believe that his exposure to his language, the reading and writing part of his first language, makes it different for us because we have not been exposed to it. The language itself, the dynamics of this language is different because it is not a written language, and we don't read it. There was never a need to read or write the language versus the education system, the academic system, isn't that what it's all about? Reading and writing when we have never had to do it?

The following Table 2 represents research participant's perspectives on the comparison of First Nations languages, such as Ojibway, Cree, Dakota, Oji-Cree and Dene, and the English language. Many participants noted how important it is for educators, clinicians and instructional leaders to know and more carefully reflect on the differences outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Structural Comparison between First Nations and English Languages in Oral and Written Form

First Nations Language	English Language
Rules most always followed	Rules are constantly broken
Fewer vowel sounds	Additional vowel sounds
Longer more descriptive words	Shorter words
Do not use all sounds of English language	Additional sounds are required for
Devoicing of specific sounds	Voicing of all sounds
Conversational-both low and high level	Conversational and Academic language
language	
4 components of CLA (Cree Language	6 component of ELA (English language
Arts) (listening, speaking, viewing, and	Arts) (reading, writing, viewing,
representing)	representing, speaking, and listening)
Fewer adverbs and adjectives	Additional adverbs and adjectives
Nouns often before verbs ‘to the store I	Verbs often before nouns ‘I go to the
go’	store’
Oral culture	Written and read culture
Fewer synonyms and homonyms	Additional synonyms and homonyms

Related to language acquisition and First Nations language loss, one participant highlighted that many First Nations teachers are EAL educators themselves, which further affects classroom instruction. She stated,

Some First Nations educators, lack proficient English. In some cases they are really bad. My spouse, for example, still confuses he and she. Imagine he is a classroom teacher. He has 25 students within his classroom and he is referring to a he as a she on a daily basis. It has nothing to do with his thinking ability. It's a language thing. I believe language is a huge part in it.

Some educators and clinicians report the complexity using of classroom based, resource based and clinical assessment procedures to determine whether or not the student has a learning dis/abilities versus/or has additional challenges performing academically due to English as an additional language. A critical insight from one of the research participants, A teacher noted the following about both herself and her children: "Yes, when they look at the language they think to look it as a disability, which it is not. When you look at the English itself it is a very hard language to learn."

Another veteran teacher noted,

There is misunderstanding by those coming from the outside towards the kids is where they treat them differently. They think they do not know it because they cannot express it so they label them as if they don't know. They [the students] only know what they can express what they can express in English (and Cree), so it is sometimes very limited. In both languages they can't express themselves. I know the kids, so I probe them and direct them into what they may be thinking.

In summary, the participants note that due to the history of First Nations language loss through colonization, and inadequate resources provided for First Nations language emersion, has not only contributed to First Nations language loss but also to the lack of understanding of the unique aspects of second language learning as it applies specifically for and to First Nations learners. Further research is required to enhance understanding of this complex aspect of First Nations education with respect to language use and bilingualism.

Although the vast majority of participants did indicate they do support enhancing linguistic relevance and First Nations language programming in First Nations schools two respondents, both of First Nations ancestry did express some reservation about the enhancement of First Nations language programs in First Nations schools today. One participant noted,

I am not a supporter of Cree Immersion. In my opinion I feel it kind of limits them. Depending on what their career path is going to be later on in their life, it seems a bit limited because they do not have full exposure to what is going to be demanded of them down the road. There are only so many words you can use within the Cree language. It is very descriptive. When you think about the grammar components, First Nations languages have a lot of nouns and verbs. You do not get many adjectives and adverbs. Even the layout of the grammar, the verbs always come before the nouns. So there is confusion there when it is translated over to paper. I would think it is kind of like a slower process, processing information for them.

The participants in this study continue to reflect whether language immersion, bilingual language programming or offering a single class in the First Nations language might best support and enhance educational experiences of First Nations learners. One veteran educator who,

before the dramatic shortfalls in funding started to be realized at the classroom level, said that back in the late 1970s early 1980s her school did provide a more balanced bi-lingual education program for children in her community. She indicated that at that time the students in her school seemed to be progressing much faster and to a greater degree than they are now. She said,

You know what. I would say that [Cree reading and writing in Roman Orthography} was the foundation, really. Yes, a building block. Because they learned with familiar content. There were pictures of a raven. And they know what the raven is. Then there was a story about the raven. And then we read it and wrote stories in our language. And there was always a story for those fables. The crow and the raven. Or the rabbit. And there was always those stories and it helped build a good foundation.

The effect of the loss of First Nations languages due to the colonial legacy within Canada, and language revitalization remains a complex, always under resourced area of school programming in First Nations schools in Manitoba. Participants identified the need for further research on the effect of First Nations language loss and the differences between the structures of First Nation languages and English, and what models. They also suggested the need for additional research is need to determine what programs and instructional methods might address these issues within First Nations schools. In the following section, I will examine participant perspectives on how the systemic/structural issue of poverty affects learners in First Nations schools in Manitoba.

Poverty

As is well documented in the literature, the participants in this study also reported that poverty was another significant structural issue affecting learning within First Nations

communities in Manitoba. According to a recent report titled, *Shameful Neglect, Poverty and Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada*, (2016), the CCPA reported, “ Even among status First Nation children living on reserve, poverty is not evenly distributed [in Canada], with shocking rates of 76% in Manitoba and 69% in Saskatchewan, easily the worst in the country. At the other end is Quebec where the poverty rate is 37%.” Many participants shared stories about how poverty affected the students they work with. One participant in this study stated,

A kid has trouble participating in physical education when he does not have indoor shoes and parents cannot afford two pairs, especially when there are three school-aged kids in the family. That is a big chunk right off the bat from the family income, whether it is assistance or minimum wages or whatever income you have.

Participants in this study report, with overwhelming consensus, that the effects on learning of the grinding poverty, high unemployment, and overall socioeconomic conditions within First Nations communities within Manitoba are extreme. One respondent noted, “Socio-economic conditions severely affects our kids. There is a lack of enough money in the home to provide for the kids. I have seen kids through the years of my teaching that many children come to school hungry, underfed, under clothed, and they come with issues of physical and mental abuse which has not been dealt with.” Another respondent said,

It [First Nations student learning] has a lot to do with poverty. Like coming from homes that are impoverished, there are nutritional deficiencies and sometimes there are addictions with their parents and that in itself causes problems with conception, fetal development, it affects their cognition. There is fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Another teacher said, “Poverty affects the success of First Nation students and as a result everything else trickles down from that. Additions, abuse, poor living conditions, poor health. It all stems from the superseding dominant system loosing respect for another culture. Not showing any appreciation.”

As one respondent noted, systemic poverty affects the academic performance of many learners in First Nations communities in Manitoba in many different ways. In her interview, she stated, “It goes back to how can we expect students to succeed academically when they are struggling to have their basic needs met? Social emotional basic needs and poverty are such huge factors. There are so many issues that come to you and are there before you even try to deliver the academic program.”

Poverty within First Nations can have a marked effect on student attendance in First Nations schools. A number of participants in this study report that some learners in First Nations have the additional responsibility of caring for younger siblings. According to one respondent with over 40 years of experience working within First Nations education, “Poverty is a big factor. Students who live in poverty do not come to school. They know they live in poverty and they do not want to associate with people that are not living in poverty. They would say we don’t have clothes to wear, I don’t do sports, I don’t go skating, I don’t have skates, I am just going to stay home.”

The effects of poverty results in many First Nations schools knowing that, in addition to offering academic supports, the school needs to use their limited resources to provide students with the basic needs of a child, such as school wide breakfast and lunch programs. As another participant noted,

If we did not serve breakfast and lunch at school there would be a lot of kids that would go hungry. Most of the community is on social assistance. We apply every year for that breakfast program and that is with the help of the health center too. They [the families in our community] do not know where else to turn to and they turn to alcohol and drugs. I do not know if it is just to forget the rough time they have and even in terms of winter wear. Many kids do not have the proper jackets. One of the council members, every year he gets in contact with the “Coats for Kids.” Then he brings a bunch of jackets so kids get jackets.

Participants in this research also shared their concerns about how alcohol and drug use, often related to poverty and historic trauma, affects learners in First Nations schools. The participants shared that they felt these issues often resulted in subsequent secondary problems such as child neglect, family breakdown and learning difficulties related to prenatal exposure to alcohol and other drugs. With years of teaching and resource experience, one respondent noted,

Many of our students come from such impoverished lives, that by the time they walk through our front door we should just be grateful they are there. It is difficult to have high academic expectations from them when their basic needs are not met once they leave the school so this has some influence on performance at school. We also have addictions, especially drug addictions, we are all familiar, FASD, those terms have been around for a long time. What are the statistics for addiction to prescription drugs in First Nations?

There was consensus amongst participants that initiatives to improve education in First Nation communities in Manitoba must also include strategies and programming that address the

systemic poverty faced by so many. As stated in the current literature, “What is certain is the overwhelming need to address the deepening poverty faced by Indigenous children in this country, and to do so with urgency” (CCPA, 2016, p. 7).

Often associated with poverty, the social/emotional and mental health issues faced by many First Nations learners were issues.

Social/Emotional-Mental Health

With overwhelming consensus, participants in this study reported that the social/emotional-mental health issues faced by many First Nations learners, and the lack of publically funded and accessible school and community based supports within First Nations schools, has profound and remarkable negative effects on many who attend, and do not attend school in First Nations communities in Manitoba. One participant stated,

There are so many factors [that affect the learning of our students]. The traumas. The residential school has a generational effect. There is a lack of parenting skills from that. There are issues of neglect. CFS [Child and Family Services] issues of involvement. There are addictions: drinking, pills and drugs during pregnancy too which is contributing to our special needs student population and other than that. And also even trauma, toxic stress during pregnancies, the genetics and all those factors. There is maternal depression. So there are all kinds of associated mental health issues that grew out of these and physical disabilities you know. There are different ranges of disabilities that you see in the school.

Participants in this study shared that the social/emotional, mental health issues and trauma due to child welfare involvement, and the frequency of multiple home placements has

crippling effects on the learning in many First Nations schools. The lack of resources required to address such issues remains constant in most, if not all First Nations schools in Manitoba.

Children and adolescents living in First Nations communities in Manitoba have the highest rates of suicide of any other population living in Canada (Manitoba Child Advocate, CBC report, May 15, 2015). Participants in this study talked at length about the challenges they face in coping with mental health/trauma related issues faced by the students in their schools. As one participant shared, “Our community went through that. There were 12 suicides in three months. It was crazy because you could feel it. In our community, it is a very Christian community so everybody was into praying for each other. You can sense that evil, somebody else is going to go.”

Another veteran educator indicated, “Depression and suicide is so alarming and there are a lot of students that we are seeing with these concerns. We see anger and aggressive personalities and the medical needs, there is physical impairment, there is cognitive impairment, memory retention problems, behavioral disabilities, impulsive hyper activity, there are gaps and there are learning disabilities.” The respondent went on to further state,

The social emotional issues have to be dealt with first before they can do any academic. Right now, they do have some counseling, right? And there are two more that are training in order to be in the school for the students. We have been dealing with attempted suicides and pills. Those students have to deal with those issues before they can deal with anything else. They are trying to basically survive but they have no skills on how to do it. That is where CFS comes into play with that too, that when they do an

apprehension they do not do any counseling with the students and they just place them there and say now do this type of thing. They have a lot to deal with.

Through this study, it is apparent that First Nations educators are searching for meaningful and relevant solutions for the epidemic of child death from unnatural causes (suicide, murder, drowning, and family violence) in their communities, and are asking for services, supports and resources to assist them with the ongoing cycle of grief and loss within their First Nations in Manitoba. As one respondent shared, “There is a lot of grieving that has to be dealt with and I don’t know if they have a team here when something happens. But especially this year there has been so many deaths here and I think it has affected nearly every family here and these kids don’t know how to deal with it.” Another respondent summarized,

Because of the deaths in the community, the older siblings are affected the most. They do not know how to find support therefore they take their lives. The impact is so great they just end their lives. The bigger the community, the more suicides because there is not enough things for them to do and take part in. They cannot go anywhere and are within their own homes with no interaction outside. There are no medical supports and there may be one mental health person coming in. That is not enough to support all the young people struggling. There are not enough gatherings in the community anymore. Before the Chief and Counsel would gather and talk to the family and children, and talk about how to cope and mentor them but it does not seem to happen anymore. Some Elders are dying off, there is no training for middle aged people to communicate with the students/youth in the community. Before they would go out camping, and learn survival skills, along with mental emotional skills in dealing with hardship. Our youth feel they have nowhere to go and no one to talk to.

To summarize, in this chapter, I provided a summary of the study participants; educators and clinicians with over 540 years of collective experience within First Nations education systems in Manitoba, perspectives related to the leading systemic and structural issues they feel affect learning in First Nations schools in Manitoba. Participant responses reveal, with remarkable consistency, that cultural interruption/interference, chronic underfunding, service and support gaps, cultural and linguistic irrelevance, First Nations language loss, and poverty/social-emotional/mental health issues are the major factors affecting learning in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

In the following section of this chapter, I will outline the second theme from the interviews with participants in this study; First Nations perspective, worldview and practice related to the provision of special/inclusive education in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Key Finding Part 2: First Nations Perspective and Practice in Inclusive Education

Paying specific attention to cultural relevance within inclusive education philosophy, assessment and practice, in this chapter, I will outline thought, experiences and opinions of study participants related to the provision special/inclusive education supports and services in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. I include participant suggestions related to essential aspects of First Nations inclusive education perspective and practice. Along with accommodating students with mild, severe and profound impairments/dis/abilities, participants in this study identified that all First Nations schools face considerable challenges meeting the remedial needs of many of their students. From critical perspective, and my professional practice, in order to avoid the over identification of “dis/ability” in First Nations schools I am aware of the importance of differentiating between remedial learners and those with dis/abilities.

In this chapter, I will first review participant perspectives on the causes of remedial learning challenges and dis/abilities. I will then share participant perspectives on culturally relevant inclusive education pedagogy including land-based practice. I conclude this chapter providing a summary of issues study participants raised related to inclusive education in First Nations schools, such as the challenges related to identification and diagnosis of dis/ability and the racialization of special education both within and outside of First Nations education systems in Manitoba.

SEND (Special Education Needs and/or Dis/abilities) in First Nations communities in Manitoba

Participants in this study reported that there is often confusion between determining which students have remedial learning needs (at least two or more years behind grade level expectations) due to environmental factors such as poverty, poor education systems,

disengagement from school, to poor school attendance, and language learning issues, or more organically based learning, cognitive, sensory and/or developmental impairments. In this study, participants repeatedly highlighted the challenge of ascertaining both the causes and origins of academic delays, and determining what standards might be used to define these delays. As one clinician participant with decades experience stated,

You have to be able to recognize the difference between academic delays that stem from social economic factors, stereotyping, lack of attendance. I've seen kids 100% be diagnosed as modified, low IQ and specific assessments that have come across my desk because they score poorly. They are disengaged because they feel they have been labelled. And of course the results aren't that great. The tests are not 100% relevant nor appropriate. And the kids are five grades below level in grade 10. And I've seen those kids catch up by the time they were 22 with an adult education diploma. Honestly go on and do very well in university and become teachers. Its over-identified. Everything seems to over diagnosed these days. I'd say over diagnosis is endemic in our society today. Everybody and their dog has ADHD and there is an over prescription of Ritalin. Those you have assessed must be informed by a true understanding of the circumstance and true understanding of Aboriginal learners. Their strengths, their learning differences, and the corresponding assessment tools that are used to determine whether or not they actually have needs.

Participants in this study report that the confusion between environmentally based remedial learning needs and the presence of impairments/dis/abilities, and the lack of attention to, and supports for multi levelled learners, often results in an over referral of students to special education programs within First Nations schools. One participant shared,

When I first started in the resource program in our school almost 80 percent of the students were referred to the special education program. With proper classroom based support to address the wide diversity of student needs within the classroom, particularly the remedial learners, we have been able to reduce the number of students referred to about 15 percent of the student population, those who have or, likely have real disabilities/diagnosed special needs.

Study participants report a high prevalence of remedial learners in most, First Nations classrooms in Manitoba, and suggest a number of contributing factors. All participants report a dramatic increase in the prevalence of students within special education programs in First Nations schools in Manitoba over the past three decades. This increase is likely due to the creation and expansion of student support services in First Nations and the accompanying increase in awareness of dis/ability related issues such as the effects of prenatal exposure to alcohol (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum of Disorders (FASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders (ADHD) often associated with FASD, and ASD (Autism Spectrum of Disorders). One participant, an educator from a southern First Nation reported, “Well, when I first started working in resource in 1999/2000 we started out with only 4 students in the resource program. Now I believe we have over 90 students if I am not wrong. It is safe to say that with the rising number of students requiring supports our numbers have increased over 50% since 2006.” A teacher from a northern community stated, “When I left my community 8 years ago, I did not see as many students with special needs, maybe 5. I went back two years ago, there is about 30 to 40 special needs students. I do not know why, but there are autistic kids, hard of hearing, speech. When I first started the speech program, there were only 5. Now we have over 40 in speech and language.”

Another participant, citing the dramatic increase in students with special needs stated, “Out of a school of 200 students we have over 50 students who require speech and language intervention and over 25 students with hearing problems. I also have students with visual impairments, sensory impairment and more and more autistic children and we don’t have services for that.” Another northern teacher reported, “You know when I started in (community name) in the late 1980s I had a special needs child. She was I guess borderline and that was the only one I had in my class and I did not have an EA. But then I come back to [name of community] say 12 years later, I’d say 25% in the class had special needs.”

Many participants in the study speculated about the causes of remedial learning needs within their First Nations schools, and cited attendance as a major issue. One clinician stated,

What a remedial learning need means to me is something that has developed as a result of not having adequate exposure to learning. So remedial issues might have to do with a child's letter identification, number recognition or basic song identification and not having that knowledge at a level they should. They don't have this awareness often because of poor attendance.

Another teacher stated, “I guess student attendance is one of the big gaps in the learning. There is that trajectory of failure. Attendance is a failure. Attendance right there is critical. It is system wide.”

The second most common factor participants identified that contributes to remedial learning needs in First Nations schools is high staff turnover. Participants said that high staff turnover in First Nations schools leads to inconsistently covered curriculum, lack of attachment between students and staff and lack of consistency in instructional practice. Participants reported

that high staff turnover leads to teachers “teaching to the lowest functioning students, having reduced expectations of both students and their families, and inconsistent and/or poor relationships with other community members. One participant shared,

I find the teachers will plan according to the lowest needs in their classroom because that keeps the lowest functioning busy. There are lots of remedial students because of lack of continuity I think. Persistence. There are probably times when, even with their teacher, moving from teacher to teacher, how do the teachers know what the students have already covered? Sometimes the teachers don't even cover everything that they need to do and how do they end of the year? I think so because there is always lots of teachers coming and going. I think this is the biggest possible reasons for so many remedial students. They need that structure too, right?

Another participant who has worked to support many classroom teachers noted, “I find the teachers [in First Nations schools] will plan according to the lowest needs in their classroom because that keeps the lowest functioning busy.”

Research participants identified that EAL (English as an Additional Language), and the effects of First Nations language loss, contributes to remedial learning challenges. According to one participant, “I also am going to say I believe a lot of it [the high number of remedial students in First Nations schools] has to do with language.”

Participants in this study attribute the high rates of students with impairments/disabilities to a number of factors including the rate of prenatal exposure to alcohol and other drugs, poverty and high child welfare involvement within Manitoba First Nations. A veteran northern First Nations educator reported, “FASD is higher [in First Nations] this is not slur, it is a basic fact.

The incidence of social-emotional and behavioral challenges is higher, especially with the greater number of kids in care. Those kids have trust issues, attachment issues, and engagement issues.” In her second interview, this Cree educator stated, “There is fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It used to be just alcohol but I am surprised that I came face to face with that and I didn't quite know what it was when I started working at the school in (community name). A retired veteran First Nations teacher who worked in her community and adopted children recalled, “I used to stand there and I know the parents of the children, and I know that they had effects from alcohol consumption.”

Participants in this study reported an increase in the identification of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) within First Nations schools over the past decade and much higher rates of hearing loss for many First Nations children, particularly those from northern and isolated First Nations communities. Discussing the incidence of students with SEND, according to one participant/consultant, “The audiologist in Thompson said she found it [students with hearing loss] more so in the north. I think the rule of thumb generally is that 1/3 of the class [in any Northern First Nation] is going to be functioning with a hearing loss and that affects their learning.” Reasons such as untreated ear infections, having to fly in unpressurized planes, exposure to second hand smoke and possible genetic differences were all suggested as reasons why rates of hearing loss might be so high in First Nations communities. Other reasons related to the “perception” of hearing loss within First Nations school populations include that First Nations students, taught in English, may experience dissonance between what is being said to them compared to the sounds they are used to hearing, the range of sounds they are used to, the phonemes they recognize, and that they may be used to hearing with the body rather than the

ears. Such topics indicate the need for further, more in-depth, research on the topic of inclusion, language, literacy and learning within First Nations community contexts.

I will now share research participant perspectives on culturally relevant philosophies and models of inclusive education practice within First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Cultural Relevance in Inclusive Education

Culturally relevant approaches to inclusive education identified by project participants relate to education philosophy, assessment, and instructional/teaching practices.

Philosophy. According to research participants, the philosophy of a First Nations culturally relevant model of inclusive education uses the seven sacred teachings and centers on the premise that we all have gifts to contribute, particularly those who live with a dis/ability. Rooted in teachings of acceptance of diversity, participants said that First Nations accept and often celebrate individual differences. Within First Nations, there are expectations of serving others and of sharing what you have. Caring for others guides the norms within many First Nations families and communities. First Nations persons with SEND provide opportunity for others to demonstrate these characteristics.

According to Bird and Mallet (2015), “The Elders tell us that community members with exceptionalities and special needs hold important teachings and gifts for us all. People with exceptionalities have been given to us a gift, and put on this earth to teach us about humanity and our capacity for caring.” “*Ka ki ji to wi th way* are the gifted or the blessed one. *A ni moo th ta wa* is one who takes more time to walk. *Mi no go zi nan* are the gifts we are given from our Creator” (Lyle Wood, personal communication, May 29, 2016) (Island Lake Dialect of Ojibway and Cree).

From my extensive professional practice, it is important to examine dis/ability related concepts within First Nations languages in Manitoba to ascertain the philosophy of traditional First Nations cultures in relation to the plurality within community. The repeated reference to a person living with a dis/ability being “gifted”, or “being blessed”, comes from the direct translation of First Nations languages. This reflects a common philosophy of inclusion and acceptance of diversity within First Nations cultures throughout Manitoba.

Elders in this study shared that children and adults with dis/abilities or other differences are in fact closer to the Creator. First Nations philosophy tells us that people with dis/abilities, especially children, provide others the opportunity to demonstrate the sacred teachings of love, honesty, truth, courage, wisdom, respect and humility. “Well, we do respect. We love to share. We use humour. We use humility. The Seven Teachings. Also, we need to love them.” According to many participants in this study, each child has a gift and a purpose, it is our job as parents, and teachers to find those gifts, build upon them and unwrap them within the love the community. Directly related to the teachings comes a philosophy of inclusion shared by many participants. For example, one Elder who participated in this research shared,

In my community, everybody is included. It is very important for all to have that sense of belonging. You know when you look at the teachings. There is respect. When you look at children with unique gifts we don't label them. We call them someone who has a unique gift. The First Nations people communicate with their Creator and they believe that these people with unique gifts are here for a purpose and that we can learn from them. You know, they are all unique and they have that right. Our traditional practice is to embrace all people. We have never excluded anybody.

Further discussing the use of First Nations language to understand worldview, philosophy, and practice of inclusion, another research participant from northern Manitoba stated,

I heard from the Elders that in our language there is no word, no way to say, inferior, superior or inequality because we are all equal and that is a known fact. That is a powerful statement. Each child, regardless of their dis/abilities, regardless of whatever, there is no word in our language to say he is inferior, this one is superior, we are all equal.

In the Ojibway language “the word *Kameenikoowiza*, means the ones that were given special gifts. They are specially gifted people is how she [an Elder in her community] interpreted that word to me. They were accepted in the community and not left out.” Another Elder participant stated,

First Nations don't use the word ‘disability’. It is a ‘gift’. I am speaking from the Dakota. The Creator has given this person with this gift to the rest of us, because we need to learn lessons from this person, and we need to value that. No matter what, everyone was always included. There was never any question of having a celebration or event and so-and-so was not included. That never happened.

The participants (clinicians, First Nations educators and allies) involved with this study noted that the seven teachings do frame a First Nations philosophy of inclusion. One of the First Nations clinicians shared,

Even the way you treat the special needs kids, like if people are really following the seven teachings then you would not have any hard feelings for them being in their

classroom. They will know how to deal with them prior to them being registered in their classroom. To tolerate diversity you have to carry those teachings. You have to use wisdom in the way you deal with people. You have to have respect. And you have to be honest about your feelings too. If you do not share how you feel about a certain situation then you are defeating the purpose of the teachings that are being taught. To me you seem hypocritical for not following those teachings. Not being true to yourself. Be tolerant and promote inclusion because if you carry those teachings it should become like old habits, something apart of you already.

Responses by research participants showed that they believe students with SEND are here to teach us. It is often stated that within First Nations, community members see the person first rather than the difference. According to veteran First Nations educator,

Inclusion is not new for First Nations people! When I first went to a session and that was in the 90s, the professor introduced a philosophy on inclusion. As the only First Nation person in the room, I stood up and when I said, excuse me, philosophy of inclusion is not new for First Nations people. It has always what we have done and practiced. We have never excluded anybody. To this day, we do not exclude anybody.

Many of the participants in this study gave concrete examples of the differences between western mainstream and First Nations practices of special/inclusive. Within First Nations culture, there is less emphasis on labeling and diagnosis, more acceptance of difference and greater focus on the abilities versus deficits or challenges. Thinking about both her personal and professional experience with inclusion, another participant shared,

From a western mainstream perspective that we talk about now, that we follow the medical model now, right? Disabilities, disorder, disease, dysfunction. I think from a

traditional context those things were not focused on. To some degree, our people still do it. They should talk about their strengths, their abilities and what they can do, not what they can't do. But there is a focus on what they can't do. Based on my experiences of being around families that have children or adults with special needs, there is absolutely no segregation, everyone is treated equal. Again, the expectation is that that person will be able to carry out the same task to the best of their ability and dis/ability.

According to Dr. Marlene Atleo, (personal communication, Feb 26, 2017) in Nuu-chah-nulth culture talking about dis/abilities, disorder, disease, or dysfunction was considered “taboo” *numaak* because you could create your own dysfunction by naming it so it wasn't named or spoken out loud. Perspectives from First Nations Elders in Manitoba reveal similar explanations as to why such Western constructs may not be used within a First Nations community context.

From critical analysis, the tensions between the Western clinical approach to special/inclusive education with references to diagnosis, labeling and the traditional First Nations inclusive model of education were apparent throughout the conversations and discussions throughout the research process. While some research participants seemed to float effortlessly between western clinical constructs and more traditional First Nations inclusive models, others seemed more troubled by such apparent contradictory constructs.

One of the ally educators, who has worked within First Nation education for over 40 years remarked, “Within Western culture, when there is something different, we want to know why, why did this happen, how come? We play the blame game? With First Nations, this is the way the child is, it is a gift. My grandmother would say to me, we are never given anything in life that we cannot handle. I think First Nations very much have that philosophy. We were given this child, this is a gift, we are given the capabilities to raise this child.”

The conversations related to the deconstruction of western practice is, and will continue to allow for the development of more culturally acceptable constructs to be named and practiced within First Nations education settings and systems throughout Manitoba.

Despite the lack of education related and community based supports and services for student with disabilities, a factor contributing to why many children and adults with dis/abilities have to leave their communities, participants noted that inclusion is strong within First Nations, and person and student centered differentiated practice and response is inherently First Nations in nature. A northern educator in this study stated,

The degree of inclusion is far greater [in First Nations communities] and the level of acceptance of individuals with disabilities is significantly higher than that in a typical provincial jurisdiction. People do not look at the disability they look at the person. There is a huge degree of acceptance and that is amazingly good. Our students with special needs - you will see the kids hanging out with their peer groups or walking along with kids on the weekend, sitting in Tim Horton's together, their friends accepting the person for who they are. They [students in First Nations] do not differentiate or segregate based on ability. The degree of community inclusion is considerably higher, especially within the school.

The next aspect of First Nations inclusive education participants provided recommendations on related to assessment practices within education.

Assessment. The First Nations clinicians and educators who participated in the study all discussed the personal and professional struggles related to student assessment. They shared how they adapt their assessment practices to be more culturally relevant. The participants in this

study provided a road map for enhancing cultural relevancy within the assessment processes of inclusive education practice for learners in First Nations schools in Manitoba. One clinician began our discussions on this topic stating the following,

The standardized tests; when they do to standardize them they give samples of Caucasian people, African people, depends on their location and who's there. First Nations were never included or very minimally. So they don't have a good sample. I think if they are going to standardize a new assessment they should include First Nations (not just in Manitoba) but in the other provinces too.

As an essential component of First Nations inclusive education practice, all participants noted the need to reevaluate both the purpose of and practices inherent with using standardized assessments with First Nations learners. To ensure culturally relevant assessment, building positive relationships with students, parents and communities is a priority. Many research participants stated that focusing on assessing for the right reason, and then attending to the process of reciprocal relationships within the practice of student assessment, are essential aspects of First Nations inclusive education practice. One clinician stated, "A lot of time in the past has been about assessing [First Nations learners] for funding and you need that report done in order to access funding. I have been fortunate that I am starting to work with schools now and they have allowed me that time to come back a second or third, and sometimes even a fourth time to see this kid because I say to them, I am not sure yet."

This same clinician, evaluating the clinical work done in First Nations schools, shared the following story, noting shifting perspectives toward s adopting a strengths/ potential based perspective and the importance of a dynamic, evolving model of student assessment,

In terms of assessment, I always pay more attention to more of those things that give a measure of the fluid type of intelligence. When a child is given a problem where they have to think without having to use words that provides a better indicator of what that child's potential is really rather than solely relying on verbal skills, vocabulary abstract reasoning or conceptual development. It's the performance skills, the perception reading skills provide a better understanding of what that child's potential is, rather than relying on vocabulary.

First Nations clinicians who participated in this study shared the internal conflict and professional struggles they have in applying assessment practices of their clinical disciplines into practice within their First Nations communities and education settings. One clinician shared the following story,

When I went back in 2005 for my Ph.D. and at that time I was really unhappy with the work that was done in the schools and at that time I was really unhappy with the work I was doing because I felt that I was doing a disservice to the students, the kids, the community and to the families. It was because of how we were trying to understand the challenges that the students were feeling and the emphasis that was being put on those standardized tests that told us that this child was at this certain level of functioning. I felt that was really unfair and I talked to an advisor and said I wanted to do things differently. I said I can't do this. I said I won't do this. And she introduced me to this different idea about dynamic assessment and the approach that places some legitimacy that validates the culture in some way and the language in some way. The more I think about it really what you were doing was that you were looking at these tasks that the child's full reasoning and the child's ability to solve a problem at your knowledge and level. And

what they are saying now is that full reasoning is highly coordinated with reading achievement but those particular tasks are not particularly needed by the English language. There is a difference there.

This research shows that First Nations clinicians and educators are engaging in discussion, debate and dialogue and are just now beginning to adapt clinical assessment practices to more closely reflect not only the culture of the First Nations learner, but to more aptly contextualize why First Nations learners face certain academic struggles, particularly within English learning environments. Increasing the number of First Nations practitioners across the clinical disciplines, a recommendation by study participants, is a necessary step in order to fully implement and enhance culturally relevant clinical assessment practices for First Nations learners in Manitoba.

Many educators involved with the study referenced both the effects of second language learning, and the lack of cultural relevance of standardized assessment tools as barriers to the accurate determination of strengths, challenges and interventions for First Nations learners. One participant indicated, “But a lot of the students, even pre-screening in kindergarten, they only spoke their language. And they are screened on English based tools. Then you know what they say.... little so and so here does not recognize whatever. But it is because they are totally fluent in Cree.” Teachers and clinicians suggest changing concepts or objects foreign to First Nations learners, particularly those for who English is their second language and those children living in remote northern and/or isolated communities. It is again important to note that over 65% of all First Nations learners in Manitoba live in northern, remote and isolated communities. For example, words for and pictures of asparagus, tractor, shears, lama, intersection, and boulevard, all common in standardized tests, may be changed to pictures, objects or words more familiar to

First Nations learners such as fish, potatoes, boat, scissors, caribou, moose, bush and lake.

Clinicians and teachers suggested repeating these words in both First Nations languages and then in English to enhance cultural relevance within the assessment process. Again, participants highlighted the need to train more for First Nations clinicians, who are fluent in both English and their First Nations language. As one veteran teacher stated,

First of all, we need to give culturally appropriate assessments for students. And what I mean by that, I will give you an example. Students way up north have never seen a tree before. Right? And yet, we show them a picture of a tree and say “What is this?” So obviously, they are not going to say a tree. Right. Why don’t I show them a caribou? Why don’t I show them trapping? Something that they are familiar with. Hunting and so forth.

Another seasoned classroom teacher, when discussing issues related to assessment with a First Nations model of inclusion noted,

But in that particular type of book, they may be talking about a tractor and the student from the north may have no idea what a tractor is if they have never left the north. Even something like a rake or a hoe. I am taking this from personal experience, First Nation students do not know what those tools are. So when they are exposed to those types of aspects of assessments or books it is not fair because they don’t know what they are.

There is no prior knowledge

If the purpose of the standardized test is do more than determining the knowledge and skill of a learner compared to the “norm”, but to also provide an accurate level of current

understanding and thinking, then clinicians and teachers may need to use objects, words, phrases and languages familiar to the First Nations learner.

Many participants not only noted how they adapt assessment processes for their students but also demonstrated their creativity and ingenuity in creation of processes and tools to ensure assessment process and practices were more inclusive of First Nations content and perspective. Unfortunately, most of this critical work is an ‘add on’ to already taxed employees without additional resources. In our interview, one participant clinician recalled,

Interestingly enough you give a kid a picture of a vocabulary test, they may bomb it. Here’s the best example I can think of. When I first started testing I was using an assessment tool, a standard one in the industry and it said, it was a reading test and it said ‘Sally and her dad sat on the boulevard watching the cars speeding by’. I do not think a single student at that point could tell you what a boulevard was maybe one or two. So cultural relevancy is very important. Everything from vocabulary to capitalizing on different learning styles. These are glaring generalities. If you want a clear indication of how well the child could perform, what their ability levels are, and their capacity to learn is, then you are going to need to have stuff that is culturally relevant, they can relate to, they can understand that sort of optimized engagement. It speaks for itself, cultural relevancy is extremely important but there’s a problem because we already looked at this. These tests are standardized, their normed, they’re standardized – the whole nine yards. It is an enormous task to ask a company to develop a whole new test for First Nations. So what we did at our school is we did our best to develop our own tests for certain levels of achievement.

Many educators in this study also commented on ways they can differentiate not only the assessment practices and tools but also the ways they differentiate the ways they allow students to demonstrate their conceptual knowledge. For example one teacher shared different ways she adapts assessment approaches to be consistent within her First Nations worldviews.

Well, you know when we are assessing children, like we can assess special needs the same way. So in order to make it culturally relevant we have to teach them culturally relevant things. Like get a special needs girl, and teach girls how to make bannock. If they make good bannock, well that is a good sign. I am not going to ask to show them these pictures of scissors and say what is this, shears? This is shears. And you know we all fail. I am going to have them make me soup, or make me a blanket, or something like this. Culturally relevant means, doing things that are relevant to your culture. And not giving them oh let's see how far you can count in, and see if you can rote count. No, that is not the way, measure, measure, show me by measurements, and show me by doing.

After much discussion and careful consideration about how to enhance cultural relevancy within the clinical and education assessment processes, the participants in this study recommended approaching assessment of First Nations learners with caution. Study participants noted that First Nations schools have used clinical and educational assessments to generate more funding for schools, and, at times, the assessment process has further marginalized First Nations learners and their parents. Enhancing cultural relevancy within the assessment process means building relationships between school staff, students and their parents, using a strengths-based approach, and adapting current methods to use concepts and ideas that First Nations students are more familiar. Understanding the implications of First Nations language loss and the differences between the grammar and structure of English and the First Nations languages will also assist in

this endeavor. Although the commonly available commercial assessment tools and tests lack culturally relevance, First Nations clinicians and specialty educators are making adaptations to these tests and procedures in order to more effectively meet the needs of First Nations learners in schools in Manitoba. With an increased commitment to training and hiring First Nations clinicians, I do hope that this trend towards enhanced cultural relevancy will develop exponentially within the near future.

First Nations inclusive instructional and teaching practices. As the interviews in this study progressed, a clear and definitive model of First Nations' inclusive education practice began to emerge. Participants shared that within First Nation families, communities and cultures there is acceptance of difference and that promoting inclusion with a school and classroom setting is a First Nations cultural practice. The participants also shared that a First Nations model of inclusive education consists of both cultural teachings and culturally based instructional and teaching practices.

Elders define teachings as guidelines or principles for how one should live their life and interact with others (Don Robertson, personal communication, May 7, 2016). First Nations teachings, or sets of teachings, are often oral in nature, and handed down from generation to generation. Research participants referenced a number of different teachings to ground a model of First Nation inclusive education. In this study, participants referred to the seven sacred teachings, the seven generations story, and the Spirit or Karma teaching as culturally relevant inclusive education practices.

Most study participants indicated that the seven sacred teachings include love, respect, courage, generosity, truth, wisdom, and humility. They indicated that these teachings form the

basis and foundation of inclusive education practice. Among the many stories told about the seven sacred teachings, I will share the following four of the participant stories:

The Seven Teachings would be the ground, the foundation for including culture, diversity, First Nations teachings, and you can have the Elders as guest speakers. We used to have those programs where the Elders would come in and we would have those sharing circles. This was in high school. But I know they did in elementary school. I think if they had that they would come in and they would learn from them. They are storytellers because they would learn from the storyteller's stories. They make an impact rather than redo a piece of written story and answering five questions. They are all going to remember that, what you tell them in a story....

Well the seven teachings are all there. The teaching of inclusion. Because love, respect, courage, everything is all a part of our lives. If we teach it, and mean it, and everyone in this class is taking it all in and so therefore they are not going to look down on that one because that's not what the seven teachings is about. It's about respecting everyone for their uniqueness....

Promoting inclusion and tolerance of diversity within the education systems today. You know I thought of the seven teachings but that should be something that is taught in the school. You plaster it to your students in the classroom and you say those to your students and the students should say them back and ingrain those....

In the First Nation culture they [people with special needs] are usually considered a gift because of all these teachings that you have to practice when you are working with an individual that has very high needs. Having respect for them. Just being there for them because they take a lot of care. You need to care a lot looking after them. There are a lot of teachings that would be applied to that. That is why in First Nation culture they believe that these individuals with high special needs are a gift from the creator or God.

The seven generation story was shared by a number the research participants as a culturally relevant practice of inclusive education. Participants stated that the seven generations story instructs students to think about their life as they are in always in the middle of seven generations. They are encouraged to learn about at least the three generations of people that came before them, what happened to them, how they spoke, learned and interacted with others. The Elders encourage knowing this information, as it is the three generations that come before you that affects who you are today. Students are then encouraged to think about their life and their behaviour. The Elders teach that everything one does, the decisions that you make will affect at least the next three generations that come after you. The participants in this study said that this teaching has specific relevance for developing a better understanding of how our behaviour affects future generations. This teaching has specific relevance to helping prevent fetal alcohol and drug related birth defects within future generations.

A number of participants referred to the spirit karma teaching as another foundation for First Nations inclusive instructional practice. Study participants shared that their parents or grandparents told them this story to guide our behaviour in terms of how we treat others, particularly those who are different from you in any way. Called the spirit karma teaching, Elders say that what you do to others, will come back to you. If you make fun of another person,

then others will make fun of you. If you exclude someone from the circle then at some point someone will exclude you from something you want to be a part of, which will hurt you very badly. Elders also say you are not to speak negatively about others or someone will speak negatively of you. Elders say this also works with good things, that if you help someone out, then others will be there to help you out in your time of need. If you are kind to others, it is more likely that others will be kind to you.

Some Elders say that we all have spirit guides, which travel ahead of us. Even if you think bad thoughts, you are sending out your spirit to go ahead of you and fight with the spirit of the other person. Elders say that educators in schools can use this teaching to help First Nations learners accept each other's differences and to create caring companionate learning communities. After explaining this teaching to me, one of the participants, a well-respected Elder from the northern Manitoba stated, "that teaching [the Karma teaching] should be taught in school to everyone."

Study participants identified a number of instructional/teaching practices, which are a part of a model First Nations inclusive education practice. Teaching techniques such as storytelling and modelling are inherently First Nations. Participants recommend using Elders in the classroom, and in student support programs in schools in First Nations communities. Study participants reported that Elders, and other community resources, are not only beneficial for teaching pro-social skills and practical skills such as hunting, trapping and medicine picking, but also have a calming/healing effect on students with social/emotional and behavioural challenges. As one experienced educator stated,

I highly encourage it [First Nations perspectives and practices for our students with special needs]. I do believe in it. It happens to be very effective. As a resource teacher, I

developed a component of outdoor education and the most enabling environment if you want to call it a sensory room where we had a sense of belonging. We have community people, a team of resource people, you know, elders, the granny program. That is where the grandmothers are. You know, the students learn the things that they need to learn. And it has to be very effective. These students have made tremendous gains academically, socially, name it, it was very effective. They loved school. They did not want to leave school because they had so much to do. You know, they had many hands on things. They were hearing many oral stories. You know modeling and things like that.

Learning the skills of listening and learning through observation is also highly valued with many First Nations communities in Manitoba. Known with western practice as guided practice, (I do, we do, you do) the participants in this study identified that learning through supported, guided and hands on practice is also an essential aspect of First Nations inclusive instructional practice. One teacher/consultant in this study stated,

In regards to specific cultural approaches, I think these students that do have some difficulties, they need, like, in our culture, there is a lot of repetition. Watch and observe. Then do. You know, they could use those kind of processes, right? Using a lot of encouragement, patience is important for all students. That is in our culture. And also being quiet. Let the student speak. Don't speak to the student. Hear from the student, you know. That is what I meant when in specific cultural approaches, I thought about them. And so our students are always strong in kinesthetics. That is how they learn the indigenous way and then if that is there if teachers would put in the time and the effort to have activities and tasks that have those components.

Participants suggested that experiential, hands on learning, particularly through land based activities, provides real life experiences, in which learners, particularly those with SEND learn best.

Many participants in this study report using First Nations traditional/ceremonial practices to help students develop and build upon positive self-identity. One teacher who participated in this study stated that she now uses First Nations ceremonial practices with some of the student referred to her resource program at her community school. She noted, ‘A lot of First Nations practices works for some of the students with special needs. For instance, we had a boy with ADHD; we used things-i.e., the sweat lodge, the fire, the pow wow. Sometimes an Elder comes out and sits by the fire and tell stories. He was totally interested in that and that practice improved his attention and his negative behaviour.’

When asked about First Nations inclusive instructional practice, participants in this study suggested that teachers in First Nations communities should use strength-based, achievement measurement rather than performance based assessment and teaching practices. Focusing on the gifts of the learner, along with teaching news skills, is an essential component of First Nations inclusive instructional practice. Participants in this study reported that building up and strengthening the natural gifts and talents inherent within every human being is a necessary focus of a First Nations culturally relevant model of inclusive instructional practice.

The participants in this study also recommended the use of First Nations communication practices such engaging in sharing circles to help build and maintain a positive classroom communities along with developing listening, prosocial and critical thinking skills within First Nations learners. An educator in this study stated, “With them explaining or talking about, just sharing circles and you know how the feelings and then how the effects it happens or that

nothing in this world is so bad that we have to do something to ourselves or something like that.

As well, we should have classes from grade seven all the way up on social emotional wellness.”

As one participant shared, techniques such as participating in sharing circles helps First Nations learners build self-regulatory skills imperative for working effectively in a group setting.

Participants also mentioned that cooperative learning, when First Nations learners work together helps build effective and collaborative classroom communities.

One participant suggested that a First Nations model of inclusive education must include learning within the context of the everyday lives of students with and without SEND. Through the following story, she indicated that “place based” model of education most definitely has a fundamental role within First Nations inclusive education practice. She shared,

There was one teacher, I really enjoyed seeing that. She was a young teacher. She was a super teacher. I was pulling into the parking lot and I saw these young grade 9 students running around. They had a piece of paper. And she was out there. I said “How come these students are out here running around?” And she said “Oh, in math we are talking about categorizing, something like that so the students had a table where they went and entered all these objects from our community, and she was applying that. Rather than just giving them a piece of paper, they applied it to something real.

Identification vs Labeling, Diagnosis and Racialization of Special Education

Other issues related to First Nations inclusive instructional practice raised by study participants include concerns about labelling and diagnosis of dis/ability/difference, and the over identification of dis/ability in First Nation learners in First Nations and non-First Nations education settings in Manitoba.

Identification, labelling and/or diagnosis of dis/ability is a contentious issue not only within First Nations education but within mainstream special/inclusive education as well. Based on responses from study participants, it appears as though labelling and diagnosis of difference remains a particularly contentious issue for many First Nations families, teachers and clinicians. From First Nations perspectives, the majority of participants expressed that labeling or diagnosis of dis/ability, or any difference for that matter, is not a part of First Nations perspective or practice. As one participant noted, “Historically we didn’t have many labels back then. It was considered a gift to have a child that has Down syndrome because you could learn so much from that child. You learn more love.” Another participant, raised with a sibling, whom she now knows had Down syndrome, said that he was never labelled or diagnosed and she always remembers him as a happy and very hard worker. She remembers her parents always telling other children that he was the hardest work and then everyone should try to be more like him. She stated, “He was never labelled nor judged or criticized in any way for his cognitive impairments.” Another First Nation teacher shared a great deal about the approach her mother used when raising her sister who lives with a “severe cognitive impairment”. She stated, “I don’t think it is important for First Nation people to have a label or a diagnosis. Yes, we understand that this child may have special needs, but it does not make him any different from the five other children in the home. The expectations are the same.”

In their interviews, three other veteran teachers attested that a non-labeling approach is consistent within First Nations inclusive education perspective and practice. The first participant stated, “I would personally say we need to eliminate labels. We need to see the person as a valuable classroom community member, and not view someone as that’s my IEP student.” The second participant stated,

We don't diagnose. And we don't label. And regardless whether there is something wrong with their body it doesn't necessarily mean wrong with your cognitive ability because you are still able to do things. There was this old man that had lost his arm but he was able to work with his one hand. You know it was very interesting when he worked. When he would make his roll your owns, you know making his own cigarettes, that was so fascinating. I used to love watching him. I love watching people with unique gifts, you know, the things that they were able to do.

The third participant stated, “First Nation families know, they know when a child may have special needs or a potential cognitive disability, but it’s not important for them to have the diagnosis. Ultimately, what difference does that make in their daily lives?”

Governments and First Nations school systems continue to use a labeling/diagnostic process, clearly originating out of a medical model of dis/ability and a western approach to special education, to determine eligibility for additional funding for specific students and to “gate keep” eligibility for specialized program involvement. Participants in this study strongly encouraged reconsidering such practice and moving towards supporting students with special gifts within First Nations schools and communities within Manitoba without it being necessary to label or diagnose. Shifting towards sufficient block, non-categorical and targeted education funding to address the diverse needs of all First Nations learners is a step towards this goal.

Participants in this study warned that, due to the many causal factors of remedial learning challenges already discussed, there has been, and continues to be, an over representation of First Nations learners in special education programs in both First Nations and non-First Nations education settings in Manitoba. Most participants recalled stories of either themselves, or their

children being perceived as delayed or learning disabled, and then placed into special education programs or classroom upon entering the provincial education systems. One teacher told a story about her son stating, “I had made a note here of a foster child [whom she eventually adopted] that was moved to an urban center and they battered him with assessments and of course they are always identified as having some kind of a delayed level and so they labeled right away.”

Another educator reported times when she moved into urban settings and the experiences her children faced. She stated,

but then again, you see, they see the Native kid and they automatically assume the kid needs enrichment. Never mind that my son came from a home whose mother was a teacher, whose Dad had a full-time job, you know. They just automatically assumed you were poor. But mind you, a lot of our people were. Nevertheless, they did marginalize our students. Because even when I think back, my daughter was 5 years old when she went to school in 1972 when she started school, she attended the provincial school as we lived in Transcona, right away, when I went for a parent-teacher interview I was so depressed because the teacher said “Oh, all your daughter wants to do is play. She is not interested in learning.” You know. Automatically, because she was native. So her learning disorder was detected! I was glad when we got out of the city we went to a training center for native people, so more native people could get into the work force in the city. I liked that school because it was mixed. There were many non-native families of workers who came here to work in that program and it was much happier. When I went for the June report she was one of the smart ones! You know total difference in how she was perceived before.

Another teacher reported a similar, more recent experience of one of his First Nations students.

He said,

I have witnessed students who moved to other jurisdictions, and have remedial skills and definitely have the capacity to learn, be labeled as “special needs”. There is a difference between a kid that is remedial and one with a true disability...a deeper “special need”. Case in point: a student that was included in the regular classroom here and received supports was immediately pigeon holed and put in a special needs class elsewhere. Then everything became a vicious cycle. The student did not like that, started skipping, and was labeled as having engagement issues. That was not the case in our school. There are old school attitudes about First Nations students; there is obvious prejudice.

It has been my experience, and a number of the study participants concur that attitudes toward First Nations learners, which continue to persist, contribute to an over representation of First Nations learners within special education programs throughout Manitoba. Participants report decades of unfair treatment and marginalization of First Nations students from as far back as they can remember.

But I think I am safe to say that not very many Native children attended public schools. Until the late 50s maybe. In the 60s it was horrible for racism. It was just God awful. And when they did go to public schools the majority were placed in what they called Occupational Entrance Courses (OEC) without any testing or anything. They just automatically assumed that if you were a Native, you were a poor learner.

Another participant shared, “The weaknesses I guess was that our learners were always improperly labeled as being mentally deficient and having an IQ lower than 70, you know because of the unfair assessments.”

Participants in this study reported that the over-identification of First Nations learners as dis/abled or cognitively impaired, often for the purpose of attaining additional funding also occurs in First Nations band operated schools in Manitoba. With little regulation and the chronic underfunding of First Nations schools, participants expressed both concern and a hope that schools and clinicians eliminate such practices. Participants suggested that adequate funding, culturally relevant support for multileveled learners in First Nations classrooms, and enhanced regulation and standards inherent through the creation of First Nations alliances of schools/school divisions should assist First Nations schools in moving in that direction. As one clinician stated, “clinicians are over diagnosing kids for the sake of getting the dollar value in your school to buy resources or whatever way they want to spend that money and that has to stop.”

When asked about students with SEND attending First Nations schools in Manitoba, the participants in this study felt that the problems faced by some First Nations learners identified as having SEND relate more to cultural and linguistic irrelevance of their schooling experience, particularly in the testing processes used within many First Nations schools. As exemplified by a First Nations clinician who participated in this study, he stated,

Over identification. They are classifying them and categorizing them. They are drawing the conclusion that they have special needs when, in fact, they maybe just learn differently. And that is what those these two scales show. That is what I have been

trained to look at. When you look at the verbal skills, we must acknowledge the fact that the verbal sub-test of any standardized test are mediated by the English language.

Children coming from remote First Nations in northern communities speak a different language, the language of Cree, Dene, etc., a different group of languages being spoken fluently at home and in the community. It is an English language environment because the instruction is in English, the text books are English and so the danger of over identification is real because of the challenge the English language presents.

Increasing the number of First Nations clinicians and certified resource teachers adequately trained in cultural adaptation of the level B, (resource based) and level C (clinical) assessment producers, preferably by those who are fluently bilingual, are all strategies suggested by participants to improve/enhance programming in this area of cultural relevance within First Nations inclusive instructional practice. The move towards adequate, non-capped and non-categorical block funding for special education within First Nations schools in Manitoba will also enhance and reinforce culturally relevant programming and practice.

Related to the identification of special needs/exceptionalities in First Nations, all three clinicians who participated in this study engaged in lengthy discussions about both the challenges and benefits of, working within and bridging worldviews of their culture of origin and the models and frameworks provided to them through their formal western clinical training. As one clinician stated,

Surprisingly, I couldn't find work because the people in the schools did not understand what I did; specifically in my home community. When I went for an interview with the organization here I remember they had some sense. You know, they asked for a

clinician. I remember when I went there; there were a lot of questions. I don't know if they were trying to get a feel for what I knew or they didn't have a full understanding of the work we do.

The clinicians who participated in the study report both challenges and opportunities connected to building professional practice between the worldviews of their cultures of origin and their training situated largely within western Eurocentric clinical models. This was aptly stated by one of the clinicians who shared a story when faced with the challenge of competing, at times, contradictory worldviews:

I phoned an elder. A guy who was a teacher down in Wisconsin. He is an old man but he e-mails. I phoned him and I talked to him over a period of time and I reached that point when I told him I wanted to leave because I don't think this place [the university providing his clinical training] is for me. I know what I was told and I gave him the story about that in order to help my people I have to get education and bring it back to them. But he said, you can quit you can go home if you want to. But there is something important and I have to be honest with you about. When you learn what something is, he says, you will understand what it is not. He left that with me and that is all he said. He wouldn't tell me anymore then. So he left that to sit with me and I came to realize that if I am opposed in any way to what western science has to offer I need to be darn sure of what it is that I am opposing then. So that motivated me that I need to find out everything I can. Even to this day I think about that. He said once you learn what something is, you will understand what it is not. And so that is the critical piece of information for me.

This clinician also stated,

You need to be open. But don't accept things without questioning. You know, even today I am told that when we are around teachings you need to ask why. That simple question why. Our people need to start asking why. Any practice that we are doing in the school we need to be asking why.

The complexities of the assessment and identification process for First Nations students with special needs/exceptionalities, was a reoccurring theme with the clinicians interviewed for this study. The clinicians cited English as an additional language, the stigmatization of First Nations learners, and the remedial learning needs as factors adding to the complexity of clinical work within First Nations education settings in Manitoba. The First Nations clinicians noted the importance of engaging and building trust with First Nations parents, who, for a multitude of factors, have great distrust of the clinical disciplines. (I will expand upon these themes within the findings section of this dissertation.) The clinicians identified their ongoing and steadfast commitment to build First Nations clinical programs and strongly expressed the desire to see more First Nations clinicians working within the system to enhance the cultural relevance within the school based clinical/intervention process within the First Nations education system in Manitoba.

In the following section of this chapter, I will focus on participant recommendations for improvement of First Nations inclusive educational systems and practices they feel will result in improved educational outcomes for all First Nations learners. Participants in this study suggested that adhering to these recommendations will result in a brighter future for all First Nations learners in Manitoba. Centered within a dialogue of hope for the future, I will share

participant suggestions about what needs to occur to improve and enhance the educational experiences of all First Nations learners in Manitoba.

Key Finding Part 3: Ways Forward: Towards and Bright Future for all First Nations Learners in Manitoba

The participants in this research not only identified a multitude of often overlapping and intersecting factors that affect learning within First Nations communities, but also a model of First Nations inclusive education practice for consideration. They also provided many recommendations as to how the current system of education in First Nations communities can evolve and improve to meet the diverse learning needs in First Nations schools in Manitoba. In this chapter, I will provide a summary of firsthand accounts of participant recommendations related to resource allocation, service and support requirements for schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba, and First Nations inclusive education teaching principles and practices.

The factors contributing to the current situation in First Nations schools are both complex and multilayered. The solutions to remediate the current situation will likely need to be as well. As one of the clinicians who participated in this project stated, “When you look at one particular issue, then you are drawn into another. It is multi-layered. There is no easy quick fix solution to what is going on and I believe the answers are within the questioning,”

Improving outcomes within any education system is challenging. The same is so, if not more so, for First Nations education systems in Manitoba today. Changes in relation to past and current practice, questioning whose worldviews are at the heart of the content of curricula, and identifying what constitutes, and who determines success and achievement is interrelated. Self-determination must be at the core of any attempt to improve educational outcomes for First Nations learners in Manitoba and throughout Canada.

Attempts to solve or move towards resolution of issues within First Nations education are often compartmentalized, at times piecemeal and often rather simplistic. For example, looking at curriculum content in isolation of funding allocation, or vice versa, is not likely to lead to long term, sustainable solutions. A critical examination of language issues, curriculum content, assessment practices, resource allocation, the effects of poverty on First Nations learners, and engaging parents and grandparents, many still affected by the wounds of the past, must be considered if we expect lasting change and long term sustainable improvement in academic and social emotional functioning within First Nations schools in Manitoba.

The participants in this study suggest that a more complex, multilayered response to, and practice within First Nations education is required. As stated by one clinician I interviewed, “the issues require more and broader conversation and critical thinking.” Based on inherent treaty rights with the Crown, Canada must provide First Nations the opportunity, and the resources required, to move towards system wide structural and transformative change. Transformation of education for First Nations learners in Manitoba today is an opportunity for consciousness raising and moving towards structural change, which will benefit all Manitobans, and the future of our province and country.

Rather than point sole blame on First Nations students, their parents or educators in First Nations schools, or place 100% blame on First Nations, provincial or federal governments, this project is an opportunity to reflect, to think deeply and critically, and to listen to those most directly involved in receiving, and now delivering First Nations education in Manitoba. It is also an opportunity for all stakeholders take some responsibility for both the past and current situation(s) and context(s) within First Nations education, and then move forward to create points

of change in order to increase relevance and effectiveness of education within First Nations communities in Manitoba.

I begin this chapter considering the recommendations of research participants related to the allocation of resources for schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. As one participant stated, “You cannot just throw money at a system and expect it to improve, but equalization of resource allocation is a darn good place to start.” Another participant stated, “Money isn’t always the answer, but it is part of it.”

Resource Allocation

Adequate resource allocation was the most prevalent recommendation provided by the research participants to improve education in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Within their interviews, all participants stated that every facet of education programming in First Nations communities is significantly underfunded. All participants recommended that the education dollars provided by the Government of Canada to First Nations operated schools be at least on par, or exceed the amounts provided by the Government of Canada to provincial run education systems in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Directly related to this, participants shared that staff within First Nations schools receive lower financial compensation resulting in high staff turnover and, at times, morale problems and lowered expectations of both staff and students. Participants recommended that all education staff working in First Nations education systems receive salaries on par with education staff in comparable geographic locations in Manitoba. One participant stated, “I would like to see the budget up to par to the provincial schools. The teachers deserve to be paid the same salary as those teaching the same materials [in other jurisdictions], and more often with higher needs.”

Directed at First Nations Chiefs and Councils, all participants recommended that First Nations target the funding they do receive for education and use this money for education purposes only. A clinician in this study emphatically stated,

I think all education funding should be targeted, however in First Nations communities we were underfunded across the board. A large part of the education budget is taken to reduce debt and our children should not pay for the mistakes of others who have been reckless. So as long as the money is not targeted, that will be the case and children will not have access to the resources or special services they need. It has to change.

The third recommendation related to resource allocation from study participants focused on the current processes the Federal Government of Canada uses to fund First Nations education in Manitoba. Rather than piecemeal, siloed and proposal driven approach used for accessing education funds, which is the approach currently used, participants suggested that funding be determined based on the total amount to educate “the whole child”. Providing an adequate per student allocation, rather than having to apply every year for siloed, proposal driven grants would greatly enhance efficiency and effectiveness of programs at the local level. Allowing the First Nations community to apply for funding whenever a student comes into their school, and basing that funding on the need of the whole child, was also a recommendation provided by many participants. “Why not base funds on the needs of the student. Yes, have that base amount that they are giving, right? But if a new student comes in and you know that you don’t have the funding for them there. They need to have extra funding available and that is going to help that community.”

Participants in this study recommended a number of changes to the funding process for special/inclusive education supports and services for First Nations schools in Manitoba. Most research participants shared the advantages and struggles associated with intervention-based, high-cost special education funding, capped since the 2006/07 school year. The majority of participants indicated they preferred intervention funding for high cost special education compared to the application-based approach used within First Nations communities prior to the 2006/07 school year. The first recommendation for special education was that the Government of Canada lift the cap on special education intervention amounts currently provided to each First Nation school in Manitoba. As one participant shared,

Well one of the things I like about the intervention model is that there is no yearly application for each student because that was so time consuming. Another strength I find about the intervention-based model is the resource teachers became more proficient by using all the testing batteries. I find that this is good. They are able to interpret a lot more and understand a lot more about the student. And the major weakness I found is that, like I said before, when a new student comes to our school that is at our cost. There is no extra funding. We absorb them with what we have now. And one of the other weaknesses is that all special education salaries are taken out of the high cost budget and that leaves nothing for materials or equipment.

The second recommendation related to special education funding provided by participants is that First Nations target and use all special education funding, including both low and high cost, specifically for supports and services for students with SEND (including remedial learning needs). In addition, participants also recommended that First Nations education systems develop and implement mechanisms for monitoring and accounting for the educational outcomes

of students with SEND. As one participant stated, “I think we need to continue with intervention based model. The change is that it really needs to be targeted. And some mechanism in place for accountability.” Another long-time resource teacher stated, “It [low cost special education funding, and all education funding for First Nations] should be targeted. No it’s not being targeted because sometimes it doesn’t even reach a school.” The final recommendation related to special education funding made by study participants is that resources be available to build capacity of First Nations staff to provide regional clinical support services for all First Nations schools. Participants suggested using economies of scale to hire full-time clinical staff rather than relying on expensive contract employees for the delivery of such services. Participants felt it important for local schools to be able to use special education funds to develop traditional inclusive education practices through incorporating Elders into student support services and employing community specific, cultural approaches to inclusion education such as land based and hands on teaching practices.

Related to adequate base education amounts, participants in this study felt that funding for First Nations schools should enable the school to offer enhanced course and program options for all First Nations learners including vocational programs such as trades and technology as part of the regular high school course offerings. Participants also recommended that funding for First Nations schools must include resources for a range of First Nations language programs including First Nations language immersion, bi lingual programs, and/or full First Nations language integration cross all subject and grade level year, unit, and lesson plans. Finally, one participant suggested, that due to the large numbers of school aged children not attending school in First Nations communities, “funding be provided so that programs can be developed for school aged children and adolescents who are living in First Nations communities but currently

not attending or engaged within existing education systems within their communities.” This participant suggested that the Government of Canada should fund creative supports, services and programs to reengage these students, many of whom she thinks have special needs, back into the education system in her community.

Other study participants suggested that adequate funding for programming to address the social emotional/ mental health needs faced by First Nations learners be included in the base education funding and all stakeholders target this funding specifically for these purposes. The current allocation of 86\$ per student is insufficient to hire staff to address these issues of their students in this area.

Finally, not what some National First Nations political leaders, who see the sovereignty demands of First Nations as primary, may feel, a number of study participants suggested that First Nations must move to protect and guarantee First Nations education funding through federal statutory laws, so that adequate funding is not dependent on the government of the day. According to one participant,

There should be legislation for First Nations education. In fact education, whether it be federal or provincial, each kid has a right to be educated with all the same bells and whistles that the other kids have, whether it be provincial or federal. And also for special education. Why should a child be denied the right to an equal education because of the color of their skin or where they were born?

Specific to education transformation and reformation, in the following section, I will outline recommendations of participants in relation to the specific services and supports they feel

are required to meet the needs of all learners in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Services and Supports

I organize the services and supports for First Nations inclusive education settings suggested by study participants, into the following three categories including in school support, second and third level supports including First Nation regional clinical supports and services, and then transition/community based adult, dis/ability specific supports and services.

In school supports and services. Study participants suggested that in-school supports are required to ensure effective inclusive education instruction in First Nations schools begins with well rounded, consistent, and well trained, classroom teachers, able to deal with children with multiple needs and differing levels of academic functioning. First Nations educators, with exposure to a wider range of experiences and cultures, and with critical thinking skills, can provide the foundation for this system. As one clinician stated,

We want teachers with good skills, safe spaces/support, relevant strategies and the flexibility to change. We need adequate resources, and appropriate compensation. They [teachers from her community] need to go away and they need to get into those programs, and they need to surround themselves by people who are not like themselves. They really need to strengthen and enhance their thinking and develop some, I guess, critical thinking, even about what goes on in their community. They have to hear the voices of people from other cultures.

A teacher from northern isolated First Nation community shared a strategy utilized by her community is now using. She stated, “We are trying to get teachers to go out for a year or two,

somewhere else and come back and you will be a better teacher. That is what we are working on.”

Second, participants identified having sufficient, well-trained and certified special education/resource teachers who can support a wider range of student needs at the classroom level. One participant indicated that, “You should have two resource teachers for every 200 students.” Participants recommended that resource teachers provide both support for student with severe to profound dis/abilities, along with in class supports such as co planning and co teaching so that classroom staff can adequately meet the diverse and remedial needs of all learners within every First Nations classroom in Manitoba. Participants suggested that providing co teachers and academic coaches would enhance small group and multi levelled instruction in schools in First Nations communities throughout Manitoba.

Participants suggested that Elders are a vital component of the student support services programs and that every school should consider Elders as essential services. Participants recommended that trained and certified mental health and guidance counselors, at both the regional and local levels, be in place. A number of study participants also endorsed that alternative spaces such as calm down/sensory rooms are a vital component of in school supports and services. As one teacher commented, “A sensory room! That is what I would want for each school. But they would a schedule of when these kids could come here. They’re not just going to spend all their time in the sensory room (that’s not what I’m saying) but they need to experience those types of environments.”

Participants also identified the need for in-class and well-trained education assistants as a part of in school services. Particularly in smaller, more remote and isolated communities,

participants identified that typically it is the educational assistant who will carry out the clinical recommendations of the visiting regional clinicians. “So E.A.s (Educational Assistants) should be trained specific like the way we train our E.A.s for speech and language development.”

Participants suggested that expanded program/course options and alternative programs, such as community survival skills, be available in every First Nations school in Manitoba. One participant said, “I think life skills should be changed to more a how to survive in your own community type of program. I find with the special education involving the western system it is just all academic and there are no survival skills.” Another participant suggested,

Yes, there needs to be more on an emphasis on how to build their own homes. That kind of thing is lacking too. Well, a lot of that like would be to go out of the school instead of being in the school from 9:00 to 3:30 every day. They should be out on the land for blocks of time. I think right now there is too much emphasis on trying to make the students read and do math. Sometimes if a person has a dis/ability, they are only going to progress so far but it is not to say they cannot do all this other stuff once they get older.

Second and third level First Nations clinical support services. Many participants in this study mentioned the need for accessible and “culturally competent” clinical supports and services for every First Nations school in Manitoba. The clinicians interviewed report such extreme demand for their services and that their current workloads are beyond manageable. One teacher, very exasperated due to the lack of clinical supports and services in her northern isolated community said, “I don’t know how to work with them because I never had to work with a high autistic. But if I would have had a psychologist to test him and give me feedback. We could

reach so much more if we had a child development clinic. We could work with these kids in our communities, we could know how. We would just need to be given the tools.”

With overwhelming consensus, participants felt that investing in the training of First Nations clinicians, Resource Teachers and Educational Assistants would lead to enhancing cultural relevance of inclusive education assessment and instructional practices in the classroom, resource and clinical areas. As another First Nations clinician in the study stated,

This might sound like a cliché, but any child I work with, what makes me stop in my tracks is I look at that child and I ask myself, what if this was my son? What if this was my daughter? How would I work with my son or my daughter in this situation and that puts it on a different level and I think I move more cautiously.

The participants in this study cited numerous reasons why they need certified and well trained First Nations clinicians and Resource Teachers representing the various regional/linguistic dialects and communities, particularly those from northern Manitoba. First, study participants said that First Nations schools need First Nations clinicians and resource/support teachers because of their knowledge of First Nations languages and language structures. Second, participants also stated that First Nations schools need First Nations professionals due to their cultural knowledge and competency, their knowledge of the moorays and histories of the communities, their long-term commitment to First Nations communities. Third, participants also stated that First Nations practitioners show a greater ability and commitment to establish and maintain rapport with parents, who, for many reasons already mentioned, have mistrust towards professionals within clinical and resource/education systems. Inappropriate assessments used to generate resources for the school and inappropriate and

inaccurate labelling of special needs are among the many reasons cited why so many parents of First Nations children mistrust “special education” systems within First Nations schools in Manitoba.

Some participants in this study suggested that First Nations schools use aggregation and ‘economies of scale’ to provide regional models of community based clinical and cultural support services in order to meet both the prevention, remedial, and intervention needs of students with SEND. One model could consist of five regional multi-disciplinary clinical/cultural teams, including speech and language pathologists, reading specialists, social workers/traditional healers, school psychologists, Deaf hard of hearing specialists, inclusion specialists, American Sign Language (ASL) trainers, audiologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dis/ability advocates, family support workers and Elders, preferably both First Nations and bilingual, for every five First Nations schools in Manitoba. In her interview, one First Nations clinician stated,

In our division we service schools in 43 communities. In order for us to do a good quality job I think being assigned to only five schools it could be done. In Manitoba, there would probably need ten speech language clinicians and for psychology, we only have one that is First Nations and this one person would not be able to service all of Manitoba. I would imagine we would probably need maybe even close to ten or more school psychologists.

A veteran resource teacher also noted the needs for bilingual First Nations clinicians to service First Nations learners. He indicated,

Language barriers are huge. The child speaks English at home, it is English with a Cree cultural base. It is “creenglish”. So the assessment has to be relevant and those who are

assessing have to have a true understanding of First Nations learners. Hence, my argument that at the level 3 assessment [clinical] I firmly believe that those people who are trained in the educational psychology level it would be preferable if those were First Nation people themselves. And from that specific region.

Another teacher/consultant suggested, “Like I said, I would set up a Child Guidance Clinic program for all of the First Nations. And also for training. Have these cohorts for Resource Teachers so that they can be trained.”

Discussing the need for First Nations clinicians, one First Nations resource teacher who participated in the study stated, “I find that when we had Stan [a First Nations psychologist] coming in to do assessments the parents are more willing to come in and sit and they will open up more and talk more to him.” Another consultant and former resource teacher stated, “Parents felt more at ease with the First Nation [clinician]. I ended up having more meetings. If I mention the name of the other one [the non-First Nations clinician] they are going to meet with, the parents won’t come. The First Nations clinician does not talk above the people. He is the same level as the people.”

When asked about the importance of clinicians being able to speak a First Nations language, one clinician stated,

Oh, for sure I use my Cree language in my work. I have a good example. I took over for (one of the other speech therapists). One of my school principals, in one of my schools, she was telling me about this kid that doesn't want to do anything. He would just sit there and cry. So, she warned me ahead of time that she couldn't get anything out of this kid. He is in grade one this year. So I go in there and he was trying to cry. No matter what I

said to him you could tell he wanted to cry. Until I said to him in Cree ‘Don't cry. I was only playing with you.’ So my Cree came in handy there. So I understood then that he doesn't understand English.

Respondents in this study also suggested that the clinical service teams working for First Nations education systems move towards more preventative approaches such as whole class language development throughout the school year as opposed to just working from a clinical intervention model after the child shows delays in meeting curriculum demands. Some participants in this study suggested that the over identification of First Nations children with learning challenges is directly related to the lack of preventative early intervention and language enrichments programs and supports at the community level. Another veteran First Nations educator stated, “Anyway, what I was trying to get at is there are so many students for speech and language. I think if they had more emphasis on language development, and it does not necessarily have to be in English. It could be the Native language and I think there is an indication in that aspect. I think it boils down to the fact that English is not our first language.”

Transition and community based, adult dis/ability supports and services. Likely a result of the lack of publically funded systems of services by the Federal Government of Canada, participants in this study attest to the fact that a framework of community based dis/ability related adult supports and services is just simply not available in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Neither the departments of INAC (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada) or FNIHB (First Nations and Inuit Health Branch) have accepted responsibility to fund services such as independent, community living supports, employment supports such as job crafting or coaching, independent living resource center type services for adults with dis/abilities, public advocacy or trustee services, nor self-managed home and community care.

All of the participants in this study shared heartfelt stories of family members or their work with students with special needs through to grade 12, only to have them either have to leave the community, or stay with family members without any community based support after they finish their secondary education. Within the transcripts of the interviews with study participants, there are over 20 pages of stories shared about the lack of adult dis/ability related supports and services and the often tragic effects on many First Nations people with disabilities. One of the many examples is as follows,

Once they [students with SEND] finish school there is really no transitioning. You know we all have to feel a purpose. In our case, we work, we make a living, and we provide for our families. We are able to buy nice things when we want. I guess it is almost like we are filling almost any need that we might have. But are there opportunities for my brother [an adult who lives with a cognitive dis/ability) to do that in our community? There is nothing. So, my brother stays home.

With tears in her eyes, another study participant, a resource teacher with over 40 year of experience in First Nations education, stated,

It is really hard to see those students leave school to go to nothing. I am still in contact with a lot of students as they come to visit me or I go and visit with them out in the community. You just really want more for them. Like some of the kids that I worked with in the nursery, I still see them today after they are out of high school. And that is the special needs students. And a lot of them stay with a grandparent, and then the grandparent is getting older. And then, what is going to happen to that student?

The participants in this study not only reported the complete lack of adult based dis/ability supports and services in First Nations communities, but also provided concrete examples of the types of culturally relevant programs, models and resources that are needed to enhance the lives of adults with dis/abilities living in First Nations communities. One teacher stated,

There has to be community based living and adaptive skills for adults. We have to prepare them for life after school as adults. Our focus should be on developing good people, not just good students. We need to provide them opportunities such as life skills, independent living and mentoring within the community. The housing shortage, I know down in Winnipeg they have group homes or special housing. The federal government should be looking at that. You have some that may want to live with their mom and dad forever but just the same they should have the opportunity to have a place of their own and support in that way - independent living.

From the participants responses it is clear that there is no shortage of ideas or the motivation to create and deliver adult dis/ability supports and services, simply an absence of any type of financial support from any level of government to make it happen.

Along with enhancing and targeting resource allocation, and increasing services and supports within both schools and communities, the participants in this study identified a number of key teaching principles and practices that incorporate a First Nations model of inclusive education. The education related principles and practices suggested by research participants to achieve inclusion within First Nations education settings include; Minopimatisiwin (developing good people), achievement oriented/strengths based practice and child and family centered

schools. Early intervention for remedial learners, best practices associated with “western” based inclusive education practice, hands on visual and land based education with Elder involvement, expanded program and course options, and enhanced First Nations cultural practice are also considered essential aspects of First Nations inclusive education practice. In the following section, I will share recommendations of research participants in each of the above noted areas.

First Nations Pedagogy Teaching Principles and Practices

The participants in this study offered many programmatic and pedagogical suggestions related to the practice of First Nations inclusive education. Some recommendations are philosophical, others more practical in nature. The following recommendations have implications related to the allocation of resources and the amount of resources required to provide culturally relevant and meaningful models of First Nations inclusive education. In addition, these recommendations provide school staff with strategies to educate diverse children in First Nations multi-levelled classrooms. The ideas can also guide what models of practice might be used by classroom teachers and resource/special education staff in First Nations schools. The suggestions also relate to how curriculum content may need to change, how we provide second and third levels supports and finally how First Nations school staff can relate to parents and other community stakeholders.

Minopimatisiwin/developing good people. Translated into English, *Mino pi ma ti si win*, is a Cree term that means, “Living a good life.” Many participants in this study felt that *Mino pi ma ti si win* is the first component of the practice of First Nations inclusive education. Elders in this study suggested caution when defining what makes a good life and who determines what that good life is. One Elder stated, “everyone in the community has the right to contribute and feel good about themselves.” Elders suggest that “a good life”, from a western perspective,

may entail accumulating material wealth and possessions. They also suggest that within Indigenous worldviews, First Nations people often determine what good life is by how much you share, how kind you are to others, and/or how generous you are in your help towards others. As one clinician stated, “First Nations schools should first and foremost be developing good people.” According to an administrator/resource teacher who participated in this study, “I think in our education vision is to achieve Minopimatisiwin which is to lead a good life, living in balance and our school mission statement is to embrace our culture and language.” She also stated, “To us success in our own context is for our people to survive and to live the good life, right? And who is telling us what the good life is? Is it capitalism and all this materialism and stuff? People who have more things, does it make them any happier? We have our own way of defining success.”

One of the clinicians in this study began his first interview stating,

Yes, we are not just nurturing their minds because our teachings tell us that we don't focus on only one aspect of our being. Our focus is on developing a good human being, good people, which includes someone who may not go to university but is respectful, is kind and has humility and you know all those teachings we talk about. I have always maintained for my own children that if they can have their independence, self – sufficiency, self-determination and be ok with who they are, and the choices they are making in life, then they are successful. All that other stuff is secondary.

Participants in this study identify that the theme of developing good people, teaching all children to treat others with respect, to live with a generous and kind spirit, all while being humble, often

tied to the seven sacred teachings, is the cornerstone and foundation of a First Nations inclusive education paradigm.

Everyone can succeed – achievement-oriented and strengths-based practice. The second major theme of a First Nations inclusive education paradigm identified by the majority of participants, is that everyone can succeed. Study participants reminded me repeatedly that historically First Nations education systems were inclusive and failure proof for everyone. Elders in this study shared that all children have gifts to contribute and must have the opportunity to share these gifts with others if they are to develop to his or her full potential.

Strengths based practice, and focusing on the gifts of all was a common recommendation of all study participants. The following story, an event that occurred during a phone interview with one of the study participants, reflects the use of strengths based practice as an inherent component of First Nations inclusive education paradigm.

The story goes something like this,

Over the phone, as I asked one of the respondents about his perspective of what a First Nations inclusive education paradigm might look like. He immediately recalled one particular student he had been working with for quite a while. He also said that the student's mother was a very involved in her daughter's education. He explained to me that she lived right next door to the school and had walked so many times to his office that she had created a path from her front door to the front door of the school, which was very close to his office. He rather excitedly asked me if he could run and get the mother right and have her speak to me right in the middle of my interview with him. Before I could answer, I heard the phone hit the top of his desk and I knew that he was running to her house to ask her to be part of the interview with me.

Within minutes, the resource teacher was on the phone excited to pronounce to me that this mother of this student wanted to share her story with me. He told me to 'just wait' or 'ches qua', as he informed me that he was now about to put the phone on hands free. He said that the mother of his student was just plugging in her compact disk player and was about to play something. 'Listen close', he said, 'this will absolutely amaze you.' I waited as the mother said hello to me and then proceeded to play a recording of someone on piano playing the most remarkable rendition of recognizable classical music from both Bach and Beethoven. After the music stopped, the mother announced with pride that it was a recording of her daughter who had only recently started taking lessons through the "special education" program at the school.

The mother and the resource teacher took turns sharing their stories about the young girl playing the piano. They explained that she is one of the students in the schools' resource program and the biological grandchild of the woman on the other end of the phone. They both described the student, whom I will call Jennie, as a young girl aged 15, who was prenatally exposed to alcohol and other drugs and then given to paternal grandmother to raise. The two described the many challenges this young girl faced within the school system, including not being able to learn to read at the same pace as her peers, and not being able to complete simple mathematics such as counting to five or understanding the multiplication table. They both shared that this young girl struggled in school and had a very hard time fitting in.

This teacher and the mother then went on to say that, despite her challenges, this student had amazing gifts and talents. They indicated that her memory was remarkable and that she could memorize great amounts of information if another person read books to her. They said that simply by chance, the resource teacher enrolled her in music lessons in a nearby town, as it was the only extracurricular activity not filled by other students in the school. Much to

everyone's amazement, the music teacher called the parent and resource teacher saying that this student had a very remarkable gift. Within a few short lessons, it was apparent that she could identify any note played on the piano by ear. Although unable to read notes, she quickly demonstrated that if she was able to listen to a piece of music, any piece of music, that she could instantly replay it, typically without flaw. Once she learned a piece of music by ear, she never forgot it.

After they discovered her talent for music, along with a photographic auditory (not visual) memory they knew this must be used within this student's education. Both the resource teacher, and the parent, shared that her teachers now use these strengths to program and build her academic skills and excitedly shared that she is now thriving in school both academically and socially. They said that since focusing on her gifts her emotional wellbeing had improved and that she now feels she has a bright and hopeful future. After listening to more of her music, and hearing the mutual excitement of her teacher and parent, a warm feeling of contentment flowed over me. The soothing music they played for me made me happy to be a part of the story they shared with me.

This student is now in grade 5 of the Royal Conservatory of Music (University of Toronto) and is a gifted and talented artist, as so many students in First Nations schools are.

This story reflects the strong relationship between the school and the parent of child with SEND in this community. A First Nations inclusive education paradigm is working with and not against and as this story reflects, is based on finding and then building on the strengths of the student rather than focusing on the deficits or challenges. It is then finding the strengths that all students have and using those strengths to compensate for the challenges and deficits. This story

also reflects that what is in place is working for this child. It is creative and tells an educational story of inclusion, connectedness, everyone working together and measurement of achievement versus measurement of negative performance according standardized tests and curricular norms.

This strengths based paradigm has particular relevance to classroom, resource, and clinical assessment processes, as well as the format and content of individual education and behavioural intervention plans, which participants say should be portfolio based and student driven. According to every person interviewed in this study, strengths based practice is most definitely an essential element of a First Nations inclusive education paradigm. As another participant noted, “I think that if that is part of their program at least they are learning or displaying their own talents to others what they know. They are not just empty, they have things to share and give to others. So I think that that is the best way.”

According to another participant in this study teachers should ask, “What are they [First Nations learners] good at? Are they good at working with their hands and/or do they enjoy building structures? Well, isn’t that a reflection that they could be a good carpenter, given the chance, given the opportunity?” Another educator stated, “The student’s strength has to be focused on for the student to develop as according to the traditional ways of how he or she can contribute to the community in a way that is meaningful for that student.”

Related to achievement oriented and strengths based practice, participants in this study suggested that having high expectations of all learners is an important aspect of First Nations inclusive education practice. One educator who participated in this study emphatically stated, “If you have high expectations in mind and that is transferred to the students, students very often will just rise to the level of expectation that the teacher has of them. They thought that they could

not learn and that was an enormous part of the old system. Now that is something we have had to shed.” Another participant, an Elder and retired resource teacher suggested that a strengths based education practice is inherently First Nations in nature. She suggested,

We have got to get away from the Western model that has been so damaging to certain individuals. Like a student has been labeled with such a low I.Q. you know. And this same student is such a profound artist. I am not an artist. I don't have talent in that. He is better than me. She is better than me. That kind of thing has to be realized. These people have their own strengths. They have their own talent. When you are talking about that lady without a vocal cord who can't speak. I had a boy and that was in his record in his file that at birth that is what happened. He could not read. He could not write on his own. He could print and all that stuff. He was a handsome boy but very fluent in Cree, very knowledgeable and wise in the ways of our people but he could not read or write.

Family and child centered schools. Family and child centered schools was the next most frequent philosophy/practice participants associated with First Nations inclusive education paradigms. First Nations recognize that parents, grandparents and extended family members are the child's first and most important teachers in life. Clinicians and educators working in First Nations schools, resoundingly recognize the need for a broad framework of education related supports, not just for students, but for their families and other community members as well. Related to the historical and contemporary forms of trauma, and the negative schooling experiences of many people in First Nations communities, a great deal of healing work is required to build trust and provide resources and supports for family members of First Nations learners. Such recommendations require the rethinking of the role, and purview of schools

within First Nations communities in Manitoba and throughout Canada. Practices such as contacting parents of students on a regular basis to build rapport and regular reporting on student achievement participants said can and should be a regular part the educational practice within all First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Going beyond simply having a home school coordinator, which is most often the case in First Nations schools in Manitoba, participants felt that programs and services should be expanded to include parent literacy and support groups, parenting skills training and strategies for how to building literacy and numeracy skills within the home and the community. As one clinician stated, “You know, that parenting piece is so important to what our children are doing and how they are doing within the schools. You know, if you do not have that parental support a lot of things can go wrong for any child. The message needs to be sent that education is important.” One participant, an resource teacher with decades of experience shared, “To tell you the truth I have been thinking about this more recently and thinking about placing myself in the classroom and asking myself how could I be an effective teacher and not only help my students, but help my parents to understand how to help my students.” Another participant, a First Nations instructional leader commented, “There are family breakdowns, separations, so I think we need a lot more supports for our families there and that is why we are looking at appropriate parenting and family programs.”

The participants in this study not only displayed an awareness of the importance of extending learning opportunities to the families of the learners in First Nations communities, they also demonstrated systemic approaches to build the capacity and empower the parents of students in First Nations communities throughout Manitoba. As one clinician stated,

Inclusive education systems have programs that build up parents, showing them how to get involved. Providing opportunities for the parents to take ownership of the child's education is very important. We need to provide families opportunities to grow. The idea of positive self-identity, positive self-esteem, and family dynamics plays a huge part of that. When families are struggling to provide the most basic needs for their children a lot of times they aren't even thinking about what the child is going through at school. A lot of families are affected like that, more than we know.

A number of participants suggested that the role of the resource teacher includes advocating for community based supports and services, and building advocacy skills of parents of students with SEND. As one consultant, an educator who has worked with many hundreds of children with dis/abilities and their parents noted, "Parents need training. Parents need support. But as the primary resource teacher, I am also advocating for the parents. I had an opportunity to have these parents receive training and professional development because they need help. And they need respite as well. They are the only caregivers. They are only human. They burn out."

From a systemic child and family perspective, many participants in this study noted the need to enhance the role of parents to ensure that schools are responsive to the unique needs of families in each First Nations community. As one clinician/participant reported, "How do you break down those barriers that exist within the community, much less, than exist at the provincial or federal level? I mean, it is difficult. The ideal system would be one that is responsive to the child and the family, and that is responsive to the community, and one that is unique to that particular community." A resource teacher/participant from a northern First Nations community, very committed to enhancing family literacy in her community provided the following example,

You need to improve caregiver literacy, caregiver engagement. The caregivers need to understand they are a valuable part of the process, an asset. For example, there is a mother in school who previously never went past Gr 9. Her children are in school and were faltering; their attendance was not the best. The mother started taking classes here. It was a clear demonstration of the power of a parent and the impact it made on her children. That is education for all. If you empower the parent, you empower the kids.

Early intervention for remedial learners. Early intervention for remedial learners was the next most frequent recommendation participants offered in relation to the practice of inclusive education in First Nations schools in Manitoba. Citing the overrepresentation of First Nations students “perceived” to have special needs, functioning below grade level expectations in middle years and high school, participants recommended a general shift to addressing remedial literacy and numeracy needs much earlier in a First Nations child’s educational career. Participants recommended using preventative whole class or small group remediation in the early years to reduce the incidence of students with SEND in middle and senior high school in First Nations communities in Manitoba. A number of participants suggested using the supports of speech and language and reading clinicians early in order to develop, and train school staff to implement early intervention program such as “Learn to Read” and “Speak to Me”, rather than simply assessing academic problems in response to lower functioning at the middle years and high school levels. As one participants noted, “we cannot continue to promote remedial learners as they fall further and further behind.”

Participants note that all teachers need to become more proficient in teaching reading and in building both literacy and numeracy skills within multileveled classrooms in First Nations schools in Manitoba. Research participants noted that resource or support/co-teachers and

academic coaches need skills to build these capacities within classroom teachers, particularly at the early years level. Participants recommended that First Nations post-baccalaureate training programs be established to assist resource teachers practicing in First Nations communities in Manitoba to develop these skills.

Participants indicated that resources are required for First Nations schools to hire resource teachers, co-teachers, literacy and numeracy coaches, and education assistants. Resource teacher/co teachers within this model not only act as co-instructors and co-planners, but also take on a much more active role in training school and community staff in supporting classroom-based assessment, in the grouping of students, and in planning and delivering small group instruction within the classroom. As one of the participants in this study suggested,

I think support and identification right at the beginning is important. And not trying to put things in to place at grade 4 or grade 5. The gap is already hugely wide and some doors have closed, you know. At grade 5 and low language level, I don't think we are going to go to medical school even if the knowledge is there. There is a huge gap. So choices of what to do might be limited. So having it early on, having that consistent support, having someone who is able to do programing and to do suggestions right off the bat is so important.

Another consultant/participant recommended,

Early identification with nursery and kindergarten is a must. There are attendance gaps and readiness skills are lacking. Lack of early intervention will have a trajectory of failure if there is no intervention. We had talked about the early development instruments (EDI) (Early Development Index) and when we were looking at that early

data, where those gaps start it is before they come to school. It is those lack of readiness skills. The EDI is showing whether our community is ready for these kids, right. It forces us to look at our systems and our programs of our early childhood and our early childhood wellness, right?

Speech and language pathologists suggest early intervention and communication skill development is critically important for all First Nations learners. These clinicians also suggest that moving towards a preventative early intervention approach, rather than waiting to react after the child has problems later on, is a best practice of First Nations inclusive education. Stating that she would like it if this could be the sole focus of her practice, one First Nations speech and language pathologist/study participant recommended, “I would like to focus more on early years. It is hard for us to change the kids, as they get older. They have already had these habits for so many years. In early years we do these changes really quickly and then they follow them for the rest of their life.”

Inclusive education paradigm. Participants in this study, without exception, suggested that an inclusive education paradigm, rather than a segregated education model which excludes some students, is at the heart of successful inclusive education practice in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Some participants suggested that due to the remedial learning issues, and the pervasiveness of multi-levelled learners in most, if not all, First Nations classrooms, that an inclusive education paradigm, and the practices associated with inclusive education, may be the only way to effectively deal with learning issues within classrooms in First Nations schools in Manitoba. In the data collection phase of this research, I was reminded by one of the participants, a proud northern Cree woman, that, “the philosophy of inclusion is in fact First Nations in nature.” Having all students included within the classroom and within all regular

aspects, routines and activities throughout the school is essential to First Nations inclusive education perspective and practice.

According to the Manitoba First Nations Curriculum Framework Initiative, “The belief historically was that all people can learn and everyone can contribute to the family and community” (MFNERC, Research and Development Unit, 2016, p. 8). This curriculum, which lays the framework for a First Nations inclusive education framework, also states, “Within First Nations worldviews are found the way to do things in a respectful way. Such respect involved always helping others and always accepting others for who they are” (MFNERC, Research and Development Unit, 2016, p. 9).

When asked about inclusion within his community, one of the participants excitedly shared, “First of all you have to be accepted and that is inclusion. That is the number one thing. I am a part of it all, I am just like everyone else, I come in the morning, I go to class, I hang up my jacket with everyone else. I participate in discussions like everyone else. I am included in all the events like everybody else. I am valued. That’s going to be very important.” Participants in this study stated that an inclusive education paradigm is not only beneficial for students with SEND, but for all students in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. As one veteran educator, a Dakota Ojibway Elder, commented, “I found that when you include kids in the regular stream, the other kids kind of take care of them. They understand them better and they want to help them. When you include kids with special needs, it seems everything works out somehow! You know. It is almost like something comes naturally, you know, and it develops naturally somehow.”

Many First Nations educators, clinicians and consultants who participated in this study suggested that an inclusive education paradigm was not only recommended but that this model was likely the only way to address the multileveled needs that fill most First Nations classrooms in First Nations communities. Participants recommended specific models or frameworks of inclusive education practice, including Response to Intervention (RTI), Social Role Valorization (SRV), Differentiated Instruction and Assessment (DI/A) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as having particular relevance for education practice within First Nations schools in Manitoba. Many participants in this study warned that failure to adopt such teaching strategies is one of the major significant factors negatively affecting learning in most First Nations classrooms today.

Participants in this study seemed to steer away from just one model or format of inclusive education support and rather suggested using a collection of best practices and frameworks that support learning and development of all students within regular classroom settings. As stated by one of the Cree teacher/consultants, “I don’t believe in just one model, I believe in a number of models working together. But you’re going to have the proper interventions in place with good resources with the right understandings. And you are going to have consultative/collaborative support from specialists, consultants within the school and from outside the school.”

RTI (Buffum, et al. 2010, p. 10), a tiered model of school based support, involving strategies for all (whole class), strategies for some (remedial) and strategies for a few (severe and profoundly dis/abled), was the most common model of inclusive education model suggested by study participants. As stated by one participant, a consultant with decades of school based experience, “We have to remember it is an inclusive environment, it’s not an education ‘one size fits all’. Absolutely not.” A number of study participants stated that RTI is an excellent tool for

planning for multileveled classrooms, identification of need and determining what intervention supports need to be in place to support the success of all students in all First Nations classrooms. Due to the high number of students with remedial learning needs in First Nations classrooms in Manitoba, many participants suggested that RTI is an effective tool to use in order to target early intervention programs to help remedial and struggling learners. Most participants in this study suggested that the numbers of students with remedial learning and special education/dis/ability related needs is typically higher than the number of students functioning at grade level in most First Nations classrooms. Some study participants also suggested using RTI to determine the appropriate and most effective allocation and use of resources within First Nations education systems in Manitoba.

A resource coordinator and curriculum consultant, excited to be using RTI as an intervention framework, explained the benefits of this model within a First Nations education setting.

Last year, we were able to begin to look at RTI programming in the classroom, to begin to look at intervention for those students that had previously qualified for special education but we recognized no, this is not special education or dis/ability, this are remedial learning problems specific to First Nations students. So we were able to deliver programming to meet the needs of those students.

Later in her interview she shared,

I think using the RTI model again, if parents were familiar with that type of a model, and if you had a school that adopted that model and really focus on it, I believe that parents would really appreciate that type of a model more than the model that is there right now.

The reality is there is not a lot to offer to the kids. With the RTI model, going a little further, and infusing other types of programs within the education system, like home economics, life skills, trades, would be good I think.

As classroom teachers, resource teachers and consultants further explore and use RTI for planning and applied educational practice within their schools, the role of, and the supports provided by resource staff is changing. As one teacher emphatically stated,

The RTI model helps to deal with the multiple levels and different needs in classrooms in First Nations schools. We need classroom-based assessment. One of the things we may be doing in First Nation schools is always relying on the resource program to deal with special needs students in the school. I am recognizing we cannot rely on the resource program for that. We need to provide quality education even for those students with special needs in that inclusive environment in that classroom. The role of the resource teacher should be to come in and support you [the classroom teacher] and determine what that program is going to look like. Do not rely on them [resource teachers] to deal with special needs, rely on them to help design your program so it is successful for all.

Another consultant/participant noted, “We need more co teaching, more collaboration, and about two to four resource teachers per school, depending on the needs of the school, not just one for every four hundred students. How silly is that? You could do it very well because you could start to do co-teaching. You could be more supportive in the classroom instead of taking kids out. More inclusive. Things like that.”

Another participant from a northern and isolated First Nations school reported that she and her staff are beginning to use RTI to guide their school improvement initiative. She shared,

What we need now is appropriate educational programming that would meet the needs of students with different learning needs with different tiers of response to intervention. We have our remedial students you know. That would be like everyone has the same learning needs on tier 1 and then on tier 2 you would have the remedial learners and then students with special needs would be in tier 3 with certain interventions and programming to meet their learning needs.

Another teacher noting the complexity of teaching and meeting the needs of all students within First Nations classes and schools said that she has started to use RTI as the model to help teachers to understand and respond to the needs of the students in their classrooms. She said,

I believe the RTI model would work best for First Nations schools. We have to start to plan for meeting those multiple levels in the classroom. We have to start to consider that meeting those needs may look very different that the expectations in terms of curriculum. It is almost like reverse thinking. For instance, within the provincial curriculum, your priority is to teach grade 4/5 curriculum. Within the First Nation classroom, your priority is not to teach the 4/5 curriculum, but to teach the curriculum that you hope will eventually reach the Gr 4-5 level. You are still teaching the curriculum, but a lot is adapted, very differentiated instruction. We have to look at it that way, we cannot think of grade levels. We have to program according to student needs and ask what does success look like for each and every individual student in that classroom.

SRV (Social Role Valorization) is another theory or philosophy recommended by research participants to achieve a First Nations inclusive education framework. According to Wolfensberger, (2011, p. 38), “The central hypothesis of SRV i.e., that the more valued the roles

are that people have, the more they are likely to be accorded the good things in life by others.”

From my practice, I contend that Social Role Valorization has potential to assist First Nations educators to not only evaluate/re-evaluate the role and value of marginalized individuals within First Nations systems, but also the role/value assigned to marginalized groups, including First Nations within Canadian society. Some participants indicated that SRV frameworks can assist in facilitating understanding of how First Nations have been, and continue to be devalued both within historic and current Canadians contexts. As one educator/participant stated, “Well, we help all students to learn and to have high expectations for all learners and to help them achieve their greatest potential. I believe in a social role valorization theory for a framework for providing inclusive appropriate educational training to these students needs for social inclusion.”

Study participants also noted that differentiated instruction and differentiated assessment (DI/DA) (Borja, et al., 2015, p. 31) are important aspects of inclusive education practice in First Nations communities. Differentiated Instruction involves teachers providing students with different ways of taking in and/or learning new information. Differentiated assessment involves providing students with different avenues to demonstrate conceptual understanding of ideas, skills or information learned. According one participant, “Differentiated instruction and inclusion should be compulsory for teachers in order to work with students with special education needs and disabilities.” Related to the use of differentiated instruction and inclusive education paradigms in First Nations schools, another veteran teacher commented,

That is where difference in instruction really plays a big part because not all students learn the same way and you cannot just teach one way and hope to reach everybody because you are not going to. And I find that more and more the teachers are doing that now. They are doing different activities to include all the students. Now in the primary

grades some classroom teachers that do not want their students out at all. They want them to stay in the classroom and that is a big difference. The kids are catching on and they are happy in there.

Many research participants also shared that UDL (Universal Design for Learning) has specific relevance within First Nations inclusive education practice. Universal Design for Learning (UDL), as defined by the Centre for Applied Special Technology (CAST) website, “is a research based set of principles to guide design of learning environments [and educational practices] that are accessible and effective for all learners” (Accessed October 16, 2016 at <http://www.cast.org/>). With its roots originating from within the field of architecture, where people with dis/abilities demanded equal access to private and public spaces for the broadest range of possible users, architects began to design more universally accessible physical spaces. In the early 1990s Anne Mayer and David Rose, first laid out the principles of UDL, which began its use within the education profession. Within the education profession, teachers began to design learning spaces and teaching practices to meet the needs of the broadest range of student learning styles, preferences, developmental abilities and needs. Within this practice, teachers engage students in multiple ways, present information and content in different ways, and allow and even encourage students to express what they know in differing and multiple formats.

One study participant shared, “The first time I heard about Universal Design for Learning I realized that they had just summarized what we in First Nations have known all along.” Another research participant reported that she, and other teachers in her school, now use UDL to promote inclusion. In her interview, she shared a story about an approach she used with a particular student after she took courses in UDL at the post baccalaureate and masters levels.

I had a student that the teacher said was not able to read. But his talent was as an artist. His self-esteem was really low and he had no friends. What he would do was that he would draw. That was his gift. And then as he was drawing I used the heart-*depwe*. From there we would discuss what he drew. From that discussion what I would do was I would write down the words. And then we would write the sentence with his finger. Then he would say it orally. And then I would try to write it on to paper. Then he would draw a beautiful picture of it. He began to do presentations to other students because you know not all of us are good in art. Then there were a lot of students that wanted to talk to him and he started speaking. He became very successful and he loved coming to school because he had many friends.

Hands on, visual, experiential, and land-based learning with Elder involvement.

Participants in this study identified that First Nations students tend to be visual and hands on learners. Participants then recommended that students in First Nations communities learn best when teachers use experimental, project, place, and land based learning practices. One Cree clinician/teacher who participated in this study shared, “In the classroom, I did a lot of hands on stuff. I find the kids responded better with things they could manipulate.”

Experienced teachers who participated in this study identified that for visual and learners, particularly those whose second language was English, providing visual cues, pictures and concrete objects students could manipulate brings out the knowledge of students and can help enhance engagement in learning. One participant shared,

Even if the students cannot express it, they can draw it. If you are cutting up fish, or moose, the student involved with cutting has more expression about how the fish smelled

so they have better communication. They would say ‘smelly fish’ as opposed to ‘fish’. So they have more descriptive words. By doing this activity hands on, their communication and language development is wider than someone who just reading it. Visual, asking them to draw it because they see it in a picture in their mind and then they can express it better.

Participants described that pencil and paper only tasks do not meet the needs of most learners in First Nations schools in Manitoba.

When asked about cultural relevance within inclusive education paradigms, all participants espoused the virtues and benefits of land based learning for First Nations learners, especially those with SEND. In her interview, a resource teacher/participant talked about the use land based learning using First Nations languages for students with SEND and second language related learning challenges alike. She stated,

I was thinking about Outdoor Education as a cultural practice we could use, also just learning off the land. Explaining survival and also using our languages to increase awareness. The English language is there and I think if they express with their language what they have seen. They feel better, they activate that, I think that makes them feel better that they know something, it is nothing new for them.

As outlined in the newly established First Nations K-12 curriculum framework developed by MFNERC (2016) “Traditionally, student learning involved the whole community in the process of educating children. Teaching on the land involved methods and strategies for learning” (p. 8). This curriculum also states,

First Nations people had a special relationship with the land that was embedded in their daily and special practices. Being on the land was considered healing. Young people were sent out on the land to think, reflect and make decisions. This practice helped to nurture their independence, strength and courage. (p. 21)

Participants shared that many First Nations schools only offer land based education opportunities at specific designated times during the year. Participants suggested that these practices be more fully integrated into regular ongoing learning activities within the school and community and be integrated throughout and across curricular areas. Participants also recommended that land based pedagogy be used to teach life skills training, especially for students with SEND so they can build relevant skills they can use in their own communities. Activities such as hunting, cleaning and preparing meat and harvesting food from the environment are particularly relevant. As an experienced Elder educator/participant shared,

I don't know like, you know this land based education is really meeting their needs. Because you are training them to be able to live independently. All our education, First Nations, because we don't have centers, we don't have places where they can work. They can hunt, they can trap, and they can snare rabbits. land based... ya. It is like a life skill. That's what we need. We need to teach them life skills.

Related to experiential learning, participants in this study suggested that teachers use story telling as a teaching methodology. They stated that storytelling can be used to not only enhance student engagement but also assist with development of thinking skills. Participants also shared that story telling helps students to build memory retention skills. According to one teacher, "You asked me for concrete examples of practical skills for First Nations students. I

think that one good thing would be storytelling. Because you know, some of the students, they have the stories that have been passed down from their home, from their grandfathers, from their Elders. You don't forget stories that is one thing I am going to say.”

Participants in this study also suggested that integrating land-based activities into literacy and numeracy development can bring additional relevance and increase student engagement for First Nations learners. Participants recommended that teachers in First Nations communities develop essential learning understandings and outcomes from cultural and land-based perspectives and practices for all learners throughout the school.

Integrally connected to land-based education is the use, and role of Elders within a community school. Every participant in this study noted that Elders must play and increasing role in every First Nations school. One consultant/participant shared,

What I think of for the role of Elders in a school is the students have to know the past. And that comes though Elders being in the school and talking about their experiences. This is how it was before the white man came. This is what happened after. This is where we are now. This is where we hope to be in the future. You have to have the past, the present and the future to build on. And Elders are a good way of doing that. Elders are respected.

Able to pass on extremely important worldviews, teachings and perspectives, and central to First Nations language exposure and revitalization, many participants stated that Elders have a central role in 21st century First Nations learning systems. Some participants commented on the calming effect that Elders have in the school and that behavioural problems often decrease when Elders are present in the school. Participants also shared that Elders can play a key role in

helping address the social emotional issues faced by many First Nations children. “Elders can be supports in the school, especially within high school. They can talk to anyone. By students seeing them there, even by feeding them, and being in a classroom, the Elders give support,” stated one study participant.

Participants noted that Elders can play a particularly key role in the education of First Nations learners with SEND. Participants said that Elders carry the traditional teachings and virtues of respect, tolerance of diversity and reverence towards all children, especially those with dis/abilities. Another participant in this study shared, “I would like to see Elders come into the schools and explain to the teachers how all children, especially those who were different in any way were looked upon as gifts from the Creator with strengths to build upon how they can use the gifts to plan for their future.”

Expanded programming and course options including high schools in First Nations communities. For an inclusive education paradigm to be effective within First Nations schools in Manitoba, participants in this study said that First Nations schools must expand course and programming options, specifically at the high school level. Due to lack of resources provided for primary and secondary education by the Government of Canada, most First Nations schools in Manitoba do not offer course options such as music, the arts, drama, or vocational programming such as carpentry, welding, and home economics, to name just a few. According to study participants, the lack of course/subject/program options within First Nations schools limits choice and opportunity for many First Nations learners, thus eroding attempts at creating inclusive culturally relevant schools. Currently, First Nations schools offer only basic, and most often limited academic courses. One participant stated,

I think like our school programing lacks a lot of different programs. There is no variety of programs to keep them interested in school. They have very basic academic programs and that is it. If you look at the provincial school programs they have a lot of things like music and so on. Our students do not see any of that. It comes down to lack of funding. Also lack of space in the schools to do anything like that because the schools are so crowded.

All participants in this study shared their frustration about the effects of the limited programming in First Nations schools. They shared they felt this contributes to the high dropout rate amongst students in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Another experienced teacher/participant stated, “We wouldn’t have such a low percentage of First Nations students graduating because it is such a struggle for them. It is always in a crisis situation to try and get the kids to get their credits. The programing is so bare bones that there is no incentive for them to keep going to school. It is almost like a Band-Aid solution. When you look at other high schools too they have so many different programs and options.”

The lack of high schools in First Nations communities was another factor that participants felt had a marked effect on student engagement and ultimately successful completion of secondary education studies. For those communities that do not offer any high school programming, participants recommended that the federal government provide resources so that all First Nations communities in Manitoba can offer high school programming at the community level. One resource teacher from a community with a student population of over 400 school aged children and adolescents stated, “My students from the school I am at now, grade 8 is the highest grade we have at the school, and grade 9, 10, 11 and 12 's are sent to public school at the next division over from us. This contributes to the high dropout rate in our student population.”

Participants shared they felt that one of the single most effective way to increase school success rates would be to offer high school programming in more First Nations communities throughout Manitoba. Participants felt that allowing First Nations learners to remain with their parents until completing their secondary education would most definitely increase the success rate of First Nations schools in Manitoba. As one participant shared, “They didn’t have high schools in a lot of our First Nations, even after they shut down the residential schools. And you know they would go into these racist high schools. It is slowly changing... but really slowly. The ones that have their own school system, like Norway House, are so successful, the majority of students in Norway House anyway.”

Study participants shared that fine arts programming, drama, music and band are needed in every First Nations community but are most often not provided because of the lack of school funding provide by the Federal Government. Another participant shared, “Some of these kids are very artistic and we don't have an artistic program in the school. I was at one school that had an art program because it was a big school and they even had an art teacher.” Participants shared that of the few First Nations high schools that do exist, most do not offer courses for university entrance such as pre-calculus, chemistry and for physics. Participants also stated that business and technology, First Nations language immersion programs and alternative education programs, to name a few, are almost impossible to offer with the limited funding provided to First Nations operated schools again making very difficult to meet the diverse needs within First Nations schools throughout Manitoba.

Many participants noted how beneficial both light and heavy vocational programs would be within the First Nations education context. Program options such as auto body, power mechanics, small engine repair, carpentry and welding/machining, cosmetology and food

services courses, offered at many provincial regional high school education systems, would be hugely beneficial for the First Nations education system in Manitoba. A number of First Nations communities have over 1,000 students and/or are located within close geographic proximity to one another, allowing for creative regional First Nations secondary programming if funding were available to support such initiatives. Providing school based and/or regional community based vocational and academic programs should be available to provide enhanced options and a critically needed skilled work force for First Nations communities throughout Manitoba.

Again, adequate funding must be in place for this to be possible. As one curriculum consultant and resource teacher/participant emphatically stated, “Along with the RTI model, going a little further, and infusing other types of programs within the education system, like home economics, life skills, trades, would be good I think.” Another teacher noted, “I think there should be more into trade skills, like, they should be learning more like automotive repair, carpentry skills, and computer skills is another important one.”

Enhancing linguistic and cultural relevance. The final area for improved inclusive education practice recommended by study participants was to enhance First Nations linguistic and cultural relevance within First Nations schools in Manitoba. Enhancing linguistic and cultural relevance within First Nations education systems requires an appreciation of the diversity within First Nations in relation to linguistic and cultural programming and education related objectives determined at the local First Nations level. Recognizing the heterogeneity of First Nations, from a context of self-determination, participants in this study felt that beliefs about what practices constitute cultural relevance, and what role First Nations language use and revitalization should have in a First Nations school, should be the decision of each individual community. This may pose challenges for standardization but will ultimately result in

enhancement of community relevance of education related services. According to one participant,

First Nations culture is something we live and breathe but it is unique to each community. Sometimes it is nothing written on paper, it is just part of... its culture. Something that you can't really pinpoint but you'll notice it when you go to different communities. Each culture is different. For example one northern community they wouldn't look you directly in the eye, they would choose to look around your face. You can't make a sweeping generalization that all First Nation people are like this. They just don't fit into one neat little mold. They are all different.

Some communities may choose traditional Indigenous ceremonial practices to be a part of school programming, while other communities may choose to enhance the role of traditional land-based practices and/or "Christian based" teachings for the children attending their community school. Participants felt that First Nations communities should have the opportunity to choose, and receive funding for, the type and degree of First Nations language and cultural programming they choose to offer in the school in their community. A clinician who participated in this study also noted,

There is always that danger of generalizing First Nations and that is what has been done throughout our history. We are all treated the same and we are not. We share a lot of common knowledge but our histories are different. Our languages are different. We are unique in our own ways. But that danger of clumping us together in one group, whether they are calling us aboriginal or whether they are calling us Indians or First Nations. There is where our risks lie.

According to Cree Elders, a “good education” is one where students know their identity and how important they are to society (Elder Dr. Don Robertson, personal communication, June 15, 2016). Students need to know the true and accurate history of First Nations in Manitoba, from First Nations perspectives and worldviews. Elders also say that First Nations learners need to know the positive historical contributions First Nations have made throughout the history of Manitoba. (Elder Dr. Doris Pratt, (Dakota), personal communication, April 20, 2005). A participant in this study stated,

What you will find is that you can introduce something as simple as a song that will teach a child about who we are and strengthening our identity, you are addressing things like self-confidence, self-esteem, giving that child a sense of who they are and where they are coming from. When you introduce that song, you can quickly turn it into a history or English Language Arts lesson.

An additional theme related to linguistic and cultural relevance raised by most research participants was the need for both clinicians and educators to build up their own awareness of the linguistic and cultural factors affecting learning within the students they are teaching or assessing. One First Nations clinician noted,

They [clinicians who work with First Nations] need to have an understanding of the stories of who they are. They need to have an appreciation for the teachings, of the culture, and they need to have some sense of what the [First Nations] language is and the concepts to continue that language because language is what gives meaning to our life. They need to be motivated and to be able to look at things with a critical eye and not just accept things for the value of the report. I always try to ask that question “OK, What

does this mean for my people? Is it meaningful? Is it useful? How can I use it?" If I use it, what changes or adaptations do I have to make so there is some meaning and relevance?

Initiatives to build capacity through training First Nations clinicians and inclusive educational specialists (resource teachers, co-teachers, numeracy and literacy coaches and educational assistants) will enhance the cultural relevancy of services and supports provided, and will have beneficial outcomes for the clinician disciplines as a whole. For example, training a clinical team from the Island lake area so that all clinicians serving those students are fluent in the language of Oji-Cree, and cultural practices of the region, will help to improve cultural and linguistic relevance within the educational assessment/clinical intervention areas for learners in the Island Lake region.

Noting the complexity around linguistic and cultural relevance, and the connection between student identity and learning, one clinician who participated in this study cautioned that self-reflection, openness, and non-judgment must ground this conversation. He shared,

A lot of people are saying you have your self-identity with your language and your culture. But then it always goes back again to that dualocity that is happening in the communities, the native culture being practiced the Christian way. This one community, in particular, is having many issues. It is the dualocity, there are two groups, I would not say competing, but that have different views. It will cause confusion to some young people. I think knowing where you stand, what is important to you, then that is probably only when it is going to become effective. If you know who you are as an individual, whether you will practice in the traditional ways, or if you do not want to include them in

your life and do another thing. I think kids are becoming confused if they are not sure where they stand and with confusion comes a lot of other issues which I won't mention at this time, but it causes a lot of confusion.

Participants report that First Nations schools are enhancing the use of cultural practices. Based on antidotal evidence this resulted in positive outcomes for many First Nations learners. One participant shared, "There was this woman who was my educational assistant went every week-end with her grandchildren to the bush and they learned how to live off the land. You ate what you gathered and what you caught. The kids did very well in school when this started to happen." Another participant shared, "There is something which is amazingly successful here, super successful, we just finished our land based games and it was great up there at one of our cabins. We have these learning cabins. Is really understanding who you are and where you come from and valuing that. That is going to very important."

Education specialists must consider the degree of infusion, including the place or role of First Nations linguistic and cultural practices when implementing change to influence student outcomes. Some participants noted that both educators and clinicians start within mainstream practice and curriculum and see First Nation content as simply an add-on. Many participants in this study suggested that situating First Nations language and culture as the base of the education system and then adding or aligning with western content, contexts and curriculum might be a better process to engage in. Essential understandings in curriculum, which are the "big picture" ideas; a component of backwards design in educational practice can be used to resituate First Nations perspectives and understanding within everyday curricular outcomes. Statements such as, "students will understand that First Nations had a positive role on the development of Canada", differs from stating with history from a Western Eurocentric perceptive and then

adding a small degree of First Nations content to an already biased outsider and settler perspective.

The allies interviewed in this study provided advice for other ally educators and clinicians should they choose to engage in First Nations clinical or education pursuits. One ally stated that she “wanted to go in and do so much, but needed to be careful not to steam roll in.” Another ally suggested to, “shut up, open your eyes, look, listen, and find a good mentor. You can be firm, but you have to be respectful, the gentle side. You have to be humble and you can’t come off as the ‘be all end all’ authority.”

This ally also stated the benefits of being in a minority position and that she had not really encountered this until she began her work within First Nations education.

To me, it’s just knowing yourself, the baggage that you have, your own culture, knowing you are a minority going into a different society that is dominant, you are no longer the dominant one, so like I said, you sit back and watch and learn and practice what you see them doing. You ask questions, learn, but because you are observing, you find more people that are willing to share because you are not an annoyance. Never be judgmental, because you are the minority. If you have never experienced being a minority, it’s a lesson that will stick with you for the rest of your life. Respecting self-determination, no matter what group you are working with.

To conclude, in the second and final interview I asked two significant questions to each study participants, the first being: *What should be at the heart of inclusive education for First Nations learners?* One participant answered that, “Truth or Debwewin (heart). That is how truth is defined within the culture and that should be the essence of education.” The last question

asked to every participant was: If you had the Chief and Council of your community, the Grand Chief of Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the Premier of the Province of Manitoba and the Prime Minister of Canada all sitting together in front of you, what would you tell them about First Nations inclusive education in Manitoba? One participant answered,

Oh my goodness. If they were sitting right in front of me with all this that is happening I would tell them that they should be ashamed of themselves for how they are picking and choosing what nationality, or what culture gets enough money for educating children. I would tell them if you had children of different cultures sitting here are you going to give some cultures one amount and some another amount? Is this not Canada? I would ask them how would you feel if this was your child or grand-child? I would say come to the Aboriginals, and we get this amount of dollars. Like you know, we are a big issue with everything that is going on at home and you wonder why. It just makes me so mad, and very very very sad.

For the candid reactions of all study participants to these two questions, please see the responses located in Appendix A and Appendix B of this dissertation. A review of these comments reflects not only the current state of crisis of the First Nations education system in Manitoba, but also the passion and desire to improve the education related systems, structures and practices to create a more balanced, equitable and effective education for all First Nations learners attending schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

In his final comments, one participant suggested, “If we can hold on to who we are as Anishanaabe or as Cree, Blackfoot, Navaho, whatever, and if we can hold onto that and begin to unlearn what has been done to us, then I think we are onto something big.”

In summary, the recommendations related to inclusive education of the participants in this study, First Nations educators, allies and clinicians with a collective 700 plus years of experience delivering education and clinical supports within First Nations schools in Manitoba, can provide a blueprint for education transformation in First Nations education systems in First Nations communities in Manitoba. The participants in this study suggested that all levels of government, educational service providers, and parents of children attending school in First Nations communities re-examine the education offered in First Nations communities in Manitoba. They also suggested that all stakeholders focus the allocation of resources, reevaluate the purview of education in First Nations communities, and use the recommendations for First Nations inclusive education philosophies and practices to guide the improvement of community based education programming in First Nations communities.

In the following final chapter I will offer concluding remarks about this research and will share how I will bring closure and honour the relationships that evolved and strengthened throughout the processes of this study

Chapter 7: Conclusion

I initiated this study to examine the perspectives of Indigenist inclusive educators related to their work with students with and without SEND attending (and in the community but not attending) First Nations schools in Manitoba. I wanted to better understand how they approach working with students with and without dis/abilities, what unique or distinct perspectives they might bring to their work, and what they think should change to improve the systems and structures to create a better education for all students in their communities. A member of an Ojibway community, and a participant in the study, stated, “So that was a term I heard a couple of years ago: Education is the new buffalo. You think about how First Nation people sustained themselves in the past, and buffalo was such a big thing. Today education is the big thing. Education is now our new buffalo. The reality is what do you do without education?”

In this conclusion I will summarize the three areas of key findings from the analysis of the data collected from Indigenist educators and then, from the convergence of critical race and dis/ability theory, I will review those findings.

The key findings from the analysis of the data collected in this research have been presented in three distinct, yet interrelated areas including: 1. Participant perspectives on the structural/systemic factors which affect learning in First Nations communities including cultural interruption/interference through residential schools and child welfare systems, chronic underfunding of First Nations education systems, service and support gaps, cultural and linguistic irrelevance and poverty, 2. First Nations perspectives and practices related to special/inclusive education including philosophy, assessment and instructional practices and 3. Recommendations for changes to existing First Nations education systems including resource allocation, required community based services and supports, and the teaching principles and

practices suggested to enhance inclusiveness and improve academic outcomes for all First Nations students.

Factors which affect learning. A number of First Nations educators and clinicians who participated in this study commented on, and expressed concern about, the effects of prenatal exposure to alcohol and other drugs of children within First Nations communities in Manitoba. From the convergence of critical race and disability theory, the rates of these conditions and other dis/abilities (fetal alcohol spectrum of disorders and hearing loss experienced disproportionately within some First Nations communities in Manitoba) seem to be directly related to the history of race related exclusion, colonization and marginalization. From the responses of the participants, it appears there is fear, apprehension and discomfort when addressing issues related to prenatal exposure to alcohol. Some Indigenist educators do address these issues, but others expressed that at times they do not for fear of blaming already traumatized, marginalized and oppressed members of their families, communities, and nations.

The rates of child welfare involvement amongst First Nations students in Manitoba, particularly those with dis/abilities, is grossly disproportional in comparison to non-First Nations and non-disabled children in Manitoba. This also remains a continuous struggle for most Indigenist educators. The educators who participated in this study expressed that this not only completely unacceptable, but has particularly damaging effects on the education and attachment issues for many First Nations children in Manitoba. From this study it is clear that First Nations are exploring and struggling to attempt to develop other forms of care and support needed to keep children safe and develop to their full potential. The need for community based services and supports and healing options from pre-birth to death, developed from First Nations perspectives and practice would most certainly be a move in the right direction.

Given the pervasiveness of poverty related issues affecting children and families in First Nations communities many Indigenist educators and clinicians are examining different ways they can maximize availability, and use of, community based and publically provided resources to provide the most meaningful responsive and wholistic education systems for all children within their communities.

First Nations perspectives and practices on inclusive education. Indigenist inclusive educators are weaving paths together. They are integrating worldviews and educational frameworks together in response to evolving lived experiences. Participants suggested practices such as providing enhanced hands on land based teaching practices, using strengths based achievement monitoring and incorporating traditional, more normative views towards people who are on various spectrums and ranges of the continuums of human functioning and behavior.

Changes/improvements to existing First Nations inclusive education systems. It is clear from this inquiry, that First Nations children and adults with disabilities, still have to leave their communities in order to access most publically funded supports and services and the services that they do access outside of their communities are not linguistically nor culturally meaningful or relevant, particularly when it comes to First Nations approaches to dis/ability and/or difference. Participants in this study suggested that First Nations authorities demand the treaty right to education in Manitoba be upheld, that First Nations build community based supports and birth to death continuums of supports and services within First Nations communities and that these services be offered under First Nations jurisdiction, whenever possible by First Nations providers. Other initiatives, such as training First Nations clinicians to enhance cultural relevancy and competency within these areas of professional practice, were often suggested. Many participants also suggested that resources provided by the Government of

Canada be equalized to at least those provided to provincially affiliated First Nations schools and that educators and clinicians use First Nations perspectives, practices and pedagogies to promote inclusion of diversity within First Nations schools. The participants in this study are actively engaged in defining, constructing and utilizing evolving frameworks consistent with First Nations models of inclusive educational practice.

In order to ground this inquiry, I situated my examination at the convergence of critical race and critical disability theories. Using critical theoretical constructs allowed me to examine issues related to educating students with and without dis/abilities within this unique and specific cultural context. Drawing upon both these critical theories helped to contextualize why the voices and perspectives of First Nations people, particularly those living and with working with dis/ability, have been devalued, largely absent from the literature on both First Nations education and mainstream special/inclusive education alike. This analysis reveals various tensions related to the provision of meaningful, relevant and effective inclusive education for all students attending First Nations operated schools in Manitoba. These tensions include determination of what models of practice and curriculum might be used, how special needs and/or dis/abilities might be identified, funded and supported, and the ongoing tensions between intersecting and competing worldviews related to the provision of education supports for First Nations learners in Manitoba. The tensions related to what frameworks, practices, jurisdictional, funding and educational models to move forward to improve current conditions within First Nations in Manitoba remain contentious.

Colonial history has marginalized and created pockets of invisibility of First Nations people and persons living with dis/ability. When experiencing intersecting identities of being First Nations and a person living with a dis/ability it is apparent that the invisibility and

devaluing multiplies, resulting in additional and often intersecting layers of oppression and marginalization. This study reveals that the very nature of the systems created for First Nations learners has limited access and participation in multiple and overlapping ways for these students, particularly those who live with a dis/ability. This study also reveals that this devaluation also applies to those who work within special/inclusive education systems in First Nations communities throughout Manitoba.

Indigenist educators throughout Manitoba work every day within intersecting and, at times, competing worldviews. The issues which frame the examination of educating all First Nations students in inclusive education systems are complex. This study reveals that people are using a number of ways of making sense of past circumstances and present realities, all the while trying to strengthen their children, families, systems and communities in what they see as a good way. Participants in this study repeatedly questioned how they, as Indigenist educators, can function in both, and at times multiple overlapping and contradictory worlds and how they might prepare their children to function within the worlds in which they intersect.

Another overlapping tension is between “traditional” First Nations education and what might be described as “modern western” education. Most of the participants have been educated in the latter system and have based their careers on their “western” credentials. They are now responsible for educating First Nations students from a “western” frame/worldview.

Using convergent critical theories allows for illumination of the complexities of various dimensions of, and tensions inherent within this inquiry. Insights by participants, such as noting that the identification of dis/ability or impairment within First Nations contexts, may have more to do with cultural and linguistic irrelevance of the current and past education systems rather

than ‘perceived’ individual deficits, impairment or dis/abilities. This in turn changes conversations and directs exploration of causes and most importantly, solutions, in different and varied ways. The struggles expressed by participants around not wanting to label, diagnose, nor point out differences in others, but also having the responsibility to respond to children living with impairments and dis/abilities, particularly within the course of their work as clinicians and inclusive educators, remains an ongoing battle for many.

Although intersections between critical race and dis/ability, and the associated power structures often associated with these identities, framed the theoretical frameworks and associated analysis and interpretation of the data, issues of gender, gender identity and gender analysis were not included in this study. Although 15 of the 18 participants identified as female, the responses between those who identified as female did not differ significantly from the participants who identified as male. In the analysis of the data, gender based patterns did not seem to be evident in the responses of the lives of the participants. For example most of the women interviewed identified that they themselves were in leadership positions likely due to the education their formal level of education they had attained. Stronger gender based analysis related to dis/ability, although identified briefly around issues related to substance use during pregnancy, would be better suited for more in-depth studies related specific to FASD within First Nations contexts in Manitoba.

The struggles and tensions experienced by the participants when working with students from western clinical models of training, which tells them their students are ‘broken’ and ‘need to be fixed’, point to the tensions of working within differing, at times competing worldviews of First Nations models of inclusion and the clinical models of dis/ability from outside western influences. As demonstrated through the stories of the Indigenist educators who took part in this

study, the tensions between the clinical/medical western model of dis/ability and special education and a First Nations model of acceptance and inclusion, which normalizes the experience of dis/ability and difference, through greater acceptance, often seeing differences as ‘gifts’, produces additional challenges. The Indigenist educators who participated in this study revealed ways of integrating effective practices from both worldviews to enhance the services and supports for their students. As one participant stated, “it is not either or, but both and”.

My involvement also revealed many tensions often realized when working to educate the students with and without SEND in First Nations communities in Manitoba. The apparent tensions and struggles, as demonstrated within many of the participant stories, relate to the inadequate and ineffective ways in which First Nations are required to access funding for all students, and in particular for students with dis/abilities. These tensions create real challenges on a daily basis for Indigenist educators throughout Manitoba.

My analysis, which is situated at the convergence of critical race and dis/ability theory, does explain and contextualize current situations within First Nations such as the pervasiveness of poverty, the lack of funding for First Nations education systems, and the lack of certainty of the actual rates of disability/impairment, which may be in part, due to the devaluation of First Nations through colonization within historical and contemporary Canadian contexts. Those who work within the current education systems struggle being embedded within western education models, frameworks and curricula, which are currently not working very well for the majority of First Nations learners, particularly for those living with SEND.

For the participants, the grinding poverty within First Nations and the lack of equalized comparable education funding provided by the Government of Canada for the operation for First

Nations band operated schools is one of, if not the most significant barrier, to implementing appropriate inclusive education programs for students with and without SEND attending band operated schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

With sound principles and practices, much resilience, adaptability, openness, humour and sheer determination, Indigenist educators are building new possibilities. It is important to understand and appreciate not only the dilemmas but the solutions posed by this segment of inclusive educators in Manitoba. Consciousness raising amongst all First Nations and non-First Nations Canadian citizens is important. Respecting and supporting grass roots community based First Nations and disability first perspectives and practices and ensuring that public funding is in place, is targeted and monitored for effectiveness is critical for reconciliation and the future wellbeing of First Nations, Manitoba and Canada.

Limitation of the study and implications for further research. This research is limited to the study of the perspectives of the providers rather than the recipients of special/inclusive education within First Nations operated schools in Manitoba. Although all schools operating in First Nations communities were invited to participate in this study, some provincially operated First Nations schools chose not to participate or did not have staff who met the eligibility requirements to participate in this study. This study is also limited to First Nations educators who practice within First Nations education systems in Manitoba. I also limited this study to those First Nations educators practicing within the Province of Manitoba, therefore this study represents the issues and practices specific to this region of Canada. Lastly, this study does not represent all First Nations educator perspectives on inclusive educational practice, only those who chose to participate in this study, interpreted through my lens as I conducted this research.

Based on the analysis of the recommendations of study participants, there are many implications for further inquiry into the provision of inclusive education supports in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Additional research to further investigate the reasons for, prevention of, and intervention for specific conditions such as hearing loss and FASD which are reported by participants to exist at high rates in some First Nations communities Manitoba is warranted. Future research may also be completed to study the effects of high cost special education intervention versus assessment based funding in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Third, it would be helpful to engage in future research to document the direct experiences of First Nations students with and without SEND, and their parents/caregivers, attending First Nations schools in Manitoba.

More research is needed to document the outcomes of the different school funding structures available to First Nations communities in Manitoba, i.e., Band operated versus provincially affiliated schools such as Frontier School Division, and the newly developed First Nations school division. Further research is also required to study how First Nations language issues affect learning of First Nations students in Manitoba. Topics in this area might include how First Nations language loss affects student learning in First Nations schools, how the differences between structures of the English and First Nations languages effect student learning, and determining what methods and types of language instruction best meet the needs of learners in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

From the illustrated tensions as a result of colonization and a medical approach to disability, I suggest further investigation to determine what First Nations stakeholders are expecting in terms of education at the local level and what it will take to produce these results. Those committed to the development of, and ongoing delivery and support of First Nations

education systems may need to think more about the effects of imposing more ‘western’ education models and interventions or shifting towards the adoption or infusion of more ‘traditional’ Indigenous education systems and practices. People who reside in First Nations communities in Manitoba today, for the most part, are not living purely hunter/gather lifestyles and desire the benefits of what some might call the ‘modern’ education system. It is also clear, based on the number of First Nations communities who retain jurisdictional authority over their education system that the vast majority of First Nations communities in Manitoba remain steadfast about their belief to self-determination and their treaty right to appropriate community based educational services and supports.

One resounding recommendation of the participants of this study is that the future direction of First Nations education does need to change so that systems evolve to more effectively meet the needs of more of the close to 20 thousand school aged children residing in First Nations communities in Manitoba today, a number which is only expected to increase dramatically in future decades.

I would also suggest continued research related to how First Nations educators define literacy, numeracy, and how First Nations educators define culturally competent educational pedagogy and practice. Finally, additional research is needed to study what types of models of applied education practice i.e.) RTI, UDL, co teaching, yield the best academic, social and emotional outcomes for First Nations students in Manitoba.

In conclusion, from the lens of a First Nations model of inclusive education, this study, from the perspectives of those who have delivered special/inclusive education and clinical services in First Nations communities in Manitoba, is an attempt to comprehensively investigate many broad and intersecting factors affecting learning of First Nations students in First Nations

schools in Manitoba. Education restoration and reformation within First Nations communities in Manitoba will take adequate resourcing, commitment, meaningful and relevant educational pedagogy and practice, and most of all the ongoing hard work of staff, parents and students at the local level. The testimonies, insights and recommendations of the participants in this study reveal that real change is possible and transformation can be accomplished.

No one study has all of the answers. I do hope that this study will make a contribution to the growing scholarship in the area of First Nations education. A nascent scholarship is emerging. Consider recent PhD dissertations in this area. For example, Margaret Scott's work on Effective Instructional Leadership (University of Manitoba), Violet Okemow's work on First Nations language preservation (University of Alberta), and Nora Murdock's work on First Nations Education Governance (University of Manitoba). In summary, the delivery of special/inclusive education in First Nations communities is at times political, and often not an easy clear or straightforward task. The complexity of how the history of colonization affects the current education delivery systems and outcomes for all First Nations learners, particularly those living with SEND, is deeply embedded within lived experiences of First Nations educators, students, families, and communities. The process of research within First Nations inclusive education by Indigenous and non-Indigenous, disabled and non-disabled researchers is complex, situational, and emergent. There is no one right answer for every individual, family, school, or community. In this study, the rich diversity amongst First Nations, and their non-First Nations allies, did produce a wide array of thoughts, beliefs and opinions, which all must be respected with sincerity, genuineness, and humility.

The delivery of education in First Nations communities, and the associated research and validation methods must be conceptualized within what Cresswell (2013) suggests is a

“postmodern sensibility”. He notes that “the character of a social science report changes from a closed narrative with a tight argument structure to a more open narrative with holes and questions and an admission of situatedness and partiality” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 247). This research is situated at a specific time in my life and the lives of my brothers and sisters in First Nations education. It is my hope that the testimonies and stories documented in this manuscript stimulate discussion, and conversation and provide a sense of hope for the future.

There are no simple, insular or singular causes for the issues affecting the education of First Nations students both with and without SEND attending schools in First Nations communities throughout Manitoban and neither are there simple, singular or quick solutions to completely ameliorate the challenges that exist within First Nations education systems. As Justice Murray Sinclair, chairperson for the Truth and Reconciliations Commission stated as he shared the commission’s findings in 2015, “it took 150 years or more of colonization, the effects on a minimum of seven successive generations of First Nations to get to his point, and it may take generations to ameliorate the damage done.”

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Appendix A: “The Heart of First Nations Inclusive Education”

The heart of First Nations Inclusive Education

In the final interview, the second last question I asked participants the question was: What should be at the heart of inclusive education for First Nations learners? Their responses are as follows:

Truth or Debwewin (heart). That is how truth is defined within the culture and that should be the essence of education. (Clinician)

Knowing the student. Getting to find out what they want for themselves as being an adult and providing options for them. Where I just mentioned, like having them to see other things that could be made available if they have that desire to go further than grade 12. Meeting what their wants and needs are. If they don't see anything brighter for the future than I am sure they will just stay where they are at. (Clinician)

The heart of First Nations education should be to give the child the best quality of education to help him/her reach their potential, no matter how disabled they are, they have one shining quality, and that is the quality we look on to build this child up. (Resource Teacher)

The child that is the bottom line whether they are special ed. or not. Any child it is what is best for that child. A child should be put first regardless of finances/politics/family it is what the child needs. (Special Education Consultant)

It has to be a true embodiment, it has to truly embody the spirit of inclusion. The essence of it is-everybody is valued, everybody is equal, everybody's needs are equally

important. And such, planning, resource revision up and down has to be in place. It's respect based inclusion of everybody is valued. Its equality. There are so many words in concept of true inclusion. And at the heart of it has to be (I wish there was another word that existed) one that I could think of that spoke to what inclusion truly is. The essence of effective special education is inclusion with value. Everybody's need is special and that is what I mean by inclusion. (Cree Resource Coordinator)

I believe Elders need to be brought in to inform the teachers how the children were all accepted regardless of special needs or disabilities. Our Elders looked at the strengths and helped that child build as it determined the place the child would have in the community. The gift was focused on and not the weakness or challenge. (Ally-Resource Coordinator)

Success for all should be at the heart of First Nations education. I believe to some extent it has to have something to do with encouraging citizenship. We want to create good citizens. (Ojibway Curriculum Consultant and Resource Teacher)

The heart of education in First Nations is that all the students are included. There should be inclusion in the classrooms and all are welcome in the school. The supports should be in place and the students should have access to clinicians that should be able to help them. As well, all physical challenges would be met. (Northern Cree and Ojibway Resource Teacher)

At the heart of it[First Nations education]. The answer is that all children should feel accepted, loved, and a part of a community. Without that I am sorry. It is not going to be successful. (Cree Consultant)

What I said was that you have to provide the best possible education for every child in the school. I wish we were all like that. But I have heard teachers say, “You know what, he doesn’t want to learn.” “He is too disruptive. He is too stupid.” No, I think you have to provide the best school experiences for the child. (Cree Resource Teacher)

You have to be innovative, creative and have the time to do that. But there are teachers there that have families at home. How can you get your time and go home and prepare your supper for the family. That must have an impact on us. And I am talking about my perspective because I didn’t have anybody to take up my time at home. I was free to spend that time but then you do have to be innovative and creative. (Ojibway Resource Teacher)

I think too that we should have some funding available to provide a meaningful educational experience for each child and for schools to access that funding, on an on going basis, and not be stalled somewhere. Because we need resources, materials and funding for special trips. That is really good to take students out on educational trips. (Retired Cree Resource Coordinator)

The children. The children are the essence. If it wasn’t for them we wouldn’t have to have education. The children are what’s important and how they learn and what we can do to help them learn. That’s why we are having all these meetings as a special education group. We want to help our children. If we can teach Down’s syndrome kids to read, if we can teach someone in a wheelchair to race downhill, we can teach our children anything. You know when Sheryl said to you know, why get that whole set of Fontas and Panel, its for the middle class. I said, “So what? What is wrong with us learning it?” and

then Marguerite said, “I like that comment you made – so what”. Like in a way, expect our children to do the best, to be the best they can be. When our teachers don’t expect much from our kids, they don’t do well. Teach love, respect, courage. Expose them to everything. (Cree Instructional Leader and Resource Teacher

Appendix B: Messages for Our Leaders about First Nations Inclusive Education.

In the final interview, I posed the following question to each participant: If you had the Chief and Council of your community, the Grand Chief of Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the Premier of the Province of Manitoba, and the Prime Minister of Canada sitting together in front of you, what you tell them about the state of First Nations education in Manitoba? With some anger, some added humour, and a few choice words, they replied:

I would invite them to come spend time at the schools. Not half an hour visit here but come visit for a longer period. We can educate them more on special needs and the challenges that our schools have to come up with an amount for resources. Sure we're creative but we need other stuff. (Cree Clinician)

We are still here. Education, unfortunately, has been used against us in the wrong way many times over. Math, Sciences are important, but we have to be given the opportunity to teach our children who they are. We have to look at how we define education and what it means to our people. Education can ensure our survival, but we have to define what that is. Historically we haven't been given that opportunity to do that. (Cree and Ojibway Clinician)

Give us enough dollars to provide good programming in the first nations communities. We know that there is a big gap; they are underfunded. As you walk into the classrooms you can see that there is more that needs to be provided for the students. It would be nice to see the nursery and kindergarten shelf filled up with toys that are colorful. Grade ones having more resources available to them to make learning even more fun. I know they are having fun now, but I think if they had a little more options made available it will make it even more of a fun experience for them. (Cree Clinician)

I would tell the Prime Minister that we need to be equally funded. We do follow the Provincial Educational Guidelines but we should take into consideration cultural background especially and it should be recognized that every child is different and everyone has to be viewed on a case to case basis on how much inclusion that they can be allowed to have as a school within a classroom because they may be able to do only one or two things. (Ally – Early Year Resource Coordinator)

I would like to bring a montage of pictures and say “now you take a look, this is what it is” and especially the Prime Minister, you know like in Ottawa go into those schools take a pic. Same circumstance, special needs. What school do you want your child to go to or your grandchild? Now you think about that and how could you sleep at night if you’re not providing it to all children because they are all deserving.(Ally Special Education Consultant)

I would highlight right off the hop the fundamental despairingly (because you need a touch stone) for comparison. You need something which predicates the argument a petition a plea, whatever the case may be. I would immediately highlight the rank disparity between provincial and federal service provision funding and everything associated with it as it applies to effective educational programming, appropriate educational programming. And I would use case study after heart wrenching case study to make my point. Pre-school age, school age and post school age to illustrate the dire need for change. We need awareness, and then I would like the capacity to punish them if they didn’t do it. Unfortunately, not everybody is conscience driven. We’re rewards and punishment driven. Behaviour serves two purposes, you get something or avoid something and you’ll find that in examples of all levels of government. They’re

constantly talking about accountability and using that for an avoidance mechanism.

Because in all First Nations desperate times, calls for desperate measures. (Early Year Resource Coordinator, North)

I would also inform all leaders that as teachers in First Nation Schools, our staff have work hard and if not harder than other systems due to doing a job without the supports in place but by doing the best we can and doing it for the children. We deserve the same supports as other provincial systems and our children deserve the best education possible which was part of the Treaty right, therefore we should be on equal standards as other systems across the board in funding and all other areas. I would also ask them to stop the jurisdiction across the provincial and federal systems so we can have support clinicians come to our school for meetings with children they may have worked with in other systems. I would tell them there are a lot of things in change at this time and we need to work together for the benefit of children who transfer between our systems. (High School Resource Teacher Cree)

If I could meet with the political leaders I would discuss how important it is to have enough funds to meet the needs of the students, and to have a look at the progression of on reserve students as compared to provincial schools. What the provincial schools take for granted the reserve schools wish they had access to. And then with the students too, they say, well how come part of you can do that? Like they are right next door and they can see it. But yet we don't have access to that. Especially when you live just across what used to be a railway track. And they see it daily. It all comes down to the lack of funding. I know there are a lot of good people on staff who try daily to do their best, but you can only go so far with nothing. I think they do an amazing job with what they do

with what they can get. I know too a lot of them are purchasing things for their students with their own money and it can get pretty costly and especially if you have your own family too, but you don't want to see your students go without. (Early Year Resource Teacher Ojibway)

I would encourage them [all leaders] to visit schools and talk to teachers about some of the issues they are dealing with. I believe education is happening in the classrooms. Teachers are the front liners, and all too often, aren't being heard. They are the ones trained to deal with that, but in reality, they are expected to do much more than teaching the academics, they need to be heard. I would encourage them to visit classroom teachers in multiple communities so they are hearing it from everyone, not just me. (Ojibway Curriculum Consultant and Resource Teacher)

Oh my goodness. If they were sitting right in front of me with all this that is happening I would tell them that they should be ashamed of themselves for how they are picking and choosing what nationality, or what culture gets enough money for educating children. I would tell them if you had children of different cultures sitting here are you going to give some cultures one amount and some another amount? Is this not Canada? I would ask them how would you feel if this was your child or grand-child? I would say come to the Aboriginals, and we get this amount of dollars. Like you know, we are a big issue with everything that is going on at home and you wonder why. It just makes me so mad, and very very very sad.

I would tell all of them that we are underfunded. We cannot provide services to students, especially in special ed. We need funding to be able to function and have a better

academic results in school. Right now we are exhausting our teachers in trying to provide for high school students within the community. We are having teachers work all day and into the evening and they don't want to come back to the community if that is what takes place. We are having teachers retire, and not bringing in fresh teachers out of education therefore teachers get tired and the older you are you can't function as well. But we are trying to provide education for students that dropped out and they can come back no matter what their age is. (Northern Cree resource teacher)

First of all I would say to them [our leaders] what First Nations do have. Right now, they try their best. They really try their best to make their schools successful. However, I would stress the importance of making funding equal across the board. Second, I would say that we need the Child Guidance Clinic for First Nations in order for us to be successful and in order for us to succeed in helping our students with disabilities. Third, all education funding should be targeted there Mr. Grand Chief, Mr. Prime Minister. And fourth, bring back First Nations arts and crafts in the classroom. Bring those things back that helped me succeed in schools where I got my degree in school. (Cree Education Consultant)

One I thought of right away, we as indigenous learners, people, parents in First Nations communities regardless of where we learn that we are entitled to the same possible to the best education that is available to mainstream society but we don't have that because we are not given the money. We have to be provided the same funding for all students. We need new schools, Mr. Prime Minister. We want new schools. We invite you to come and look at some schools where 2,000 students are crammed in there. I would say stuff like that to them. But, we certainly need new schools, more space. We need facilities of

course for our students. We don't want anymore substandard facilities for our students, Mr. Prime Minister. We want all these specialists available to our learners that they do have in other schools. (Northern Cree Teacher)

We need to train more of our people to be specialists but we want our schools to have access to their money first and foremost. We don't want that money poured to the First Nation office. I don't know why that came about where the Assembly of Manitoba First Nations Chiefs came about with that agreement with the government and that's when that started where the money all went to the band office. You do whatever you want with it. You know, that needs to stop. (Northern Teacher)

And the thing is it seems like the assembly of Manitoba First Nations Chiefs, they don't really go against, they just kind of, they don't push, unless they don't really know what is going on. It should be pushed. (Retired Cree Resource Teacher)

It sucks. We are not reaching our children with what you are giving us. We need more money, more funding, more specialized teachers. We need more specialists. We need so much. You are holding us back because of the dollars. (Cree Instructional Leader/Resource Teacher)

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Appendix C: ENREB Application

Ethics Protocol Submission Form:

1. Summary of Project:

In this study I will examine the perspectives of First Nations educators, clinicians and consultants, as well as Elders, and Indigenist allies, who work in First Nations special/inclusive education, on dis/ability and difference and the provision of supports and services for students with and without special education needs and/or dis/abilities attending schools in First Nations communities throughout Manitoba. I use the intersections of Tribal Critical Theory (Brayboy, 2009) and Dis/ability Critical Theory (Annamma et.al., 2012) to understand issues related to the provision of special/inclusive education supports and services provided in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. The overall research question for this study is: What are the perspectives and experiences of First Nations educators related to the history, development, and implementation of special/inclusive education supports and services in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

Qualitative methods will be used in order to document the history, funding, challenges and opportunities related to the provision of special/inclusive education supports and services in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. In this study I will use individual, in-depth one-on-one interviews to collect data. Research participants will be asked to participate in two individual interviews, each being approximately one hour in length.

In this study, I will build upon existing relationships I have with First Nations Educators, Elders, Consultants, Clinicians, and Indigenist allies currently working, or have worked in special/inclusive education supports and services in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Through my full time employment, over the past 15 years I have engaged with First Nations educators and education systems on issues related to dis/ability and special/inclusive education. This provides me with the trust and a set of established connections to build community engagement for this study. In this research, I will explore, understand, and document the experiences, perspectives and practices of those who work most closely within the field of special/inclusive education in schools in First Nations education systems in Manitoba.

There will be no financial remuneration for participating in this study. As is the case within First Nations, a small gift such as tobacco (a single cigarette) or a handmade item (a small dream catcher) will be offered with the exchange of information between individuals.

I currently am employed, in the Special Education Unit with the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Center. In no way will the services to your local school be affected in any way by your participation or refusal to participate in this project. This research is not part of my work at the MFNERC and is a separate project undertaken through the Department of Education at the University of Manitoba.

In this study I will be engaging a transcriptionist, research assistant and a critical First Nations friend to assist me while conducting this study. The transcriptionist will transcribe audio taped interviews. The research assistant will help with reviewing non identifying data

and will provide an additional review of my analysis of the data and the critical First Nations friend will reviewing study proposals and interview guides, providing critical feedback, which may include reviewing non identifying aggregate data and data analysis outcomes. The purpose of this critical First Nations friend is to provide me with helpful cultural insights, but not to be critical of participants nor their schools.

2. Research Instruments:

Individual interview questions have been designed for study participants and will be sent to participants prior to the interviews. Not only has my advisor reviewed these questions I have also received advise and recommendations from First Nations community members on the nature of both the study and the questions within the research guides. In addition my advisory committee has read and reviewed the questions, which includes one member of a First Nation community. The in-depth, one-on-one interviews will be held in a place and location that is mutually agreeable to both the researcher and study participants. I do not anticipate that any of these instruments, or the information located within them, will pose any risk to study participants. Please see Appendix C: Interview Guides.

3. Participants:

Once I receive approval from ENREB, I will send a letter to all authorities (First Nations Education Portfolio Counselors/Education Directors, Superintendents of relevant School Divisions, and the Executive Director of the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre: MFNERC) informing them of the study and asking them to disseminate a recruitment letter to interested parties who meet the eligibility criteria for the study. See Appendix A: Letter to Authorities. See Appendix B: Recruitment Letter for Research Participants. Those interested in participating in the research will be asked to contact me directly. Participants will be selected based on criteria outlined in the research proposal to ensure a wide range of experiences and perspectives. For those who express interest I will contact them and have a conversation about their background. See Appendix E: Conversation Script. Those who are not selected will be contacted to explain why they were not chosen and to be thanked for their interest.

Using maximum variation sampling, a method which provides for identification of wide variations in the experiences and perspectives, a sample of 10-15 participants will be selected and invited to be a part of the study. There are approximately 100 eligible First Nations resource teachers, consultants, Elders, clinicians, and Indigenist allies who work in, or have worked in First Nations special/inclusive education. These individuals must be currently working in, or have worked in, First Nations primary or secondary special/inclusive education for a minimum of at least 5 years. Clinicians may include First Nations Educational Psychologists, Audiologists, Reading Clinicians, Speech and Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists or Physiotherapists. I will attempt to include representation from each of the five First Nation linguistic/cultural groups (Dakota, Dene, Ojibway, Island Lake Dialect and Cree/Innu), representation from the various clinical groups, educators, Elders, and consultants for First Nations schools in Manitoba. (MFNERC or Frontier School Division)

There are eligible study participants who are known to me but no longer work in existing schools/divisions or education service organizations. For those individuals, I will contact them directly informing them of the study and inviting them to express their interest in participating in the study. For these individuals I have no authority or influence over them in any way.

As the MFNERC currently has authority over one First Nation school (Ginew School, Roseau River First Nation), to avoid any possible conflict of interest, I will not invite participation from any staff member working at that school.

4. Informed Consent:

Please see Appendix D: Informed Consent of Research Participant. All research participants will be provided a copy of the interview questions prior to the meetings. Participants will be advised that they are not obligated to answer any questions in this study they do not want to, and are free to withdraw from the study at any time, simply by telling the researcher. All responses to the interviews will be kept confidential. Names of individuals, position types/roles, communities or divisions will not appear anywhere in the results. Pseudonyms will be used for names of people, places and identifying information such as the nature of the profession i.e., teacher, speech therapist or psychologist. To further protect the confidentiality of the participants a confidentiality pledge will be signed by the transcriptionist, research assistant, and the First Nations critical friend working with me on this study. See Appendix F: Confidentiality Pledge. Only aggregate data will be reported to further protect the confidentiality of all participants.

5. Deception:

No deception will be used in any aspect of this research.

6. Feedback/Debriefing:

All participants will have the opportunity to review, add to or change the information they provide in their interviews and will also receive a summary of the findings at the completion of the study.

7. Risks and Benefits:

There are minimal risks to participation in this study. To minimize any potential risks, project participants will be assured of confidentiality and that no identifying information will be shared through the dissemination of the results of the study. I will also advise participants that although I may not be able to provide them with complete anonymity, every effort will be made to protect their confidentiality. The benefits of participating in this study include adding to the limited academic research on First Nations education in Canada in particular, and on First Nations special/inclusive education in general. Participants may also appreciate the opportunity to reflect on their work.

8. Anonymity or Confidentiality:

The data in this study will be the audio recorded answers from the interview questions posed to the study participants.

All data collected in this study will be treated as private and confidential. It will be kept in a locked briefcase and or filing cabinet at my home office at _____ in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I will audio record the interviews using a hand held tape recorder, which will then be transcribed and stored in an electronic format. The audiotapes will be stored in a locked briefcase and will then be destroyed following the transcription. Electronic data will be stored only on an encrypted memory stick which will also be kept in a locked filing cabinet or the locked briefcase of the researcher. All paper data will be kept for a maximum of 3 months following final completion of the research project. The data will be disposed of by shredding all transcripts of interviews and erasing the electronic data. All electronic storage devices will be cleared of data following the completion of the research project.

Confidential data will be protected by not identifying any research participants, individual schools or communities in the dissemination of the results of the study. Project participants will be ensured confidentiality through written consent forms developed for this study. Due to the relatively small number of clinicians and specialists, the identity of project participants will be further protected by not identifying the type of position held related to specific information shared in the interviews. For example, “A speech and language clinician indicated.....” will not be used due to the relative small number of First Nations speech and language clinicians currently practicing in Manitoba.

All consent forms clearly indicate the right of participants to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence with a guarantee of confidentiality.

As noted in the consent letter in Appendix D, I have the following statement: “All responses to the interviews will be kept confidential. Names of neither individuals nor communities will appear anywhere in the results. Only my transcriptionist, academic advisor and research assistant will have access to the anonymized (non-identifying) data collected. Pseudonyms will be used for names of people, places and identifying information such as the nature of the profession i.e., teacher, speech therapist or psychologist. The transcripts of the interviews will be sent back to the participants so that they can delete or change responses to ensure that all information is accurate and to ensure that all identifying information has been omitted. Pseudonyms, and only aggregate data, will be reported in this study. Please be advised that even with all of the efforts made to protect anonymity, there still may be a small risk of someone identifying your involvement. Please be assured that refusal to participate in the study will not negatively affect you, your school, or your community in any way.”

9. Compensation:

There will be no financial remuneration for participating in this study. As is the case within First Nations, a small gift such as tobacco (a single cigarette) or a handmade item (a small dream catcher) will be offered for the exchange of information between individuals.

10. Dissemination:

The study results will be disseminated through the presentation and publication of the final PhD dissertation. All research participants, schools and educational organizations will receive a summary of the findings of the study. In addition, to continue to foster community engagement, I will look for ongoing opportunities to discuss the findings of the study. Study results may also be shared in academic publications and presentations at the local, regional, provincial or national level.

Letter to Authorities to Authorize Staff Participation:



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Research Project Title: First Nations Educators, Clinicians, Consultants, Elders, and Indigenist Allies on Special/Inclusive Education in First Nations Schools in Manitoba.

Principal Investigator: Don Shackel, Ph.D. Student, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba.

Research Supervisor: Dr. Zana Marie Lutfiyya,

Dear Education Portfolio Counselor/Director of Education/Superintendent/Executive Director: *this will be adapted for the appropriate recipient.

Hello, my name is Don Shackel and I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Manitoba in the Faculty of Education. I have worked for the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre for the past 15 years within the special education unit. I am sending this letter to inform you of a research study and to request your assistance in the recruitment of potential participants in *your school/the First Nations school(s) in your division/the service organization you oversee. I am conducting a study on issues related to delivery of special/inclusive education supports and services in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives and experiences of First Nations educators, clinicians and consultants, as well as Elders, and Indigenist allies who work in First Nations special/inclusive education, on dis/ability and difference and the provision of supports and services for students with and without special education needs and/or dis/abilities attending schools in First Nations communities throughout Manitoba.

Please know that this study is not an evaluation of any specific First Nations school/special inclusive education program or education organization. It is an opportunity for participants to reflect upon, share their general experiences, and contribute to providing overall recommendations toward the enhancement of special/inclusive education supports and services for schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Eligible research participants include those with a minimum of five years of experience working in special inclusive education in a school in a First Nations community in Manitoba. Participants will be selected in order to get people with a range of experiences and/or backgrounds including various positions, jurisdictional affiliations, roles, and cultural and

linguistic groups involved in the provision and delivery of special/inclusive education supports in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

In this study I will ask participants to take part in two individual, open ended, semi structured interviews which should take approximately an hour for each session. These sessions will take place at a mutually agreeable time and location. The questions are related to their work, training, experiences and perspectives. The interviews will in no way affect their ability to do their work or perform the duties of their job. The interviews will be audiotaped with a digital recorder. The audio recorded tapes will then be transcribed and stored on an encrypted electronic storage device and destroyed at the completion of the study.

The benefits of your staff participating in this study include adding to the limited academic research on First Nations education and in particular, First Nations special/inclusive education. Participants may also appreciate the opportunity to reflect on their work. It is my hope that this study will contribute to the strengthening of First Nations education systems in Manitoba and throughout Canada. There are minimal risks to participation in this study.

The data in this study will be the audio recorded answers from the questions posed to participants in the two interviews. All data collected in this study will be treated as private and confidential. It will be kept in a locked briefcase and or filing cabinet at my home office at _____ in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I will audio record the interviews using a hand held tape recorder, which will also be kept in a locked filing cabinet and/or briefcase. All paper data will be kept for a maximum of 3 months following final completion of the research project. The data will be disposed of by shredding all transcripts of interviews and clearing all electronic devices. All electronic storage devices will be cleared of data following the completion of the research project, no later than June 2016.

Confidential data will be protected by not identifying individual students, teachers, clinicians, consultants, parents, community members or individual schools or communities in the dissemination of the results of the study. Due to the relatively small number of clinicians and specialists, the identity of project participants will be further protected by not identifying the type of position held related to specific information shared in the interviews. For example, "A speech and language clinician indicated....." will not be used in the final report due to the relative small number of First Nations speech and language clinicians currently practicing in Manitoba.

All responses to the interviews will be kept confidential. Names of neither individuals nor communities will appear anywhere in the results. Only my transcriptionist will have access to the raw data and will be required to sign an oath of confidentiality. My academic advisor, research assistant and critical First Nation friend will have access to the anonymized (non-identifying) data collected. A confidentiality form has been developed for the research assistant and critical First Nation friend. Pseudonyms will be used for names of people, places and identifying information such as the nature of the profession i.e., teacher, speech therapist or psychologist will not be disclosed. The transcripts of the interviews will be sent back to participants so that they can delete or change responses to ensure that all information is accurate and that all identifying information has been omitted. Pseudonyms, and only aggregate data, will be reported in this study. Please be advised that even with all of the

efforts made to protect confidentiality, there still may be a small risk of someone identifying participant involvement. Please be assured that refusal to participate in the study will not negatively affect you, your school, or your community in any way.

There will be no financial remuneration for participating in this study. As is the case within First Nations, a small gift such as tobacco (a single cigarette) or a handmade item (a small dream catcher) will be offered with the exchange of information between individuals.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and declining to participate will have no negative consequences. Participants are not obligated to answer any questions in this study that you do not want to, and they are free to withdraw from the study at any time, simply by telling me that they so wish.

All participants will have the opportunity to review, add to or change the information they provide in their interviews and will also receive a summary of the findings at the completion of the study. All participants and schools in First Nations communities will receive this summary no later than March 2016 and will be sent by either email, or mail, whichever they prefer. Results from this study may also be disseminated through presentations at educational and scholarly conferences and through publication in academic journals.

I currently am employed, in the Special Education Unit with the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Center. In no way will the services to your local school be affected in any way by your participation or refusal to participate in this project. This research is not part of my work at the MFNERC and is a separate project undertaken through the Department of Education at the University of Manitoba.

Your signature on this form indicates that you agree to arrange for the distribution of the recruitment letters for this study. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsor, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

These are the minimum standards for conducting research, however with research with First Nation communities I believe there are additional responsibilities, which I will also adhere to. In this study I will ensure that First Nations voices and perspectives are front and center. In the study I will honour and respect sacred knowledge(s), observe cultural protocols. I believe it is important that the study benefit the communities and education systems directly involved in the study. For me, this study is about being in your community and school in a good way and working towards a better future for all First Nations learners.

The University of Manitoba may look at the research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC), Margaret Bowman at 204 474-7122 or Margaret.Bowman@umanitoba.ca.

If you agree to distributing the recruitment letter for the study please sign this form and return it to me and forward the attached recruitment letter to all teaching, clinical, Elders

and/or consulting staff you know who work in, or have worked in, special/inclusive education for a minimum of five years in a school in a First Nations school in Manitoba.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Don Shackel

Signature of Authority: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone Contact: _____

Signature or Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Recruitment Letter for Participants:



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Research Project Title: First Nations Educators, Clinicians, Consultants, Elders, and Indigenist Allies on Special/Inclusive Education in First Nations Schools in Manitoba.

Principal Investigator: Don Shackel, Ph.D. Student, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba.

Research Supervisor:

Zana.Lutfiyya@umanitoba.ca.

Dear Educator/Elder/Consultant/Clinician/Ally:

Hello, my name is Don Shackel and I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Manitoba in the Faculty of Education. I have worked for the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre for the past 15 years within the special education unit. You have been given this letter as an invitation to participate in a research study that is looking at issues related to delivery of special/inclusive education supports and services in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives and experiences of First Nations educators, clinicians and consultants, as well as Elders, and Indigenist allies who work in First Nations special/inclusive education, on dis/ability and difference and the provision of supports and services for students with and without special education needs and/or dis/abilities attending schools in First Nations communities throughout Manitoba.

Please be advised that this study is neither an evaluation of any specific First Nations school, special/inclusive education program or education organization. It is an opportunity for participants to reflect upon and share their general experiences, and to contribute to providing overall recommendations toward the enhancement of special/inclusive education supports and services for schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

In order to be eligible to participate in this study you will need to have a minimum of five year of experience working as a special education/resource teacher, clinician, consultant or Elder in a First Nations special/inclusive education position in a school in a First Nation community(s) in Manitoba. Of the approximately 100 eligible participants, from those who voluntarily express interest in participating, 10-15 will be selected. Eligible and interested research participants will be selected in order to access study participants from various positions, jurisdictional affiliations, roles, and cultural and linguistic groups involved in the

provision and delivery of special/inclusive education supports in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

In this study I will ask participants to take part in two individual, open ended, semi structured interviews which should take approximately an hour for each session. Each session will be held at a mutually agreeable time and location. The questions are related to your work, training, experiences and perspectives. The interviews will in no way affect your ability to do your work or perform the duties of your job. The interviews will be audiotaped with a digital recorder. The audio recorded tapes will then be transcribed and stored on an encrypted electronic storage device.

The benefits of you participating in this study include adding to the limited academic research on First Nations education and in particular, First Nations special/inclusive education. Participants may also appreciate the opportunity to reflect on their work. It is my hope that this study will contribute to the strengthening of First Nations education systems in Manitoba and throughout Canada. There are minimal risks to participation in this study.

The data in this study will be the audio recorded answers from the questions posed to participants in the two interviews. All data collected in this study will be treated as private and confidential. It will be kept in a locked briefcase and or filing cabinet at my home office at _____ in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I will audio record the interviews using a hand held tape recorder, which will then be transcribed and stored in an electronic format. The audiotapes will be stored in a locked briefcase and will then be destroyed following the transcription. Electronic data will be stored only on an encrypted memory stick which will also be kept in a locked filing cabinet or the locked briefcase of the researcher. All paper data will be kept for a maximum of 3 months following final completion of the research project. The data will be disposed of by shredding all transcripts of interviews and all electronic data will be destroyed. All electronic storage devices will be cleared of data following the completion of the research project, no later than June 2016.

Confidential data will be protected by not identifying individual students, teachers, clinicians, consultants, parents, community members or individual schools or communities in the dissemination of the results of the study. Due to the relatively small number of clinicians and specialists, the identity of project participants will be further protected by not identifying the type of position held related to specific information shared in the interviews. For example, "A speech and language clinician indicated....." will not be used in the final report due to the relative small number of First Nations speech and language clinicians currently practicing in Manitoba.

All responses to the interviews will be kept confidential. Names of neither individuals nor communities will appear anywhere in the results. Only my transcriptionist, academic advisor and research assistant will have access to the anonymized (non-identifying) data collected. They are required to sign a confidentiality form for this project. Pseudonyms will be used for names of people, places and identifying information such as the nature of the profession i.e., teacher, speech therapist or psychologist. The transcripts of the interviews will be sent back to participants so that you can delete or change responses to ensure that all information is accurate and that all identifying information has been omitted. Pseudonyms, and only aggregate data, will be reported in this study. Please be advised that even with all of the

efforts made to protect anonymity, there still may be a small risk of someone identifying participant involvement. Please be assured that refusal to participate in the study will not negatively affect you, your school, or your community in any way.

There will be no financial remuneration for participating in this study. As is the case within First Nations, a small gift such as tobacco (a single cigarette) or a handmade item (a small dream catcher) will be offered with the exchange of information between individuals.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and declining to participate will have no negative consequences. You are not obligated to answer any questions in this study that you do not want to, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, simply by telling me that you so wish.

All participants will have the opportunity to review, add to or change the information they provide in their interviews and will also receive a summary of the findings at the completion of the study. Participants and schools in First Nations communities will receive this summary no later than March 2016 and will be sent this by either email or mail, whichever they prefer. Results from this study may also be disseminated through presentations at educational and scholarly conferences and through publication in academic journals.

I currently am employed, in the Special Education Unit with the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Center. In no way will the services to your local school be affected in any way by your participation or refusal to participate in this project. This research is not part of my work at the MFNERC and is a separate project undertaken through the Department of Education at the University of Manitoba.

These are the minimum standards for conducting research, however with research with First Nation communities I believe there are additional responsibilities, which I will also adhere to. In this study I will ensure that First Nations voices and perspectives are front and center. In the study I will honour and respect sacred knowledge(s), observe cultural protocols. I believe it is important that the study benefit the communities and education systems directly involved in the study. For me, this study is about being in your community and school in a good way and working towards a better future for all First Nations learners.

If you wish to take part in this study, or have any additional questions, please contact me by phone at (204) 793-3976 or email at umshackd@myumantioba.ca.

I will contact all prospective study participants within 2 weeks of receiving notice of your interest. The interviews are planned to take place between September 15 2015 and December 15, 2015. If you are chosen to participate we can set mutually agreeable times and locations and if not selected, I will explain the reason why.

Thank you for your consideration and support of this study.

Sincerely,

Don Shackel

Interview Guides:

Interview Guide #1.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study about special/inclusive education in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. We have already gone through the informed consent form and have signed it. Do you have any other question before we proceed? Please know that you can ask any questions at any time so do please stop me at any time. The purpose of the first interview is to get to know you better, and to ask questions about your background, your understanding of key terms and your perspectives related to the school experiences of students with and without special education needs and/or dis/abilities (SEND) in First Nations communities in Manitoba. The second interview includes more in-depth questions about the history, current context and future recommendations related to the delivery of special/inclusive education supports within First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Let me remind you again that this study is neither an evaluation of any specific First Nations school/special inclusive education program or education organization. It is an opportunity for participants to reflect upon, share their general experiences, and contribute to providing overall recommendations toward the enhancement of special/inclusive education supports and services in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Let's begin.

Opening Questions:

1. Can you please give me a little background about yourself and your work in special/inclusive education in First Nations schools/organizations/communities in Manitoba?
2. What experiences have helped you in these positions?

Prompts:

- life experiences,
- pre service training,
- ongoing training,
- support systems,
- other.

Definitions:

3. What does inclusion mean to you?
4. What does a special education need mean to you?
5. What does remedial learning mean to you?
6. What does dis/ability mean to you?

7. From your experiences and understanding, is dis/ability defined or viewed differently within a First Nations cultural context compared to non-First Nations contexts? If so, how? Do you know of any direct translation for the word or term dis/ability into the First Nations languages?

8. When considering different factors such as dis/ability, geographic location, gender, age, what are the differences in the experiences of students with SEND in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

School Experiences of students with and without SEND:

9. From your experiences, what factors account for the number of students identified with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in First Nations schools in Manitoba?

10. From your perspective what constitutes meaningful and relevant education for students with and without SEND attending school in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

11. How are students with dis/abilities in First Nations seen by:

Prompts:

Teachers,

Peers,

Family members,

Others in the community.

12. What factors contribute to the perceptions of students with and without SEND in school in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

13. What happens to students with and without SEND in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

14. What factors affect the success of education for First Nations students with and without SEND attending schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

Prompts:

Mobility of their family,

Poverty/socio economic conditions,

Child apprehension,

Availability (or lack of) of services and supports in the community,

Jurisdictional wrangling and offloading,

Other.

15. What is in place for students with SEND and their parents in terms of dispute resolution mechanisms if their needs, services and supports are not being met/in place?

16. What if any are the barriers to school and community based inclusion and full participations for children/students with SEND living in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

17. How does the functioning within and between governments (Federal Provincial and First Nations /interdepartmental (health education, family services, social services) affect the lives of students with SEND attending school in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

Special/inclusive education within First Nations communities in Manitoba:

18. Do First Nations cultural teachings influence your response to special education needs and/or dis/abilities? If so, how?

19. How has what you learned in your professional training affected your response to special education needs and/or dis/ability in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

20. What are the implications of being trained within a mainstream framework of special education and then practicing within a First Nations community education context?

21. How has the history of First Nations, and First Nations education, affected issues related to special/inclusive education and academic achievement of students in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba, particularly those with other special needs and/or dis/abilities?

22. What processes and/or educational approaches might constitute or enhance cultural relevancy with students with special education needs and/or dis/abilities?

23. What are the strengths within First Nations communities in relation to meeting the needs of students with SEND?

24. What are the challenges related to the implementation of special /inclusive education with First Nations community education contexts in Manitoba?

25. What innovative/proactive methods of instruction/programming/or system changes might help to prevent or reduce the reported high number of remedial students and the lack of successful school completion of students, particularly those living with dis/ability, in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

26. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interview Guide #2.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the second interview for this study. By now you have received the transcripts of your first interview and have had an opportunity to add or delete anything you wish. The purpose of the second interview is for me to ask you more specific questions about the history of, current issues, and future recommendations for educating students with special needs and other dis/abilities in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. Before we proceed do you have any questions for me or do you need to add anything you think is important from the questions you were asked in the first interview?

Let's begin.

History:

1. Can you please outline the significant events or phases of the history of special/inclusive education in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba from as far back as you can remember?
2. If you are aware, what happened to students with special education needs and/or disabilities in First Nations schools before "special or inclusive education" systems i.e., specialists, resource teachers, clinicians, educational assistants, technologies were in place?

Cultural relevancy in First Nations special/inclusive education:

3. What are ways to build positive self-esteem and positive self-identity of the First Nations students you work with, particularly those with SEND?
4. What is, or should be, the role of mainstream educational curriculum and special/inclusive educational practices in the education of First Nations students with dis/abilities in First Nations schools in Manitoba?
5. Are the needs of First Nations children with dis/abilities attending schools in First Nations communities being met? If so how, and if not why? What are some of the ways schools, families and communities can better meet the needs of these students?
6. How do the following issues affect the development and delivery of supports and services for students with/or without special education needs and/or dis/abilities in First Nations schools in Manitoba?

Prompts:

Attitudes, philosophies, beliefs,

Funding of special education (levels, models, flow, third party management)

Funding levels of overall education (level, flow, third party management)

Staff turnover

Poverty, alcohol and drug use, socio economic conditions, political issues

Available school and community based supports and services

Cultural and linguistic relevance of curriculum and pedagogy

7. What are, or were, the biggest challenges, pressures, successes, and opportunities involved with your work in First Nations special/inclusive education?

Recommendations for future improvement/enhancement of special/inclusive education supports and services in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba:

8. How might teachers, clinicians, and consultants improve the identification and assessment of special education needs and/or disabilities in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

9. What is cultural relevancy in educational assessment overall and within assessment practices of special/inclusive education?

10. How does jurisdiction (i.e., local control vs. affiliation with provincial division or First Nations aggregate) within First Nations education affect students with and without special education needs and/or disabilities?

11. How does legislation, or lack thereof, in education within First Nations affect the education of students with and without special education needs and/or disabilities?

12. How does the current level of community based support for people with dis/abilities in First Nations communities affect the ability of the education systems to deliver supports and services for students with dis/abilities in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

13. What structural changes/educational practices or cultural approaches would you recommend to improve the special/included education supports systems operating with schools in First Nations communities throughout Manitoba?

Prompts:

Funding changes of general education,

Funding changes for special/inclusive education,

Jurisdictional changes,

Services and supports,

In school programming options,

Specific cultural approaches,

Specific education practice,

Other.

14. What is, or should be at the heart of special/inclusive education in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba?

15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Informed Consent:



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Informed Consent of Research Participant

Research Project Title: First Nations Educators, Clinicians, Consultants, Elders, and Indigenist Allies on Special/Inclusive Education in First Nations Schools in Manitoba.

Principal Investigator: Don Shackel, Ph.D. Student, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba.

Research Supervisor: Dr. Zana Marie Lutfiyya, Zana.Lutfiyya@umanitoba.ca.

Dear Educator/Elder/Consultant/Clinician/Ally,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives and experiences of First Nations educators, clinicians and consultants, as well as Elders, and Indigenist allies who work in First Nations special/inclusive education, on dis/ability and difference and the provision of supports and services for students with and without special education needs and/or dis/abilities attending schools in First Nations communities throughout Manitoba.

In this study I am asking you to participate in two open ended, semi structured interviews which should take approximately an hour for each session. Each session will be held at a mutually agreeable time and location. The questions are related to your work, training, experiences and perspectives. The interviews will in no way affect your ability to do your work or perform the duties of your job. The interviews will be audiotaped with a digital recorder. The audio recorded tapes will then be transcribed and stored on an encrypted electronic storage device.

The benefits of your participation in this study include adding to the limited academic research on First Nations education and in particular, First Nations special/inclusive education. In addition, participants may also appreciate the opportunity to reflect on their

work. It is my hope that this study will contribute to the strengthening of First Nations education systems in Manitoba and throughout Canada. There are minimal risks to participation in this study.

The data in this study will be the audio recorded answers from the questions posed to you in the two interviews. All data collected in this study will be treated as private and confidential. It will be kept in a locked briefcase and or filing cabinet at my home office at _____ in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I will audio record the interviews using a hand held tape recorder, which will then be transcribed and stored in an electronic format. The audiotapes will be stored in a locked briefcase and will then be destroyed following the transcription. Electronic data will be stored only on an encrypted memory stick which will also be kept in a locked filing cabinet or the locked briefcase of the researcher. All paper data will be kept for a maximum of 3 months following final completion of the research project. The data will be disposed of by shredding all transcripts of interviews and clearing all electronic data. All electronic storage devices will be cleared of data following the completion of the research project, no later than June 2016.

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want to, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, simply by telling me that you so wish.

All participants will have the opportunity to review, add to or change the information they provide in their interviews and will also receive a summary of the findings at the completion of the study. You will receive this summary no later than March 2016 and will be send to you by either email, or mail, whichever you prefer. Results from this study may be disseminated through presentations at educational and scholarly conferences and through publication in academic journals.

I currently am employed, in the Special Education Unit with the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Center. In no way will the services to your local school be affected in any way by your participation or refusal to participate in this project. This research is not part of my work at the MFNERC and is a separate project undertaken through the Department of Education at the University of Manitoba.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate in this study. In no way does this wave your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsor, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

These are the minimum standards for conducting research, however with research with First Nation communities I believe there are additional responsibilities, which I will also adhere to. In this study I will ensure that First Nations voices and perspectives are front and center. In the study I will honour and respect sacred knowledge(s), observe cultural protocols. I believe it is important that the study benefit the communities and education systems directly involved in the study. For me, this study is about being in your community and school in a good way and working towards a better future for all First Nations learners.

The University of Manitoba may look at the research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) Margaret Bowman at or Margaret.Bowman@umanitoba.ca.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone Contact: _____

Signature or Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Conversation Script:



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Thank you very much for expressing interest in this study on special/inclusive education in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba. I will now ask you a number of questions about yourself and your background. The purpose for these questions is to be able to select a group of participants (10-15) which represents and broad range of experiences and perspectives of the people who have worked within special/inclusive education in schools in First Nations communities in Manitoba.

1. Please tell me about your work experience.
2. Do you identify with any specific First Nations cultural and/or linguistic group?
3. Please tell me about your professional training and or affiliation with any licensing bodies.
4. Do you identify as a First Nations Elder?

Thank you very much for this information. I will contact you within the next two weeks to notify if you have been selected to participate in this study and if not, the reason why.

Thank you once again for your interest in this study.

Don Shackel

Confidentiality Pledges:



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For: Research Assistant(s),

I, _____ am the _____ (role) for the project entitled, First Nations Educators, Clinicians, Consultants, Elders, and Indigenist Allies on Special/Inclusive Education in First Nations Schools in Manitoba. My responsibilities include reviewing non identifying aggregate data and data analysis outcomes.

This the course of my involvement with this study, I may or may not see identifying data, I understand that all participants in this study have been guaranteed the right to have their identity and their responses treated in a confidential matter.

As a result I pledge to maintain confidentiality and anonymity for all information that I receive connected to this study.

Dated at _____ this _____.

Signature and Role

Witness

Confidentiality Form For Transcriptionist:



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I, _____ am the _____ (role) for the project entitled, First Nations Educators, Clinicians, Consultants, Elders, and Indigenist Allies on Special/Inclusive Education in First Nations Schools in Manitoba. My responsibilities include transcribing audio recoded tapes of interviews. As a result I will be seeing identifying personal data.

I understand that I may be working with confidential information (data) and that all participants in this study have been guaranteed the right to have their identity and their responses treated in a confidential matter.

As a result I pledge to maintain confidentiality and anonymity for all information that I receive connected to this study.

Dated at _____ this _____.

Signature and Role

Witness