

**Troubling pathways:
Exploring the schooling experiences of young people in Winnipeg's inner city through
a Peace & Conflict Studies frame**

by

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ABSTRACT

This multi-method qualitative study explores the educational and community experiences of middle years students attending one public school located in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The purpose of this work was to engage in a contrapuntal re-reading of the hegemonic map—as conceptualized in existing scholarship and policy—used to explain differentiated educational attainment rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada. This map has provided the foundation for policy and practice meant to close statistical gaps in attainment—efforts which have largely failed to address the relative disparity between populations. This study presents an outline of this map and then reinscribes excluded perspectives to highlight aspects of the educational landscape which are commonly ignored or misconstrued.

While methodologically committed to the non-prescriptive approaches common to grounded theory and narrative research, this study was influenced by the author's own disciplinary background in Peace and Conflict Studies. It sought to press against the critical periphery of this field by engaging with the notion of “everyday peace” as well as postcolonial studies, educational studies, and childhood studies. It was designed as a methodological bricolage and draws together multiple research methods, including mind mapping; focus groups; semi-structured interviews; participant observation; and document analysis. These engagements offered insight into differently-situated vantage points from which the educational landscape is viewed. During these exchanges, participants told both *stories about* (definitional stories) and *stories of* (open, nuanced stories of lived experience). Examination of the former allowed for the identification of the sensemaking frames employed by participants while considering the latter provided counter-stories that challenge dominant understandings. Analysis of this data suggests that the existing map of the educational landscape tends to homogenize diverse experiences; constructs “mythical norms” of idealized studenthood, workerhood, and parenthood; and reverberates with neoliberal, colonial, and adultist discourses. Further, it excludes and/or contorts the perspectives and embodied experiences of young people, thereby rendering their capacity for agency as invisible, illegitimate, or pathological. Reinscribing these perspectives and experiences suggests a need to denaturalize and challenge not just the map, but also the educational landscape upon which it is based and the hegemonic storyscape which delegitimizes alternative conceptualizations.

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Within this report I suggest that a student's capacity to "make it through" the schooling system is shaped by their access to a large relational web upon which they can draw for material and non-material support. Similarly, I would not have made it through my doctoral studies without my own web—which was filled with brilliant, loving, and dedicated individuals who decided to take a chance on a skittish educational "first-gen" kid from the urban enclave of Rexdale.

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²A pseudonym for the school will be used throughout (in keeping with this project’s ethics protocols).

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DEDICATION

To Danielle and Zachary—
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Maybe someday I'll be Anonymous. Maybe, maybe. Right now, I'm just anonymous. – Jordan



Figure 1 Jordan and Leo's³ "Anonymous" masks (Photo: J. M. Hyde)

³ Jordan was in grade six, Leo was in grade five. Both boys identified themselves as Indigenous (Cree). In total, four participants created masks based on those worn by the "hacktivist" group Anonymous.

CHAPTER ONE

GETTING ACQUAINTED: ARTICULATING THE RESEARCH PUZZLE

1.1 Introduction

This multi-method qualitative study explores the educational and community experiences of young people (middle years students) attending a public school located in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The primary purpose of this work was to engage in a “contrapuntal” (Said, 1994) re-reading of the hegemonic “map”—as conceptualized in existing scholarship and policy—used to explain differentiated educational attainment rates (e.g., school completion rates) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada. This map has provided the foundation for policy and practice meant to close statistical gaps in attainment—efforts which have largely failed to address the relative disparity between populations, despite an increase in the overall number of school “completers.” In this chapter I describe how I came to conceptualize this particular “research puzzle” (Gustafsson & Hagström, 2018), clarifying key terms and presenting my early analytical hunches. This is followed by an overview of the study design and a brief summary of the chapters included in this report.

1.2 A note regarding terminology and guiding metaphors

Before going further, I would like to provide some clarity regarding certain terms and metaphors that are employed throughout this document. Firstly, I am employing the term Indigenous (and, by extension, non-Indigenous) to encompass an incredibly complex array of political nations, including the Métis Nation, diverse Inuit Peoples, and more than fifty First Nation *nations*. This includes individuals who reside in urban settings, within the 630+ First Nation reserve communities, and those in rural and northern areas. Romanow (2020), in her work with post-secondary students living in Winnipeg, notes that “few, if any” young people “actually refer to themselves using the pan-indigenous term ‘Indigenous’” (p. 5). I found this to be the case at Eaglecrest as well. The young people I worked with more often identified as “Aboriginal” or “Native,” employed more specific terms (e.g., Cree, Métis, or Ojibwe), or spoke in direct reference to a community (e.g., “I’m from Bloodvein [First Nation]”).

While I will attempt to be as specific as possible, I will often employ the terms Indigenous and non-Indigenous—as does Romanow (2020)—for “academic convenience” (p. 5) and in the interests of attuning to certain shared experiences and dynamics that help to highlight the operations of colonialism. This occurs across the corpus of literature and policy on this topic area, reflecting both a colonial drive toward homogenization *and* a critical effort to highlight macro-level patterns. While I have attempted to “press against” this frame, I am still largely reliant upon it (particularly when making statistical comparisons and more generalized claims).

This use of identity descriptors is further challenged when considering the different non-Indigenous participants in this study. It is common within literature and policy to designate recent immigrants and refugees (that is, those who are not citizens of Canada) as “newcomers”—a categorization scheme that was also employed by many study participants. Within this discourse, those who pass through the citizenship process (with its various bureaucratic and ritualistic elements) shed this “newcomer” label and are constructed as “Canadian citizens” (or simply “Canadians”). This rhetorical move is not only a part of a broader process of colonial nation-building (which furthers Indigenous assimilation and dispossession) but also serves to construct a false sense of (what Thobani, 2007, terms) “mythic equality,” which persists despite gross (racialized and socioeconomic) injustice (p. 78). To challenge this dynamic, it becomes necessary to identify all non-Indigenous persons as “newcomers” in some respect. However, using the term “newcomer” in this way also erases distinctions between those for whom the experiences (and challenges) of immigration are part of their lived experience from (to draw upon wording offered by participants) “long-term” and “established” Canadians.

To tread through these complexities, I have drawn upon LaRocque’s (2010) use of the term “immigrant re-settlers”⁴ to denote all categories of non-Indigenous “state-created Canadians” (p. 7) while retaining the term “newcomer” for first-generation immigrants (regardless of immigration or citizenship status). Further, all participants in this study who are neither Indigenous nor a newcomer, are identified in this document as “White”⁵—partly due to the use of this term by participants to self-identify, partly in the interests of challenging the

⁴ LaRocque (2010) uses the term “re-settler” (rather than “settler”) so as to destabilize linkages made between “Europe,” “settlement,” and “civilization”—to emphasize that, as she states, “Europeans cannot own the notion of “settler” and settlement” (p. 7-8).

⁵ In this particular study, all non-Indigenous persons of colour were also “newcomers.” If this were not the case, I would be employing additional identity categorizations.

culture of silence around whiteness that permeated the primary research site, and partly to draw attention to the centrality of whiteness within colonial and Canadian nationalist discourse. That being said, “White” is also a homogenized discursive identity construction, albeit one that is employed as normative so as to negate and marginalize various “Others” (Ahmed, 2007).

Navigating age-based and “adultist” discourse was also challenging. I found that my participants (regardless of age) employed a variety of terms when discussing “young people.” They were addressed as “kids,” “clients,” “children,” “youth,” and “students”—with “adult” participants also often employing possessive frames (making reference to “my kids,” “my child,” “our youth,” “my students,” etc.). All of these labels are elements of complex discourses which create problematic binary delineations (Smith, 2014; Beier, 2011a; Bruhm & Hurley, 2004). In an effort to place (at least) one foot outside of these frames, I primarily employ the term “young people” when identifying those who hold the subjugated position in age-related dichotomies and “adult” for those situated as dominant. The former classification generally refers to those under the age of majority (which, in Canada, means younger than eighteen or nineteen years), although this “cap” is a cultural, historical, and political construction and should not be taken as an absolute cut-off. In some instances, I use the terms “student” (when seeking to highlight how young people are positioned within schooling hierarchies) and “child” (when identifying their placement in family systems and discourses of childhood). When discussing research participants, I differentiate between “young participants” (the “students” I worked with) and “adult participants” (the caregivers, school staff, and community-based organization representatives with whom I conducted supplementary interviews). In this study, the young participants were also “middle years” students—which, in Manitoba, refers to young adolescents from ten to fourteen years old (in grades five to eight). Again, this terminology⁶ is “convenient” and helpful for articulating broader phenomenon, while also problematic in its tendency to discursively erase difference.

Overall, I am employing these various terms as consciously as possible as a means to (drawing upon Lather, 1991) navigate “the inescapability of reductionism” endemic to (my)⁷ language—which “frames” and “brings into focus by that which goes unremarked” (p. xix). This

⁶ As well as the terms “male,” “female,” “girl,” and “boy”—which I use occasionally to describe gender.

⁷ Lather (1991) appears to presume that this is applicable to all languages, but I want to leave open the possibility that there are exceptions to this tendency.

lexicon—and the binaries implied—is being used strategically (if problematically) and I encourage the reader to be aware of the challenges caused by the “inadequate category systems” (p. xvi) upon which it is predicated. Lather (1991) presses for this type of consideration, drawing upon her own engagement with feminist poststructuralism to suggest that:

“intellectual workers” can no longer remain oblivious to what has been brewing for so long, evidencing itself perhaps earliest in quantum mechanics and the ushering in of the reality crisis in physics. We live in both/and worlds full of paradox and uncertainty where close inspection turns unities into multiplicities, clarities into ambiguities, univocal simplicities into polyvocal complexities. (p. xvi)

As a consequence of this “close inspection,” classifications of collectives “become fragmented, multiple, and contradictory across groups and within individuals” (p. xvi). I encourage the reader to keep this heterogeneity in mind when I make my own claims to (impartial) truths—to know that I am trying to articulate complexity that I can never fully wrap my tongue around. However, at the same time, remember that I am making a case for the inclusion of “subjugated knowledges” (Foucault, 1980) by oppressed and excluded individuals and collectives and, hence, will need to engage in homogenization in order to make these political assertions—employing what Spivak (1990) refers to as “strategic essentialism.” This is a tricky “doubled” approach to social science (Lather, 2007) that prevents one from getting too comfortable.

I also encourage the reader to remain suspicious of my use of the terms *landscape*, *pathway*, and *map* throughout this document, which I rely upon as key metaphors to describe the phenomena of study. The use of metaphor is suggested by McGregor (2005) as a means to provide “a temporary common language” (p. 5) that can aid with the transdisciplinary approach necessitated by the complexities of peace work. She suggests that this can “give us new degrees of conceptual freedom, releasing us from the chains that bind us to our root discipline or life work” and are thus “useful tools for conveying very complex ideas” (p. 5). I found that the utility of symbolic language was demonstrated at numerous points throughout my work. Firstly, participants employed various “spatial” terms in our conversations; they often used the words *landscape*, *pathway*, and *map* as well as phrases like “getting there,” “moving forward,” and “going through” as a means to articulate their own perspectives and experiences—thereby using metaphor to communicate, in abstraction, complex embodied processes. I also found spatial metaphors in academic literature, with the terms “landscape” and “pathway” often being utilized in educational research. Given the ubiquitousness of this metaphorical discourse, it is

unsurprising that I also found it personally helpful for thinking through and writing out my research findings.

However, while this language has proven useful, it should not be treated as neutral or innocent. Postcolonial theorists in particular suggest the politicized nature of language use, including that which is employed to discuss space, land, and maps. The way in which scholars come to study and think about a phenomenon is not merely descriptive or reproductive; rather, it actually constitutes that which is being described—commonly in ways that maintain existing structures of power (Said, 1994; Spurr, 1993; Foucault, 1980). Consequently, I believe it is necessary to provide further clarification and justification for my use of these particular terms.

The word *landscape* is commonly employed in academic literature on education (e.g., see Clandinin, Steeves, and Caine, 2013) and also appeared in various engagements with research participants. I use it here, symbolically, to connote the complex web of interconnected structural (political, socioeconomic, etc.), cultural, discursive, and material elements which shape the various social worlds of young people and the overall social arena⁸ of public education. In doing so, I hope to denaturalize hegemonic assumptions about the nature of the educational system, to highlight how the particular *topography* of this landscape is not “natural” or inevitable, but rather the product of historical and contemporary processes of *landscaping* (as undertaken through, for example, policy development, the use of overt violence, and various daily practices) which have (and continue to) serve the interests of dominant powers who benefit from direct, structural, and cultural oppression (including the dispossessions of Indigenous peoples). This *landscaping* has directly impacted how individuals—differentially situated in terms of, for example, social location and physical geography—can *move through* life by shaping the *pathways* (the social, institutional, political, and economic trajectories) available to them. This has created and/or eased pathways for some, while hiding, blocking, and/or eradicating those of others.

⁸ As described by Clarke and Star (2007), the social worlds/social arenas framework stems from symbolic interactionism. The term *social world* refers to various “shared discursive spaces” wherein “meaning-making” and action are undertaken by a collective using “shared objects” (p. 113). *Social arenas* are “composed of multiple social worlds organized ecologically around issues of mutual concern and commitment to action” (p. 113). I am adding the concept of *landscape* to this framework to highlight the “constant dialectical relationship” between subjectivity and objectivity (Freire, 2011, p. 50), which suggests that social change can only occur through engagement with both perceptions and “the concrete situation which begets oppression” (p. 50)—in other words, to recognize the relationship between the complex subjective and embodied interactions that constitute social worlds/arenas as well as the more “concrete” structural and discursive formations of the landscape.

These different pathways are, further, culturally coded as desired or deviant and, consequently, imbued with specific promises of affective fulfillment. As Ahmed (2010) suggests, such directions, and the “objects”⁹ to which they grant or promise access, “are already invested with positive and negative value” (p. 34). If an individual finds themselves “out of place” (Ahmed, 2006a, p. 568), it becomes their responsibility to adjust their own mode of being (including the directions of their affect) to fit a sanctioned “orientation” (Ahmed, 2010; 2006b). One must “work on the body such that the body’s immediate reactions, how we sense the world and make sense of the world, take us in the ‘right’ direction” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 34). This is, of course, predicated upon “the faith that adjustment to certain forms or practices of living and thinking—for example, the prospect of class mobility, the romantic narrative, normalcy, nationality, or a better sexual identity—will secure one’s happiness” (Berlant, 2011, p. 126), a faith often rendered false by the ways in which structural/material realities shape embodied, everyday experiences (Ahmed, 2010; 2006b). Going along with social expectation will not guarantee safekeeping and “[a]chieving conventionality...is not the same as achieving security (Berlant, 2011, p. 126).

Essentially, I am talking about *governmentality*, which Morgensen (2011) suggests is “a persistent activity of [re-]settler states [such as Canada] that were never decolonized and of the global regime[s] that extend and naturalise their power” (p. 53). This is achieved primarily through the operations of biopower and necropower, which can be seen as “the product[s] and process[es] of a colonial world” (p. 55). These forms of power order and control social life by making certain forms of living possible (exalting some as the norm) and others impossible or deviant (thereby justifying the subsequent exposure of certain individuals/collectives to conditions which result in physical, social, cultural, and/or political death). These mechanisms of power are not just material, but also shape perception and affect (as identified by Ahmed, 2010, Berlant, 2002, and others). To draw upon Freire (2011) and Memmi (1965), the consciousness (and social worlds) of both the oppressed/colonized and oppressor/colonizer are impacted, resulting in the privilege of the latter at the expense of the former—and the harming¹⁰ of both.

⁹ E.g., forms of economic, cultural, symbolic, and social capital.

¹⁰ I am not suggesting that the harm done to the privileged is equivalent to that of the oppressed, but to emphasize how “[t]he colonial situation manufactured colonialists, just as it manufactures the colonized” (Memmi, 1965, p. 56), resulting in the colonizer’s own (particular form of) dehumanization, characterized by (for example) “mediocrity” (p. 48), fascist tyranny (p. 53) a “necrophilic view of the world” (Freire, 2011, p. 59) and a pathological drive toward consumption and denial (Freire, 2011; Green, 1995; Memmi, 1965).

Such a conceptual frame is vital for understanding Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in Canada because—to draw upon the work of Fullenwieder (2018)—one must consider the specific characteristics of “[re-]settler biopower” and necropower, which “draws populations, bodies, and species-life into production and value, in ways [that] can contribute to [re-]settler accumulation” (p. 424). That is, the operations of power which shape educational inequity in Canada—and, by extension, the life courses of individuals and collectives—facilitate a process of *accumulation through dispossession* wherein natural, economic, political, and symbolic resources are drawn under the control of the immigrant (re-)settler population (Toews, 2018). The terms *landscape*, *landscaping*, and *pathway* provide metaphorical resources to help link this scholarly analysis with the discursive repertoires of my research participants.

Lastly, I should clarify that the terms *map* and *mapping* are used to denote how the issue of educational inequity has been conceptualized and studied. I argue that there is a general *hegemonic map* of this issue that has been/is being (re-)produced by scholars, governments, and corporations who share particular conceptual schema and ideological commitments. This *view from above*, which is used to both explain differentiated educational achievement rates and propose means of intervention, also serves to obfuscate the operations of colonial governmentality. This map, therefore, functions similarly to geographic maps, which are themselves “spatial discourses” (Rivard, 2008, p. 47). That is, maps,

provide both the means (technical and cultural) and the motives (e.g., a territorial claim) to articulate a geographical knowledge—a peculiar set of selected and hierarchically organized geographical facts. The discursive nature of maps indicates that knowledge is shaped by the “truth,” representations, practices, codes, and rules recognized and authorized by the society in which the cartographer lives. Regardless of map-makers’ claims to objectivity, their maps are socially and contextually constructed documents, the expressions (often unconscious) of their society’s culture, norms, and ideologies. (p. 47)

Similarly, the “map” used to conceptualize the educational arena and explain differentiated educational attainment rates is also based upon a “set of selected and hierarchically organized... facts” and reflects socially “authorized” “representations, practices, codes, and rules” (p. 47). Specifically, it serves to justify and/or naturalize the (historically and politically constituted) landscape—thereby rendering certain causes of inequality invisible and limiting imaginaries of action. It is this map—and the governing landscape which it obscures, naturalizes, and justifies—that I sought to challenge in this study by reinscribing the voices of young people. This, I believe, draws attention toward the injustice of the landscape and affirms the agency, reflective

capacities, and humanity of young people (and the various adults with whom they are connected).

1.3 Coming to this research: Early hunches

My interest in reinscribing the voices of young people onto the existing map of the educational landscape (so as to destabilize it) was triggered by an event that, at first blush, may appear distant and unconnected from the inner-city school that I ended up engaging with for my field research. I first became aware of this issue in November 2011, when the Attawapiskat First Nation entered mainstream media and public (re-settler) consciousness. A few weeks previously Theresa Spence, Chief of the northern Ontario fly-in community, had declared a state of emergency so as to draw government attention to the number of residents living in inadequate housing without access to heat, running water, or sanitation facilities—a state widely cited by federal opposition politicians, reporters, and Spence herself as resembling that found in “the Third World” (The Canadian Press, 2011; CBC News, 2011a; Stastna, 2011). This spurred a headline-grabbing political drama that pit community leaders (claiming the crisis was the result of chronic underfunding) against the current government and Prime Minister Stephen Harper (who attributed the situation to “mismanagement” by the band council). Shawn Atleo, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, stated that he hoped the Attawapiskat situation and resulting controversy would serve as a “tipping point” for action on similar issues facing other communities (CBC News, 2011a).

While the public narrative—this *story about*—the Attawapiskat situation was bounded by this political conflict, there existed another *story of* the community and its people that, while also making national news, was rarely woven alongside reports of the housing crisis. This centres upon Shannen Koostachin and other Attawapiskat students, activists who orchestrated one of the largest youth-led children’s rights movements in Canadian history. In 2000 the community’s elementary school, which had long been situated on soil contaminated by diesel fuel leakages, was closed. The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC),¹¹ under then-Minister Robert Nault, set up a series of “temporary” portables and promised the community that a new school would soon be built. Ten years later all classes were still being conducted in

¹¹ Which is now split into two federal bodies: Indigenous Services Canada and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.

portables identified by students, parents, teachers, and INAC itself as unsuitable for learning (FNCFCS & KAIROS, 2011). Tired of governmental inaction, Koostachin and her peers initiated an internet-based action campaign calling for better schools for First Nations students (The Canadian Press, 2012; CBC News, 2011b). This movement—called “Shannen’s Dream”—continues despite Koostachin’s untimely death in 2010.¹²

While this media attention and resulting pressure did, eventually, lead to the construction of a new school facility in Attawapiskat (CBC News, 2012) as well as the 2012 passing of the “Shannen’s Dream” motion (a non-binding rhetorical commitment to improve the quality of educational services on reserves across Canada), the broader issues targeted by Shannen’s Dream remain largely unaddressed. For example, more recently, an inquest into the deaths of six young people from remote First Nations who were attending highschool in Thunder Bay proposed 145 (non-legally binding) recommendations—most of which mirrored those made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada—outlining the continued need to improve the provision of educational services on reserves and to support those who move away from their communities to attend school (Porter, 2016b). Indeed, despite the commitments of 2012, it is estimated that on-reserve schools receive 30% less funding than their provincial counterparts (Porter, 2016a). These disparities, the inquest jury argued, directly contributed to the six students’ death. While some progress related to these recommendations has been made, this work has stymied in the wake of the COVID-19 school shutdowns and funding re-allocations (Porter, 2020b).

Further, insufficient spending was identified as only one aspect of the problem. In 2012 the National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education, a joint task force set up in 2011, released its final report—*Nurturing the learning spirit of First Nations students*. Within this document the panel claims that, in fact, “there is no First Nation education system that consistently supports and delivers positive outcomes for...students” (p. vi). Instead, educational provision is based upon “a patchwork of policies and agreements that do not provide an adequate foundation to support comprehensive improvement” (p. vi). These findings are congruent with those of the 2011 *Status report of the Auditor General of Canada*. In this document the existing funding formula is described as both outdated and uniformed. Furthermore, it suggests that

¹² Koostachin was killed in a car accident in New Liskeard, Ontario. As with many other First Nations students living on reserves, she had moved to the area (hundreds of miles away from Attawapiskat) in order to complete her highschool education.

recommendations on this issue made by the Auditor General in 2004 were ignored and that the Canadian government “has not maintained a consistent approach [to reform] and cannot demonstrate improvements to date” (p. 13).

This failure of funding and policy creates virtually insurmountable obstacles to providing educational services—particularly in light of the various additional challenges faced by students, teachers, parents, and staff working in on-reserve schools (inadequate housing, food insecurity, etc.)—and detracts from efforts to address special learning needs, ensure adequate professional development, and provide varied opportunities for students. The most obvious repercussions of these multiple failures are lower completion rates. In 2011, the Auditor General of Canada identified that, while overall graduation rates across the country had risen since 2011, the education gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous (immigrant re-settler) population had actually widened. At this time, the high school graduation rate among on-reserve students was 41%, much lower than the 77% national average. It was further estimated that, at the current rate of growth, the imbalance would take at least 28 years to correct (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2011). This situation has remained largely unchanged and the funding and services provided to students living on-reserve continue to compare very poorly to those offered by provincial education systems across Canada. It is this complex knot of problems that the students of Attawapiskat and their allies continue to challenge.

Following these various reports over the past few years, I have been continually struck by the persistent unwillingness—on the part of various state authorities—to acknowledge and engage with this issue. Indeed, pathological denial, chronic delay, and the skirting of responsibility (as demonstrated in the Attawapiskat case) appears as the more common response. Similar issues have been raised, again and again, by both large-scale assessments—such as the 1996 *Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, the 2015 *Final report on the Truth and Reconciliation of Canada*, and the 2019 *Final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*—as well as most localized studies. For example, in 2008, Ontario’s Office of the Chief Coroner released a report reviewing the root causes of youth suicide¹³ in the community of Pikangikum First Nation. While numerous proximate causes for the suicides were identified (solvent abuse, exposure to suicide in the family, etc.) the *first and more critical recommendation* of the report is telling:

¹³ Between 2001 and 2009 fifty-eight youth committed suicide in the small community.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) should fulfill its commitment to build a new school in Pikangikum as soon as possible. This school should: accommodate all children currently of school age and projected into the future; include children’s playgrounds, soccer fields, baseball diamonds, and basketball courts; include an auditorium where community members can gather for traditional and cultural community events; and include a daycare facility. (Office of the Chief Coroner for the Province of Ontario, 2008, p. 21)

Despite the clear connection made within this report between youth suicide and inadequate educational service provision, the development and construction of a new school was not completed until 2016—eight years after the publication of this report (Porter, 2016a).

While funding and governing structures for provincially run schools differ significantly from those on-reserve, linkages between educational inequity and the direct harm to Indigenous children and youth in urban and public-school settings have also been identified. For example, Penrose (2019), the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, argues that systemic and local failures by educational authorities and professionals contributed to the 2014 death of Tina Fontaine.¹⁴ Specifically, the lack of constructive response to her absenteeism, long delays in providing mental support services following the murder of her father, and the use of suspensions for behavioural issues served to push Fontaine out of school, further isolating her and increasing her vulnerability to further risks. The report concludes that:

the educational system had an opportunity to identify her struggles early and coordinate resources to ensure her well-being and potential. While there was clear evidence that Tina encountered wonderful educators in her life, overall, the educational system missed opportunities to provide supports and engage in meaningful ways that may have kept her in school. (Penrose, 2019, p. 62)

This “failure to meaningfully engage” with Fontaine, the report suggests, directly contributed to her increasing vulnerability and eventual death.

These findings, and the related recommendations, mirrored those made in a 2018 report outlining the circumstances leading to the 2016 death of “Circling Star” (a pseudonym). He died just shy of his eighteenth birthday in a vehicle accident while driving intoxicated. The report concludes that his death resulted from a long history of accumulating distress and escalating behaviours that resulted in school suspensions, struggles with addiction, involvement with the

¹⁴ Fontaine, a 15-year-old First Nations youth born in Winnipeg and immediately removed from her mother’s care by Child and Family Services, was reported missing in August 2014. Soon after, her body was found in Winnipeg’s Red River. Raymond Cormier (age 53) was charged in second-degree murder but found not guilty.

justice system and Child and Family Services, hospitalization for suicidal thoughts, and periodic homelessness. As with Fontaine, the failure of numerous institutions and professionals—including schools and educators—to constructively notice and respond to his evident struggles were highlighted as significant factors contributing to this his death.

Notably, the report provides significant detail regarding Circling Star’s transition to Grade 9 and attendance at a provincially-run school (for which he had to travel 40-minutes daily by bus from his First Nation community). While his previous educational experiences had been generally positive, this changed significantly at the new school, largely due to an escalating series of series of conflicts between Circling Star and one specific teacher (referred to only as “Teacher X”). The report states that:

[a] review of Circling Star’s suspension history at his high school reveals that almost all of the incidents for which he was disciplined or suspended involved him and one particular teacher... Circling Star was formally disciplined or suspended 19 times and 14 of the incidents that led to these suspensions involved Teacher X. What is repeated across the discipline referral forms are characterizations of “refusing to comply,” “disruptive,” “disrespectful,” “violating the dress code,” “late to class,” and other similar infractions. During Circling Star’s second year at this high school, these incidents became more troubling and included “intimidation,” “verbal abuse,” “aggressive attitude,” and “threats of violence.” The school administration had opportunities in the first few months to work with Circling Star and Teacher X to dig below the surface of these behavioural incidents, to ask questions about what was happening for each of them, and to work to address the relational problems that were present and growing. Instead, suspensions were handed out repeatedly, creating a picture of suspension as the ‘go-to’ strategy for dealing with this specific interpersonal conflict. (Penrose, 2018, p. 49-50).

This approach served to “lay all the blame at Circling Star’s feet, characterize him as not willing to follow the rules, and expect[ed] Circling Star to submit to the authority of the teacher-student dynamic” (p. 50). This reaction not only failed to address the underlying challenges faced by Circling Star, but also allowed the behaviour of Teacher X (which, it is suggested, may have been “inappropriate” and based upon prejudicial assumptions¹⁵) (p. 19) to continue unchallenged. As with the case of Fontaine, this failure led to the youth being pushed out of the education system, leading to increased social isolation, instability, and vulnerability.

By looking across all of these cases and reports, I began to identify various casual connections and patterns of response that resonate persistently across educational systems and schools, despite significant differences in locale and policy. This includes, at the macro-level,

¹⁵ While the report does not state it explicitly, it is implied that the teacher’s behaviour was driven by racism.

failures and delays in policy design and implementation (including funding allocations) that only become issues of governmental concern in the face of significant (often locally driven) pressures that stir the broader Canadian public with either spectacles of “big data” or tragic stories of early death. And, even then, there is a tendency toward denial by federal, provincial, and local authorities. As the Attawapiskat case well illustrates, the burden of proof (and the blame) is commonly pushed upon those who are most impacted by the prevailing structural conditions. Discursively this operates to characterize Indigenous children and youth, families, and communities as (to appropriate the phrasing used by Penrose, 2018) “not willing to follow the rules” and expected to “submit to the authority of the [colonizer-colonized] dynamic” (p. 50).

Studying this topic during my coursework and hearing from individuals working as educators in Winnipeg, it became quite evident to me that these logics also operated in the city’s urban schools. Indeed, the issue of on-reserve education was but one manifestation of a multi-level “colonial mesh”¹⁶ (Woolford, 2014) which “tightens or loosens” depending upon local circumstances but, overall, maintains a “genocidal frame of reference” (p. 32). Thus, I turned my attention to the setting in which I was currently embedded—the City of Winnipeg—and began the process of developing a study that would engage with those who are often represented by others, but rarely spoken too—young people who are current students.

1.4 My own positioning on the landscape

Within various “critical” disciplines (feminism, critical race theory, etc.) it is generally considered good practice to acknowledge one’s own social situatedness. Indeed, I believe that much of my own experience provided the impetus for this study as well as my overall (to be frank) *suspicion* of schooling. I grew up in Rexdale, on the periphery of Toronto, with parents who each came from complex mixed (immigrant re-settler and Indigenous) heritages and working-class backgrounds. Early in my educational career (grade four) I was moved from my local school and placed in the (so-called) “gifted” program offered by the Toronto District School Board. Suddenly, I found myself amongst other children who came from families with wealth, educational experiences, and “ways of being” that were quite different from my own. Coming from a different part of the city (which meant spending over an hour riding what was

¹⁶ Woolford (2014) suggests the phrase “colonial mesh” as a means for explaining the residential schooling system. I argue that this concept is also useful for conceptualizing the contemporary educational landscape.

commonly referred to as the “bad kids” school bus by those from more affluent areas), I found it difficult to connect with both peers and teachers and (without giving details on the more abusive treatment I received from some) had a very challenging elementary school career.

After grade eight I chose to leave the gifted program and to attend my local school (which, quite literally, sits right across the street from where I grew up). At this new school I felt “seen” by many of the teachers and, with their encouragement, became involved in student leadership activities. These opportunities and support significantly impacted my sense of self and, for the first time in my life, I began to consider post-secondary education. However, years later (mainly due to my undergraduate work in Women’s Studies), I began to wonder to what extent the “second glances” and “second chances” I received from my highschool teachers were due to my own whiteness, status as a re-settler “state-created Canadian” (LaRocque, 2010, p. 7), and learned capacity to perform a particular kind of upper middleclass subjecthood. This is not to dismiss my own work, but rather to bring to light those in my cohort (the majority of whom were from racialized and economically marginalized backgrounds) who were not afforded the same resources, attention, and (most importantly) time that I was granted. Realizing that there was nothing “special” about the kids in the gifted program (and, consequently, nothing “wrong” with me) and recognizing how my own racial positioning and class performance helped me access pathways often denied my equally capable highschool peers, I adopted a profound suspicion of education and schools that has both shaped and been affirmed by my graduate work—a sense that continues to haunt me as I attempt to navigate the precarious landscape and greedy institutions of academia.¹⁷

1.5 Overview of this study

Drawing upon my “early hunches” and deeply rooted “suspicion,” I sought to design a study that would allow me to hear from young people (specifically, current students) attending school in Winnipeg. While this study is, methodologically, committed to the non-prescriptive approach to analysis common to grounded theory and narrative inquiry, it was influenced by my

¹⁷ The term “greedy institution” was suggested by Coser (1974) to connote how formal and informal organizations “compete with each other for the limited energies and time commitments of individuals” (Sullivan, 2013, p. 2) and employ various mechanisms to demand ever-increasing contributions. Bone, Jack and Masyon (2018) and Sullivan (2013) both suggest that academic institutions are “greedy” and that this is facilitated by employment precarity and information technologies. I concur with their analysis and suggest that elementary and secondary educational institutions are also “greedy,” placing increasing demands on employees, caregivers, and students.

own disciplinary background in Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS). More specifically, it was shaped by—and seeks to press against—the critical periphery of the discipline by engaging with the notion of “everyday” peace and arguing for greater integration between PACS and postcolonial studies, educational studies, and childhood studies.

Employing this rough conceptual frame, I took up the issue of educational inequity and attainment rate disparity as a “research puzzle.” Drawing upon Gustafsson and Hagström (2018), this requires exploring a topic so as to “pinpoint what is considered deviant or unexpected rather than normal, typical or expected” given existing explanatory schemes (p. 639). Research is thus meant to “produce new knowledge that not simply confirms, but questions what we collectively believe we know” (p. 639). In this instance, I wanted to draw attention to the persistence of educational disparity *between* Indigenous and non-Indigenous demographics *despite* overall increasing attainment rates, *despite* policy changes and program implementation, and *despite* the attention drawn by the various cases and reports discussed above.

Given that addressing this research puzzle would necessitate an extensive research program requiring more time and resources than available to me as a doctoral student, I opted to focus my research on the perspectives and experiences of current (middle year) students. I further framed this narrowed study using the following research question: how do middle-years students think about—and act within—school? My goal was to keep this question broad and to then provide a space wherein participants could articulate: their understandings of schooling and education; their own personal/collective educational experiences; and how they see the intersections between school, community, and broader contexts. While I wanted to focus on young people, I also anticipated that it might be fruitful to also work with adults so as to allow for comparisons between differently situated individuals. By creating space where participants could articulate their perceptions and narrate their experiences, I sought to identify that which resonated with and/or challenged the existing map of the educational landscape.

This developed into a qualitative research project that focused on one school site (referred to as Eaglecrest Community School) and the experiences of students in grades five to eight. While I had initially intended to only work with a very small sample of students who self-identified as Indigenous, my early data collection indicated that there might be some benefit to expanding this sample to involve non-Indigenous (immigrant re-settler) students (including White students and those from the school’s small but growing newcomer population). In total, I

worked directly with twenty-three students in grades five to eight (using arts-based activities and focus groups) and conducted twenty additional interviews with adults (caregivers, school staff, and community-based organization representatives). Overall, I spent nearly two years working with the school, although the majority of the data collection with students occurred over a six-week period. This data was further supplemented by researcher observations and the analysis of institutional documents. These numerous engagements offered insight into different *vantage points* from which the educational landscape is viewed—perspectives which both resonated with and challenged the *view from above* commonly cast by researchers and policy makers.

During these exchanges, participants told both *stories about* (closed, definitional stories) and *stories of* (comparably more open, nuanced stories of lived experience).¹⁸ Examination of the former allowed for the identification of the (to draw upon the work of Scott, 1990) “public transcript”—the official, hegemonic, publicly “performed” discourse—about education that impacts everyday interactions. Conversely, *stories of* provide insight into the “hidden transcripts” of subordinated groups—that is, the “discourse that takes place ‘offstage,’ beyond direct observation by powerholders” (p. 4)—as well as important *counter-stories* that challenge dominant understandings. These stories often revolved around the participants’ *implicit theories* of schooling, how they attribute (or “locate”) the causes of success and failure, the resources and supports that they navigate and draw upon, and the actions (the work) that they and other everyday actors undertake on a day-to-day basis to “move through” school.

Analysis of this data suggests that the existing map of the educational landscape—as expressed in policy, research, and the public transcript—tends to homogenize diverse experiences, presents analyses of root causes that confuse causation and correlation, constructs “mythical norms” of idealized studenthood, workerhood, and parenthood, and reverberates (often very loudly) with neoliberal, colonial, and adultist discourses. Further, it excludes and/or contorts the perspectives and embodied experiences of young people, thereby rendering their capacity for agency—and the various (socially-stratified) work and labour demands placed upon them—as invisible, illegitimate, or pathological. Reinscribing these perspectives and experiences (these

¹⁸ The distinction between “stories about” (definitional stories) and “stories” (stories of lived experience) is drawn from the field of narrative therapy (e.g., as described by O’Dwyer and Ryan, 2012, and Morgan, 2000). The distinction between these two types of stories points to the need for practitioners to employ methods that help complexify often limiting narratives of self, family, and community.

hidden transcripts and counter-stories) suggests a need to denaturalize and challenge not just the *map*, but also the *educational landscape* upon which it is based and the hegemonic *storyscape* which delegitimizes alternative conceptualizations.

As stated, this specific study is but one component of a broader endeavor that centers around a complex research puzzle. Hence, my goal for this particular initiative was comparatively modest—to denaturalize and destabilize the existing *map of the educational landscape*. That being said, there are also limitations to this specific work (e.g., the use of a single site and small participant sample can be used to challenge the generalizability of my theorizing). However, I believe I achieve the aim of opening up avenues for theory and research while also further enriching the Peace and Conflict Studies discipline through a deeper exploration into the possibilities—and challenges—of exploring “everyday” peace and considering the perspectives and experiences of young people.

1.6 Overview of dissertation chapters

Following this introductory chapter (chapter one: Getting acquainted: Articulating the research puzzle), I move on to provide an “outline” of the existing map that has been/is constantly being (re)produced by scholars, governments, and corporations to explain differentiated educational achievement rates and justify specific modes of intervention (chapter two: Getting the lay of the landscape: Existing maps of educational disparity).

In chapter three (Getting rooted, making trouble: “Everyday” Peace and Conflict Studies), I present the sensitizing concepts which shaped the design, implementation, and analysis of this research. I position this work at the “creative edge” of the Peace and Conflict Studies discipline (Byrne, Matyók, Scott, & Senehi, 2020, p. 493), engaging particularly with the possibilities and challenges of researching “everyday peace” and undertaking critical explorations of discourse. Further, I provide a brief overview of postcolonial studies, educational studies, and childhood studies—the other major theoretical perspectives which shaped this research (and this researcher).

Chapter four (Methods for re-searching the landscape) focuses upon the methodological frame and specific methods that I employed in this research. I discuss my intentions behind the design of this study while also highlighting the various challenges I faced implementing my plan.

These struggles help to illuminate the messiness of school-based research with young people as well as the impact of various gatekeepers and gatekeeping practices.

The next three chapters provide an overview of my main research findings. Each chapter begins with (and centralizes) the perspectives of the student research participants, but also includes (summarized) findings from data generated through my interviews with adults (the caregivers, school staff, and community-based organization representatives). The purpose of separating the participant clusters in this way is to help illuminate points of resonance and discord—to explore how participants *see the landscape* differently, depending upon *where they stand* upon it. Chapter five introduces the central concepts of *stories about* and *stories of* as well as key ideas derived from the field of narrative therapy—detailing how the employment of these concepts shaped the data collection methods employed with young participants. In addition, it describes and explores the impact of the dominating deficit-oriented *stories of self and community* (noting how the underlying *storyscape* both reflects and reinforces inequitable relations of power) and further suggests how these may be challenged through the articulation of *subordinated stories of experience* which, when explored, offer insights into the richness of community resources and the capacities of young people.

Chapter six—entitled Envisioning pathways: Stories about school—centralizes the future visions of participants as well as how they understand the linkage between schooling and these long-term outcomes. I suggest that the sensemaking frame that young people use to both understand their present situation and envision the future is impacted by both structural and cultural forms of violence, including racialized discourses of deficit, colonial conceptualizations of “child saving,” and assumptions of parental and community deficit. Despite some distinctions, across participants there is an overwhelming sense that education (defined primarily as “school completion”) is the only legitimate pathway (and, indeed, a presumably guaranteed pathway) toward a “good life.”

Chapter seven (Attributions and actions: Young people making it through) focuses upon how participants “locate” the causes of school “failure” (dropout) and “success” (completion)—that is, upon whom or what they place responsibility for “how things turn out” for different students. These findings, I suggest, demonstrate the way in which students draw upon the discursive repertoires available to them in order to “make sense” of their own experiences as well as what they observe in their families, school, and community. These stories suggest that,

within this sensemaking frame, participants conceptualize “successful students” as *good student-workers without rights* who need to follow a narrow, predetermined pathway of success. They try to follow this path by attempting to embody a *mythical norm of studenthood*. Following from this, they attribute the cause of school failure primarily to the failings of individuals, parents, their community, and their school. The perspectives of adults generally resonate with those of the students, with school failure being understood as either a failure of “affect” or a failure of “access.” These stories not only further illustrate the complex challenges faced by young people and other everyday actors, but also provide evidence of their capacity for agency, the various forms of (unrecognized and largely unsupported) work that they perform, and the costs (the “hurt”) that these actors subsequently incur. This analysis points to the operation of the *educational technocracy* as well as the manner in which the landscape and storyscape manufacture inequality and harm. This is followed by my concluding chapter (chapter eight: Destabilizing and de-naturalizing the map and the landscape) wherein I draw together my main findings and discuss the implications of this work in relation to my overall research puzzle and the discipline of Peace and Conflict Studies.

CHAPTER TWO

GETTING THE LAY OF THE LANDSCAPE: EXISTING MAPS OF EDUCATIONAL DISPARITY

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I sketch out the dominant map—(re)produced by scholars, governments, and corporations—that is used to depict the educational landscape, explain differentiated educational attainment rates, and justify the development of interventions meant to address this gap. To sketch this *view from above*, I undertook a deep, systemic dive into existing information sources (primarily scholarship and policy) so as to identify common discursive themes and causal explanations. I begin by discussing the methodology of this review and then provide an overview of its key findings. I argue, overall, that this dominant map tends to homogenize diverse Indigenous experiences, presents fragmented analyses of root causes that often confuse causation and correlation, and indicates ideological/discursive commitments to colonialism¹⁹ and neoliberalism.^{20, 21} Further, the existing corpus of literature largely excludes the perspectives of young people and renders their own capacity for agency as invisible or illegitimate.

2.2 Outlining the map: Methodology of this review

Following my initial “hunches” regarding educational inequality in Canada (as described in chapter one), I undertook a systematic exploration of existing policy and scholarship. Methodologically, my strategy for this review aligns with common practices utilized for

¹⁹ *Colonialism* refers to “one form of practice, one modality of control which results from the ideology of imperialism, [that] specifically concerns the settlement of people in a new location” (McLeod, 2010, p. 9). Colonialism is a spatial/physical, economic, political, and cultural project, rooted in the pursuit of “economic gains” and the construction of “unequal relations of power... between colonising and native peoples” (p. 10). Veracini (2010) suggests that *settler colonialism* is a specific manifestation of this, characterized by “a recurrent need to disavow” both acts of founding violence and on-going relations of dominance (p. 14). Drawing upon the work of Edward Said (1978/1994), *colonial discourse* may be defined as “the complex of signs and practices that organize social existence and social reproduction within colonial relationships” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2000, p. 37). This discourse employs “a constructed, instrumental racism” (Green, 1995, p. 87) and the construction of a strict dichotomy between notions of “civilization” and “savagery” (LaRocque, 2010).

²⁰ Drawing upon Toews (2018), I define *neoliberalism* as “a strategy for transferring social wealth from everyday working people to a wealthy few by insisting that markets and private ownership are the most beneficial way to distribute the world’s resources” (Introduction, p. 4). *Neoliberal discourse* operates as justification for this strategy.

²¹ While neoliberalism and colonialism are different processes, there are linkages between them (as outlined by Toews, 2018). This includes the strategy of “accumulation by dispossession” (Introduction, p. 4; Englert, 2020) through, for example, privatization (a neoliberal strategy) and land theft (a colonial strategy).

“scoping” reviews and discourse analyses. Hence, I was interested in developing a broad map of existing literature while also being attentive to how the central issue of educational inequity is conceptualized and framed (Onwuegbuzi & Freis, 2014; Arksey & O’Malley, 2005). I structured this work using the following research question: how are the disparities in educational attainment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons in Canada commonly conceptualized and explained?

I then developed a list of search terms and used these to acquire sources from numerous databases (focusing most of my attention on EBSCOhost, ERIC, Wiley Online, and Taylor & Francis Online Journals) and institutional websites (including those for provincial education ministries, Indigenous organizations, and non-governmental research institutions). I reviewed the abstracts and executive summaries for these sources so as to eliminate those that did not fit my selection criteria (e.g., that did not focus on Canada). This resulted in a final list of 290 scholarly articles, fifty research reports, and thirty-two policy documents.

Reviewing the abstracts and/or executive summaries for these sources, I classified each piece according to the following categories: focal population (e.g., First Nations, Métis, Inuit, or Indigenous/Aboriginal); focal locale (urban, on-reserve, etc.); educational level (early learning, elementary, secondary, post-secondary, etc.); and study type, aim, and evidence. After some preliminary reviews of this literature corpus, I focused my analysis further along two main lines of inquiry; firstly, I considered how various authors framed the issue of educational inequity (e.g., how they argue why this is an issue requiring research and intervention). I then considered *where* authors *locate* the causes of disparities in educational attainment (within individuals, within policy, within curriculum, etc.). I reviewed each classified piece²² so as to identify common trends and themes. My results from this review are too extensive to fully articulate in this chapter and, hence, what follows is only a brief summary of my main findings. A more comprehensive report of this work will be the subject of future academic publications.

²² While I completed a cursory review of all sources (looking at each abstract/executive summary, introductory and concluding paragraphs, and main headings), I only examined 83 sources in depth. These sources were selected for their overall quality and relevance to the emerging research themes.

2.3 General trends: Homogenization and myopic foci

Existing research and policy commonly homogenize diverse populations and phenomena, thereby implying some form of universal “Indigenous” experience and/or perspective. It is very common for sources to either not specify if they are referring to First Nations, Métis, or Inuit populations or to make reference to all three but imply that the distinctions between them are of secondary concern. Consider, for example, the following summary statements—the first is from a corporate report and the second is drawn from Manitoba’s own *First Nation, Métis and Inuit education policy framework*:

Slightly more than 60% of Aboriginal Canadians do not have the literacy skills necessary to participate fully in the current knowledge-based economy... In other words, 60% of the Aboriginal population are unable to understand and use the information around them to create a better life for themselves and their families. Discouragingly, this share is ten percentage points higher than registered by Canadian adults. (Gulati, 2013, p. 1)

Revitalization of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit identities, languages and cultures, histories and rights instill in Aboriginal people the confidence to bridge two worlds. The view expressed by Aboriginal peoples consulted stress that Aboriginal peoples need to be comfortable and confident in their own ways so that they can live and contribute in both worlds. (Aboriginal Education Directorate, 2016, p. 13)

These types of sweeping statements can, if not explicitly unpacked by the author or reader, obfuscate historical, political, and cultural distinctions between Indigenous groups while also ignoring important statistical differences between demographics.

Further, the “bridging two worlds” metaphor used in the second quotation—drawn from the Government of Manitoba’s own policy framework—discursively “obscure[s] [the] reality of Canada’s colonial foundations” (Green, 1995, p. 91). There are not “two worlds,” but rather *one*—grounded upon a hierarchical relationship *between* colonizers and colonized—that was built through subjugation, dispossession, extraction, and theft. This metaphor trivializes entrenched relations of power and exploitation, naturalizes immigrant re-settler control over this “world,” and places the onus of change onto Indigenous students—it is they who must learn to “live and contribute” to both worlds.²³ While some scholars (e.g., McCoy, 2009; Henze and

²³ This being said, some scholars employ the term “two worlds” (or variations such as “two-eyed seeing”) to indicate different epistemologies and ontological paradigms and/or as a means to conceptualize how some Treaty documents frame the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and (re-)settlers (for example, in relation to what is commonly referred to as the Two Row Wampum Treaty). My criticism is not directed at these additional uses per se, although I do believe these may also require deeper exploration and re-consideration.

Vanett, 1993) have critiqued this metaphor, its use remains quite common (see, for example, Kay, 2017; Bomberry, 2013; and Fitzgerald, 2006).

Sources that do specify a population of Indigenous Peoples most often focus on the experiences of First Nations students (although there is a growing body of work exploring Inuit education in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories²⁴). Literature that centralizes Métis experience is comparatively quite rare (indeed, it appears less common than that which considers *non-Indigenous* perspectives on Indigenous education).²⁵ This skewing is possibly due to the greater political and public attention paid to the state of First Nations on-reserve schooling (which led to several commissioned reports) and the heightened focus on the history and impact of the residential school system (instigated by, for example, the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC]).²⁶ Although, it appears that the body of work exploring urban settings and provincial schools also commonly sidelines Métis (as well as Inuit) experience. Some authors have also identified that this trend is reflected in public school curriculum, policy, teaching practices, and other aspects of school life (Kearns & Anuik, 2015; Anuik & Bellhumeur-Kearns, 2014; McGregor, 2013).

Limitations are also evident when considering educational levels and measures of educational success. The majority of larger, more comprehensive studies revolve around discussions of highschool graduation rates, post-secondary enrolment/completion rates, and the relationship between education and employment (e.g., see Atlantic Evaluation Group, 2010; Stonechild, 2006; and R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2002)—research which is often explicitly framed as part of an effort to improve the economic prospects of Canada and its provinces. With the exception of policy and reports developed by provincial education ministries, much of the work focusing on elementary and secondary education discusses issues associated with on-reserve schools and/or the intergenerational impact of residential schools (e.g., see Paquette & Fallon, 2010; Mendelson, 2006; and Tait, 2003). While there is a growing body of literature exploring off-reserve and urban elementary/secondary schooling, much of this is based on smaller-scale qualitative studies, single-site case studies, evaluations of specific programs, and/or policy and curriculum analysis (e.g., see Lamb & Godlewska, 2020; Osmond-

²⁴ For example, see Stoffer (2017), McGregor (2013) and Tagataga Inc. (2007).

²⁵ For exceptions to this, see Iseke (2010), Ferguson (2019), and Pratt (2020).

²⁶ Which predominantly—but not exclusively—impacted First Nations communities.

Johnson & Turner, 2020; Romanow, 2020; and Cherubini & Hodson, 2008).²⁷ This work also has a tendency to centralize the experiences of non-Indigenous school personnel.

Lastly, there is a significant body of work that explores issues which are presumed applicable across different levels of education. This includes scholarship that articulates (and often homogenizes) Indigenous paradigms of knowledge and/or that discusses issues of colonization and decolonization in education more generally (e.g., see Papp, 2020; Battiste, 2005; and Kanu, 2005). Much of this literature is produced by scholars in the education field or Indigenous/Native Studies.

Overall, while the body of scholarship examining educational inequity and differential attainment has expanded considerably in recent decades, the scope of this work remains tilted toward specific demographics, locales, and educational settings—which, again, can be read as the result of political pressure surrounding First Nations on-reserve schooling, the work of the TRC, and political/economic interest in improving enrolment and completion rates. Further, the vast majority of these studies, policies, and reports are based upon either analyses of statistics, curriculum, and policy documents or draw upon the perspectives of specific adult populations (e.g., post-secondary students, educational professionals, parents/caregivers, and adults reflecting upon their past schooling). With rare exception,²⁸ the voices of Indigenous youth and (to an even greater extent) younger children are largely absent from the literature corpus. To put it simply, there have been many efforts to speak *about* Indigenous young people/students, but very few attempts to speak *with* them.

2.4 Framing the issue of educational inequity: Common discourses

To analyze how the issue of educational inequity is commonly framed in policy and scholarship, I focused my attention on the arguments used by authors when discussing the overall significance of their work and how they articulated the need for research, policy change, and other forms of intervention. I pulled statements from 170 sources and then classified these

²⁷ The same limitations characterize scholarship on adult education and early years/pre-school education.

²⁸ For exceptions to this trend, see: Stelmach, Kovach, & Steeves (2017); Claypool & Preston (2014); Proactive Information Services Inc. (2013); Hare & Pidgeon (2011); Kanu (2011); Shannen's Dream Campaign (2011); Brown, Rodger, & Fraelich (2009); Silver & Mallet (2002); and Melnechenko & Horsman (1998). However, with the exception of the reports by the Shannen's Dream Campaign and Melnechenko and Horsman, all of these sources focus on highschool students. While work on young people is generally limited, work with elementary-level students is particularly rare.

according to the underlying thrust of the arguments expressed. This resulted in the identification of seven main “logics” which were employed by authors to argue in favour of studying and/or changing the way education is structured and delivered. These logics include: 1) closing “gaps” and “unlocking potential”; 2) growing economies and building human capital; 3) directly and indirectly addressing social welfare gaps; 4) exploiting the “opportunity” and preventing the “threat” of Indigenous population growth; 5) fostering intercultural understanding and enriching the collective “national heritage” of Canadians; 6) demonstrating adherence to normative standards and rights frameworks; and 7) fostering Indigenous survival and self-determination. These are outlined below.

The central metaphors: Closing “gaps” and “unlocking potential”

The most commonly articulated argument employed amorphously calls to “close the gaps” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada, often with a subsequent stated goal of “unlocking the potential” of Indigenous students. These metaphors and axioms are repeated, mantra-like, within academic scholarship, commissioned research reports, and policy documents. Consider the following statements from the C. D. Howe Institute, the Rupertsland Institute, the Government of British Columbia, and the Government of Canada:

While Aboriginal student outcomes are better in provincial than in on-reserve schools, a large gap exists between performance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in most schools across Canada. Understanding why the gap exists and what strategies can reduce it is among the country's highest social policy priorities. (Richards, Hove, & Afolabi, 2008, p. ii)

An alarming Aboriginal Education gap exists in this country—a gap between the levels of educational attainment of the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal populations. In Alberta, and across Canada, the Aboriginal Education Gap is large, and growing rapidly. (Howe, 2008, p. 3)

Across Canada, systemic barriers have created an environment where Indigenous learners encounter various obstacles to accessing and persisting through postsecondary education, resulting in an educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. The federal government has recognized the importance of and made it a priority to address this gap. (McKeown et al., 2018, p. 3)

At this important juncture in our shared history as Canadians, we can all learn from the past and act for the future. It is a moment to look carefully, together, at how a new approach to First Nation education can help close the gaps between First Nation students and other students. It is only by improving the quality of their education that First Nation youth will be enabled to achieve their full potential. (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013, p. 2)

This *gap talk* is extremely common²⁹ and is often paired with expressions of urgency and notions of crisis. Closer examination of these sources suggests, however, that there are differing assumptions about which *gaps* need to be closed and what type of *potential* should be unlocked. A variety of gaps can be identified—in early learning experiences, core academic capacities (especially literacy), and schooling completion rates—that are linked to additional differences in employment, income, and (by extension) social welfare. It is also presumed that in order to close these school-related gaps, there is a need to address other disparities in, for example, parental engagement, funding, teacher training and recruitment, curriculum, and policy.

The most common connection, however, is the one made between highschool completion, postsecondary enrolment, employment, and personal wellbeing. This suggests an implicit theory of change³⁰ which presumes, at its core, the link between schooling, employment, and the achievement of a “better life.” Hence, “getting an education” (meaning, “finishing school”) is positioned as the primary mechanism for addressing a host of other issues (e.g., mental health challenges, involvement with the justice system, and unemployment) primarily because it increases the chance of employment and higher earnings. A further connection is made between individual and collective outcomes. The congregate impact of this individualized change is assumed to have a ripple effect on families, communities, and broader collectives.

Essentially, it is suggested that the key to addressing “Indigenous issues” is to improve the situation of Indigenous *individuals*, rather than directly challenging structural relationships between Indigenous and immigrant re-settler peoples and their associated institutions—an

²⁹ “Gap talk” is also found in scholarly literature, often being used as a framing device for introductions and context sections. While completing this report I also found it difficult to “speak outside” of this framing and so, instead, I turned my attention directly toward it and unpack how it operates.

³⁰ Hernandez & Hodges (2006) define a theory of change as “the articulation of the underlying beliefs and assumptions that guide the development and implementation of a strategy” (p. 166). Several authors note the importance of explicitly identifying, analyzing, and evaluating the underlying assumptions which guide social interventions—that is, to articulate *unarticulated* theories of change (e.g., see Archibald et al., 2016). Here, I suggest the existence of an *implied* theory of change within scholarship on Indigenous education that is axiomatically presumed to be “fact” rather than “theory.”

argument consistent with the neoliberal ethos of individualistic bootstrapping and devolved responsibility. Following this, the “potential” of young people that requires “unlocking” is defined primarily as the potential for individuals to participate in the labour market and “improve” their own circumstances. The “promise of happiness” (Ahmed, 2010) made here (for following the “correct” pathway) is offered not just to individuals, but also entire (local and macro-level) collectives.

Directly and indirectly addressing social welfare “gaps”

Looking specifically at the *implicit theory of change* that permeates much of the reviewed literature, it appears that education and improvements in personal wellbeing are most often linked *indirectly*—that is, school completion leads to employment which, by extension, leads to improved life outcomes. Consider, for example, the following statements from the governments of British Columbia and Saskatchewan:

Investing in post-secondary education and training for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples will... position Aboriginal British Columbians to take advantage of the economic opportunities that exist in the province, and enhance their participation in the social, cultural and economic life of their communities, the province and global society. The benefits of post-secondary education accrue to individuals, communities and society, and are associated with better labour market outcomes, better health outcomes, better outcomes for children, lower crime rates, and higher levels of civic participation. (Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills & Training, 2012, p. 1-2)

Improving the education outcomes of Métis and First Nations students not only benefits the students but also benefits the province as a whole. Strengthening Saskatchewan’s education outcomes will expand the education and skills of the labour force, leading to decreased expenditures in areas of justice and corrections, child and family services and social assistance. Improving education outcomes is particularly significant as the population continues to grow. (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018, p. 12)

In these instances, the implicit *school-to-work-to-wellbeing theory of change* is articulated quite clearly and further framed in relation to broader social welfare gaps. Hence, addressing social *ills* through the *cure* of education-for-employment is to be done not only in the interests of social welfare and human rights, but also as a mechanism for reducing expenditures (read: defunding) public services. This, however, ignores the manner in which the labour market itself is characterized by both overt and systemic racism as well as the impact of growing (national and global) economic precarity (as discussed by Bone, 2019; May, 2019; Hennessy and Tranjan,

2018; MacKinnon, 2015; Cairns, et al., 2016; Magnusson, 2013; and Cranford, Vosko, and Zukewich, 2003).

Some authors suggest that education (again, meaning school attendance and completion) can also have a *direct* impact on personal welfare. As exemplified in the reports detailing the cases of Pikangikum First Nation, Tina Fontaine, and Circling Star (see chapter one), school is understood as an important site for recognizing and addressing a host of challenges often faced by young people, including substance abuse (Maina et al., 2020), health and nutrition (Gillies et al., 2020) and poverty (Phillips, 2010). Thus, school is conceptualized as a *channel* for contact and intervention as well as a *space* that can foster a sense of connection, belonging, and purpose—thereby positively impacting a young person’s self-concept and improving their mental health. This presumes that school—if properly fulfilling its (ever expanding) social mandate—will serve as a sanctuary for *all* students and meet their various needs.

This underlies the basic logic of Manitoba’s Community Schools Program (or CSP)³¹ (of which Eaglecrest Community School is an active member). Dating back to 2005, this program provides funding to “schools serving in low socio-economic neighbourhoods [thereby] helping them develop a comprehensive range of supports and approaches to meet the diverse needs of children, youth and their families” (MECY, 2006a, p. 1). This includes funds to hire a community support worker (or liaison) specifically tasked with mobilizing and developing resources for each specific school. As described by the Province of Manitoba (2007), the Community Schools Program (then known as the Community Schools Partnership Initiative, or CSPI) seeks to achieve direct

outcomes [that] are expected to have an impact on issues of poverty, low academic achievement, poor student attendance, high migrancy/transiency rates, and diverse student populations—barriers that can have substantial effects on programming within schools. (as cited in Phillips, 2008, p. 30)

Hence, the CSP is meant to equalize the educational playing field (to *smooth out* the topography of the landscape) by addressing the (primarily material) effects of various factors that impact student performance. While these barriers vary by location, it is generally argued that

³¹ While the Community Schools Program is not explicitly directed at improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous students, the majority of schools in the program have larger than average Indigenous populations.

[m]any communities encounter chronic challenges such as families that lack parenting skills, students with behavioural issues, and communities overwhelmed by drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, vandalism, and a dependency on social welfare. There are also physical and geographical barriers to securing resources in a number of these communities. CSPI is a means to address the root-cause issues and provide grassroots solutions. (p. 30)

Key to this is the assumption that schools are “trusted sites” that can serve as the solution to other forms of social inequality (rather than potentially being part of the problem). This, of course, ignores the reality that schooling itself can also be a cause of trauma, abuse, stress, and alienation.

Indeed, while the eurocentrism of Canadian schooling is widely acknowledged in scholarship and policy, this is generally attributed to a lack of “Indigenous perspectives” in school curriculum. Including these “perspectives,” it is argued, will inevitably address this sense of dislocation. For example, the Winnipeg School Division’s 2010 *Aboriginal education report* suggests that the “infusion” of Indigenous perspectives in school curricula and practice will help Indigenous students “develop a positive self-identity through learning their own histories, cultures, traditional values, contemporary lifestyles, and traditional knowledge” and “participate in a learning environment that will equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to participate more fully in the unique civic and cultural realities of their communities” (p. 4).

In addition to problematically suggesting that a (re-)settler-state institution can “teach” Indigenous young people their identity, the overall insinuation that the “infusion” of (often heavily circumscribed, homogenized, and reified) conceptions of culture and history will inevitably make schools “safe” places for learning reflects a significant underestimation of how the “hidden curriculum” of schooling (as manifested through, for example, racist microaggressions and disciplinary policies) reinforces oppressive relations—dynamics identified by Romanow (2020), Kanu (2007) and other scholars who employ critical theoretical frames in their analyses. This notion of “cultural infusion” reflects a (rather simplistic interpretation of) the “cultural discontinuity framework” employed by some educational theorists to explain the lower educational attainment of racially and culturally marginalized students.

Kanu (2007) suggests that this theory

argue[s] that children’s conceptual frameworks (i.e., their learning and thinking processes) are deeply embedded in their own cultures and that difficulties in classroom learning and interactions arise when there is a discontinuity or mismatch between a child’s culture and all the intricate subsets of that culture and the culture of the teacher and the classroom, setting up that child for failure if the school or the teacher is not sensitive to the special needs of that child. (p. 24)

She then goes on to identify the implied theory of change that underlies this perspective:

The assumption, therefore, is that making the curriculum and the classroom processes culturally compatible will mean higher rates of successful school outcomes for students whose home cultures conflict with those of the school. Informed by this framework, Aboriginal educators and scholars have directed their efforts at restoring continuity between the home cultures of Aboriginal students and the school by lobbying for the inclusion of Aboriginal cultural knowledge in school curricula. (p. 24)

Kanu (2007) further notes that cultural discontinuity theory has been criticized for its inattention to “macrostructural variables”—an oversight which Ogbu’s and Fordham’s (1986) “oppositional culture theory”³² and various class-oriented analyses have sought to correct by *re-locating* the cause of school failure (placing it upon structural inequality rather than cultural difference).

While these authors suggest the necessity of changing curriculum content and formal teaching practices, they emphasize that this necessitates a long-term and nuanced process that should be directed toward anti-racist and anti-colonial ends—and that this complex transformation, if undertaken, should not be mistaken for a panacea. For example, Kanu’s (2007) own research “suggests a positive connection between the integration of Aboriginal content/resources/pedagogical styles and academic achievement” (p. 34) but also identifies that this did not translate into improved student retention rates or address chronic absenteeism. Others, including St. Denis (2007) and Green (2004), have critiqued the culturalist approach

³² Drawing upon Kanu’s (2007) summary, this theory links race and class and focuses upon the experiences of “caste-like minorities” “who have been incorporated into the society involuntarily and permanently” (p. 24) and “face a job and status ceiling” p. 24). It is suggested that they “tend to formulate their economic and social problems in terms of collective institutional discrimination” (p. 24). As a result, they “define their culture not merely as different from the dominant culture but in opposition to it; therefore, they may resist achievement in school if they perceive the school as representing dominant cultural values” (p. 25). This reframes lower achievement as the result of the *threat* posed by (White/re-settler) educational institutions, rather than “cultural discontinuity.” While this theory helped to re-locate the cause of school failure (placing it upon structures of domination) it has also been critiqued for its simplistic homogenization of marginalized cultures and experiences—particularly around the assumption that students may resist schooling because academic success is associated with “acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

more broadly, suggesting that it may intensify oppression by reaffirming both rigid identity categories and limiting notions of “authenticity” while also failing to address social injustice.

Despite the existence of these scholarly “counter-stories” that critique the cultural discontinuity framework and overall culturalist orientation, there remains a prominent assumption that school is a potential sanctuary for Indigenous students so long as they feel their Indigeneity is *recognized* within that space and that “Indigenous perspectives” have been sufficiently “infused” into school life so as to make learning experiences safe, comprehensible, and/or “relevant” (meaning, *culturally* relevant). Further, while the explicit use of schooling in Canada as a means of assimilation is identified, it is framed as a historical phenomenon confined, predominantly, to the use of residential schools. It is implied that the weaponization of schooling and its use as a “total institution”³³ no longer occurs. Rather, Canada, its school systems, and its associated agents (e.g., teachers) are presumed to have the “best interests” of Indigenous children in mind—with the exception of a few bad apples such as Circling Star’s “Teacher X” (see chapter one).

Growing economies and building “human capital”

While the central argument for addressing educational inequity revolves upon the impact on individuals, a variety of additional justifications are also offered that speak to collective (primarily *non-Indigenous*) economic, political, and social interests. The most common of these justifications makes reference to potential improvements that can be made to national, provincial, and—to a lesser extent—local economies, as suggested in the following statements (from governmental and academic sources):

Having a well-educated Aboriginal population is directly linked to developing a vibrant knowledge and skills-based NWT [Northwest Territories] economy. The social and economic outcomes of both Aboriginal and other residents improve when they engage in a variety of educational opportunities. This approach to education ensures that the NWT economy and society are sustainable, socially responsible and able to enhance personal growth opportunities for all NWT people. (Northwest Territories Education, Culture, and Employment, 2011, p. 4)

³³ As suggested by Rand (2011).

[T]he postsecondary educational achievements of Aboriginal peoples *support the health and sustainability of the Canadian nation*; spearheaded by Western Canada's current economic prosperity, human resources supplied by Aboriginal peoples have become increasingly important... Aboriginal peoples urgently need to be provided with greater opportunities to succeed in postsecondary education. (Preston, 2008, p. 1, my emphasis)

The notion of “leveraging” the labour potential of Indigenous populations is often depicted as being particularly pertinent to Manitoba. Busby (2010), for example, suggests that:

[h]aving avoided the worst of the recent recession's trouble with a modest 0.2 percent decline in provincial GDP for 2009, Manitoba now faces its next big challenge: how to prepare for an aging labour force? A wave of babyboomers is set to retire, raising the question of who will replace their contribution to the economy. Without improving the education outcomes among Manitoba's Aboriginal youth—a significant share of the population—the province will be limited in its ability to offset the effects of the boomers' departure from the workforce. (Busby, 2010, p. 1)

Here, investments and “reform” meant to “close the gaps” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations is justified primarily in the interests of ensuring the economic growth and sustainability of the Canadian economy and (to draw upon Preston, 2008) the “Canadian nation” (p. 1). Indigenous students/workers are expected to step in and fill yet another gap (between the required and available labour force supply). Thusly, the educational attainment of Indigenous Peoples becomes foundational to the economic security of the Canadian (re-)settler state.

In addition, some sources note linkages “between schooling and *community* economic development” (Tompkins, 2011, p. 1, my emphasis)—particularly for reserve communities and those in northern territories. Some authors have also noted (and critiqued) how extractive industries (especially oil, gas, and mining companies) have justified offering vocational employment and training (VET) programs by referencing benefits to individuals and communities. Hodgkins (2016) suggest that this such efforts are predicated upon “ignoring historical forces of colonisation and oppressive power relations, and casting [I]ndigenous peoples as deficient learners and workers in need of special remedial social programmes” (p. 123). He further problematizes the paradigm of “market citizenship” (p. 123) which underlies these programs. McCreary (2013), meanwhile, suggests that such programming is designed to serve the labour needs of industry while also “limit[ing] the terms of Aboriginal empowerment to those of marketized neoliberal subjectivities” (p. 285)—thereby undermining collective challenges to industry/state encroachment onto Indigenous lands and rights. These efforts encourage

Indigenous individuals and communities to develop a vested interest in the extractive projects undertaken by corporations *so as to* lessen the possibility of collective resistance—to dispossess through assimilation and “reorientation” (Ahmed, 2006a; 2006b) rather than overt repression.

Exploiting the “opportunity” and preventing the “threat” of Indigenous population growth

This national/provincial/local “development” argument is often linked to discussions of demographic trends. Across Canada, the Indigenous population is increasing at a faster rate than the non-Indigenous population—mainly due to higher birthrates³⁴ (Statistics Canada, 2018a). As of 2016, Indigenous Peoples represented 4.3% of the total national population (or 1.4 million people), a percentage that has risen steadily (up from 3.8% in 2006, 3.3% in 2001, and 2.8% in 1996) and is expected to reach 2.5 million by 2030 (p. 3). This population is also much younger than the national average. Indigenous children age fourteen and under make up 28% of the total population while youth aged fifteen to twenty-four represent 18.2% (compared to 16.5% and 12.9% of the total non-Indigenous population respectively) (p. 5). From 2006 to 2016, the total number of Indigenous youth (defined as fifteen- to thirty-four-year-olds) increased by 39%, while the total number of non-Indigenous youth increased by 6% (p. 4).

These demographic trends—and the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous population growth—is often cited within scholarship and policy and commonly framed discursively as either a kind of “opportunity” or an impending “threat.” Consider, for example, the following statements (one of which is from an academic journal article and the other from an influential—and often cited—Caledon Institute of Social Policy report):

Canada has struggled to keep up with other developed countries in terms of labour productivity performance in recent years.... The low education levels of Canada’s Aboriginal population *offer an opportunity to improve our labour productivity performance by increasing the human capital of Aboriginal Canadians*. Greater levels of educational attainment for Aboriginal Canadians would also boost employment rates. (Calver, 2013, p. 27, my emphasis)

³⁴ Although increasing self-identification rates are also a factor (Signer & Costa, 2005).

A young and dynamic First Nations population could *be adding to the common wealth and well-being of Canada* by fulfilling the demand for increasingly skilled workers and contributing to arts and culture, while also taking advantage of opportunities to start up exciting new businesses—and some of those businesses might be rooted in First Nations culture in ways we have not yet imagined. *Instead, we likely will have continuing and escalating dependency*, resulting in a heavy financial cost to society, especially on the Prairies where First Nations are an increasing proportion of the working-age population. (Mendelson, 2009, p. 2, my emphasis)

In these instances, this growth is framed as an opportunity for “Canada” (and its provinces) to address labour shortages that will inevitably be caused by an aging population. To maximize this opportunity (to “unlock the potential” of this demographic) it is necessary to ensure they will have the educational credentials and skills required to participate in the “knowledge-based economy.” Failure to do so will be detrimental to economic growth and lead to a “continuing and escalating dependency” (Mendelson, 2009, p. 2) of Indigenous populations on the state.

This logic easily slips into a frame which presents Indigenous population growth as a threat to “Canada.” Consider, for example, the use of the “gathering storm” metaphor in the following two excerpts (from the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami):

Aboriginal peoples are a growing part of Canada’s population, especially in the West and the North. While there are many Aboriginal people who are doing quite well, on average the Aboriginal population suffers from higher unemployment, lower levels of education, below average incomes and many other indicators of limited socioeconomic circumstances. These problems will have an increasing negative impact *on the well-being of all of Canada*, particularly in the West and the North. It is critical for *all Canadians* that this dire situation changes for the better... A shocking number of Aboriginal young adults are not completing high school. *This is a gathering storm, which will have huge social and economic costs over the next decades. It must be addressed urgently now.* (Mendelson, 2006, p. 35, my emphasis)

There is a gathering storm in Inuit education. Inuit are among Canada’s youngest citizens, with a median age of 22... The bulk of this population is now moving through the education system, yet too few are graduating... Low educational outcomes are associated with adverse social implications, including greater unemployment, greater numbers of youth entering the criminal justice system and greater incidences of illness and poverty. *Existing socio-economic conditions will worsen* unless more Inuit children graduate from high school with opportunities to succeed in post-secondary education. (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2011, p. 7, my emphasis)

Currently, these more *explicit* (colonialist/racist) conceptualizations of Indigenous populations as a kind of (to put it bluntly) uneducated, threatening mass of youth, is (comparatively) rare.

However, I believe this framing will become far more common over the next decade due to

increasing levels of conflict between Indigenous communities/nations and immigrant re-settler governments and corporations over natural resource extraction as well as other social injustices (as indicated by the trends of increasing resistance and state militarization discussed in Crosby and Monaghan, 2018). Essentially, I am suggesting that the issue of “Indigenous educational achievement gaps” will become increasingly securitized and militarized—perhaps shifting the current metanarrative of “national reconciliation”³⁵ toward one of “national security.”

This would not be a new phenomenon; precedent is readily found, for example, in the use of residential schools as a mechanism for containing Indigenous political opposition to colonization—as was clearly the case in Manitoba (Woolford, 2014; Daschuk, 2013; Milloy, 1999). Longstanding discursive tropes predicated upon the construction of a strict dichotomy between notions of civilization and savagery—what LaRocque (2010) conceptualizes as an enduring “Civ/Sav master narrative” (p. 15)—continue to circulate, constituting a form of “textual warfare” (p. 38) against the colonized. Consequently, information about Indigenous peoples—even if incomplete, grossly inaccurate, or overtly racist—is read through this eurocentric “super-myth” (p. 4) and employed as further “evidence” of the inherent legitimacy of Euro-Canadian authority. Adding to this, the securitization of various social concerns as part of the Global War on Terror (as discussed by Crosby and Monaghan, 2018) has further set the stage for shifting discourses around Indigenous educational attainment.

Elements of this discourse (and the militarized state practices that it justifies) are already evident in other areas of political/social life. Consider, for example, Bland’s (2013) *Canada and the First Nations: Cooperation or conflict?*—a report commissioned by the politically influential Macdonald-Laurier Institute. Bland, who is himself a retired member of the Canadian Armed Forces, paints First Nations communities—and, particularly, the growing cohorts of young people—as “seeth[ing] with frustration” (p. 1) due to their “dreary, dark and dangerous” (p. 1) lives on reserve. Drawing upon the “feasibility hypothesis” of rebellion, he suggests³⁶ the presence of four factors which will, if unaddressed, result in significant violence between First Nations and Canada, namely: social fractionalization (p. 1); the existence of (to use Bland’s wording) a “young warrior cohort” of “poorly educated and unskilled” Indigenous youth (p. 1);

³⁵ Which is, in itself, problematic.

³⁶ This argument also frames Bland’s tellingly titled *Time bomb: Canada and the First Nations* (2014) and the narrative of his fictional *Uprising: A novel* (2010).

increased national reliance on more spatially remote resource extraction sites; and the limited capacity Canadian security forces. Speaking specifically on the threat posed by the so-called “warrior cohort” he suggests that

[t]o reduce the feasibility of an uprising in the First Nations, Canada needs educational and employment policies *that immediately transform* future First Nations cohorts aged 15 to 25 *into productive, self-reliant people...* The challenge for Canadian and Aboriginal leaders is *to rescue today’s Aboriginal youth from the negative realities and shortcomings of Indigenous governments*. At the same time, they must prevent conditions from disenfranchising future generations of First Nations youth. There is no either/or choice in this situation. (p. 2, my emphasis)

This statement not only demonstrates adherence to the colonial discourses of savagery and dependency (which posits Indigenous peoples paradoxically as both dangerous and in need of paternalistic care), it also reflects neoliberal notions of “market citizenship” (Hodgkins, 2016, p. 123) and personhood. Notably, this argument also resonates with scholarship from various fields (including Peace and Conflict Studies) which depict demographic “youth bulges” as threats to national security (a tendency critiqued by Pruitt, 2020).

In summary, while the type of explicit framing employed by Bland is not currently prevalent in scholarship that discusses educational inequity, I believe it will become far more common as the Canadian immigrant re-settler state seeks, increasing and more overtly, to monitor and suppress Indigenous movements and resistances (see Crosby and Monaghan’s (2018) *Policing Indigenous movements: Dissent and the security state* for several recent examples of this dynamic). Further, while it is currently more common to frame Indigenous population growth as an “opportunity” rather than “threat,” both forms of discourse are colonial, neoliberal, and dehumanizing.

Fostering intercultural understanding and enriching “our” collective national heritage

In addition to the “collective national prosperity” and “collective national security” justifications presented above, many sources suggest Indigenous education as a means for fostering “intercultural understanding.” Manitoba Education and Training’s (2017a) *Creating racism-free schools through critical/courageous conversations on race* suggests that

a new attitude and vision has emerged in Manitoba and throughout Canada that changes how we view diversity in the classroom. Diversity is no longer seen as an obstacle or a problem but as a strength and source of hope for the future. Respect and appreciation for diversity has become in many ways and for most Canadians the keystone

that unites Canada and its people and is often put forward as an ideal for the world as a whole. (p. 25)

This rhetoric of a unified Canadian nation is reiterated in the province's 2016 *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education policy framework*, which suggests that a “lack of knowledge and understanding at first contact... contributed to a deep and long period of colonization which engulfed the relationships between the Aboriginal people and *those that settled here*” (AED, 2016, p. 8, my emphasis). Attributing colonization to a “lack of knowledge [that] continued to grow on both sides of the relationship” (p. 8), the document further asserts that

[a]s this void grew in both directions, the distance between relationships has become a big challenge to overcome. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike suffer at the hands of not knowing the truths about each other. Moreover, there have been many misconceptions, biases and stereotypes formed. (p. 8)

If, as the policy's authors argue, the root of the problem is simply both sides “not knowing the truths about each other” than the means to overcoming the impact of colonization is clear:

[i]n order to better understand each other there is knowledge acquisition that is required which will assist in filling the void and dissipate the lack of knowledge that exists among Canadians today. The level of respect accorded Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing must be the same at any educational discussion that is about achieving a better life in Canada. In this way knowledge can lead to equitable relations and respectful relationships. (p. 9)

This consequently requires “the dissemination of accurate and positive knowledge about *their* [read: Indigenous] worldviews, lifestyles, histories, contributions and positive attributes that have helped to shape Canada into the country it is today” (p. 9, my emphasis). Once this knowledge has been “acquired in an equitable way” students “will be able to foster future relationships without racism, bias, misconceptions and oppression” (p. 9).

There are several discursive maneuverings in this document worth noting. Firstly, colonization is reduced to an issue of poor communication for which “[b]oth Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike suffer[ed]” (p. 8)—a rather grotesque dismissal of both the intentions and impacts of colonial policies and practices. The manner in which colonization has (and continues to) benefit immigrant re-settlers in Canada is also rendered invisible. Indeed, colonization is conceptualized as a kind of inhuman malevolent force which “engulfed” relations between Indigenous peoples and “those that settled here” (p. 8). It is, further, a phenomenon largely relegated to the past. Now, in this supposed new era of relationship, we are all members

of the (to draw upon Anderson, 1991) “imagined community” of Canada. Lastly, there is a theory of change apparent here wherein knowledge (content) acquisition will result in understanding which will then lead to more principled individual action and, by extension, broader social change—while also reducing the likelihood of social conflict.

Other documents employ this notion of an imaginary national community, further suggesting that Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and histories are part of “our” collective “national heritage.” For example, the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents’ (2013) *Position statement on Aboriginal education* asserts that Manitoba’s “unique heritage and rich intellectual history [is] due in large part to the contributions and achievements of Aboriginal people” (p. 1).³⁷ These contributions, it is argued, have “been largely unacknowledged” (p. 1). To address this, we “must draw upon the knowledge and expertise found among Manitoba’s Aboriginal people” (p. 1). This not only “provides an opportunity to become inspired and learn about the importance of resilience” (p. 2), but also gives access to “cultural beliefs and practices” which “contribute to Canadian culture and the global community” (p. 2). As this document demonstrates, Indigenous histories and cultures are situated as collective *Canadian* resources. This serves to disengage Indigenous history and culture from political realities as well as geographic context. This depoliticization and deterritorialization can be read as serving broader colonial efforts to subsume Indigenous peoples into the imagined community of Canada through the logics of “recognition” and incorporation (Coulthard, 2014).

Such incorporation includes the rearticulation of colonial violence as part of “the story of Canada”—as a challenge which “the nation” has acknowledged, accepted, and risen above. This is particularly evident in the framing around residential schooling which, in his 2008 *Statement of apology*, then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper rhetorically transformed into a “sad chapter in our history” (Harper, 2008, my emphasis). Thusly, it becomes a plot point in a broader metanarrative which posits “Canada as a national body growing into a distinctive, ethical and racially tolerant creature” (Montgomery, 2006, p. 23) through the use of discursive “redemptive maneuvers” (p. 24) that suggest Canada has “become a more tolerant version of its younger self”

³⁷ To be clear, I am not contradicting the “accuracy” of this statement, but rather the manner in which it is framed by the authors. Such exploration *could be* used as a means to destabilize colonial relationships but is instead serves to “disavow” both the “founding violence” of colonization and its contemporary manifestations (Veracini, 2008).

(p. 31), thereby granting it a particular kind of moral authority within the international community.³⁸

Thus, reconciliation serves as a “politics of distraction” which “shift[s] the discourse away from restitution... ground[ing] it instead in a political/legal rights-based process that plays into the affirmative repair policies of states and ultimately rewards colonial injustices” (Corntassel & Holder, 2008, p. 8). Flowers (2015) further notes that this “affirmative repair” also involves the regulation of affect, serving to “disregard anger and resentment as destructive emotions” and reframe resistance so that “blame is placed on the injured party, who is seen as an irrational ‘blockade’ blinded by their rage compared to the “reasonable” apologist” (p. 42). Continuing to challenge the Canadian re-settler state thusly becomes a deviant act—a “gathering storm” perhaps—that threatens the unified Canadian nation.

Regan (2010) echoes this in her articulation of the “Canadian peacemaker myth” and its effect on state-Indigenous relations. Regan employs this term to describe the dominant narrative of Canadian settlement which rhetorically positions Canada as “a constant good work in progress” (p. 109). That is, unlike the violent, genocidal practices employed by colonizers in the United States and other areas of the Americas, the “settlers” of Canada—and by extension the Canadian nation itself—are conceptualized as non-violent “peacemakers” who sought negotiated agreements with Indigenous populations. Following this, it is assumed that while some policies and practices proved harmful to Indigenous Peoples, they were nonetheless well intentioned or the inevitable outcome of Euro-Canadian progress.

This myth—prevalently taught in the public education system and reflected in scholarship and policy addressing the issue of educational inequality (Godlewska, Moore & Bednasek, 2010; Kempf, 2005)—has become “part of the common-sense knowledge that cuts across all segments of settler society” (Regan, 2010, p. 107) while obscuring “the underlying structures and behavioral patterns of colonial violence” (p. 109). Green (1995) argues that this “mythologized history” (p. 85) legitimizes land theft, social inequality, and political repression and is indicative of a “contemporary Canadian psychosis” (p. 91). She suggests that

³⁸ Montgomery’s (2006) analysis is actually based upon discourses of war and militarism found within Canadian history textbooks. However, the “semantic maneuvering” (p. 32) he describes is also present in descriptions of Indigenous/(re-)settler relationships.

[t]his illness is evident in the repetition of historical accounts that are partial and exclusionary; in the carefully maintained incomprehension at indigenous nation's resistance to assimilation and struggle for self-determination; [and] in policies that purport to respond to indigenous problems while failing to conceptualize the role of settler populations in creating or solving those problems. (p. 91)

Failure to “treat” this psychosis—through a critical re-evaluation of Canada’s colonial past/present and the creation of an “equitable and restitutionary” (p. 91) foundation for future interactions—fundamentally undermines all national reconciliation efforts (including educational initiatives).

For example, within the Manitoba curriculum, the “enduring understandings” meant to be internalized by grade eleven students include recognizing that “the relationship between First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples [has] moved from autonomous coexistence to colonialism to the *present stage of renegotiation and renewal*” (Manitoba Education, 2013, p. 38, my emphasis) and that “First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples play an ongoing role in shaping *Canadian* history and identity” (p. 38, my emphasis). Manitoba Education’s (2013) *From apology to reconciliation: A guide for grades 9 and 11 social studies teachers in Manitoba* suggests that these understandings may be developed through engagement with various—to draw from Foucault (2003)—“knowledge apparatuses,” including Harper’s 2008 *Statement of apology*. In the teaching guide, this learning activity is meant to help students “reflect on Aboriginal people as citizens of Canada...[and] consider the significance of the fact that the apology was given on behalf of all of the citizens of Canada, not just the government of the day” (p. 51).

Such “semantic maneuvering” (Montgomery, 2006, p. 32) takes the “*evolving colonial entity*” (Green, 1995, p. 85, my emphasis) that is Canada and reframes it as an *evolved moral entity*, “moving towards healing, reconciliation and *resolution of the sad legacy of Indian Residential Schools*” (Harper, 2008, my emphasis) and engaging in a process of “renegotiation and renewal” (Manitoba Education, 2013, p. 38). The discourse of reconciliation and numbing of the potential impact of the “counter-stories” provided by residential school survivors (Madden, 2019) operates as a means of claiming institutional and/or political legitimacy—to rhetorically position Canada (and by extension its institutions) as “a constant good work in progress” (Regan, 2010, p. 109) and validated bearer of human rights norms “with a moral responsibility to uplift, redeem or rescue apparently implicitly inferior (i.e., more violent and less tolerant) spaces,

nations and peoples” (Montgomery, 2006, p. 33-34). Hence, this nationalist narrative serves both domestic and international economic, political, and social purposes (Logan, 2014; James, 2013; Thobani, 2007).

Demonstrating adherence to normative standards and human rights frameworks

As discussed above, while the majority of sources frame the issue of educational inequality in terms of either economic and social stability/security, several make reference to “reconciliation” and/or cite the normative standards expressed in documents such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s *Calls to Action*, the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), and various Treaties, as in the following examples:

The question of how to achieve meaningful reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada has emerged as a major national priority since the 2015 release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada final report. Through the TRC’s... comprehensive Calls to Action, the report outlines a vision for a positive way forward... The report places schools and educational activities at the heart of processes to advance reconciliation. (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020, p. 1)

We, as universities, colleges and public school boards in Manitoba, celebrate the gifts that Indigenous students and educators bring to post-secondary educational institutions... These serve as valuable resources for advancing Indigenous education and for enhancing the educational milieu for all learners in Manitoba... We recognize the Nation-to-Nation relationships affirmed in the Treaties, the Aboriginal and Treaty rights in the Canadian Constitution, and Indigenous understandings of rights, title and Treaties. Historic inequalities and colonial processes have interfered with these relationships and rights which continue to affect Canada today... We support reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Manitoba... This will establish a strong foundation of mutual respect and appreciation for the diversity of all cultures. (*Manitoba Collaborative Indigenous Education Blueprint*, 2015, p.1)

These sources (and the 2013 Manitoba Education teaching guide discussed in the previous section) make linkages between various normative standards, reconciliation, and education. However, as I have discussed above, *education for reconciliation* is commonly conceptualized as either: 1) *education for intercultural understanding* (a rhetorical sleight of hand that replaces discussions of historical and contemporary violence with the exaltation of an imagined Canadian nation); or 2) as *education for employment and development* (as something achieved through the development of human capital and economic growth—which, it is argued, will address the

structural inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations). While both approaches have been subjected to critique (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020; Hodgkins, 2016; Madden, 2019; McCreary, 2013; Regan, 2010) such linkages remain common within both academic literature and policy.

These commitments are largely symbolic—rather than substantive—and function as a mechanism for affirming the legitimacy of governmental, institutional, and professional bodies (Cottrell, Preston, & Pearce, 2012).³⁹ This rarely results in significant change to practice and lived experience, a tendency noted and sometimes critiqued by a handful of sources (Inspire, 2018; Snow, 2017; Anuik, 2008; Greenwood, De Leeuw, & Fraser, 2008)—although this critique is generally directed at the gap between the stated ideals and subsequent action, rather than the “reconciliation project” itself.

Several of these sources, however, employ these normative standards to levy a broader critique of contemporary Indigenous/(re-)setter state relationships. These documents, primarily produced by Indigenous (most commonly First Nations) organizations, draw upon normative documents and Treaties for the purpose of demonstrating the gap between stated principles and the actions of the Canadian government *so as to* call the legitimacy of the state into question. Consider, for example, the following statements from Indigenous organizations and the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples:

First Nations have always adhered to a clear vision of an inclusive and holistic education, and will not allow Canada to disregard their obligation to provide adequate resources in fulfillment of their historic and contemporary fiduciary commitments... Provisions for, and access to, lifelong learning is an inherent and treaty right of all First Nations peoples. (Assembly of First Nations, 2010b, p. 5)

Education is an inherent and treaty right for First Nations. The federal government is legally required to provide funding at adequate and equitable levels. It is therefore recommended... that new a funding model be developed in full partnership with First Nations that is needs-based, uncapped, flexible, transparent, stable, predictable, holistic, and indexed to needs. (Chiefs of Ontario, 2017, p. 5)

We join First Nations children in asking why Canada has not taken the necessary measures to address the inequities in education and other services on reserves—such as child welfare—given that there are no barriers to the full and proper implementation of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* in this very wealthy country. (Shannen’s Dream Campaign, 2011, p. 8)

³⁹ This attempt by professions to assert their legitimacy by expressing adherence to reconciliation appears to be particularly common in the areas of social work, health care, law, and education.

[C]ountless 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. If we believe that education is a basic human right, then we are most certainly failing First Nations children. (St. Germain & Dyck, 2011, p. 1)

While these sources all focus on the provision of educational services on First Nation reserves, they still provide an important counter-discourse which: asserts Indigenous nationhood and rights; places the responsibility for inequality back onto the shoulders of colonial institutions; and refuses the facile subsuming of Indigenous nations into the Canadian body politic. As the statement from the Shannen’s Dream Campaign (2011) illustrates, this often means denaturalizing the current state of affairs, identifying how the institutions which govern “this very wealthy country” (p. 8) are actively choosing to maintain the exploitative status quo. However, it can be argued that these documents also frame the critique using other potentially problematic discourses—by, for example, reaffirming the dominant status of the Canadian state by emphasizing its “fiduciary commitments” (as in the first two statements) or appealing to paternalistic and adultist notions of childhood dependency and presumptions about the inherent goodness of school (as in the latter excerpts). Thus, while these narrative challenges are notable, they are rare and have their own limitations.

Fostering Indigenous survival and self-determination

Following the (not unproblematic) counter-discourses identified above, some sources embed the analysis of educational inequality within a broader discussion of Indigenous self-determination and/or survival. This includes sources which explore how education can be employed to fulfill the right to language and culture (Fontaine, 2017; Cook & White/Xelimumw, 2001) and/or to provide the overall foundation for maintaining Indigenous political self-determination (Assembly of First Nations, 2010a). Several of these authors note that progress in the area of educational equity is primarily due to “the resiliency of Indigenous communities and social justice movements advocating for inclusion and change” (Toulouse, 2016, p. 1)—rather than being the product of the moral awakening or enlightened self-interest of Canadian authorities.

It is also notable that these discussions often offer particular conceptualizations of “education” that challenge the current emphasis on quantifiable outcomes. For example, the Assembly of First Nations’ (2007) *Soul of sovereignty* suggests that

[e]xisting federal programming and policy touts literacy and numeracy as the panacea for First Nations success in the educational realm. First Nations take a broader perspective on student success to identify authentic education as including social and emotional competency factors, culturally based curriculum, civic engagement or service to one’s people, character education, community control of education, culturally responsive pedagogy and assessment and relationships between school and community as key factors to be embedded in cultural traditions, languages, cultural protocols, ceremonies, land based learning and the wisdom of Elders. Excellence in academic education is also a goal of First Nations along with meeting and exceeding national standards of literacy and numeracy. (Longboat, 2007, p. 8)

This presents a complex definition of educational success that de-centers (but, notably, does not exclude) quantitative measures. Again, these counter-discourses are most commonly articulated by scholars and organizations speaking in reference to education on First Nations reserves—but, nonetheless, these still serve to challenge more common truth claims and, in some cases, suggest that education can be “a form of resistance” (Neeganagwedgin, 2001, p. 3). These sources, however, sit at the periphery of the literature corpus. The framing of most documents presumes that Indigenous (political, cultural, economic, etc.) survival is no longer under threat and/or suggest that self-determination is neither a realistic nor legitimate political project—indeed, it is more common to frame self-determination, resistance, and non-acquiescence *as a threat to* the economic, social, and national security of Canada.

Summary

Thus, overall, discussions of educational attainment disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations commonly assert a theory of change which simplistically links schooling completion, employment, and personal welfare as the primarily means for addressing all manner of structural inequalities (as well as the so-called “historical” legacy of residential schools). It is further argued that building “human capital” will help Indigenous communities undertake localized development while also allowing Canada to maintain its economic growth and stability. Underneath this is the implied threat of Indigenous population growth, which is considered a challenge to national and economic security as well as a drain on public spending. Preventing this requires ensuring Indigenous young people are integrated into the Canadian

economy and strengthening a collective national identity which reduces the distinctiveness of Indigenous nations to a simple matter of cultural difference—thereby subsuming all into a homogenized national community. In doing so, the knowledge and history (as well as the lands and resources) of Indigenous peoples become the property of “all Canadians.”

Within this discourse, schools are framed as “safe spaces” while the abuses of educational authorities are relegated to the past. Contemporary conflicts that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can be addressed through the “infusion” of Indigenous perspectives into curriculum content and teaching practices. This, it is argued, will not only address these challenging relationships, but also help Indigenous students develop their own cultural identity and feel “safe” and “connected” to school.

There are several examples of sources that challenge these notions, including those offered by scholars who employ critical theory when analyzing educational inequality and those developed by Indigenous political and community organizations seeking to reframe educational attainments gaps as manifestations of profound injustice. However, these counter-stories are rarely evident in policy documents or reports produced by influential thinktanks. I suggest, further, that the majority of sources reflect the “contemporary Canadian psychosis” as defined by Green (1995). This “psychosis” arises from a kind of “political/cultural unconscious” (Cash, 2004)—a deeply embedded “repertoire of culturally specific othering mechanisms” (p. 165) that belie histories of conquest and realities of conflict. This colonial unconscious “continues to disfigure and distort (re-)settler-indigenous relations” (including so-called reconciliation efforts) and manifests within narratives of Canadian nationhood (p. 165). This colonial political/cultural unconscious is unquestionably evident in much of the existing scholarship and most policy documentation, particularly when discussions revolve around the topics of social welfare, the opportunity/threat posed by Indigenous population growth, and reconciliation.

In addition to this colonial unconscious, a neoliberal ethos of individualism and “market citizenship” (Hodgkins, 2016, p. 123) permeates much of this work. Collective problems are addressed through individualized, market-based solutions. This technocratic paradigm couches axiomatic assumptions (around gaps, potential, and human capital) in a regime of statistics and graphs, thereby making the ideological appear objective and casting the complex as simplistic and measurable.

2.5 Locating causes

To further illustrate the existing scholarly and political “map” of educational inequity, I also examined the corpus of literature so as to identify: 1) the various explanations offered to account for the different educational attainment rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students; and 2) the types of intervention mechanisms suggested. I then classified these causes according to their presumed “location”—that is, within whom or what the cause is attributed. By doing so, I was able to detect what aspects of education are conceptualized as deficient or problematic and, subsequently, identified as potential targets for intervention. This resulted in a complex set of factors and targets, briefly summarized⁴⁰ below. Across these sources is a tendency to frame a binary between school “completers” and “leavers” (those who acquire highschool credentials and those who do not) and to explain why Indigenous students “fall into” either of these categories and/or why they often follow more “indirect” paths through schooling (e.g., paths that involve leaving and returning to the system on one or more occasions and/or going through other highschool equivalency programs) (Bougie, Kelly-Scott, & Arriagada, 2013, p. 4).

Underlying these reports is the assumption that the goal is to not only ensure students become “completers” but to also help them undertake more “efficient pathways” through school and into the labour market—to graduate from highschool “on time” (within four years), to select “appropriate” post-secondary learning opportunities, and to slide into existing labour market gaps. This is emphasized by Gluszynski (2005) in his analysis of the schooling trajectories of Manitobans. He states,

[e]nsuring that students choose the most efficient pathways between education and the labour market is of benefit to themselves and society. On the personal level, an efficient pathway can maximize potential earnings and minimize potential costs associated with participation in post-secondary education. On the societal level, it maximizes productivity and also minimizes societal cost associated with providing post-secondary education. Therefore, schools and parents can be key players in ensuring that the right pathways are chosen by students. (p. 3)

While his specific analysis does not differentiate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous demographics, its main findings (which centralize the role of parental engagement in their child’s education and in-school career counselling opportunities) are reiterated within more focused studies. This includes MacKinnon’s (2015) analysis which, while offering a critical take on the

⁴⁰ More thorough discussions of these categories/factors will be explored in subsequent publications.

colonial and neoliberal dynamics of the labour market, also notes that “[t]he best jobs in the primary sector⁴¹ are often awarded to those individuals who follow the standard path, usually without interruption, from secondary through post-secondary education” (p. 43). Reflecting this, most analyses of educational disparity in Canada—and their related interventions—were predicated upon not just ensuring young people “finish school” but that they also take an “efficient pathway” through the system so as to increase their chances of employment. Many of these sources seek to identify and address the causes of school leaving as well as *pathway inefficiency* and *delayed transitions* between elementary, secondary, and post-secondary systems.

There are a small number of sources (mainly literature reviews) that propose frameworks for classifying the causes of school leaving/completion. The majority of these employ a level-of-analysis model⁴² (e.g., identifying historical, geographic, cultural, systemic, family-based, and/or individual factors) or highlight different aspects of the education system⁴³ (e.g., curriculum, teachers, students, and policy). Others classify causes by commonality and impact. For example, a literature review produced by the Atlantic Evaluation Group (2010) on the factors which inhibit Indigenous participation in post-secondary education classifies barriers according to prevalence (so as to identify “major challenges”) while also distinguishing between: the factors which impact both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students; those that impact Indigenous students to a *greater extent*; and those that are *unique to* Indigenous experience. Several sources note that, while these classification efforts are useful for conceptual clarity, it is important to remember that these factors interact with each other, leading to reinforcing feedback loops and compounding risk (sometimes referred to as a “layering effect”) (p. 36).

To develop a classification system for this review, I created a list of commonly referred to factors and intervention methods⁴⁴ and then sought to identify the stated or implied *location* of each (that is, upon what or whom the cause of failure/success is attributed). This resulted in four location categories: 1) the individual Indigenous student; 2) the caregiver, home, and local

⁴¹ MacKinnon uses the term “primary sector” in reference to jobs that are stable and offer high wages and benefits. She uses the term “secondary sector jobs” in reference to unstable/precarious work and low-wage employment.

⁴² For example, George (2008) distinguishes between historical, geographic, cultural, individual/personal, and systemic factors. R. A. Malatest & Associates (2002) suggest the following categories of “barriers”: historical; social; cultural; family-related; and personal/individual.

⁴³ For example, Mattson and Caffrey (2001) classify barriers under the following headings: organizational structure (“issues of control”); school staff (“keepers of the knowledge”); curriculum; socio-economic conditions; and over-representation in special education contexts.

⁴⁴ Including interventions that have been implemented as well as those that are suggested, but not yet in effect.

community; 3) the individual educational institution (the school and classroom); and 4) broader systems and histories (education system, other systems, and historical dynamics). These categories are described below. A full list of all the identified factors and intervention methods is included in Appendix one (Summary of factors impacting the educational outcomes of Indigenous students).

Factors located within the individual Indigenous student

Most of the reviewed sources make linkages between demographic characteristics and educational attainment rates. Overwhelmingly these relate lower socioeconomic status to the increased risk of educational failure and/or delayed completion—often implying (but not necessarily explicating) causal pathways which link distal and proximate factors (Statistics Canada, 2009; Richard, Hove, & Afolabi, 2008). For example, Turner and Thompson’s (2015) work on the impact of student mobility suggests another binary (between “movers” and “non-movers”) and argues that:

school movers are more likely than non-movers to live in lower-income families and families headed by parent(s) with less than high school education, and to have behavioural problems or learning disabilities... Similarly, the present analysis shows that movers in Grades 1 to 6 were significantly more likely than non-movers to need or receive help because of behavioural/emotional problems. Among students in Grades 7 to 12, movers were more likely than non-movers to live in lower-income households, to have parents with less than high school graduation and less likely to have parents who were involved in school activities. (p. 11)

While the statistical correlations made by the authors may be “correct” (this is based on the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey), they are presented in a way that implies a specific theory of failure that links together complex factors to create what De Witte et al. (2013) term a “‘photofit’ of those most at risk, for whom targeted intervention measures can then be devised” (p. 17). In this way the causes of educational disparity are located not in the structural realm, but rather within *individuals* who embody—through their demographic characteristics and practices—the impact of systemic issues.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Notably, while gender is often identified as a variable which impacts the outcomes of Indigenous students, it is rarely associated with specific intervention methods (aside from, say, gender-based socio-emotional support groups and activities). There are several instances, however, where supports for young mothers are suggested (e.g., parenting classes, pregnancy supports, and childcare).

Consequently, intervention mechanisms—such as in-school nutrition programs, specific supports in literacy and numeracy development, the Community Schools Program, and early learning (“Head Start”) initiatives—target individuals and local communities that manifest specific risk criteria. The goal of such efforts is to mitigate the impact of structural inequality, to *level the playing field* by *ensuring access* to specific resources so as to ensure the *school readiness* of individuals (Gillies, et al., 2020; Office of Audit and Evaluation, 2017; Nguyen, 2011; Phillips, 2010; MECY, 2006a; Health Canada, 2000). Such efforts often rely upon “identity declaration” practices (so as to acquire funding/resources for and “target” Indigenous students), the obtaining of diagnoses for specific learning needs, and the development of individualized educational and/or behavioural plans.

Similar maneuvering is evident in sources that centralize the subjective perceptions, affect, and/or specific behaviours of students. This includes literature that explores the role of self-concept (Whitley, 2014a), cultural identity (Ball, 2012; Toulouse, 2006), and personal aspirations/hope (Ferguson, 2019; Shankar, Ip, & Khalema, 2017; Harper, 2007; Ramp & Smith, 2004). These psychological/affective states are further associated with⁴⁶ Indigenous language fluency⁴⁷ (Guèvremont & Kohen, 2019), the intergenerational impact of residential schooling (Barnes & Josefowitz, 2019; Fontaine, 2017; Feir, 2016; Gray, 2011; Barnes, Josefowitz, & Cole, 2006), and student perceptions of post-secondary accessibility, career possibilities, and the overall purpose and relevance of education (Cheeptham et al., 2020; Shankar, Ip, & Khalema, 2017; Claypool & Preston, 2014; Nardozi, 2013; Restoule, 2013; Brown, Fraehlich, & Debassige, 2012; Marshall et al., 2011). Subsequent intervention mechanisms include: language immersion programming; curriculum reform to make pedagogical content, practice, and assessment more culturally relevant/accessible; cultural, socioemotional, and leadership programming meant to bolster student mental health, wellbeing, and self-esteem; and career education initiatives to foster a sense of connection to post-secondary education and employment pathways (Coyne-Foresi et al., 2019; Gartner-Manzon & Giles, 2018; Lavoie & Blanchet, 2018;

⁴⁶ There were a few sources that offered more critical perspectives on the complexities of education and identity/self-identification (e.g., Anuk & Bellehumeur-Kearns, 2014, and Hallet et al., 2008).

⁴⁷ There are contradictory arguments made in relation to language proficiency. While some researchers note a correlation between language fluency and improved schooling completion rates (Guèvremont & Kohen, 2019), others suggest that the use of Indigenous languages and “non-standard” English can be a disadvantage due to teacher and curricular bias (Babaee, 2011; Sterzuk, 2008).

Morcom, 2017; Toulouse, 2016; Marshall et al., 2011; Western and Northern Canadian Protocol, 2011; Epstein, 2009; Longboat, 2007; MacLean & Wason-Ellam, 2006).

As with the aforementioned material efforts to *level the playing field*, these initiatives primarily target individuals (and, to a lesser extent, local communities and schools). However, these interventions focus on subjective perceptions and sociopsychological states; that is, they seek to *engage the affect* of individuals—to change perceptions and value judgements, create a sense of attachment, and affectively *move* people into closer connection with schools, post-secondary education, and the job market. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s 2018 report, *Indigenous employment and skills strategies in Canada* suggests that,

[b]uilding the educational and skills levels of the Indigenous population will require concerted efforts *to mentor Indigenous youth about the value of participating in the education system* and to support educational institutes in providing and maintaining quality and *culturally sensitive* education to Indigenous students, from primary to post-secondary levels. Such supports should focus on ensuring student retention and nurturing Indigenous student in their development in socially and psychologically safe settings. (p. 48, my emphasis)

The theory of change implied by this statement resonates with cultural discontinuity theory and suggests (problematically) that, aside for material concerns, Indigenous students (which are treated as a homogeneous group) may *fail to recognize* the value of education (which, in this report, is understood in relation to employment and personal well-being). The underlying goal of these efforts is to *correct this value-judgement* (and its associated affective attachments) for the purpose of ensuring student retention and graduation.

Other connections were made between student perceptions, behaviours, and achievement. School attendance, engagement, and “persistence” (sometimes termed “academic resilience”) are commonly identified predictors of success while “disruptive” in-school behaviours (and disciplinary practices) and various out-of-school behaviours (e.g., sexual activity and pregnancy) are associated with academic failure⁴⁸ (Clark & Pidgeon, 2020; Snow, 2017; Arriagada, 2015; Sanderson, Hutchinson, & Grekul, 2013). Overall, school leaving and pathway inefficiency is considered more likely if a young person engages in (or has peers who engage in) a variety of “risk behaviours”—as suggested (and defined by) Bougie, Kelly-Scott, and Arrigada’s (2013) in

⁴⁸ Conversely, out-of-school behaviours like working part-time and reading were associated with completion (Bougie, Kelly-Scott, & Arrigada, 2013).

their Statistics Canada report (based upon the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey [APS]). They state that,

APS respondents were asked how many of their closest friends during their last year of school skipped classes once a week or more; had a reputation for causing trouble; and smoked cigarettes, used drugs, and drank alcohol. Together, these questions can provide a profile of the number of friends with “risk behaviours.” Off-reserve First Nations leavers were generally more likely than completers to report that “most” or “all” of their closest friends had risk behaviours. For instance, higher percentages of leavers than completers reported that “most” or “all” of their closest friends skipped classes once a week or more (33% versus 23%) and had a reputation for causing trouble (18% versus 8%)... Leavers were also more likely than completers to have many close friends who smoked cigarettes (58% versus 33%) and used drugs (29% versus 15%). (p. 15)

This suggests a variety of behaviours believed to be correlated with failure to complete school, including “skipping” school, “causing trouble,” and the use of intoxicants—framing these behaviours as causes in themselves, rather than as *responses to* other dynamics. Such behaviours are used as indicators that a young person is *disengaging* (physically and emotionally disconnecting) from school and, consequently, *moving* the wrong way. They are, therefore, in need of “reorientation” (Ahmed, 2006a; 2006b).

These behaviours—along with the material, sociopsychological, and cultural “barriers” to schooling completion—are often linked to the characteristics and personal histories of students, with several authors noting that involvement with child welfare agencies and periods of disrupted schooling increase a student’s risk of dropout (Navia et al., 2018; Feir, 2016). Personal and “cultural” learning styles have also been identified as influencing factors (Rasmussen, Baydala, & Sherman, 2004; Ryan, 1992), along with the challenges associated with various special learning and behaviour needs (including the tendencies to “under-diagnose” and “over-diagnose” Indigenous students) (Lindblom 2014; McBride & McKee, 2001).

While there is often passing reference to systemic and historical forces which underlie these behaviours, the intervention targets are *individual students*. Their behaviours (which arise from their overall “situation”) may be addressed by *ensuring access* to resources and/or *engaging their affect* (e.g., by addressing self-esteem issues, providing mental health support, and helping them “recognize” the value of school). Underlying this, however, is an effort by schools to minimize disruptive, oppositional, and resistant behaviours—which means that efforts to address root causes are undertaken in tandem with various overt disciplinary practices, which

include standard coercive means⁴⁹ such as detentions and suspensions—which are disproportionately levied against Indigenous students and reflective of systemic and overt racism (Romanow, 2020; Gebhard, 2019; 2012; Freflund et al., 2014; St. Denis & Hampton, 2002; McBride & McKee, 2001).

Overall, numerous scholars (particularly those employing statistical analyses) have a tendency to locate the causes of school failure within individual students—as the product of some form of personal deficit that is commonly attributed to their socioeconomic or cultural background. This includes studies that try to identify the proximal factors which lead to school dropout. Consider, for example, the following statements from the Bougie, Kelly-Scott, & Arrigada’s (2013) report:

The most common reasons off-reserve First Nations male leavers dropped out were: wanted to work (22%), lack of interest (17%), had to work/money problems (14%), and school problems (12%). Just over one quarter (26%) of off-reserve First Nations female leavers cited pregnancy or the need to care for their own children as the main reason why they left school. An additional 14% reported they lacked interest. (p. 11)

The most common reasons why First Nations people living off reserve, Inuit and Métis reported not finishing postsecondary education were: got a job or wanted to work; lost interest or lacked motivation; pregnancy, caring for their children or other family responsibilities; and courses were too hard. (p. 7)

Respondents were asked if, during their last year of school, racism, bullying, alcohol, drugs, or violence were problems at school. Together, these questions constitute a “negative school environment” indicator. Leavers were more likely than completers to perceive a negative school environment. Higher percentages of leavers than completers reported that racism (40% versus 33%), bullying (54% versus 46%), drugs (53% versus 46%), and violence (43% versus 30%) were problems. (p. 20)

These statements suggest a careful framing of the statistical data, distinguishing between “wanting to work” and “having to work,” constructing “lack of interest,” “lacking motivation,” and finding courses “too hard” as phenomena arising from *within* individuals, and suggesting “pregnancy” and “caregiving” as proximate factors in and of themselves (rather than, say, focusing on the level of support individuals caring for children receive).⁵⁰ Further, a common tendency to measure student and/or parent “perceptions of” school structure/climate locates

⁴⁹ Although there appears to be growing interest in so-called “restorative” disciplinary practices.

⁵⁰ Conceptualizing early and single motherhood as a cause of schooling failure and pathway inefficiency is quite common (e.g., see Boulet & Badets, 2017).

causes within the subjectivity of the individual, rather than the schooling context. The presumption here is that the deficit lies within individuals, but that individual schools and educators—if properly fulfilling their social mandates—will be able to “address” those deficits and “include” Indigenous students in schooling practices.

Factors located within the caregiver, home, and local community

Numerous sources discuss (or imply) how the socioeconomic status of a student’s family corresponds to his or her risk of educational failure (Statistics Canada, 2009; Richard, Hove, & Afolabi, 2008). Particular attention is often drawn to the educational attainment level and employment status of parents, the size and structure of the family household, and family mobility (e.g., due to unstable housing situations) (Turner & Thompson, 2015; Guèvremont & Kohen, 2014; Aman, 2008; Canadian Council on Learning, 2008). The studies suggest that the relative capacity of a caregiver or family *to provide access to—to transmit—*specific resources (that meet basic needs, provide stability, offer learning opportunities, etc.) reverberates across all aspects of a young person’s life and impacts their schooling experiences. Consequently, to improve the success of Indigenous students, it is important to *level the playing field* by *increasing the capacity of caregivers* to support their child and, thereby, ensure *school readiness*. Achieving this involves providing support to “at-risk” caregivers and families through various local initiatives (e.g., the Community Schools Program, Head Start initiatives, food hampers, clothing donations, etc.).

However, the concept of parent-child *transmission* is understood as far more than just a material phenomenon. Other sources suggest that the intergenerational transmission of trauma (including that stemming from residential schooling, child welfare involvement, and other issues) and various associated characteristics and behaviours (e.g., health challenges, substance abuse issues) impact familial relationships and a young person’s capacity to complete school (McKenzie et al., 2016). Other sources discuss the “intergenerational transmission of educational attainment” (Levine, Sutherland, & Cole, 2012, p. 2) and emphasize how parental schooling experiences, aspirations for their children, and involvement/engagement⁵¹ with schools are

⁵¹ Drawing upon Pathways to Education (2015), I differentiate between parental involvement and engagement. Parental involvement refers to volunteering, attendance at school events, and other activities that support school initiatives. Parental engagement refers to participation in school planning and decision-making (working with a school, rather than working for it (p. 4).

central factors that shape the pathways of Indigenous students (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020; Milne, 2016; Berger, 2009; Taylor, 2007; Gluszynsky, 2005; Friedel, 1999). Regardless of whether the focus is on material or immaterial factors, the tendency here is to locate the deficit within the parent or immediate family system.

However, many sources also note the challenges parents/caregivers face when connecting with schools—due to such factors as low trust, experiences of discrimination, the impact of various daily stresses, and a lack of knowledge regarding the “hidden structures” of education (Taylor, 2007, p. 17)—and are careful to clearly note the presence of parental “aspirations,” as in the following examples (from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami):

[T]he knowledge that parental involvement and parental “push” promotes better educational outcomes for children is beginning to re-emerge within families. Despite the history of traumatic experiences, despite being raised in a shroud of silence regarding the history of residential schools, and despite their personal achievements in terms of locating work in the absence of formal education, this generation of parents has recognized that their children need more—more education, more support, and more opportunities. (Levine, Sutherland, & Cole, 2012, p. 16)

Ask any Inuk parent if they want their children to receive education that will permit them full participation in modern, mainstream life, and the response will be a resounding “YES.” Then ask if they want their children to receive education that fully supports Inuit identity, and the response will be an equally resounding “YES.” Inuit may vary in the emphasis they assign to mainstream and Inuit identity, but all want their children to be fully Inuk, but prepared to participate in mainstream society. (Taylor, 2007, p. 7)

These assertions of aspiration are, arguably, meant to contextualize disparities in rates of reported parental involvement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations (Arriagada & Hango, 2016; Turner & Thompson, 2015)—to emphasize that parents “recognize” the value of schooling and that lower levels of involvement and engagement are due to a multitude of barriers, rather than a lack of care or aspiration. Some sources also stress the complexity of parent-school relationships, characterized as they are by competing pressures and goals (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020; Taylor, 2007).

These authors challenge the “culture of poverty” argument that also underlies existing scholarship, which suggests the role of familial and local values in maintaining class inequalities. For example, in the C. D. Howe Institute’s 2004 *Aboriginal off-reserve education: Time for action*, Richards and Vining suggest that:

[f]amilies that value education can be found, of course, at all income levels. But, there are a number of routes through which family income can influence children's education attainment. First, *poor families often have more humble expectations for their children's careers, and place less emphasis on their academic performance*. Second, whether individual parents have either high or low academic expectations, *these low expectations may spread through a school population via student peer effects*. Third, wealthier parents may monitor school teaching quality more aggressively than do parents of poor families. If parental monitoring matters, schools in wealthier neighbourhoods may recruit better teachers and, in general, perform better. (p. 12, my emphasis)

In this manner the authors peg lower rates of educational attainment upon the values, expectations, and resulting actions of parents, suggesting that these have either a direct or indirect impact on educational quality and student outcomes. In an earlier work, Richards (2001) also suggests that “poverty may depend on the prevailing subculture among neighbours” (p. 10); that is,

[i]f, for example, this culture attaches a limited priority to educational achievement and accepts single parenthood as the norm, intergenerational poverty is likely to ensue. Here, we encounter the complex matter of the values and norms of society, both the general culture prevailing among the majority and local subcultures within neighbourhoods. Culture in this sense almost certainly matters in understanding intergenerational poverty.

This argument seeks to link identified socioeconomic patterns in spatial environments to shared norms and behaviours—to provide an additional explanation for what is commonly termed the “neighbourhood effect” (e.g., as described by Findlay and Kohen, 2012). That is, to explain correlations between educational challenges and community characteristics (e.g., lower educational attainment rates, higher crime rates, inadequate housing, and unemployment) by proposing how “a self-reproducing ‘culture of poverty’ among the marginalized” (Richards, 2001, p. 14) can serve to normalize and perpetuate intergenerational cycles of behaviour.

Given the continuing circulation of this homogenizing and pathologizing discourse, it is unsurprising that numerous scholars have sought to counter it with affirmations of parental interest and capacity so as to tilt the lenses of analysis toward the socioeconomic and school-based barriers that *reduce the capacity* of parents to provide for their children and/or engage with education. That being said, even these more nuanced arguments still primarily locate school failure within the deficits of parents, families, and/or local communities—further emphasizing the individualized responsibility of parents to *provide for* their children (e.g., meet their material

and sociopsychological needs) and *transmit* “appropriate” behaviours, values, affective states, and expectations (e.g., by modelling involvement in school and discussing career expectations). Schools, however, can facilitate this parental role by fostering parental engagement and/or providing support to families (Berger, 2009; McDonald, 2009; Taylor, 2007; Friedel, 1999). These intervention mechanisms are, however, limited and largely dependent upon the identification of Indigenous and at-risk families through identity declaration practices and the self-reporting of socioeconomic need—which requires a certain level of caregiver connection with the school (Anuik & Bellehumeur-Kearns, 2014).

Efforts to build these subjective and affective attachments generally centre upon local efforts to *build relationships* with families and *provide opportunities* for caregiver inclusion and engagement—a relational process outlined in Manitoba Education, Citizenship, and Youth’s (2004) *Working together: A guide to positive problem solving for schools, families, and communities*:

When families and schools work together, relationships are formed. These relationships can be positive or negative, depending on how people choose to treat each other. The first step for building strong relationships in schools is the first step for building any strong relationship: talk to each other. The more we communicate our hopes, desires, and needs within the school system, the more ideas and solutions we will have to discuss, the more plans we will have to put into action, and the more support and enthusiasm we will have for seeing those plans through. (p. 5)

To form these relationships, the use of both formal events (such as parent-teacher conferences) and informal, daily interactions are suggested, and it is asserted that “[m]isunderstandings or disagreements can often be cleared up with simple phone calls or brief meetings” (p. 6). However, others note that an assortment of barriers impede such interactions and question the presumed openness of school personnel—suggesting that the formal and informal engagements are predicated upon relations of power and social exclusion and that the forms of engagement permitted are predetermined by institutional norms (and therefore limited in form, scope, and quality) (Milne & Wortherspoon, 2020; Milne, 2016; Pushor & Murphy, 2010; McDonald, 2009; Stelmach, 2009; Martell, 2008; Tagataga Inc., 2007; Taylor, 2007; Friedel, 1999). Underlying this is the presumption that disengagement, resistance, or opposition is primarily due to a lack of the *caregiver’s* capacity and/or *their* failure to recognize the (presumably) positive intentions of schools and school personnel—a “distrust” largely attributed to the colonial history of assimilationist education (which is presumed to be a feature of the *past*).

Factors located within the individual educational institution (the school and classroom)

Various school-based factors which can impact the educational achievement of Indigenous students have been identified. As discussed earlier, this work generally stresses the necessity of integrating Indigenous perspectives into curriculum content, learning resources, pedagogical practice, and other aspects of school life (e.g., school events and the physical design and décor of classrooms). Such efforts, however, are sometimes critiqued as superficial/merely additive or ideologically suspect, reductive, and dehumanizing. Even if the underlying project of integration is not questioned, many sources note that practitioners have faced numerous limitations when seeking to implement these changes, including a lack of training and resources, contradictory policy directions and accountability mechanisms, and teacher opposition (Douglas, Purton, & Bascunan, 2020; Gebhard, 2018; Kim, 2015; Stevenson, 2014; Zurzolo, 2010; Tupper & Cappello, 2008; Wotherspoon, 2008; Berger & Epp, 2005). Some authors also note that these efforts are largely dependent upon the motivation and capacity of school administrators (Osmond-Johnston & Turner, 2020; Preston et al., 2016; Blakesley, 2008; Laramée, 2008).⁵²

Further, most of this work focuses upon the formal curriculum, with less consideration given to aspects of the hidden curriculum and/or issues of school climate, culture, and structure. While these structural and “subjective” aspects of school life are recognized as important factors impacting Indigenous student achievement, much of the literature on these elements revolve around rather amorphous calls to ensure classrooms and schools develop positive, inclusive, welcoming, and/or safe atmospheres and “a sense of community” (Manitoba Education and Training, 2017b; Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, 2014; Manitoba Education, 2011; Manitoba Education, Citizenship, & Youth, 2006). Specific mechanisms for achieving this include: integrating Indigenous perspectives throughout school life; creating “safe spaces” in for Indigenous students and families (such as a specific Indigenous Students Room or Parents Room); developing “caring” relationships between teachers and students; and involving students and caregivers in school planning (Smith & Varghese, 2016; Wallace, 2016; Preston & Claypool, 2013; Richmond & Smith, 2012; Friesen & Krauth, 2010; Martel, 2008; Wotherspoon, 2002).

⁵² This implies that there is a need for interventions that seek to develop administrator capacity and “motivation” while also ensuring the accountability of school leadership to Indigenous students and families. That being said, there is minimal discussion of interventions *directed at* school leadership (besides, say, tracking and accountability mechanisms).

Discussions of school-based factors also emphasize the impact of school personnel (mainly teachers and, to a lesser extent, school administrators). Most scholarship suggests that improvements to teacher training and professional development will help increase the capacity of educators to more effectively engage with and support Indigenous students (mainly) by *increasing their awareness* of Indigenous perspectives and histories. This assumption is challenged by those who focus upon the impact of teacher bias, racial and colonial discourse, Eurocentric teacher training and practice, school disciplinary practices, and microaggressions (Romanow, 2020; Ferguson, 2019; Higgins, Madden, & Korteweg, 2015; Clark et al., 2014; Kerr, 2014; Neeganagwedgin, 2013; Gebhard, 2012; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012; McCreary, 2011; St. Denis, 2011; Orłowski, 2008; Berger, Epp, & Moller, 2006).

For example, Silver and Mallet (2002) suggest that there is a “culture/class/experiential divide” (p. 28) between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous educators (and the school system in general) that impacts classroom interactions⁵³ while some note that non-Indigenous educators exhibit perceptual and behavioural tendencies indicating racial discrimination while also expressing adherence to a “colour blind” liberal multicultural ideology that denies the impact of ongoing colonization and racism (Gebhard, 2018; Scott & Gani, 2018; St. Denis, 2011; McCreary, 2011; Kitchen et al., 2010; Orłowski, 2008).

Other sources suggest the need to increase the proportion of Indigenous professionals working in the education system (and/or to work more extensively with cultural advisors and Elders). These authors argue that increasing the “presence” of Indigenous peoples in schools—through changes to hiring and teacher training practices—will create a more inclusive climate and provide role models for students (Hansen & Antsanen, 2016; Stevenson, 2014; Saskatchewan Education, 2001). While the limited number of studies focusing on the experiences of Indigenous educators do suggest the benefits of making these changes, they also note that these individuals face numerous professional challenges, including overt racism and a general lack of formal and informal support (Oloo & Kiramba, 2019; Stevenson, 2014; Kitchen et al., 2010; St. Denis, 2011; 2010; Young et al., 2010; Cherubini, 2008). Hence, some suggest the need develop Indigenous-centric institutions of learning and to increase support for (and

⁵³ Their work “flips” the cultural discontinuity argument on its head—suggesting (perhaps also problematically) significant incongruence between cultural, class, and personal perspectives while suggesting that the “deficit” lies with the teachers, rather than students.

foster the independence of) existing institutions (Assembly of First Nations, 2010a; 2010b Morgan, 2002).

Overall, the majority of existing literature examining specific educational “sites” presumes that educational disparity can be addressed through additive, rather than transformative, efforts. Elements of schooling may be modified so as to be “inclusive” of Indigenous experience—which is largely reduced to fit within a limited cultural frame.⁵⁴ Underlying this is the assumption that various overt (largely performative) attempts to increase recognition of Indigenous experience will foster a sense of safety and connection amongst students. Discussions of educational professionals demonstrate a similar logic, presuming that the addition of teacher training will build up sufficient awareness and capacity so that one may effectively “connect with” Indigenous students, families, and communities.

Hence, while the cause of educational disparity is somewhat *re-located* (placed upon the classroom, school, and educational professional), presumptions about inherent Indigenous deficit and difference—as well as the essential universality and “goodness” of schools—remain. School and educational professionals are presumed to operate in the best interests of all students, although this intention may not be “recognized by” Indigenous students and families. Schools and educators can, however, modify their behaviour, activities, and appearance so as to make their intentions and character (presumably) more *recognizable*—thereby *engaging the affect* of students and fostering a sense of “connection”⁵⁵ The underlying drive of these efforts is not to decolonize or transform schooling, but to make it more *palatable* and easier to consume while maintaining its underlying structure and dominant paradigms.

This argument, however, has been critiqued by numerous scholars (mainly from a critical theory background and/or who base their work on smaller qualitative studies). In addition to questioning the limited notions of safety, inclusion, and community implied by the additive approach, these authors highlight the depth of colonial relations (and how they manifest at the interpersonal level) as well as the sheer complexity of educational institutions—characterized as they are by competing (and often contradictory) funding, policy, curricular, and professional

⁵⁴ Effectively, overt forms of colonial racism are replaced with overt forms of “performed inclusionism”—while the more latent aspects of colonial racism remain unchallenged.

⁵⁵ This is, perhaps, related to the fact that measures of school climate are largely based upon analyses of perception rather than site-specific factors (e.g., see Bougie, Kelly-Scott, & Arrigada, 2013).

goals. That being said, overwhelming, classrooms, schools, and personnel are generally treated as the “cure” for, rather than the “cause” of, disengagement, dropout, and inefficient pathways.

Factors located within broader systems and histories

Many of the individualized and site-specific challenges identified above (e.g., the socioeconomic barriers faced by individuals, lower rates of caregiver engagement, the lack of Indigenous representation within the education labour force) are often linked (albeit thinly) to broader systemic factors and the historical dynamics which shaped their development. Central to this analysis is the operations of various education systems (including provincial ministries, local school boards, and band-operate schools) as well as how these are impacted by provincial, federal, and international policy directions and assessment regimes (e.g., as articulated by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada [CMEC]). Most of the scholarship focusing on this area represents an effort to identify/address specific barriers to school completion and to ease transitions. This generally revolves around discussions of curriculum; educational governance and decision-making practices; policy and institutional structures; and funding.

Much of this work focuses on the politically contentious issue of on-reserve education which, while centralizing the experiences of First Nations, provides insight into the operations of colonial governance. For example, in 2012 the federal government outlined a proposal for the First Nation Education Act (FNEA)—a policy effort that, while hailed as a necessary prerequisite for improving the provision of educational services on reserves, was widely criticized both for its content and lack of community consultation (Simeone, 2014). This early proposal suggested that the FNEA was “a framework for achieving better outcomes for students through reform, by: creating standards and structures; strengthening governance and accountability; and providing mechanisms for stable, predictable and sustainable funding” (AANDC, 2012, p. 1). Stressing the need to improve (notably undefined) “student outcomes,” it was also meant to establish “a limited number of mandatory universal standards for all First Nation schools” (p. 5), outline monitoring and reporting procedures, and re-affirm the use of provincial curricula (which was considered adaptable to local needs).

Standards, outcomes, and accountability were central themes in Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada’s (2012) *Developing a First Nation Education Act: Discussion*

guide (with the term “accountability” being employed twenty-three times). The document states that

[a]ll First Nation schools and First Nation education authorities receiving funding for education from the Government of Canada would be required to comply with the mandatory provisions of the proposed Act... Emphasizing accountability and clearly defining roles and responsibilities in First Nation education systems within proposed legislation would mean that school authorities would be directly accountable to students, parents, and First Nation communities for the services they provide and for outcomes achieved. *In return*, the Government of Canada would provide stable and predictable funding. (p. 10, my emphasis)

Here the provision of federal funds is rhetorically positioned as a reward for compliance, rather than as the fulfillment of the state’s obligation to fund education as both a basic human right and requirement stipulated in various Treaty documents. Further, the document suggests that annual inspections would be undertaken by someone hired from “a list of qualified people maintained by the department [of AANDC]” who would have the power to “ensure compliance with the requirement of the proposed Act and regulations” (p. 10)—hence, an external party would determine the overall success or failure of a school’s or educational authority’s efforts. The sentiments expressed in the *Discussion Guide* were reiterated in the legislation plan published in July 2013 (Simeone, 2014; AANDC, 2013a; 2013b).

Unsurprisingly, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and numerous provincial First Nations organizations rejected the proposed legislation and its unilateral development, challenging its paternalistic ethos and arguing that it “has not met the conditions for adequate consultation and free, prior, and informed consent” (AFN, 2013, p. 75). A revised version of the legislation—now known as the *First Nations control of First Nations education Act* (or Bill C-33)—was released in February 2014 and initially supported by the AFN. This document sought to address several concerns, including the lack of federal funding commitments (via a proposed \$1.9 billion infusion to support the policy’s implementation) (Simeone, 2014). Response to this second proposal was mixed and resistance intensified after a sudden change in AFN leadership. The bill was formally rejected by the AFN in late May and, in response, the federal government refused to provide additional funding—arguing that this was contingent the AFN’s acquiescence and widespread commitment to accountability-oriented reforms (Kennedy, 2014).

The ultimate failure of Bill C-33 illustrates numbers system-level factors which impact education systems both on- and off-reserve, including: a complex policy environment

characterized by competing priorities as well as conflicts over jurisdictional responsibility (a dynamic that also significantly impacts non-status First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students) (Hodgson-Smith, 2005); relations of power and accountability that favour Canadian/colonial political authorities (Bouvier & Karlenzig, 2006); decision-making processes that limit or block Indigenous participation (Mattson & Caffrey, 2001); funding issues (including the underfunding of on-reserve schools as well as provincial elementary, secondary, and post-secondary systems) (Stewart, 2006; First Nations Education Council, 2010; 2009; 2005); and a presumption that standard curriculum and other educational practices can be simply modified to include Indigenous content.

Other authors have expanded upon the issue of funding and access, arguing that tuition fees, limited financial support, and complex application processes places post-secondary education out of the reach for many students (especially those who have to leave rural or remote communities to attend school and/or who are also caring for children) (McKeown et al., 2018; Restoule 2011; Atlantic Evaluation Group, 2010; R.A. Malatest & Associates, 2008). Further, some suggest that those who do access post-secondary education often have to undertake additional academic upgrading programs and/or have not been given the opportunity to develop the academic skills required to complete advanced degrees (Nardozi, 2013). Indeed, all “transitions” (from between grades, from elementary to secondary education, into post-secondary education, and into the labour market) are identified points of vulnerability within the academic trajectory of Indigenous students⁵⁶ (Atlantic Evaluation Group, 2010).

These numerous structural factors intersect with and reinforce the host of aforementioned issues (of curriculum development, teacher training and accountability, disciplinary practices, school planning processes, etc.), depleting the resources available for (and/or actively impeding) change efforts at all levels. Some also suggest that this complex knot of reinforcing barriers is rooted in more general Eurocentric/colonial and neoliberal presumptions about learning and human development and, as I argued earlier in this chapter, reflects certain theories of change, paradigms of analysis, and research gaps (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010).

⁵⁶ Due to numerous factors, including the geographic accessibility of school and post-secondary institutions, which often requires students from more remote communities to move, thereby removing access to their interpersonal support structures and increasing their financial burden (Atlantic Evaluation Group, 2010).

Educational policy across Canada is also impacted by broader international (and neoliberal) norms and systems, including the privileging of standardized assessments methods as indicators of educational “quality,” a general “culture of comparison” (McCallum & Waller, 2020, p. 9), and technocratic approaches to improving success rates (particularly in relation to the Program of International Student Assessment [PISA]) (Miller, 2018; Richards & Mahboubi, 2018; Blue & Pinto, 2017; Parkin, 2015; Sellar & Lingard, 2013; Friesen & Krauth, 2012; Manitoba Education, 2009). These standards have been challenged by those seeking to develop assessment methods and metrics believed more reflective of Indigenous conceptualizations of learning⁵⁷ (Stoffer, 2017; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; 2007; Tunison, 2007).

All of these dynamics have a deep history in Canada, rooted in (re-)settler-colonial practices which have sought to maintain oppressive colonizer/colonized relationships. Discussion of this history generally centre upon the impact of the residential schooling system, which operated from the mid-1800s to 1996 and directly impacted more than 150,000 Indigenous children (primarily, but not exclusive, First Nations). The assimilationist goals of residential schooling were justified via conceptualizations of Indigenous societies as primitive, savage, and doomed to eventual extinction in the wake of European encroachment (Miller, 1996). For example, in 1883 then-Prime Minister John A. Macdonald made the following statement to Parliament justifying the development of boarding schools:

[w]hen a child is on the reserve, the child lives with his parents who are savages...and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write...Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence...where they can acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men. (qtd. in Stonechild, 2006, p. 9)

The presumption of European superiority expressed in this statement provided the justification for the removal of children from their communities, the use of abusive disciplinary practices for re-socialization, and the development of policy mechanisms meant to prevent the “regression” of students after they completed their schooling (policies of involuntary enfranchisement, placing graduates in re-settler homes to work as domestics, etc.) (Miller, 1996).

⁵⁷ The Canadian Council on Learning (2009) suggests that Indigenous conceptualizations of learning are characterized by a commitment to: holism; lifelong learning processes; experiential learning; Indigenous languages and cultures; incorporating the knowledge of community members and Elders; and spirituality (p. 10).

These schools were “total institutions” (Rand, 2011) that sought to eradicate the individual and social identities of attendees through both the overt and hidden curriculum—which employed strict routines, rules, corporeal punishment, public humiliation, authoritarian teaching practices, and intense surveillance to compel passive dispositions (Milloy, 1999). Young people suffered in these “loveless institutions” (TRC, 2005, p. 5), often hungry, lonely, fearful, and completely isolated from the outside world. General neglect was “routinely ignored” by administration and government officials to the point where it became “a thoughtless habit” (INAC, 2012, p. 345). This culture of violence, combined with poor administrative oversight, fostered a climate of abuse that resulted in widespread physical and sexual assault as well as a culture of impunity that protected known perpetrators (Milloy, 1999). Substandard living conditions also resulted in high death rates, leading even Duncan Campbell Scott—the Deputy-Superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932 and an avowed assimilationist—to lament that half of the students who passed through the system “did not live long enough to benefit from the education they received therein” (p. 51). Overall, schooling represented a “concerted attack on the ontology of the children” (p. 37) that sought to facilitate their “assimilation into the lower levels of mainstream society” (Stonechild, 2006, p. 7).

These underlying dynamics continued to impact the education of Indigenous students, despite the gradual closing of the schools and transferring of students into provincial systems. In addition, during the 1940s and 1950s the remaining residential schooling institutions became repositories for young people classified as “neglected” by child welfare services (Milloy, 1999). In subsequent decades there was increasing public recognition of the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada (e.g., via the 1968 *Hawthorn Report*) that contrasted sharply with the government’s rhetorical attempt to present Canada as a “just society” (Stonechild, 2006; Milloy, 1996). This led to the dropping of overt forms of cultural suppression and the extension of the federal vote to Indigenous Peoples in 1960.

However, at the same time, the government was becoming increasingly concerned with the progression of Quebec nationalism. Consequently, in the interest of furthering his federalist goals, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau requested then-Minister of Indian Affairs Jean Chrétien to develop a policy that would dismantle Indian Affairs and nullify all existing land claims. His 1969 *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* (or the “*White Paper*”) was

actively resisted by Aboriginal political organizations and this overt attempt at political extermination was eventually abandoned (Manzano-Munguia, 2011).

In 1972, partly as a response to the National Indian Brotherhood's (now the Assembly of First Nations) policy statement *Indian Control of Indian Education* (which was a response to the White Paper), the federal government began a process of "devolution" that transferred the administration of education to reserve authorities. While this led to the hiring of more Aboriginal teachers and some curriculum changes, band authority over education remained very limited. Indeed, the responsibility for managing educational institutions was passed onto First Nation bands without adequate infrastructural and financial support or efforts to build managerial capacity (Paquette & Fallon, 2010). Further, as stated, the federal government circumscribed the extent to which First Nations communities could influence policy development and decision making. Hence, devolution

render[ed] First Nations ineligible to compete for higher or more significant forms of power within Canadian society by relegating them to the status of 'agents' of the federal government through...a master-agent relation. Devolution in the context of Aboriginal education [thusly] legitimates inequality. (p. 84)

Judging by the more recent rhetoric which characterized the government's approach to the failed *First Nation Education Act*, it appears that this underlying trend of intensified control guised as empowerment has continued. This essentially "denies Aboriginal peoples' capacity to formulate and pursue their own conceptions of person and society" (p. 88) and maintains unequal relations legitimized by an ideology of Eurocentric superiority now mixed with a neoliberal ethos.

Thus, the history of assimilationist education in Canada is not confined to the "sad chapter" of residential schooling—rather, it is a long, continuing story that intertwines with the creation of the Canadian state. The impact of these dynamics reverberates across policy, lived experience, teaching practice, and public perception. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the challenges which impact Indigenous education directly are also evident in the various other social systems which are linked to additional pressures that impact school completion, including those related to child welfare, health, social housing, criminal justice, unemployment, and the labour market as a whole (Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019; Navia, Hederson, & Charger, 2018; Drabble & McInness, 2017; Brownell, 2015; Gebhard, 2013; de Leeuw et al., 2012; Seshia, 2010; Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2009; Berman et al., 2009; Richmond & Ross, 2009; Allec, 2005).

While recognition that these various systemic and historical factors impact the education of Indigenous students, macro-level intervention approaches are rarely discussed and, when presented, largely focus on First Nations on-reserve education and revolve around issues of curriculum reform, changes to assessment approaches, funding distribution, and policy development (Gunn et al., 2011; AFN, 2010; Longboat, 2007; Tunison, 2007; Stewart, 2006). Other sources call for a more general effort to “decolonize” education and teaching practice, often relying on local case studies to demonstrate approaches for doing so (Kay, 2017; Weenie, 2009; Alberta Education, 2008; Panina-Beard, 2007; Tagataga Inc., 2007; Wilson, 2007; Bell & Anderson, 2004). Overall, the existing “map” of systemic factors and interventions veers from fragmented (but “precise”) to comprehensive (but opaque), depending upon the specific theoretical (and/or ideological) perspective of the author and underlying purpose of their work. The resulting theories of failure and theories of change are often decontextualized, dehistoricized, and presume a monolithic Indigenous experience. The underlying relations of colonial violence are often unrecognized or, if noted, relegated to the past or framed within an overall discourse of Indigenous deficit.

Summary

Thus, as with the earlier discussion of discursive framing, there appears to be two main thrusts in the existing literature; on one hand, there is a dominant story about educational failure and success which locates causes primarily within individual students, families, and (to a lesser degree) teachers and school environments. These analyses generally emphasize the deficits of these parties in terms of socioeconomic resources and cultural awareness (as well as, in the case of non-Indigenous teachers, training in and/or understanding of Indigenous issues)—while also pathologizing certain forms of response (e.g., disruptive behaviours and school-leaving). Further, in some instances, this discourse of deficit is also applied to surrounding neighbourhoods.

These findings are consistent with more general analyses of “school dropout” literature. For example, Clandinin, Steeves, & Caine (2013), suggest that an “individual deficit model” dominates current research—a model which “relies on simple, causal attributions of risk factors and sees both the individual and the family as the primary cause of early school leaving” (p. 22). Similarly, De Witte et al. (2013) calls into question the presumed causal connections between different factors, suggesting the presence of a “dropout discourse” which has “thus linked early

school leaving with unemployment, urban poverty and juvenile delinquency (often serving as a substituted for race and class)” (p. 15). This discourse characterizes the majority of scholarship which—while increasingly (albeit superficially) recognizing the impact of systemic factors, “still endeavours to pin-point personal and social characteristics” (De Witte et al., 2013, p. 17). This approach inaccurately frames school leaving as “a point in time rather than a process” (Clandinin, Steeves, & Caine, 2013, p. 39) and results in significant “gaps and omissions” in existing scholarship (e.g., inadequate descriptions of methodology, “missing perspectives,” and a failure to consider “school leavers and families in their particularity and over time”) (p. 39-41).

My own review suggests that this paradigm is commonly evident in quantitative studies, which compose the majority of existing research and are geared toward the identification of the correlating factors which make school leaving/completion more likely (a trend also identified by De Witte et al., 2013). These studies have a tendency to focus on the characteristics of students, families, immediate communities, and specific school sites—often emphasizing the role of particular behaviours which are meant to signal student and parental “engagement” or “disengagement” from school. Educational “aspirations” are also often highlighted, with attempts being made to evaluate if students, parents, or peers see school as important or valuable. When attempts are made to assess school environments, attention is commonly focused on student or parental *perceptions* of safety, comfort, and support.

This story of educational failure does identify the limitations of educational institutions, but identifies the school system itself as essentially “good” and capable of reform through adjustments that address the overt symptoms of socioeconomic inequality and/or promote the recognition and inclusion of “Indigenous perspectives.” This *paternalistic metanarrative of deficit* features several “characters”—the deprived Indigenous student/child, the deficient (and potentially dangerous) Indigenous youth, the traumatized and/or dependent caregiver who “lack[s] parenting skills” (Provinces of Manitoba, 2007, as cited in Phillips, 2008, p. 30), the well-meaning and progressive (if unprepared) teacher; and chaotic communities “overwhelmed by drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, vandalism, and a dependency on social welfare” (p. 30). Further, this metanarrative has a tendency to employ “gap talk,” quantifiable indicators of economic insecurity, the *education-to-employment-to-wellbeing theory of change*, and nationalist imaginaries of a mythological Canadian community.

Countering this is another main approach to locating causes that focuses upon the prevalent impact of colonialism, classism, and/or racism on the daily lives of Indigenous students. Scholars working from this angle highlight the impact of policy, funding, and broader cultural and ideological forces. A central component of this analysis is recognition that schools are neither separate from structural inequalities nor safe havens from discrimination and harm. On the contrary, schooling has historically been—and continues to be—employed for the purpose of colonial control. Contemporary manifestations of this historical context include: direct and institutionalized racism; decision-making which excludes Indigenous communities; and policy approaches rooted in the ethos of individualized poverty reduction. Studies examining the experiences of Indigenous students attending inner-city schools in Winnipeg (e.g. Brown, Rodger & Fraehlich, 2009; Brown et al., 2005; Silver & Mallet, 2002; Hunter, 2000) have identified these various factors.

Collectively, I suggest that these sources are based upon a *metanarrative of on-going colonization*. These sources also have a tendency to suggest complex linkages between structural factors and personal/experiential realities and to make longer temporal associations—connecting personal, family, and collective histories. Hence, there are long chains of causation that result in disengagement from school while the system itself not only fails to respond to student realities but may actually *be the cause of* many challenges.

The contrast between the metanarratives of *deficit* and *on-going colonization* is articulated quite explicitly by Neeganagwedgin (2011), who suggests that

it is time to critically examine the complicity of the colonial school system with its White supremacy ideologies as the potential source of the problem of low academic achievement as it pertains to Aboriginal students. Far too many studies have held the parents, students and their communities accountable without acknowledging and then addressing institutionalised discrimination against Indigenous students. Education has been a major vehicle through which the implementation and maintenance of colonialism have been pursued. The education system is undoubtedly flawed in this regard and requires serious reconstruction of the curriculum so that learning is not approached solely from a Eurocentric standpoint but rather from the standpoint of inclusion of the histories, worldviews and cultures of Aboriginal peoples and their cultures. (p. 14)

In this instance, while Neeganagwedgin (2011) still employs the concepts of “recognition” and “inclusion,” she frames their use in a nuanced way. There is a need to both recognize and address not only the capacities and humanity of Indigenous students (and Indigenous Peoples more

generally) but also the *ongoing relationship between* colonizer and colonized, which continues to maintain white supremacy.

Earlier work by Silver & Mallet (2002) makes a similar suggestion, further arguing that Aboriginal students experience the divide between themselves and the school system on a daily basis, and a good deal of what they experience in school is negative. Not surprisingly, many Aboriginal students resist and even reject this form of education. This is not the way in which this issue is generally understood. It is generally understood as being a problem of Aboriginal students failing in school, of their having a ‘dropout’ rate double that of non-Aboriginal students. But what follows from framing the issue as being Aboriginal students’ failures in school is that it is the Aboriginal students who need ‘fixing’, and this inevitably leads back to the thinking that drove the residential schools, which is that Aboriginal culture is inferior, and that Aboriginal students must be ‘raised’ to the level of the superior culture. This approach has simply not worked. (p. 3)

These authors re-frame school disengagement, “disruptive” (oppositional) behaviours, and dropout as a form of “resistance” (as a political action meant to address relations of power), albeit one that is limited due to the young person’s positioning in schooling (and other social) hierarchies. This argument reflects the work of many scholars in educational studies, such as Fine (1991) and Dickar (2008) who identify resistance as a form of self-protection and/or a means to re-negotiate local relations of power.

Thus, the metanarrative of *on-going colonization* centralizes “setting” (that is, social structure and historical continuities) over “characters” (individuals) but does draw attention to how individuals and local sites (e.g., schools) can work against the impact of these dynamics (e.g., see Silver and Hunter, 2002, and Hunter, 2000). The challenge proffered by this type of analysis is that the various causation dynamics are much harder to conceptualize, which makes formulating theories of (and strategies for) change more difficult.⁵⁸ The *metanarrative of deficit* is, comparatively, more conceptually simple (and simplistic) as it offers clearly identifiable “targets” of intervention (individuals) and more easily measurable indicators of progress (e.g., highschool graduation and post-secondary enrolment rates).

However, this simplicity sacrifices accuracy in favour of precision and confuses causation and correlation—thereby reflecting an ethos of “high modernism” (as defined by Scott, 1998)—while also depoliticizing and dehistoricizing educational injustice, thereby serving as “textual strategies of domination” (Duchemin, 1990, p. 63) that obscure relations of power and

⁵⁸ Inspired by Fontan’s (2012) work on the complexity of “peacebuilding,” in the future I intend to consider whether systems theory can provide avenues for addressing this challenge.

the operations of colonial violence. Further, reflecting research on school disengagement dropout more generally,

a large part of the literature is still focused on factors not related to the school, but to pupils themselves and their families. And even though many studies at least hint at the importance of both “proximal” and “distal” factors—that is: aspects related to students, their families, schools and teachers, as well as the community (from neighbourhoods to labour markets and society at large)—a considerable number of studies focus only on one or some of these types of aspects. (De Witte et al., 2013, p. 17)

That is, while a study may “tip its hat” toward consideration of how systemic factors shape the circumstances and actions of individuals, this is commonly done in passing, thereby failing to unsettle the deficit-oriented “dropout discourse.” Meanwhile, systems-oriented analyses generally stay at the macro-level, which may foreclose consideration of how individuals navigate, challenge, and work within these forces on an “everyday” basis.

2.6 Challenging the metanarrative of deficit

In addition to challenging this metanarrative through the lens of critical theory, it may also be called into question using its own proposed indicators of progress—that is, statistical trends. These suggest, overall, that the policies and practices that draw upon this framework have largely failed to address the relative disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. For example, in 2008 Statistics Canada identified that the gap in post-secondary completion rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations had actually widened between 2001 to 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2008b, p. 19)—a trend which latter sources⁵⁹ suggest has continued, primarily because the rates for non-Indigenous populations have risen more significantly (Assembly of First Nations, 2019; Richards & Mahboubi, 2018; Parkin, 2015). However, the gap in highschool graduation rates appears to be dropping slightly.

Usher (2017) suggests that this has been the case in Manitoba, an argument which is further supported by consideration of recent statistical information found on the Government of Manitoba’s (2019) website (see Appendix two: Statistical data). These figures indicate that, in 2013, 83.5% of non-Indigenous and 46.9% of Indigenous secondary students (who had started in

⁵⁹ Somewhat tellingly, in recent years Statistics Canada appears to have stopped producing reports specifically analyzing gaps in Indigenous/non-Indigenous educational attainment. Documents produced in reference to the most recent census focus on challenges faced by recent immigrants and (non-Indigenous) racially marginalized populations (e.g., Turcotte 2020; 2019). It will be interesting to see if this changes with the May 2021 census.

2009) graduated “on time” (within four years)—resulting in a 36.6% “gap” between these populations. By 2018, the non-Indigenous rate had risen (steadily) to 87.9%; however, the rate for Indigenous students had not kept pace (now sitting at 48.5%). Hence, while the overall numbers of students graduating “on time” has improved for both populations, *the gap between them had actually grown* by 2.8%. This is also a gendered trend, with boys in both populations graduating at lower rates than girls. Although this gap has tightened slightly (-1.9%) for five-year graduation rates (mainly due to increasing rates amongst Indigenous women) and only expanded slightly (+0.9%) for six-year rates, these changes have been neither steady nor substantial (see Appendix two for specific figures).

Other statistical measures of achievement mirror this dynamic. For example, standardized testing results suggest that gaps in grade three/four numeracy and reading rates have increased by 4.2% and 2.8% respectively, alongside gaps in middle-years numeracy (+8.5%), reading comprehension (+6.2%), and expository writing (+6.8%). At the secondary level, gaps in grade nine credit attainment in mathematics and English language arts have also gone up (by 1.6% and 1.7%) while differences in grade twelve provincial test results have also increased by about 1.2-2.0% (with the exception of the gap in pre-calculus mathematics scores, which shrunk by 1.0%). Again, the tendency is toward overall improvement, but widening disparity.

Census information provided by the City of Winnipeg (2019) suggests similar trends occurring within the immediate neighbourhood surrounding Eaglecrest Community School. Although this data does not differentiate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, it does provide a broader picture of the neighbourhood—which, as of 2016, was suggested to be 61.4% Indigenous (primarily First Nations [37.8%] and Métis [22.4%]) (City of Winnipeg, 2019). Overall, between 2006 and 2016, the percentage of community members with at least highschool credentials has risen, while the rate of persons with no educational qualifications has decreased. The gap between these figures and the Winnipeg average has also dropped (e.g., the highschool completion gap closed by 6.3%). However, at the same time, the gap in post-secondary achievement (measured in terms of college and university program completion) has actually increased by over 10%. While gap in university completion is particularly high

(currently 20.3%, up from 18.4% in 2006), there is also increasing disparity in terms of college program completion (this gap increased from 7.3% to 10.6%).⁶⁰

Other gaps in social welfare (between the Eaglecrest neighbourhood and Winnipeg) have also increased; for example, between 2006 and 2016 there has been increases in the household income gap (+\$16,886), the personal income gap (+\$6926), the labour participation rate gap (+7.3%) and the employment rate gap (+4.7%). The unemployment rate gap has dropped slightly (by 0.5%) but is still 13% higher than the Winnipeg average. This has occurred while mobility rates have been dropping, meaning that fewer people are moving in and out of the community.

It should be also noted that Manitoba, Winnipeg, and Eaglecrest all tout relatively⁶¹ well-developed policies and programs specifically geared toward “engaging and sustaining” Indigenous learners (Winnipeg School Division, 2010, p. 3). This has included the development of policy frameworks (such as the province’s 2004 *Aboriginal Education and Employment Action Plan* and the Winnipeg School Division’s 1996/2005 *Aboriginal Education Policy*); the founding of the province’s Indigenous Inclusion Directorate; the creation of curriculum documents; the implementation of numerous programs (including Indigenous language immersion programs); the provision of funding (e.g., the province’s Indigenous Academic Achievement Grant program); attempts to improve teacher training and professional development; the opening of two “Indigenous-focused” public schools; and mandated changes to specific practices (e.g., schools now read a land acknowledgement statement in the morning) (MECY, 2013; 2011a; 2011b; 2007; 2003; Manitoba Education, 2013; WSD, 2010; 2005). Further, Eaglecrest school offers specific programming intended to engage Indigenous students and families and many staff seek to incorporate “Indigenous” (albeit primarily First Nations) practices, information, and “symbolism” into daily school life (see Figure 2 on page 75).

While it is hard to judge the overall impact of these various initiatives, I believe it is fair to say that they have not achieved the (oft-cited) *underlying* goal of closing broader educational attainment and social welfare gaps (with the exception of small improvements in highschool graduation rates). There is, further, an overall tendency on the part of governing bodies to employ a self-congratulating rhetoric when discussing their efforts; providing (ad nauseam) great

⁶⁰ To determine these “gap” figures I used statistical data from the City of Winnipeg (2019). I compared information on Eaglecrest Community School’s surrounding neighbourhood with Winnipeg averages. These specific figures are not included so as to maintain the anonymity of the research site.

⁶¹ At least in relation to many other educational jurisdictions in Canada.

detail outlining the resources (the “inputs”) they have offered to schools (the number of people hired, the amount of funding provided, etc.) while stopping short of analyzing either the short- or long-term impact of these efforts (see WSD, 2010, and Manitoba Education, 2006, for examples). This tactic ignores and obscures indication that the trends evident in Canada, Manitoba, and local communities contradict the theory of change embedded within these documents and the broader *metanarrative of deficit* to which they adhere.

While it does appear that highschool completion rates are rising, this has not translated into improvements in either higher-level educational attainment or social welfare indicators. Rather, the overall gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations has actually increased. Further, considering the slight drop in unemployment but rising income gaps, it is reasonable to hypothesize that while more people are obtaining the necessary credentials to access employment, this may be primarily in low-wage and more precarious jobs—reflecting a broader neoliberal tendency to create larger supplies of more easily exploitable labour. As suggested by MacKinnon (2015) in her analysis of labour market trends in Manitoba:

[n]eo-liberal governments are loath to get involved in creating good jobs or prioritizing the training of marginalized groups for jobs created. Their emphasis is solely on the development of skills to meet the requirements of those jobs created by the private sector. Guided by human capital theory, they argue that *individuals are responsible for their education and training* and they will receive *adequate return for their investment if they invest wisely*: the best trained will receive the best jobs. (p. 78, my emphasis)

She further notes that,

this response is not an over-sight—neo-liberal policies *are intentionally designed to ensure that a pool of relatively low-skilled labour is readily available* for the growing number of secondary-sector [precarious and low-wage] jobs. This would explain the rationale for the neo-liberal approach and the narrow public policy concern for employers *while the aspirations of learners remain solely a private concern*. (p. 78, my emphasis)

This suggests that the trends identified in Indigenous employment and education are not aberrations, but rather the intended outcomes of neoliberal regimes—an intentionally obscured by the discursive appeal to individual choice. While there is a need for further analysis to flesh out and confirm these arguments, I believe that there is sufficient evidence to, at least, call into question the dominant approaches used to study and address the issue of educational inequality.

2.7 Summary: Outlining the map(s)

Synthesizing the findings from this literature review, it is evident that there are two general “maps” of the educational landscape. The first emphasizes and naturalizes the pathways linking schooling completion, employment, and personal wellbeing. While identifying that some students have more difficulty walking these paths due to their (and/or their family’s) socioeconomic and/or cultural deficits, it is possible to implement programs (targeting young people and/or their families) that mitigate the impact of these issues on their educational progress. Further, schools are seen as trusted sites that have abandoned the discriminatory and abusive practices of the past and are working to become more (culturally) inclusive. Through these mechanisms, the (economic) potential of Indigenous students may be unlocked for the betterment (read: economic, national, resource, and political security) of all.



Figure 2 Outdoor classroom space at Eaglecrest Community School
This space was designed to reflect common depictions of a medicine wheel
(Photo: J. M. Hyde)

This map tends to homogenize diverse Indigenous experiences, presents fragmented analyses of root causes that confuse causation and correlation, and indicates ideological and discursive commitments to colonialism and neoliberalism. Further, in addition to largely excluding the perspectives of young people, this map renders their capacity for agency as either invisible or illegitimate—pathologizing opposition and resistance as evidence of disengagement, a failure of affect, a deficit of culture or values, or a response to (personalized) trauma. This, I

argue, is the dominant/hegemonic discursive and explanatory map which is used to guide the development of most policy and practice.

The second, “counter-map” is rooted (primarily) in critical scholarship and the political efforts of Indigenous communities. This map suggests that the provided “pathways” are neither natural nor equitable. Rather, the political, social, and economic mechanisms of the Canadian (re-)settler state position Indigenous students in ways that make them more vulnerable to a host of intersecting risk factors that impact schooling experiences (Mashford-Pringle, 2012; Donovan, 2011; Bougie, 2006; McBride, 2001)—thereby compelling individuals to construct their own complex pathways to navigate a terrain that has been “landscaped” in ways which violate their rights and continues the colonial project of Indigenous assimilation, exploitation, and genocide (MacIver, 2012; Belanger, et al., 2003; Silver & Mallett, 2002). This comparatively small, but expanding body of scholarship, primarily offers a macro-level view of the educational landscape, although there appears to be growing interest in exploring how these dynamics also manifest in daily life. This approach requires that the issue of educational disparity be treated as a complex problematique (or a “wicked problem”⁶²) requiring an ecological/systems approach to analysis. Responding to this, I sought to challenge the hegemonic map by engaging in a contrapuntal “re-reading” that incorporated the educational and community experiences of young people and drew upon the discipline of Peace and Conflict Studies.

⁶² Wicked problems are highly complex “knots” of problems that are challenging to define and analyze (due to their complexity). Methods of addressing wicked problems are also hard to determine because these often have multiple possible (positive and negative) consequences. Wicked problems are too complex to be analyzed or addressed through linear or technocratic approaches (Armstrong, 2018; Newman & Head, 2017; Morrison & van der Werf, 2016; McCandless, 2013).

CHAPTER THREE
GETTING ROOTED, MAKING TROUBLE:
“EVERYDAY” PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES

Peace science is not about pacification, nor co-optation, but is instead a radical challenge to the status quo—a constant “trouble-making” exercise... I would argue that it’s the peace scientist’s destiny to be unhappy because an appropriate definition of “peace scientist” is “natural trouble-maker.” (Baumann, 2008, p. 456-457)

3.1 Introduction

While attending the International Studies Association’s annual conference a few months before beginning my field research, I decided to join the organization’s “Peace Studies Section” for its membership meeting—an event which brings together novice and seasoned scholars from Peace and Conflict Studies programs across the world. Shortly before the meeting began, I managed to mobilize my courage enough to introduce myself to one of the more eminent scholars in the discipline. During the course of our interaction, he asked me about my own dissertation topic. I provided my “elevator pitch” explanation, to which he then replied with a muted “huh,” turned on his heels, and walked away. Dejected, I took my seat and tried to avoid eye contact with curious onlookers. At another event during the same conference I found myself in (far more pleasant) conversation with another well-known scholar. Familiar with the work undertaken by students in my program, he (with good humour and, from my perspective, some admiration) referred to the work undertaken by myself and my colleagues as “quirky.”

Discussions with my peers (fellow “trouble-makers”) at the Mauro Institute has suggested that my experiences are not unique. Some have told stories of their work being “praised” for its innovation (“You are applying the concept of structural violence to Canada?! How remarkably counterintuitive!”) and others being, quite literally, laughed at and publicly ridiculed. While significantly different in tone, both forms of response imply that our topics and analytical approaches are somehow peripheral to the core work of the discipline. These “quirky” studies include Westlund’s (2012) exploration of the possibilities presented by integrating the “more-than-human” world (or “nature”) into PACS praxis, Cormier’s (2016) re-conceptualization of PACS methodological and pedagogical approaches via Anishinabeg epistemologies, Hunte’s (2012) narrative approach to exploring issues of race, gender, and class

as experienced by Black tradeswoman in the United States, and Reed's (2019) articulation of the strength and community maintenance practices of the "Mamas" (a group of neighbourhood women in Melanesia). These studies, and many others produced by my peers, centralize topics, locations, persons, and approaches often marginalized within PACS's standard cannon⁶³ while also challenging the discipline's conceptual and methodological foundations—at times with the expressed intent of critiquing anthropocentric, Eurocentric, patriarchal, and colonial tendencies.

While this argument is based on limited anecdotal evidence and while the specific sources of the varied responses to our "quirky works" are undoubtedly rooted in numerous personal and contextual factors, as a young scholar in the field I have come to believe that those seeking to do work that is situated on what Byrne, Matyók, Scott, and Senehi (2020a) refer to as the "creative-edge" of PACS (p. 493) and/or who wish to challenge prevailing ethea will, at some point, be burdened with the task of demonstrating the relevance of their work—to make a case for its inclusion in the discipline (and, by extension, to justify one's place as a member of the scholarly community).

In this chapter I make my case. I ground my work within the Peace and Conflict Studies discipline, arguing for its inclusion as a relevant topic of study and seeking to legitimize my theoretical and methodological approaches. If, as I have suggested above, this study is situated on the periphery of the discipline, how does it (and how do I) relate to (and challenge) its outermost boundaries and commonly articulated centre.

3.2 Defining the centre and peripheries of Peace and Conflict Studies

The definitional story of the Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) posits it as an academic discipline that centralizes the complex social issues of war, violence, and conflict within an interdisciplinary (or transdisciplinary) analysis specifically directed toward the development of strategies for transforming these phenomena. While rooted in various religious, philosophical, and political traditions, PACS began to coalesce as an institutionalized discipline in the post-

⁶³ This being said, the cannon is growing and the boundaries of inclusion are widening (even if many foundational ideas are not being unsettled to a significant extent). For a recent examples of work that challenges these borders, see Byrne, Matyók, Scott, and Senehi's (2020c) *Routledge Companion to Peace and Conflict Studies* as well as the various research monographs produced under Palgrave Macmillans's Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies series. For examples of texts that reflect the core aspects of the discipline, see (for example) Barash's (2014) *Approaches to peace: A reader in peace studies*, Rioux and Redekop's (2013) *Introduction to conflict studies: Empirical, theoretical, and ethical dimension*, and Jeong's (2017) *Peace and Conflict Studies: An introduction*.

World War II period, partly as a response to the devastation of this event and in the interest of preventing future wars (including global nuclear war) (Dar, 2017, p. 50-54; Rogers, 2007, p. 37; Jeong, 2017, p. 41). Hence, from the onset, PACS was conceptualized as a normative (or “values-based”) approach to the study of both past and contemporary phenomenon for the expressed purpose of altering the future. It is maintained that peace research and practice (or “praxis”) should be directed toward more than simply the advancement of academic knowledge; it must also be oriented toward transformative social, political, and cultural change—to find “practical solutions to real world problems” (Jeong, 2017, p. 39).⁶⁴

The type of “change” sought, however, has been a source of scholarly and practice-oriented debate.⁶⁵ Numerous overviews of the discipline’s progression⁶⁶ have suggested that the parameter of concern has gradually expanded due to scholarly developments (within PACS and other related areas such as Development Studies) (Paffenholz, 2015; 2013) and as a response to historical events and global trends (e.g., political independence movements in former colonies, intensified intrastate conflict in the post-Cold War period, nonviolent social change efforts, the development of human rights discourse and international normative frameworks, and increased recognition of the roles played by civil society/grassroots organizations in peacebuilding) (Ife, 2007; Johansen, 2007).

In addition, while the discipline originated primarily in North America, the United Kingdom, and Nordic countries, the establishment of PACS programs, journals, and research institutions in various locales has increasingly globalized the perspectives represented in scholarship (Dar, 2017, p. 72-74). Jeong (2017) also suggests that the “recognition that events at the grassroots are deemed worthy of scholarly attention has promoted a dialogue among activists, researchers, and educators” (p. 41), leading to the integration of perspectives from individual

⁶⁴ This explicit emphasis on defining and pursuing a “better world” has often led to controversy amongst scholars and contentious relationships with other (e.g., the more state-centric International Relations) and political institutions. For example, Rogers (2007) suggests, that the latter stage of the Cold War (from 1981 to 1987) may be characterized by a “war on peace studies” wherein scholars “became subject to far tougher scrutiny of their work than most other scholars in international relations” and, in Britain, were charged with promoting “unpatriotic appeasement” and/or “pro-Soviet” sentiment (p. 44).

⁶⁵ Rogers (2007) notes that this development was also influenced by the foci of the funding bodies supporting the growth of programs, journals, and other institutions—with some drawing from governmental coffers and others being supported by the Quaker and Mennonite historic peace churches. He suggests that the latter often resulted in more “ground-breaking research” (p. 39).

⁶⁶ While the discipline’s narrative is presented here unproblematically, I believe it requires significant analysis and reconsideration. This will be a topic of future publications.

operating outside of academic institutions. Hence, the discipline has been increasingly characterized by national, cultural, and sector-based diversity.

These trends have fueled a topical expansion with PACS beyond the early emphasis on interstate war (the primary focus of "Peace Studies" in Europe) and the promotion of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) programming (more common in the United States and Canada) (Byrne, Matyók, Scott, & Senehi, 2020b, p. 4). Since the late 1960s, focused attention has increasingly been paid to (for example) issues of ecological sustainability, gender relations, identity issues, and structural/economic inequality (Dar, 2017, p. 65-71; Jenkins & Reardon, 2007; Rogers, 2007, p. 40-42; Jeong, 2017, p. 42-43) as well as various arenas of practice (such as arts-based peacebuilding [McCarthy, 2007], peace through health [Arya, 2007], private sector peacebuilding [Santa-Barabara, 2007], religious-based peacebuilding [MacQueen, 2007], and peace journalism [Lynch & McGoldrick, 2007]). Further, the "level" of social organization emphasized within PACS has also been "stretched," with increasing attention being paid to localized manifestations of violence, conflict, and peace as well as the impact of phenomenon that transcend international borders (e.g., ecological insecurity and transnational terrorism). Hence, analysis has expanded *outwards* (giving greater attention to global dynamics and non-state international actors/organizations) as well as *downwards* (e.g., focusing on intrastate issues, local communities, and relations between "everyday" people).

Various scholars have sought to conceptualize these changes via the composition of various *stories about* the discipline's history. Perhaps the most common narrative is that initial work was driven by an intention to prevent overt ("direct") forms of violence (to establish what is commonly termed "negative peace") and has since expanded to explore means toward establishing "positive peace"—that is, the cessation of direct violence and creation of peaceful structures (e.g., characterized by social and economic inequality) and cultures (Galtung, 1969). Rogers (2007) suggests that these two main approaches represent "minimalist" and "maximalist" agendas within the discipline (p. 41). While a source of some scholarly debate, it is generally assumed that both are desired goals, although the pursuit of positive peace is considered to offer the most potential for the establishment of negative peace in the long-term because it seeks to address the root causes of violent conflict. Hence, the maximalist "positive peace research tradition" is generally centralized within scholarship (Rogers, 2007, p. 41; Jeong, 2017, p. 42).

Another story is offered by Byrne, Matyók, Scott, and Senehi (2020b), who characterize the discipline in terms of the progressive development of four main “schools of thought”: the early “Conflict Management and Conflict Resolution School”; the “Transformational Conflict Resolution School” (starting in the 1990s); the “Peacebuilding School” (of the early 2000s); and the “Critical and Emancipatory Peacebuilding School” (a currently developing paradigm which gives deeper consideration to local manifestations of peace and critiques orthodoxies within conflict, peacebuilding, and development praxis) (p. 4-5). In this story, conflict has come to be re-conceptualization as something to be transformed (that is, used as a mechanism for fostering personal, structural, and cultural change—to foster “positive peace”) rather than as something to be simply avoided or managed. It also highlights increased scholarly interest in local approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding and the arising critiques of top-down models of practice that presume cultural universality.

Underneath the various “origin stories” of Peace and Conflict Studies is a general meta-narrative of responsiveness and expansion. Scholars have sought to incorporate more issues, more perspectives, and more levels of analysis so as to develop a wide range of solutions to a greater number of (increasingly complex) problems. While I want to stress that this narrative (like all narratives) reflects the selection and ordering of specific elements from an incomprehensible array of lived experience, it remains (again, like all narratives) a subjective paradigm that can powerfully impact objective reality by opening and foreclosing options for action.

On one hand, this story of disciplinary expansion provides broad inclusion criteria that allows many individuals and organization—each rooted in various disciplinary, practical, and ideological paradigms—to place their work under the PACS banner. However, at the same time, it works discursively to clarify the “boundaries” of PACS so as to solidify its place as an academic discipline differentiated from other areas of scholarship (a practice of necessity within a climate of intense institutional and interdepartmental competition). This suggests a dilemma for those working in PACS: how do we maintain the “uniqueness” of the discipline (and our own identity as scholars) while also ensuring the paradigmatic flexibility required to address complex real-world problems and, thereby, fulfill the normative purpose of the discipline—a particularly challenging goal if one is undertaking the expansive maximalist pursuit of positive peace. In

essence, the main distinguishing feature (and end goal) of the discipline poses a challenge to its very existence as a field of study.

And this is where I situate myself—on the edge of the discipline and balancing precariously between a commitment to the existing PACS canon, while seeking to push against its boundaries.

3.3 Living on the edge (of PACS)

The idealistic conceptualization of the discipline discussed above stands in contrast to its common application, a recognition that is leading some scholars to reconsider many foundational notions; indeed, “[m]uch of what masquerades as peace studies actually fits comfortably within non-critical and orthodox paradigms” (Mac Ginty, 2011, p. 23) and therefore requires re-evaluation. This “numbing of the critical tradition” (p. 24) is most evident within discussions of “peacebuilding,” the term commonly employed to denote the overall process of reducing violence, addressing social conflict, and transforming culture (e.g. from a “culture of war” to a “culture of peace”). This is most commonly associated with work undertaken in societies transitioning out of open armed conflict, although some have argued for a broader interpretation of peacebuilding as an ongoing process of change (Lederach, 2005; 1997; Schirch, 2004; Diamond & MacDonald, 1996). At present the dominant (indeed hegemonic) understanding of peacebuilding is rooted within a liberal paradigm—and, hence, is termed the “liberal peace.” According to Richmond (2005), the term “liberal peace” encompasses “a discourse, framework, and structure” (p. 206) built around a particular “regime of truth about peace” (p. 113) wherein

peace is generally seen to be the result of a top-down, elite-led, official process, and in temporal terms is seen to be represented merely by a contemporary removal or lack of overt violence. It is conceptualized as an objective form, based upon a specific ontology, known only by those who have an omniscient view of the international system. Yet, this lack of overt violence may well disguise structural violence,⁶⁷ rather than remove it. (p. 96)

⁶⁷ Very generally speaking, PACS scholars differentiate between direct, structural, and cultural forms of violence. The former refers to overt violence with a clearly identifiable agent and recipient. Structural violence refers to systems of exploitative relationships (manifesting at any level of social interaction) which hinder the fulfillment of human needs (Farmer, 2004; 2005; Galtung, 1969; 1996; Opotow, 2001a; 2001b). Cultural violence is used to denote the symbolic systems which justify the other forms of violence. Opotow (2001a; 2001b) argues that these forms of violence are predicated upon the “moral exclusion” of those who are harmed (see also Opotow, Gerson, and Woodside, 2005, and Opotow and Weiss, 2000).

This suggests that there is a significant gap between the “maximalist” PACS tradition (which emphasizes structural inequalities) and the paradigm which currently dominates much scholarship and practice. In other words, to draw upon Richmond (2011), “[e]mancipatory thinking about peace has collapsed into conditionality and governmentality” achieved through standardized, technocratic change (p. 1).

This dominant modality involves a host of national and international actors (including the United Nations and its related bodies, regional organizations, international non-governmental organizations, international financial institutions, and comparably powerful states) employing a variety of strategies that reflect an ideological commitment to both neoliberalism and liberal, western humanism (Jabri, 2010; Mac Ginty, 2008b; Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009; Selby, 2011; Taylor, 2010). Consequently, it generally perceives problems of violence as solvable through the fostering of state capacity while “[t]he populations of these regions and their complex diversities come to be reduced to technocratic problems to be solved, rationalized, calculated and ultimately disciplined” (Jabri, 2010, p. 48). Some of the specific strategies employed include: economic policies directed towards the integration of state economies into the global market; efforts to reform constitutions and governance structures in accordance with western legal and electoral traditions; the extensive involvement of international corporations and other private sector actors; the expansion and (neoliberal) reform of education systems (under the premise that this is necessary to develop the state’s “human capital”); and the development of “civil society” (understood primarily as a service-oriented sector that meets local needs not addressed by the state) (Mac Ginty & Williams 2009).

International actors promote adherence to these norms through the placing of conditionalities on aid and debt relief, direct involvement (e.g., the involvement of western politicians and bureaucrats in peace processes) and, at times, military intervention (e.g. the 2003 invasion of Iraq) (Klein, 2007; Mac Ginty, 2008b; Richmond, 2006). Hence, decidedly violent and “illiberal” means are often used in the pursuit of a narrowly defined “peace.” This has led many to critique this model as a form of “liberal imperialism” whereby “[e]lites, both in the North and in the South, actively construct the domestic and external political, bureaucratic, and constitutional frameworks that permit the operation and consolidation of the global capitalist order” (Taylor, 2010, p. 154-155). For example, Klein (2007) argues that international actors intentionally use both manufactured and natural disasters (e.g., wars, hurricanes, tsunamis, etc.)

to push through policies that reflect elite interests. That is, the “shock” caused by these events reduces the general populace into a state of distraction, dependency, and passivity which reduces collective resistance to governmental and corporate actions—actions which are justified within discourses of liberal interventionism, peacebuilding, development, and humanitarian assistance.

Overall, this approach “promotes a specialized form of liberalism that is often highly prescriptive and reflective of western norms” and that centralizes the economic and political priorities of certain national and international elite actors (Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009, p. 50). It subsequently results in the development of state institutions and social policies that fail to meet the needs of the broader population and thusly lack legitimacy at the local level (Richmond, 2009b; Roberts, 2011). Indeed, several authors have identified the manner in which both national governments and local communities may resist and modify this paradigm in the pursuit of their own goals (Höglund & Orjuela, 2012; Kendall, 2007; Mac Ginty, 2011).

Some authors suggest, consequently, that it is more appropriate to understand peacebuilding through the lens of hybridity wherein the relationship between macro-level and micro-level actors is characterized by tension and mutual influence, even though the former party has substantially greater power in this relationship (Mac Ginty, 2011). Further, resistance by local actors is often framed as a struggle between “modernists” (read progressive, civilized, and/or rational) and “traditionalists” or “fundamentalists” (considered dogmatic, uncivilized, and/or irrational) (Höglund & Orjuela, 2010; Mac Ginty, 2011). Hence,

local cultures, institutions, actors and practices are often perceived to be the liberal peace’s other, and an obstacle to the project of liberal, rational governmentalism. Local culture is perceived...to be in opposition to the liberal peace and democratic government or development. It is from here that the disconnect that allows liberal peacebuilding to ignore the needs, local agency and institutions begins and the local is made invisible or romanticized. (Richmond, 2009a, p. 46)

Thus, while local actors are not without agency, their resistances are readily suppressed, erased, or incorporated into the broader (il)liberal peace project.

Responding to these criticism, national and international actors who adhere to the liberal peace paradigm (e.g., the International Monetary Fund and World Bank) have sought to address its identified inadequacy by both promoting “indigenous”⁶⁸ peacebuilding and employing a

⁶⁸ With this scholarship, the term “indigenous” is often used in reference to “local” populations—even if they may not be classified as Indigenous Peoples per se.

discourse of healing/therapy to further justify external interventions. In the first instance, international actors utilize notions of local ownership, capacity building, collaboration, participation, sustainability, and empowerment under the assumption that this will (or will at least appear to) foster the legitimacy of liberal peacebuilding at the local level (Mac Ginty, 2010a; 2008a). This “throw in the local and stir” approach often includes supporting the use of “traditional” conflict resolution and reconciliation methods and the fostering of community development organizations and other non-governmental bodies (Carey, 2010; Pouligny, 2005; Taylor, 2010; Van Leeuwen & Verkoren, 2012).

There are several fundamental problems with this approach. Firstly, it essentializes “traditional” knowledge, suggesting that it has an authentic ahistorical essence unaffected by changing conditions (such as those caused by violent conflict) (Mac Ginty, 2008a). Secondly, it homogenizes the “indigenous voice,” assuming universal acceptance of what may, in fact, be oppressive or contentious practices. Indeed, it erases the complexity of human relationships, ignoring internal power differentials and ongoing cultural and social debates (Mac Ginty, 2008a). Overall, it fails to transform the underlying paradigm of liberal peace as the inclusion of local practices is still “driven by Western needs rather than conditions on-the ground” (Mac Ginty, 2010a, p. 354). To draw again upon Richmond (2011):

[t]hese actors profess to “do not harm,” and often turn to local cultural practices in order to assimilate them into the top-down construction of the liberal peace, and to give the project a sheen of legitimacy and grass-roots consent. But this normally does not occur until after a top-down institutionalist approach has been tried and has begun to show signs of failure... [Hence] there is little wonder that the result looks very much like a colonial or imperial system, subject to class, cultural, or racist double standards. (p. 61)

Consequently—and somewhat paradoxically—local practices are subject to regimes of control that reshape them so as to fit within predetermined norms (e.g., by requiring community groups to submit regular monitoring reports that demonstrate fiscal “responsibility” and “transparency”) (Mac Ginty, 2011).

From this perspective, the “localization” of peacebuilding can be read as form of neoliberal/neocolonial control wherein the direct management of affairs is passed onto local authorities even though elite control is still maintained (indirectly) via standard setting and accountability mechanisms. Such programs—following a metanarrative of “imperial creationism” (Sylvester, 2002)—seek to transform the very subjectivities of local actors (who are

perceived as morally, culturally, and intellectually deficient) so that they adopt (or at least mimic) “correct human (European) values” (p. 226). Hence, peacebuilding becomes “a form of social engineering internationally rendered” (Jabri, 2010, p. 42).

This regime of indirect control is also reflected within the “therapeutic security paradigm” that often accompanies liberal peace interventions (primarily in the form of reconciliation projects and truth commissions). This lens conceptualizes social problems as resulting from the pathological states of traumatized individuals/collectives (Humphrey, 2005; Moon, 2009; Pupavac, 2004). This justifies external intervention by “construct[ing] war-affected populations as emotionally dysfunctional and requiring rehabilitation” (Pupavac, 2004, p. 150) through mechanisms developed by the state and international actors. Critics of this approach do not deny that experiencing violence causes suffering and trauma, but object to the way the discourse of the “therapeutic state” pathologizes populations and their concerns. That is,

[t]he subject is constructed as “a vulnerable damaged victim” requiring third party support for self-empowerment. From this perspective grievances are looked at as obstacles to an individual sense of well-being which is amenable to “emotional management.” Thus, psychosocial management promotes “self-disciplining” while employing the rhetoric of healing. (Humphrey, 2005, p. 206)

This suggests that state and international actors pursuing the liberal peace project have “adopted the politics of ‘emotionology’ as a source of legitimacy” (p. 206). In addition to justifying interventions as an effort to address trauma, this constructs the grievances of local people as the result of problematic subjective assessments; it is an attempt to “manage conflict therapeutically by adapting the individual to fit in with their war altered environment rather than change the environment to match individual expectations” (p. 206). Again, while reconciliation efforts, truth commissions, and other therapeutically-based interventions are not inherently without benefit, as a whole they may serve as a legitimizing mechanism that supports the liberal peace project by pathologizing dissent and positioning “the state” in the authoritative role of national therapist.

However, this discourse of suffering is not only employed by the state and international actors. It is often used, albeit problematically, by advocates of marginalized groups seeking to instigate some form of social change or inspire acts of charity—a phenomenon Wanzo (2009) terms “sentimental political storytelling.” She argues that this is a common—and frequently effective—strategy employed by social activists that involves the “telling [of] stories about suffering bodies as a means for inciting political change” (p. 3). These stories are meant to

arouse sympathy—to generate affective responses on the part of the majority so as to “[build] a bridge between the privileged and the oppressed” (p. 23) for the purposes of generating political will toward a political or social justice goal. Those subjects who are successful in employing their own personal/collective narratives towards change are said to possess “affective agency” (p. 3)—that is, they have the capacity to move others toward action.

Focusing on an American context, Wanzo argues that such an approach has, at times, proved to be a successful strategy for social activists (e.g., as employed within the abolitionist movement). However, she warns, this effort is bounded by a discourse which determines which persons and experiences are “legible” to the dominant majority and, consequently, what forms of suffering are capable of generating affective responses. This discourse of sentimental political storytelling is structured along specific conventions, including:

progress narratives that either offer more sympathy for people who are successful enough that they have moved beyond requesting state and institutional interventions, or place historical injustices firmly in the past; suffering hierarchies that privilege some bodies, stories, and histories over others; homogenization of suffering, despite the aforementioned suffering hierarchies, which result in conflating different suffering experiences; stories that suggest that the best response to structural inequities is often therapeutic (self-transformation) or emotional intimacy with someone more powerful; and the idea that some people who claim to be suffering “real” pain are only suffering hysterical or phantom pain. (p. 10)

The confines of this discourse often render certain persons and groups “illegible as sympathetic objects for media and political concern” (p. 2)—that is, they are not considered proper or authentic victims and are therefore deserving of neither care nor justice. As a result, certain forms of suffering—and the people who experience it—are rendered invisible within the public sphere (or, conversely, as hypervisible threats to social order).

Indeed, even when these narratives do succeed in generating broad support for political change, they have only done so by “utiliz[ing] conventional narratives and practices that will not fundamentally disrupt power” (p. 9) and, in the end, “they eventually preserve the status quo” (p. 9). Consequently, when such efforts are successful, “it is because person/moment/text have blended together to manifest the story that best reflects the ideology produced by the nation-state” (p. 17). Or, to draw upon Scott (1998) the suffering of these groups has been rendered “legible” to the state and its dominant population through simplification (which is inherently dehumanizing). Despite this, Wanzo (2009) suggests that the deployment of sentimental stories

is “a politically effective but insufficient means of political change” (p. 9) that is not without some strategic merit.

The operations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) provides a striking example of both the therapeutic state paradigm and the “politics of sentimentality.” This is evident in James’ (2012) exploration of the media coverage surrounding the TRC—and indeed the overall discourse of reconciliation that has come to characterize political discussion regarding Indigenous issues in Canada. James suggests that the “major framework for thinking about indigenous peoples and residential schools appears to reinforce the country’s prevailing unjust patterns of respect and power” (p. 16-17). Specifically, he identifies personal trauma (and specifically the “residential school syndrome”), forgiveness, closure, and a “paternalistic commentary about the damaged state of indigenous individuals and communities” (p. 16) as dominant public tropes that “pathologiz[e] Indigenous people as helpless therapeutic subjects who need externally administered healing in order to unburden themselves of their anger and become conventionally productive citizens” (p. 16). Hence, notions of healing and “moving forward” become the boundaries of the rhetorical space, casting discussions regarding the broader (continuing) colonial project to the periphery. Thusly, the “therapeutic security model pathologizes the recipient population by locating the source of conflict in the personality of the population, thereby questioning its capacity for self-government” (Pupavac, 2004, p. 163).

This assessment is not to suggest that those individuals participating in these processes lack agency, do not use the space provided by the TRC to offer critical perspectives, and/or do not accrue benefit from their participation. Nor is it to suggest that there are no instances of participating non-Indigenous persons coming to a deeper level of consciousness regarding the colonial situation in Canada—indeed, there is evidence of both forms of transformation (Angel, 2012; James, 2012; Regan, 2010). Rather, the discursive framework of reconciliation reflects a kind of (to draw from James, 2012) “collision” (p. 18) between the struggles of survivors to attain both acknowledgement of and compensation for their experiences of suffering and the “disbelief and indifference of the Canadian government and [re-]settler society” as a whole (p. 18). That is, the only story legitimated by public discourse regarding the TRC is that which conforms to the conventions of sentimental political storytelling—conventions which, in the Canadian case, reflect an attempt to reconstruct the legitimacy of the state even while that legitimacy is called into question. In other words, “no act of dissent or resistance occurs...entirely

separate from the dominant discourse that provides the language and the conceptual categories with which the subaltern voice speaks” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2000, p. 201). Or, to draw loosely upon the work of Spivak (1988), it is not that the subaltern cannot speak, but rather that those who are doing the listening are unwilling to hear their stories in ways that undermines existing relations of power (so, the subaltern can speak, but will not be “heard”).

Thus, the liberal peace paradigm shapes post-war interventions, development initiatives, and reconciliation/healing programs in a variety of contexts. Scholarly responses to these diverse manifestations of this orthodoxy have varied. For example, Paris (2004) recognizes the limited “success” of the liberal peace approach, but argues that its problems lie not with the paradigm itself, but rather its implementation (wherein rapid economic and governance reforms destabilize already weak social and political institutions). He suggests that it is necessary to limit the destabilizing effects of transition by focusing efforts on “Institutionalization Before Liberalization” (or IBL). This means delaying democratization and market reforms until basic domestic institutions are built, focusing on incremental change, fostering “moderation” in electoral politics, building “good” civil society, and controlling hate speech in the media. Paris’ argument represents an attempt to save a paradigm guided by an inherently flawed colonial/orientalist “metanarrative” (Richmond, 2009b) that assumes “an enlightened and rational actor being able to define what peace should be for others and how it can be achieved” (Richmond, 2005, p. 5-6).

Other PACS scholars have suggested the need for far more fundamental changes in research and practice. In particular, many call for the redirection of attention toward the “everyday nature of...sustainable peace” (Richmond, 2009a, p. 558). This has resulted in a variety of alternative conceptualizations of peacebuilding defined as “post-liberal peace” (Richmond, 2009a), multi-track peacebuilding/diplomacy (Diamond & MacDonald, 1996); hybrid peace/peacebuilding (Mac Ginty, 2010b); and fourth generation peacebuilding (Roberts, 2011). In all cases emphasis is placed upon the agency of local actors and on the development of peacebuilding practices that are “shaped and directed by the needs of everyday life” (Roberts, 2011, p. 63). While macro-level actors have an important role to play (hence the notion that these processes are “multi-track”), their actions should be guided by the visions, needs, and capacities of local communities. For example, Mac Ginty (2008b) suggests “critical peace assessments” as a means to “identify and address the shortfall between idealized and experienced versions of

peace” (p. 10). In practice this would involve local communities developing their own visions of peace, assessing peace accord implementation progress against these visions, identifying the factors that inhibit and support peace, and making policy recommendations that are then used to shape the accord so as to ensure its local relevance.

While heeding this general call to emphasize the “everyday,” Fontan (2012) argues for far deeper introspection by peace researchers regarding some of the foundational understandings of the discipline (thereby suggesting the need to “decolonize” peace). For example, she calls into question the notion of positive peace, suggesting that while it was once a useful construct broadening the goals of the PACS discipline, it has since been coopted by the liberal peace paradigm as a normative ideal (a long-term goal) that justifies the harm caused by liberal peace interventions. That is,

[i]n every such situation, there are people, civilians, including children, who will not survive our liberal peace paradigm, who will die because of it. Regardless of the relevance of positive peace at the time, its obsolescence now makes it the enabler of our failures. We cannot but transcend it. (p. 39)

The “transcending” of the minimalist/maximalist peace dichotomy requires challenging the tendency to conceptualize peace as an end state (or a predictable, linear process) and deconstructing a host of other binary constructs that characterize PACS theory (international/local, “violence as illness”/“peace as health”, culture of war/culture of peace, etc.). These cognitive tendencies reflect adherence to a fragmentary Cartesian mode of thinking (central to hegemonic western epistemology) that translates into a technocratic, dysfunctional approach to peace. This also assumes “the duality between good and bad, the people worthy of being helped, and the other, falling outside the realm of assistance because they are not ‘worthy’ victims, because they do not know their place, or because they want to much too soon” (p. 68)—thereby reflecting the discourse of the therapeutic state.

To address these problems Fontan suggests that an alternative approach to practice is required that,

does not rely on ‘benevolence’ or any other colonial narrative... Decolonizing peace calls for an introspection of all aspects of the peace industry...toward the formation and facilitation of endogenously sustainable communities of peace processes. (p. 68)

From this perspective, peace is neither a state nor a linear process that can be externally defined or imposed, rather it “evolves within the complexity of a live adaptive system” (p. 43)—that is, it

is made and re-made, negotiated and re-negotiated, constantly transforming alongside the needs and complexities of everyday life. Subsequently, the role of the “peacebuilder”/PACS scholar is to “see initiatives through a different set of lenses and to employ...what are no longer ‘tools’ but understandings of what can be facilitated, strengthened, and enabled to flourish on the ‘ground’” (p. 42). Peacebuilders are hereby reimagined as facilitators of an ongoing process, working with (and not “on”) local communities so as to strengthen a multiplicity of existing local “peaces.”

This fundamental refocusing on “the everyday” necessitates considerable change in the practice of peace research. The positivist/post-positivist stance connected to the liberal peace paradigm has resulted in a research emphasis that avoids critical appraisals of peacebuilding methodologies, instead taking a “problem solving approach” that focuses on issues of efficiency and how one may better fulfill the mandate proffered by the peacebuilding orthodoxy (a trend intensified by the never-ending pursuit of research funding that often monopolises academic life). Kappler (2003) suggests that, in addition, peace researchers often: assume the inherent passivity of research participants; demonstrate an unwillingness to develop long-term interpersonal relationships or to “engag[e] with people’s suffering and trauma” (p. 127); and analyze phenomena “through...pre-devised theoretical frameworks” (p. 129) that may be woefully insufficient for the task at hand. She argues that, due to these tendencies, peace research (as with liberal peace interventions more generally) lacks legitimacy at the local level (particularly amongst “over-researched” post-war populations).

Thus, substantial change in peace research practice is necessary. Specifically, PACS scholars must pay greater attention to the development of contextualised understandings of individual and community experiences that “highlight the importance of local voices and narratives” (Richmond, 2009b, p. 570). This means bringing “the invisible to the forefront...dismantling...‘official’ narratives, [and] asserting the first person and subjective experiences of all those involved as visible and relevant” (Fontan, 2012, p. 24). This involves moving beyond “what is visible and graspable in public discourses” (Kappler, 2003, p. 129) and identifying the “hidden transcripts” (Scott, 1992) that manifest throughout the ebb and flow of daily life.

3.4 Pushing at the edge: Integrating additional theoretical frames

While PACS offers numerous conceptual resources that are readily applicable to the study of educational inequity in Canada, it does have its limitations. To address these, I have also drawn upon the fields of postcolonial studies, educational studies, and childhood studies. Each of these areas has further enriched my own analytical paradigm and added sensitizing concepts to my repertoire.

Postcolonial studies

Postcolonial studies examines historical and contemporary processes of imperialism and colonial expansion, emphasizing how Euro-western dominance has affected cultures, psychologies, and socioeconomic/political structures (McLeod, 2010; Young, 2003; Gandhi, 1998). Considerable attention is often given to the role of colonial discourse in these processes—primarily through binary constructions that assume the essential goodness of so-called European/western civilization and the inherent “savagery” of indigenous peoples (LaRocque, 2010; McClintock, 1995; Said, 1994; Blaut, 1993; Spurr, 1993) and through what Blaut (1993) terms the “theory of Eurocentric diffusionism”; predicated upon the myth of “the autonomous rise of Europe,” this macro-theory (or metanarrative) of progress “asserts that colonialism, including settler colonialism, brings civilization to non-Europe” and that this is “the natural way that the non-European world advances out of its stagnation, backwardness, traditionalism” (p. 16)—when, in fact, the “rise of Europe” was actually dependent upon colonial exploitation. This discourse underlies the social, economic, and political marginalization and dispossession of Indigenous peoples while also buttressing a process of historical and cultural erasure meant to shape the identities of both the “colonized” and “colonizer” (Veracini, 2008; Short, 2005; Fanon, 2004; Memmi, 1965). This “political/cultural unconscious” (Cash, 2004, p. 165) shapes Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships in Canada, helping to maintain colonial power structures and public ignorance of historical/contemporary realities (Logan, 2014; Thobani, 2007; Green, 1995). This is particularly evident in analyses of both educational practices in Canada (Battiste, 2013; Kempf, 2006; INAC, 1996) and academic research more generally (Chilisa, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; 2005).

Challenging these colonial relations requires one to acknowledge that the centrality and privilege of colonizing powers is predicated upon the historical and contemporary oppression of

the colonized—to flip and dispel the myth of Eurocentric diffusionism (Blaut, 1993) and call attention to “founding” (and continuing) violence (Veracini, 2010; 2008) that characterizes oppressive relationships. Said (1994) suggests that this requires a “contrapuntal reading” of existing dynamics.

“Contrapuntalism” is a term from musical theory employed by Said (most notably in *Culture and imperialism*, 1994) to describe an analytical process/approach to critical thinking that seeks to identify and reinscribe voices, perspectives, histories, and structural realities which have been “forcibly excluded” (p. 79) from discourses that shape social meanings and power relationships. This allows for “the emergence of colonial implications that might otherwise remain hidden” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2000, p. 49) and serves to historicize, contextualize, and (consequently) denaturalize taken-for-granted understandings, practices, and social processes—not by replacing dominant narratives with marginalized ones, but by identifying the relationships between what/who is centralized and what/who is excluded (e.g., how the power and centrality of the colonial center only exists because of the exclusion and domination of the colonized periphery). Employing this approach requires that one *read back in* perspectives, experiences, and relations of power commonly excluded from prevalent understandings in a manner that “reveals the hidden interests, the embedded power relations, and... political alignments behind the claims of value free, and objective theorizing’ (Chowdhry 2007, p. 107). This creates a kind of “polyphonic reading of recent history” (Barnard-Wills & Moore, 2010, p. 386) that opens space for further critique and action.

Postcolonial studies can also be linked to the field of critical genocide studies, which centralizes how colonial processes threaten the existence of Indigenous Peoples as physical, political, cultural, and socioeconomic collectives (Woolford, Benvenuto, & Laban Hinton, 2014). Woolford (2014) argues that this operates through a multi-level “colonial mesh” (p. 32) that includes broader systemic forces, complex institutional structures, and micro-level practices. Hence, colonial genocide may be identifiable through examinations of “everyday” embodied and bureaucratic processes that are guided by a deeply embedded “habit of elimination” (Jacobs, 2014, p. 190). This “continuum of genocide” (Scheper-Hughes, 2003; 1996) has been identified as operating (both historically and currently) within the Canadian context (Ladner, 2014; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014; Manzano-Munguia, 2011; Palmater, 2011; Akhtar, 2010).

Integration between PACS and postcolonial studies, while not especially common, is evident in some criticisms of liberal peace (Jabri, 2013; 2010; Fontan, 2012)—which often employ arguments that (unintentionally) mirror Blaut’s (1993) criticism of the theory of Eurocentric diffusionism. However, most of this work focuses upon examining the relations between the (so-called) “Global North” and “Global South”; very scant attention is paid to the operation of (re-)settler colonialism and (re-)settler states, including Canada.⁶⁹ There is also a strand of PACS scholarship that focuses on identifying the peacebuilding and conflict work practices by various Indigenous Peoples (Cormier, 2020; Rice, 2009; Yousaf & Poncian, 2018; Gohar, 2008; Synott, 1996). This work often reflects an effort to identify what facets of knowledge and practice can be integrated into existing conceptual frames and models—which can situate these as “supplement” to “core” disciplinary knowledge. Indeed, there is danger that this can lead to “taxidermic” scholarship (Wakeham, 2008) that de-contextualizes and “freezes” this knowledge, disconnecting it from existing Indigenous communities.

In addition, some scholars have explored the impact of colonization on Indigenous Peoples (Rice, 2020; Yousaf & Poncian, 2018) and on the PACS discipline itself (Azarmandi, 2018; Fontan, 2012; Walker, 2004; Berlowitz, 2002). These works draw attention to the historical and contemporary violence(s) of colonization and encourage critical appraisals of PACS research methodologies, practices, and truth claims. While some elements of postcolonialism are being engaged with by PACS scholars, this work is uncommon and often situated on the periphery of the disciplinary canon.

Educational studies

Linkages between “peace” and “education” recur throughout the PACS discipline, particularly as these relate to issues of development, post-war reconstruction, and peacebuilding. This has led to the coalescence of the “peace education” subfield within Peace and Conflict Studies. Peace education, a form of transformative learning,⁷⁰ signifies a form of educational

⁶⁹ The same can be said of how related fields, such as International Relations, has engaged with postcolonial theory. For example, see Chowdhry (2007) and Barnard-Wills and Moore (2010).

⁷⁰ A term originally coined by Mezirow (1998), transformative learning denotes an approach to educational praxis meant to stimulate “deep, structural shift[s] in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions...that dramatically and irreversibly [alter] [a learner’s] way of being in the world” (O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 56). This involves questioning and potentially “unlearning” previously held assumptions, applying new understandings through practice, and critical reflection (Blunt, 2007; Taylor, 2007; Cranton, 2006; Etting, 2006; Cawagas, 2005; Tibbitts, 2005).

practice, a peacebuilding strategy, and a developing field of scholarly research that brings together many different actors, perspectives, and forms of practice guided by a common “social purpose” (Wintersteiner, 2010; Jenkins, 2008; Reardon, 2003)—namely, the cessation of violence/war and cultivation of peace through education.

Conventional approaches to peace education draw upon normative documents to justify programming that promotes the development of particular knowledge, skills, and values (conflict analysis, empathy, etc.) that are articulated as “conceptual frameworks” (Turay & English, 2008; Brenes-Castro, 2004; Reardon & Cabezudo, 2002). Programming operates under the assumption that by helping learners develop these capacities, educators can promote change at the individual level that will “scale up” when sufficient numbers of persons are impacted, thereby affecting intergroup, international, and global interactions (Salomon & Cairns, 2010; Harris, 2002). However, it is important that this occurs through “peaceful” learning approaches (e.g., dialogue, collaborative learning) that mirror the values being taught (Hettler & Johnston, 2009; Harris & Morrison, 2003; Harris, 1999).

While this conventional approach to peace education is widely endorsed and supported by international organizations (Harris, 2010; Fountain, 1999), there is a growing body of theory that challenges many of its underlying assumptions—including its theory of change—by drawing explicitly on critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy seeks to unpack the underlying social purposes of education as well as the manner in which various social, political, and economic factors affect individual and collective educational experiences (Apple, Au, & Gandin, 2009). This involves examining the material taught within schools as well as the informal “hidden curriculum” (as manifested by, for example, teacher-student relationships and disciplinary practices) (Lissovoy, 2012; Jay, 2003; Wotherspoon, 1996). Many scholars argue that these explicit and implicit practices—which are shaped by neoliberal ideology (McCafferty, 2010; Torres, 2009; Apple, 2001)—marginalize students who are not members of the dominant class, discursively constructing them as deviant or deficient (Brown, 2011; Chomsky, 2011; Nelson, 1996).

Challenging these dynamics, critical pedagogy is normatively geared toward social transformation through conscientization—that is, promoting change by encouraging individuals to develop an awareness of their own contextual reality through various practices, including: analyzing situations of power, exploitation, and domination; critically assessing “elite” knowledge; articulating and promoting the knowledge and experiences of oppressed groups;

centralizing the lived experiences and knowledge of learners; and practicing learning strategies that combine reflection, theory, and action (Apple, Au, & Gandin, 2009, p. 4-5; Bartlett, 2005; Callahan, 2004; Freire, 1970/2011). Specific topics of discussion, however, may vary with distinct “strands” of critical pedagogy exploring different (but related) foci (e.g., anti-racism education, feminist approaches to education, indigenous/decolonizing education, etc.) (Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Taylor, 2013; Cottrell, Preston & Pearce, 2012; Sefa Dei, 2011; Weis, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Skelton & Francis, 2009; Wane, 2008; Srivastava, 2007; Yosso, 2002).

Following this, *critical peace education* places emphasis on: contextual-relevance (Cabezudo & Haavelsrud, 2007); challenging reified conceptualizations of peace and prescribed learning goals (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013; Gur-Ze’ev, 2011, 2010); recognizing the contrast between the ideals of peace education and the reality of formal schooling (Harber & Sakade, 2009; Harber, 2004); opening up space for “disruptive pedagogies” (Cann, 2012; Weis & Fine, 2001); and helping learners deconstruct social injustice and hegemonic discourses (Mizzi, 2010; Shirazi, 2011; Brock-Utne, 2009; Berlowitz, Long & Jackson, 2006; Montgomery, 2006; Gur-Ze’ve, 2001). Those operating from this paradigm are more critical of the presumed linkages between education, development, reconstruction, and peacebuilding—suggesting that education can easily be (and often is) mobilized as a mechanism for furthering the liberal peace project and maintaining hierarchies of imperialism. Further, some maintain—often drawing upon the work of Bourdieu (1977)—that schools largely reproduce social inequality (e.g., through the centralization of the cultural, social, and symbolic capital⁷¹ of the privileged)⁷² and are sites of various forms of direct, structural, cultural, and epistemic⁷³ violence (Harber, 2004).

Further, as mentioned in chapter two, authors working from a critical perspective also reframe school disengagement and leaving in a manner that calls into question deficit paradigms, suggesting that these phenomena are long-term processes that are “nonlinear, partial, and

⁷¹ Cultural capital refers to knowledge, credentials, possessions, and embodied habits. Social capital refers to social relationships and networks. Symbolic capital refers to the social prestige, recognition, and authority afforded an individual, collective, or object that grants them symbolic power—that is, the capacity to position one’s worldview (one’s approach to naming, defining, and classifying the world) as central/legitimate. Certain forms of capital (commonly that which is held by those in positions of privilege) are socially/institutionally valued and are, therefore, reflected and reinforced within schooling practices (both formal and informal) (France, Bottrell, & Haddon, 2013; Archer et al., 2011; Yosso, 2005; Schaefer-McDaniel 2004; Ball, 2003; Bourdieu, 1977).

⁷² As well as particular regimes of comportment, dispositions, and values (e.g., habitus) (Bourdieu, 1977).

⁷³ Coined by Spivak (1998), the term “epistemic violence” refers to the delegitimization and erasure of certain forms of knowledge and ways of perceiving the world as well as the use of knowledge in the practice of othering (Bunch, 2015; Dotson, 2011). Epistemic violence both supports and is supported by relations of symbolic power.

fragmented” and “often contradictory, complex, filled with subversive forces and tensions, as well as a struggle for most students” (Clandinin, Steeves, & Caine, 2013, p. 27). For example, Lessard et al. (2008) (drawing upon the perspectives of former students) suggest that young people “navigate their educational journeys” (p. 25) in ways that are highly dependent upon their specific circumstances. The authors conceptualize dropout as a three-stage process, consisting of “setting the stage” (which encompasses the early and pre-school experiences that shape their overall trajectory) “teetering,” and “ending the journey (leaving school sudden suddenly or “fading out” gradually) (p. 35).

The second stage is termed “teetering” to emphasize how participants “were often off balance during their educational journeys” (p. 32)—rocking back and forth between engagement and disengagement while facing particular challenges and using strategies that would either “prolong” or “sabotage” their journey (p. 32), thus resulting in a kind of “tug of war... between in and out-of-school contexts” (p. 32). To prolong their journey, students engage in various processes, including: “living invisibly” (passively disengaging and otherwise seeking to avoid attention); “walking in the dark” (“going through the motions” without a sense of purpose); and “playing it safe” (seeking to “fit in” and trying “to comply with the rules and meet expectations”) (p. 33). Other strategies employed by participants serve to (often unintentionally) “sabotage” their journeys. These include: “solving problems with fists” (engaging in violence); “dabbling in the margins” (activities that lead to further social or legal marginalization); and “turning away” (gradually leaving school). To avoid placing the blame for school leaving on the students, the authors stress that these strategies are used in response to “external elements” (p. 33)—the “suspension policies, perceived teacher ostracism, and peer rejection [that] provided these students with messages that they did not belong in the school community” (p. 34).

While this model keeps the analytical focus primarily upon micro-level interactions, it does serve as a challenge to theories of learner deficit, suggesting that dropout is the result of various intersecting risk factors, the impact of “external elements” (including school policies and teacher behaviour) as well as the supports available to—and strategies employed by—the students themselves. Clandinin, Steeves, and Caine (2013) offer a similar analysis, suggesting that disengagement may be the result of a multitude of factors, including alienation, rejection by peers and teachers, the “mismatch between education and schooling” (p. 32), and the ways in which schools depersonalize students (p. 29-34). Focusing on the perspectives of Indigenous

participants, Silver & Mallet (2002) identify many of these factors as the underlying reason why students may “resist and even reject this form of education” (p. 3).

These analyses all reflect a more critical approach to dropout which suggests that school leaving is the result of “pull-out” (out-of-school) *and* “push-out” (in-school) factors (Sefa Dei, Mazzuca, & McIsaac, 1997). This general approach draws attention to the various forms of violence (structural, epistemic, etc.) that characterize educational environments and suggests that student disengagement and resistance is not pathological, but rather a largely *logical* response to these various forms of harm, often done in the interests of protecting oneself and/or renegotiating micro-level relations of power by “magnifying conflict” so as to make oppressive relations of power explicit (Dikar, 2008, p. 18; Fordham, 1996; Fine, 1991)—an approach which, notably, resonates with the general logic of nonviolent social action as described by Sharp (1973), Curle (1971), and Lederach (1995).

For example, in *Corridor cultures: Mapping student resistance at an urban high school*, Dikar (2008) suggests that students engage in a variety of resistant behaviours, partly as a response to oppression but also in the interests of maintaining and “affirming” their own identities (p. 15). Drawing upon the work of Scott (1985) she suggests that much of this resistance is “infrapolitical”—that is, a form of “resistance that flies under the radar because it does not directly confront authority and usually avoids serious sanctions” (p. 142). She identifies various forms of infrapolitical action, such as “excuses, over-stated obstacles (I don’t have pen, paper, a book, a partner, etc.), lateness, chatting, note-passing, taking the hall pass, foot-dragging, and so on” (p. 142) which “limit the demands of the powerful” (p. 143), reduce “the amount of time students [are] required to give themselves over to...authority” (p. 142), and increase the amount of energy and time expelled by authority figures seeking to force or compel student acquiescence. While noting that these actions are not necessarily emancipatory in the traditional sense of collectively promoting substantial systemic change, she argues that “such resistance is political and coherent” (p. 143) by virtue of how it “call[s] attention to the contradictions and inconsistencies in school authority and student relationships with school” (p. 143). Her work, overall, proposes that student action operates “along a continuum ranging from academic identification and participation on one end to open critical resistance on the other” (p. 161) and that each individual may engage in different behaviours depending upon specific circumstances.

Giroux (1983) provides further nuance to the study of resistance, suggesting that some forms of oppositional behaviour (e.g., that which aligns with patriarchal gender norms) “may not be simply a reaction to powerlessness, but might be an expression of power that is fueled by and reproduces the most powerful grammar of domination” (p. 285). Further, he suggests, that not all resistance is necessarily emancipatory because it may lead to social and structural ostracization and marginalization (thereby potentially reducing the capacity of the individual to engage in collective resistance). This ambiguity makes classifying a given behaviour—as “resistant,” “oppositional,” or some combination of the two—quite challenging. Giroux (1983) suggests this determination is not necessarily evidenced by the behaviour itself, but rather by the actor’s own motivation and the underlying “historical and relational conditions from which the behaviour develops” (p. 291).

In sum, the concept of student resistance is best understood as a continuum, the form and meaning of which is not inherent to the nature of the behaviour itself, but rather shaped significantly by context and the actor’s own intention. Resistance is always political (in that it always involves power and conflict) but is not always overtly oppositional (as in the case of infrapolitical resistance) nor inherently emancipatory (in that it is limited in impact and may help to maintain existing relations of power and exclusion). Further, *oppositional* behaviour is not always a form of resistance, as it can be an attempt to reaffirm the status quo (e.g., consider the phenomenon of teacher and student *opposition to* the incorporation of de-colonizing and anti-oppressive content and pedagogy as discussed in Payne & Smith, 2018; Alemán & Gaytán, 2017; St. Denis, 2011; Johnson, Rich, & Cargile, 2008; Weber, 2005).

Overall, while Peace and Conflict Studies scholars often do engage in discussions of education, the analyses presented rarely unpack these deeper issues of social reproduction and violence. Indeed, “school” is often presumed to be a universal “good” and, reflecting the broader liberal peace paradigm, centralized as a primarily mechanism for building human capital and promoting economic development. Educational studies (particularly critical pedagogy) suggests the need for deeper critique of the various purposes of schools and how they operate as social institutions.

Childhood studies

Broadly speaking, this field conceptualizes “childhood” and “youth” as contextually- and historically-mediated social locations and discursive constructions (rather than universal essences) that intersect with other elements of social identity (e.g. race, class, gender, sexuality) (Tisdall & Punch, 2012; Smith, 2010; Wells, 2009; Valentine, 2003; Goldstein, 1998; Stephens, 1995). Alongside this de-essentializing, scholars in the field seek to understand how this positioning shapes the lived experiences of young people as well as the broader “political, ideological, and social uses of childhood” (e.g., within nationalist and colonial discourses) (Beier, 2015; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998, p. 1; Montgomery, 2009; Best, 2007; Gonzalez & Premo, 2007; Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman, 1998). By unpacking these understandings, practitioners in the field suggest the need for complex and critical approaches to child/youth rights, citizenship, and participation (Wyness, 2013; Liebel, 2012; Burke, 2007).

Some have also suggested that discourses of childhood and colonial discourses are actually co-constructions, given that they share many common elements and have developed in historical tandem (Jenks, 2005). For example, Cannella and Viruru (2004) argue that childhood itself⁷⁴ is “an imperial construct” (p. 5) and that the “labels, forms of representation, and position imposed on those who are younger [as well as adults and collectives who are “labeled” (p. 85) as children] can be categorized as oppressive, controlling, and even colonizing” (p. 83) given that this discourse has:

- (1) legitimated the physical occupation of the territory of children’s lives by those who are older;
- (2) institutionalized the conditions of need, thus constructing the rights of one group to make decisions for another;
- (3) actually continued a form of direct physical colonization through attempts to discipline bodies; and
- (4) fostered enlightened “knowledge” that represents children as those who must be taught to know (Western, adult information and forms of thought), by the colonizer who would give “children” a voice. (p. 110)

Young people are widely conceptualized not as “beings,” but as “becomings” (Arneil, 2002) and are, consequently, “condemn[ed]...to the permanent conceptual status of absent presence” (Jenks, 2005, p. 9); they are “depotentiated” and “become nominal ciphers seemingly without an academic dimension” (p. 9). In other words, the adult/child dichotomy positions young people as not (yet) possessing full personhood, inherently dependent, “in development,” and in need of

⁷⁴ To be clear, they are speaking about dominant, western conceptualizations of childhood as an oppressive discourse.

tutelage, discipline, regulation, containment, and surveillance. Through this binary the subject position of “adult” is also created, defined (in opposition to “the child”) as autonomous, rational, competent, and in the possession of superior “knowledge about” their younger “other.” Notably, this discourse is also identifiable within the rhetoric of “care” and “child saving,” which, Jenks (2005) argues, “justifies control over the other in the name of ‘what is best for them’” (p. 40).⁷⁵

These presumptions provide the justification for adultism, which Bell (2010) describes as “behaviors and attitudes based on the assumption that adults are better than young people, and entitled to act upon young people without their agreement” (p. 540)—a situation of oppression that is encoded in and reinforced “by social institutions, laws, customs, and attitudes” (p. 540). These early experiences of comparative powerlessness are also profoundly pedagogical, serving as a key means of socialization. Miller (1990) suggests that many adult-child interactions (particularly those framed through “tough love” discourses) are best conceptualized as “poisonous pedagogy”—as a form of control that seeks the “suppression of vitality, creativity, and feeling in the child *and in oneself*” (p. 58, my emphasis). The coercive control of young people is meant not only to shape their subjectivity, but to also reaffirm the child-adult dichotomy; that is, adults use these mechanisms “to rid ourselves as quickly as possible of the child within... in order to become an independent, competent adult deserving of respect” (p. 58). Individuals seek to control young people as a means to (at least in part) expel the presumed qualities of children (“the weak, helpless, dependent creatures”) (p. 58) from their self-concept and to affirm one’s own status and identity as a powerful actor.

While there is a need for greater clarity regarding the links between childhood and colonialism/colonial discourse (e.g., to consider important distinctions between the discursive formations of “Indigenous childhood” and “(re-)settler childhood”), this approach does provide a useful means for analyzing historical and contemporary dynamics. Within (re-)settler states, the discourse of “childhood” (and the way the label “child” was/is used to denote savagery, dependency, incompleteness, etc.) was/is employed as justifications for both the disenfranchisement of Indigenous Peoples and the explicit use of overt assimilative and/or genocidal strategies on the bodies and minds of young people. Residential schooling and child

⁷⁵ Similar analyses are presented by other authors who do not explicitly employ postcolonial theory, instead drawing from the Foucauldian notion of governmentality (e.g., Smith, 2014).

welfare systems in Canada serve as explicit examples of how discourses of childhood and “child saving” were employed in this manner (de Leeuw, 2009; Prochner, May, & Kaur, 2009).

Further, many of these efforts revolve(d) around the control of bodies and intimate relationships at the micro-level, within the “everyday” settings of home, school, and community (e.g., via governance mechanisms used to track and control identity, marriage, and family life) (Anderson, 2006; Stern, 2006; Green, 2001). Stoler (2006a; 2006b) suggests that it is these everyday practices which facilitate the colonial transformation of consciousness identified by Memmi (1991), Fanon (2004), Freire (2011), and others—and, hence, “matters of the intimate are critical sites for the consolidation of colonial power” (Stoler, 2006a, p. 4).

It was (and is) through these various “microsites of governance” (Stoler, 2006b, p. 24) that colonial authorities attempt(ed) to “educate” the affect (to transform the consciousness) of colonized populations—to instil particular habits of thought, feeling, and bodily discipline that would suppress resistance to domination and/or employ the colonized in the service of the colonial project. These “habits of the heart and comportment” (Stoler, 2006a, p. 4) often revolved around simultaneously seeking to develop in the colonized a particular “desire to work” (in service of the colonizer) while also “managing their aspirations” (p. 47) so as to prevent them from challenging their servitude—to make them “useful” while also limiting the scope of their desires. Colonial education and child welfare practices were central to this biopolitical control, with interventions often being justified by notions of “child saving” and the construction of neglectful, incompetent, and/or otherwise deficient parents, families, and communities.

Scholars in childhood studies often call these historical and contemporary relations of power—these mechanisms of adultist governmentality (Smith, 2014)—into question, while also emphasizing the complex moral and political realities of “children” and “youth” (Moss, 2013; O’Toole, 2003; Coles, 1986), subsequently seeking to understand how young people construct meaning and experience agency in their everyday lives and “spaces” (schools, neighbourhoods, etc.) (Lehman-Frisch, Authier, & Dufaux, 2012; Van Ingen & Halas, 2006). Drawing upon resilience studies, scholars also commonly identify how the agency and understanding of children/youth is shaped by their (often inequitable) relationships with adult populations—commonly employing an interdisciplinary, multi-level or “ecological” analytical framework that considers the individual, familial, community, cultural, and macro-level factors which foster/inhibit risk, wellness, and action within challenging circumstances (Ungar, 2012; Fraser,

2004; Sargent & Harris, 1998). Overall, the field seeks to correct the marginalization, erasure, and/or de-legitimization of children/youth and their experiences/understandings within social research (Prior, 2013; Todd, 2012; Best, 2007; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998).

Both the experiences of young people and critical approaches to the study of “childhood” and “youth” remain quite marginal to the PACS discipline. There is a fairly substantial body of work on the impact of war, violence, and social injustice on young people as well as the roles they play in armed conflict (much of which revolves around the issue of “child soldiers”) (Balvin & Christie, 2020; Kostelny & Ondoro, 2016; Downing, 2014; Shepler, 2014; Boyden & Bourdillon, 2012; Steinl, 2007; Sanford, 2006; Sommers, 2006; Wessells & Johan, 2006). Some scholars have also considered how young people contribute to peacebuilding and the importance of engaging with this demographic (Leckman, 2015; Law, Sonn, & Mackenzie, 2014; Ungerleider, 2012; Borer, Darby, & McEvoy-Levy, 2006; Helsing, 2006; Ardizzone, 2003). Indeed, the field of peace education often (problematically) targets young people for pedagogical intervention (Cromwell, 2019; Lewsader & Myers-Walls, 2016; Lombardo & Polonko, 2015; Biton & Salomon, 2006; Wessells, 2005). However, much of this work may be critiqued for its “add children and stir” approach to analysis and practice (Beier, 2015, p. 9; Pugh, 2014, p. 80) and/or its “pathologizing” tendencies (Beier, 2011a, p. 3)—wherein certain conceptualizations of childhood (reflecting Eurocentric and imperial influences) are constructed as “normal” and/or superior to others (Beier, 2011a; Watson, 2010).

There are exceptions to this—much of which may be connected to the broader disciplinary interest in local and “everyday” understandings of peace. This includes work focusing on the social worlds, lived experience, and cultures, of young people (Berents, 2018; McEvoy-Levy, 2018; Bangura, 2016; Pruitt, 2013; 2011; Camfield, 2010; Brantmeier, 2007) and critical analyses of the discourse of childhood itself (as well as how it intersects with militarism, nationalism, and other discourses) (Tabak, 2020; Cheny & Sinervo, 2019; Thomas, 2019; Berents, 2018; Berents & McEvoy-Levy, 2015; Beier, 2011b; Millei & Imre, 2006). Although, to be fair, much of this work is actually “PACS-adjacent” and attributed to scholars in other fields (e.g., critical security studies, international development studies, and children’s geographies).⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Thank you to Dr. Marshall Beier for drawing my attention to these sources and general trends.

Despite these developments, both the perspectives of young people and analyses of the discourse of childhood itself remain on the periphery of Peace and Conflict Studies. As argued by Watson (2010), “despite the variety of roles that children play, our perceptions of conflict—and indeed of international politics more widely—consign children to a mere footnote, leaving them without sufficient attention or representation in the formulations of peace” (p. 369). Correcting this exclusion requires “an examination of children as complete, as opposed to partial, political actors” (p. 374). However, I suggest that we must be careful not to fall into the binary trap of then presuming young people are wholly autonomous, disembodied agents. Rather, there is a need to destabilize both the subject position of “child” and “adult” so as to recognize that all people—regardless of age—are both “beings” and “becomings” existing in a state of “relational autonomy” with others (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000).

3.5 Summary: Sensitizing concepts and study design

Given that this study is methodologically committed to the non-prescriptive approaches common to grounded theory and narrative research, the various strands of theory presented here represent not an explicit frame of analysis, but rather the various “sensitizing concepts” which helped “draw attention to” potential avenues of analysis (Bowen, 2006, p. 14). These sensitizing concepts provided the starting point for this study—this quirky work—shaping the way it was designed, implemented, and analyzed.

Overall, this research is aligned with the critical and emancipatory peacebuilding school defined by Byrne, Matyók, Scott, and Senehi (2020b) and seeks to leverage the “trouble-making” potential of Peace and Conflict Studies (Baumann, 2008, p. 456). This involves taking a maximalist approach that not only considers multiple forms of violence, but also critically assesses the liberal peace paradigm and other common disciplinary assumptions (e.g., notions of victimhood and agency, presumed theories of change, and definitions of peace). I am particularly interested in adding nuance to the manner in which education/schooling and young people (children, childhood, and youth) are conceptualized within the PACS discipline.

This focus necessitated a critical approach attentive to the “discursive repertoires”⁷⁷ of individuals (both public and hidden) (McGrath, 2014; McCreary, 2011; Stuber, 2006) so as to

⁷⁷ As suggested by Parker (1997; 2002), the terms “discursive repertoires” and “discursive templates” refer to the way in which broader social discourse is reflected in the cognitive schema and language use of individuals.

consider how these constitute and circumscribe perception and action around such issues as schooling, teaching, success/failure, inclusion, culture, class, and race. More specifically, this calls upon me to consider (for example): who and/or what is rendered (in)visible, deviant, and/or deficient; upon whom and/or what success and failure is located; what forms of agency are (de)legitimized; and how individuals adopt, reflect, reinforce, and/or challenge the broader discourses of colonialism, neoliberalism, and adultism. In other words, what dominant and peripheral *stories about school* are told and “lived” by research participants and how do these shape their thinking (cognitive schema), feeling (affective investments), and action (lived practice)?

Taking a critical approach, however, requires more than just engagement with subjective understandings. It also necessitates consideration of how these are shaped by structural/systemic factors, historical continuums, and material/embodied realities—or what Freire (2011) refers to as “the concrete situation which begets oppression” (p. 50). To do so, I remained sensitive to how macro-level systems (the broader *landscape*) impacted the “everyday” lives (the social worlds) (Clarke & Star, 2007) of participants as well as how differently situated actors experienced and expressed their capacity for agency and negotiated micro-level relations of power. Examining these “micropolitical” interactions between participants (these lived *stories of school*) can offer a more nuanced understanding of how local actors engage with (accept, accommodate, resist, etc.) macro-level actors/forces while also highlighting how people negotiate “everyday” relations of (formal and informal) power so as to achieve their (often unarticulated) goals (Markel, 2014; Benjamin, 2002; Ball, 1987). At the same time, however, it is important to keep Stoler’s (2006b) postcolonial analysis of “the everyday” in mind, to see how everyday interactions and intimate relationships also serve as “microsites of governance” (p. 24) that not only reflect, but also help to maintain broader systems of oppression (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The need to consider the interactions between the objective and subjective—as well as the visible/public and invisible/hidden—calls back to the notions of “doubled science” (Lather, 2007) presented in chapter one and corresponds with a contrapuntal approach to critical analysis that seeks to “read by in” the “forcibly excluded” (Said, 1994, p. 79).

In addition to this broader analytical approach, the strands of theory that I am drawing upon also suggest a few presumed truth claims; firstly, the education system is presumed to be highly politicised while teaching and learning are considered political (neither neutral nor

universal) practices. Formal and informal schooling practices can and do reproduce social inequality and different forms of violence continually operate in the education system. However, education is also a complex system (embedded in and aligned with many other systems) characterized by competing goals and a wide variety of actors and relationships. Hence, education, schools, and teacher-student relationships are constantly subjected to re-negotiation and may also serve as means for empowerment, support, and emancipation.

Secondly, I presume that Canada remains an “evolving colonial entity” (Green, 1995, p. 85) that actively seeks to “disavow” the “founding violence” (Veracini, 2010; 2008) of its establishment, while also *continuing* the dispossession of Indigenous peoples for the benefit of the (re-)settler state and population. Colonial discourse permeates across social institutions—including schools and the education system as a whole. In a similar (but not identical) vein, neoliberalism has also significantly impacted various social institutions, as evidenced by market-oriented and technocratic reform efforts and the exaltation of privatization, austerity, and individualism. Given that I am rooted in the emancipatory peacebuilding school, I see social research as a political, change-oriented endeavor and, hence, I am called to draw attention to and challenge these ideologies and how they impact the political social arena of education.

Lastly, young people are treated as “beings” (not “becomings”) who actively participate in their social worlds. Responding to the suggestions by Watson (2010), children as seen as “complete, as opposed to partial, political actors” (p. 373) and that “childhood” itself is best understood as a discursive construction. It is presumed that young people have the capacity to reflect upon their experiences and that their perspectives can inform and enrich empirical research and theoretical analysis (Casas et al., 2013). This is not to suggest that age and human development are inconsequential, but rather that these are just two elements of a person’s overall “sensemaking frame”⁷⁸ (Davis, 2008).

With these general theoretical understandings and host of “sensitizing concepts” in mind, I sought to design a study that would engage with the *stories about* and *stories of* school told and lived by young people (and the adults with whom they work) so as to add to and/or challenge the existing “map” of the educational landscape.

⁷⁸ The overall frame which shapes “the meanings we place on the events in our lives” (Davis, 2008, p. 2).

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS FOR (RE-)SEARCHING THE LANDSCAPE

4.1 Introduction

The overall purpose of this study was, essentially, two-fold; on one hand, I wanted to add to and challenge (to “trouble”) the existing “map” of the educational landscape traversed by young people so as to complexify and challenge dominant narratives regarding achievement “gaps” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada. I was particularly interested in re-inscribing the perceptions and experiences of middle-years students, as research focusing on this demographic (and critical transition period) is quite sparse. Secondly, I wanted to explore the process of conducting peace research in a manner that responds to current trends in scholarship (particularly explorations of “everyday” and “local” peace) in relation to schools and young people.

To achieve both purposes, I sought to create research contexts that would help participants share stories of their lived experience and reflect upon how they are situated within their school and community. This required the use of multiple data collection methods and engagement with a wide assortment of participants (twenty-three young people and twenty adults) in a fast-paced and often unpredictable school context—a process which proved extremely complex in practice and that required a series of on-the-fly modifications. I employed a unique methodological “frame” for this work that permitted the flexibility required to make these adjustments, although there are elements of the research process that I believe could be improved upon for future work. This chapter reviews the purpose of this study, discusses the underlying methodological approaches which structured my research design, provides an overview of the research process, and engages with several of the key pragmatic and ethical challenges I encountered.

4.2 Purpose of study and research questions

As discussed in chapter 2, the dominant map of the educational landscape—as suggested by existing research and policy documentation—tends to simplify and personalize the causes of school success and failure while also framing the purpose of education in terms of economic and/or national interest. This specific study is part of a broader research project seeking to

challenge this map by undertaking a “contrapuntal reading” (Said, 1994) of the educational landscape the seeks to identify and reinscribe voices, perspectives, histories, and structural realities which have been excluded from discourses that shape social meanings and power relationships. Employing this approach required that I try to *read back in* perspectives and experiences commonly excluded from prevalent understandings of education, failure, and success. To do so, I sought to create spaces wherein participants could articulate their general understandings of school, narrate their own personal histories, and identify the barriers and challenges they and other young people face as well as the strategies and resources they draw upon when navigating school on a day-to-day basis.

I was also interested in reading the young people’s perspectives within and against those of adults also operating within the same school/community context (including school staff, caregivers, and those working for community-based organizations). By examining the same context through these differently situated standpoints—comparing and contrasting foci and themes—I hoped to generate a broader understanding of the educational landscape, thereby identifying not only how broader contextual factors (historical, political, policy-based, and socioeconomic) manifest at the everyday level but also how individuals go about responding to the various structural situations within which they are positioned. Consequently, while the findings of this study are firmly grounded in a specific research context and participant demographic, the theoretical understandings developed can be generalized toward broader critiques of educational discourse and practice.

Reflecting the approach to question development commonly found within grounded theory and narrative methodologies, the initial research “wonder[s]” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 42) discussed above were progressively focused throughout my data collection and early analysis efforts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 37-40). The central research questions which came to guide my theoretical sampling, data collection, and data analysis processes were as follows: how do middle-years students think about—and act within—school? That is, what dominant and peripheral *stories about school* and *stories of school* are told and/or “lived” by research participants and how do these shape their thinking (cognitive schema), feeling (affective investments), and action (lived practice)?

My goal was to keep this question broad and to then provide a space wherein participants could articulate: their understandings of schooling and education; their own personal/collective

educational experiences; and how they see the intersections between school, community, and broader contexts. Effectively, I wanted to come to an understanding of how young people travel along their educational pathways so as to elucidate the underlying dynamics which result in differential educational outcomes for differentially situated students. This would include an examination of the “discursive repertoires” of individuals (both public and hidden) (McGrath, 2014; McCreary, 2011; Stuber, 2006), the “micropolitical” interactions between individuals (Markel, 2014; Stoler, 2006b, Benjamin, 2002; Ball, 1987; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), and the influencing systemic factors, historical continuums, and material realities.

4.3 Setting the methodological frame

As a multi-method, qualitative study, this work was undertaken in naturalistic settings (including two years of participant observation within the research site) and employed strategies meant to generate richly descriptive data that was then analyzed inductively for the purpose of identifying the perspectives and experiences of participants as well as relevant social processes and meaning making systems (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, pp. 4-8). Eschewing adherence to any specific qualitative research tradition, this study employed a “bricolage” approach to research design (Leyshon & Bull, 2011; Kincheloe, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) that integrated aspects of narrative research, grounded theory, youth participatory action research, and anti-oppressive methodologies as well as different data collection methods, including arts-based “mind-mapping,” semi-structured interviews, focus groups, researcher observation, and the analysis of documentation.

Bricolage is an adaptable approach predicated upon an “epistemology of complexity” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 2) that emphasizes “the nature of the relationships between parts” (p. 10) and seeks to avoid the production of unitary, de-contextualized truth claims. As “methodological negotiators,” (p. 3) researchers engaging in bricolage seek to pull from, adapt, and adjust research processes to account for the nature of the phenomenon of study and the relational dynamics formed between the researcher and participants. Hence, rather than attempting to fit the complexities of the research context into a pre-existing mold, I actively rummaged around various traditions and worked to sculpt a new methodological framing device specific to the realities I was encountering. Each of the four *beams* which provided that frame are outlined below.

Narrative research

The first “beam” which structured my methodological frame was narrative research. This approach employs various data collection methods to encourage the telling of stories by research participants so as to assist in the reconstitution of experience in a narrative form, thereby generating meaning and new understandings that can guide future action. The epistemological basis of narrative research reflects the constructivist and poststructuralist traditions, although narrative researchers specifically focus on the “storied nature of human conduct” (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 211); that is, they presume humans interpret experiences by “emplotting” these into a story structure that provides a sense of coherence and meaning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Consequently, the underlying purpose of this research is “not to generate an exclusively faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower” (Clandinin & Rosiak, 2007, p. 39), but rather to understand how individuals construct meaning through narrative and—reflecting the influence of John Dewey and Paulo Freire—to “generate a new relation between a human being and her environment...that opens up new possibilities for being in the world” (p. 39). Narrative research is, then, a pedagogical exercise meant to not only *identify* the discursive repertoire and sensemaking frames of individuals, but to also help *develop* new understandings of self and society that can guide future action.

In practice, narrative researchers try to create relational spaces that “invite” the telling of stories by participants (Chase, 2011, p. 660). The parameters of what counts as a story are wide, including oral, written, and visual narratives intentionally elicited by the researcher or informally offered by participants during fieldwork, interviews, and conversations (Chase, 2011, p. 652; Bach, 2007). Given the complexity of this work, these projects are generally long-term endeavours wherein the researcher (or, commonly, *multiple researchers*) commit(s) to establishing trusting relationships with a small number of participants.

Narrative research suited the underlying purpose of this study because it allowed for the generation of data rich in description, centralized the perceptions of participants, aided the identification of discursive repertoires, and helped to foster connections between individual/community narratives and broader contexts (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Further, the use of narrative/storytelling was both appropriate for the selected age demographic (Senehi & Byrne, 2006) and congruent with anti-oppressive and Indigenous research methodologies (Archibald, 2008; Benham, 2007; Orr, Murphy, & Pearce, 2007). It

challenges the dominance of positivism and technocratic neoliberalism within educational research while emphasizing the need for “counter-stories” that bring forward the experiences of marginalized populations (Hyvarinen, 2010; Chase, 2005). In addition, there are numerous examples of narrative studies that demonstrate the applicability of this methodology to educational contexts and research with young people (Clandinin, Steeves & Caine, 2013; Conrad & Kendal, 2009; Parent, 2011; Tsai, 2007; Young et al., 2012) as well as a growing body of work that employs narrative and storytelling within Peace and Conflict Studies research (Flaherty, 2008; Byrne, 1997).

Grounded theory

My approach to the development of this study’s research questions and data analysis process were significantly impacted by grounded theory—the second beam in my methodological frame. Studies that employ grounded theory begin with open-ended, process-oriented questions that try to minimize the influence of assumptions (from the researcher and existing literature) about the phenomenon of study, while still providing a measure of focus to “start off” the research process. These central questions are then modified through the recursive processes of data collection, analysis, and theoretical sampling and sensitivity—being narrowed, broadened, or shifted as required (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 37-40). Hence, analysis begins while data is still being collected so that the researcher has the opportunity to adjust questions, participant samples, and methods in a manner that will help enrich the theoretical explanations they are developing (Corbin & Strauss, 2012, Chapter 8, p. 5).

Grounded theory is a form of “generative” research (Corbin & Strauss, 2012, Chapter 8, p. 2) wherein data analysis is perceived of as “an intuitive process” (Corbin & Strauss, 2012, Chapter 8, p. 3) heavily reliant upon the researchers own capacity to extrapolate meaning in a systematic way. Specifically, description-rich data is analyzed inductively so as to identify and articulate key themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Charmaz, 2005; Strauss, & Corbin, 1990). During this process the researcher must “[put] aside preconceived notions about what... [one] expects to find in the research, and [let] the data and interpretation of it guide analysis” (Corbin & Strauss, 2012, Chapter 8, p. 3). The purpose of this is to open up multiple avenues for analysis, rather than allowing oneself to be constrained by a pre-set direction (e.g., the application of existing theories from literature). Giving that grounded theory is “rooted” in

participant perspectives, it is often used in social justice research seeking to develop contextually-based theories which often centralize “everyday” interactions (occurring within specific social worlds) and provide a foundation for innovative forms of social action (Charmaz, 2005). As with narrative research, grounded theory commonly requires intimate familiarity with the research context and close relationships between researchers and participants (Charmaz, 2005).

Youth participatory action research (YPAR)

The third beam in my methodological frame was youth participatory action research. Action research, generally speaking, involves both systemic inquiry and the explicit undertaking of action meant to improve practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Stringer, 2008). This dual purpose necessitates various considerations that must be reflected in research design, including: the importance of fostering relationships between researchers and participants that facilitate the co-construction of knowledge; the need to promote “self- and critical awareness that leads to individual, collective, and/or social change” (McIntyre, 2008, p. ix); and the usage of a recursive process of questioning, reflecting, investigating, planning, and acting (Chataway, 2000; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; McIntyre, 2008; McTaggart, 1991). Youth Participatory Action Research (or YPAR), is a sub-field that privileges the agency and perspectives of young people. As defined by Cammarota and Fine (2008), YPAR is an extension of critical youth studies that counters the pathologizing of youth issues and “provides young people with opportunities to study social problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify these problems” (p. 2). Further, YPAR is “explicitly pedagogical” (p. 6) as it helps young people develop research, problem-solving, and/or community organizing capacities.

Common features of YPAR include: deep consideration of issues related to power and intersectionality; the use of research to initiate action for social change; the formation of research collectives which are sustained over time; the valuing of insider and “place-based” knowledge; consideration of the affective dimensions of research; the usage of multiple, often “unconventional,” research methods (e.g. theatre games, photovoice, artistic creations, mental mapping, poetry); the collaborative identification of research themes; and the dissemination of findings through a variety of mediums (websites, awareness campaigns, workshops, etc.) (Cahill, 2007; Cahill, Rios-Moore & Threatts, 2008; Cahill & Torree, 2007; Cammarota & Fine, 2008;

Tuck et al., 2008). Within these projects it is often important to foster relationship development between participants and to provide training opportunities in data collection and analysis methods (Cahill, Rios-Moore & Threatts, 2008; McIntyre, 2008; Tuck, et al., 2008).

YPAR helped to frame how I would approach the relationship between myself and the young research participants, highlighting the importance of recognizing and promoting the agency of young people and including them in the data analysis process. Scheduling issues and pragmatic challenges limited the extent to which the student participants and I were able to engage with the “action” component of the action research cycle, although part of this study involved funding and helping to organize a school visioning/planning workshop that incorporated three student research participants as well as data generated throughout the research study. YPAR also helped sensitize me to the pedagogical potential of research as well as the need to be mindful of group dynamics and interpersonal interactions during focus group sessions.

Anti-oppressive and Indigenous methodologies

The final beam in my methodological frame involved an exploration of various anti-oppressive theories and methodologies, including feminist methodology (e.g., Rayaprol, 2016; Beckman, 2014; Dankoski, 2000; Beetham & Demetriades, 2007), critical race theory (e.g., Mills & Unsworth, 2018; Savas, 2014; Hylton, 2012), and Indigenous/decolonizing approaches to research. While each of these broad categories represent a highly diverse set of principles, perspectives, and practices, studies based upon these forms of research are predicated upon several common understandings, including: the complex and intersectional nature of identity; the importance of researcher reflexivity; the need to explicitly engage with issues of power, positionally, and oppression; the importance of connecting everyday, micro-level experiences to broader structural conditions and social discourses; the inherently political nature of research and its potential to foster social justice; and the centralization of voices and experiences often marginalized within or excluded from prevailing academic, social, and political discourses (e.g., through the process of telling counter-stories). The specific methods used within feminist, critical race, and Indigenous approaches are varied, although storytelling is often a feature of the data collection process.

Given that postcolonialism was a central element of my “sensitizing” theoretical frame (see chapter three), I gave particular attention to scholarship discussing Indigenous

methodological approaches. While this involves an extremely complex body of diverse perspectives and methods (many of which are rooted in a specific context), it is common for scholars working from this paradigm to challenge Eurocentric assumptions and research practices and to gear their work specifically toward the goal of decolonization (Kovach, 2009; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Weber-Pillwax, 2009). Further, many suggest that an Indigenous research paradigm is guided by the notion of “relational accountability” (Wilson, 2008, p. 77)—thereby implying the use of collaborative processes in all aspects of the research (Chilisa, 2012). Other commonly identified characteristics of this approach include: an emphasis on holistic forms of analysis that integrate cognitive and affective modes of knowing (Absolon, 2011; Wilson, 2008); the development of respectful relationships between researchers and participants (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012); and the recovery of community histories, values, and practices (Absolon, 2011). In addition, this approach requires that researchers reflect upon their own relationships, power, and positionality (Absolon & Willett, 2005). Consideration of anti-oppressive and Indigenous methodologies affirmed my commitment to storytelling-based methods, relationship-building, researcher reflexivity, the analyses of power and discourse, and the articulation of commonly marginalized narratives of experience.

Connecting the beams into a methodological frame

Research methodology can be understood as “an underlying set of beliefs about how and for what purposes research should be conducted” (Beckman, 2014, p. 165). The four “beams” of narrative research, grounded theory, youth participatory action research, and anti-oppressive approaches provided the frame for the beliefs that guided my research process.

Firstly, the underlying ontological and epistemological approach taken in this study sits astride the traditions of critical theory and constructivism. That is, reality is conceptualized, overall, as “more fluid or plastic than one fixed truth” (Wilson, 2008, p. 36) while efforts to learn about this “fluid” reality require consideration of the interactional complexities which characterize social worlds. From the paradigm of critical theory, this reality is understood as having been shaped by historical and contemporary relations of power. The purpose of research, then, is to undertake critical examinations of these structural relationships in the interests of fostering social change (Wilson, 2008, p. 37). This paradigm maintains that an objective reality

exists independently of individual, subjective perceptions, but suggest that this reality can be changed through human action in the world.

In contrast, constructivism suggests a plurality of realities “specific to the people and locations that hold them” (Wilson, 2008, p. 37). Given that an individual’s reality is a contextualized subjective assemblage, research involves a dialogical interaction between the researcher and participants “that compares and contrasts each other’s constructs of reality” with the goal of developing a “consensus... on a construction that is better informed than it was before” (Wilson, 2008, p. 37). Hence, the focus of this research paradigm is on exploring the ways participants construct their interpretations of lived experience.

Working betwixt and between these two paradigms, I was seeking to be attentive to both the objective (material, physical, and structural) and subjective (perceptual, narrative, and discursive) nature of reality. Hence, I wanted to respect, elevate, and generate understandings about the participants’ subjective perceptions while, at the same time, recognize that these understandings are shaped by material conditions and social discourses. This approach reflects Freireian philosophy, which suggests that a “constant dialectical relationship” exists between subjectivity and objectivity (Freire, 2011, p. 50) and that social change can only occur through engagement with both perceptions and “the concrete situation which begets oppression” (Freire, 2011, p. 50). In other words, while it is important to engage directly with the ways people interpret their lived experience (in part because these perceptions consequently shape their actions in the world), it is equally vital to identify how experiences (and the sensemaking frames that people employ in their meaning-making processes) are embedded in objective (albeit potentially transformable) material conditions. This research sought to explore the nature of the interpretations provided by participants as well as the material conditions which shaped them. The challenge, then, was to elevate the voices of participants, while still recognizing the situatedness, complexity, and tentative nature of these perspectives so as to avoid uncritical homogenization and/or romanticization.⁷⁹ Hence, I do not treat the narratives offered by participants as singular, objective truths that provide a clear mirror of reality; rather, I see the

⁷⁹ This primarily impacted the manner in which I conducted my data analysis. Further exploration of both the complexities of this paradigm (and the manner in which I sought to apply it) will be explored in later publications.

narrating of experience as an act of echolocation⁸⁰ that provides a rough indication of the form and movement of lived reality and material conditions.

Secondly, I operated from a belief that social research is change-oriented and sought to leverage the potential for this work to stimulate personal and collective reflection and action. For the young participants, I wanted to ensure the research had a strong pedagogical and reflective component that helped to familiarize them with social research as a practice, provided the opportunity to analyze issues that directly impacted their lives, and helped them identify their own strengths and social resources. While my engagements with adult participants were more limited (occurring only through one-time interviews), I still wanted to ensure the process provided opportunities for self-reflection. As mentioned previously, while opportunities for the explicit undertaking of action in this research were minimal, I did have the opportunity to connect this work to a visioning/planning process undertaken by the school, which has had a direct impact on subsequent planning processes. Further dissemination of the findings for this research will also consider the importance of instigating change and I will be producing a policy-oriented document for the Manitoba Research Alliance/Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives.

This work was also predicted upon the belief that social research is a relational process. All of the methodological perspectives discussed above emphasize the importance of respectful, often long-term, relationships between researchers and participants that are characterized by high levels of trust. The importance of building relationships was the primary reason I opted to spend an extended amount of time at the research site—working extensively as a classroom volunteer prior to beginning the formal research process. After the research was completed, I also had the opportunity to provide additional services to the school, assisting in other projects. This time spent at the school allowed me to develop a recognizable *presence* in the school and, I believe, helped to foster connections with research participants. In addition, I opted to complete the data collection with students over a ten-week period, which allowed me to meet with most students/focus groups on multiple (three to four) occasions.

Further, working within my methodological frame, I sought to develop data collection methods that would foster the telling of stories (broadly defined) and allow for the collection of

⁸⁰ Echolocation—commonly employed by sonar systems and various animals (e.g., dolphins and bats) involves sending out sound waves which “bounce off” objects. These then return to the sender, providing a sense of the location and shape of objects which are difficult or impossible to see visually.

data rich in description. I saw the research process and an *invitational* one that created a welcoming space for sharing. Adherence to this principle resulted in the selection of arts-based and open-ended questioning methods for data collection with both the students and adult participants—thereby leading to more back-and-forth, collaborative exchanges that allowed for the co-construction of knowledge (particularly with young participants). In keeping with grounded theory, the data analysis process was inductive, and the resulting theoretical insights are rooted securely in the data itself.

Lastly, this research conceptualized power as both an element of social reality to be theorized about, and as an actant⁸¹ constantly at play during the research process. This principle was reflected in the design of the data collection methods (particularly in my approach to engaging with the young participants), data analysis, and writing process. In addition, I maintained my own reflective journal throughout the study and tried to remain attentive to the micropolitical interactions, infrapolitical resistances, and public/hidden transcripts operating within the school. Further, during the analysis and writing processes I sought to centralize the commonly marginalized or excluded perspectives of young people and conceptualized all participants as “expert insiders” offering insights into their own social worlds.

These central beliefs regarding the interplay between the subjective and objective nature of reality, the change-oriented nature of research, the centrality of relationships, the use of invitational, flexible, and collaborative processes that encouraged storytelling, and the need to engage deeply with issues of power and voice, provided the underlying methodological frame which guided the decisions made both during the design of this study and while applying and modifying my processes in response to on-the-ground realities. This frame helped me identify the key ethical principles and methodological commitments that needed to be prioritized throughout.

4.4 Developing and adapting the research design

This project involved working with twenty-three young people and twenty adults that were divided into four key sets of participants: students; caregivers; school staff; and community-based organization (CBO) representatives. Most participants (the students, staff, and caregivers) were all directly connected to Eaglecrest Community School. The remaining CBO

⁸¹ Something which actively influences the situation.

participants were from organizations that offered services for children, youth, and/or families in Winnipeg.⁸²

My work with the young people centered around two arts-based “mind-mapping” activities, one-on-one discussions, paired discussions, and focus groups. My work with adults took the form of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. In addition, I spent nearly two years working as a volunteer in the school and maintained my own reflective journal and fieldnotes. Lastly, I helped to organize a P.A.T.H. (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) Process that involved various members of the school-community. The majority of the data collection occurred from January to June 2016 (with the work with students occurring from mid-March to early June), although some of the interviews with community-based organization representatives happened earlier (during the late summer/early fall of 2015). What follows is an overview my research design (focusing on the research site, participants, data collection, and data analysis process) and discussion of some of the critical issues I faced during the research process.

The Eaglecrest community: The immediate research context

In order to ensure I was able to dedicate sufficient time to relationship-building and to help me develop an in-depth understanding of the research context, I opted to focus my work on one school site in the City of Winnipeg. Understanding the dynamics of this site, however, requires consideration of the social and historical dynamics which have shaped this school and its surrounding neighbourhoods.

Approximately 92,810 persons in Winnipeg identify as Indigenous (as Métis, First Nations, or Inuit)—the highest total across all Canadian urban centres⁸³ (CBC News, 2019). Statistically younger than average, approximately 29% of this population is of mandatory school age (Statistics Canada, 2010, p. 17) and represents a growing proportion of students in Winnipeg’s schools (WSD, 2010; Loewen et al., 2005). As discussed in chapter two (and mirroring Canada-wide trends), significant—and *widening*—economic and social welfare gaps between Winnipeg’s Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations have been identified. This economic disparity manifests as higher levels of poverty amongst Indigenous residents as well as

⁸² Most (but not all) of these CBOs focused their work on Winnipeg’s inner city.

⁸³ And 12.1% of the city’s total population (CBC News, 2019).

various associated challenges (e.g., inadequate housing and food insecurity) (Peters, 2012; Silver, 2006a; Allec, 2005).

This contemporary situation is the continuation of long, historical trends. As discussed by Toews (2018) and Silver (2006), the neighbourhoods surrounding Eaglecrest—which, it should be remembered, were established through Indigenous dispossession—have been socially and physically segregated from the rest of Winnipeg for over a century (being literally cut off from the city by railyards). From the late 1890s until the end of the second world war, the area’s population consisted mainly of recent European immigrants. After this point, many of the more affluent residents left for the city’s growing suburbs, leading to a loss of local businesses, cultural centres, and services. In tandem, increasing numbers of Indigenous persons (primarily First Nations and Métis) moved into the area—or were *moved to* the area by social service agencies—from reserve and rural communities as well as other parts of the city.⁸⁴

In the 1960s, the area became a focal point of Winnipeg’s “urban renewal” strategy—which, effectively, was a paternalistic project of “slum clearance” wherein residents lost their homes to make space for new social housing developments (Silver, 2006). While these developments did, initially, improve the social welfare of (some) residents, the dynamic of social marginalization continued (due to, for example, inadequate funding for social services and predatory practices in the for-profit housing market). As a result, the area was once again seen as a centre of poverty and criminal activity by the broader public (e.g., as reflected in, for example, the [racist, classist, and colonial] discourses which characterized media reports) (Toews, 2018; Silver, 2006a).

The impact of these factors was (and continues to be) intensified by jurisdictional conflicts between different levels of government (Distasio et al., 2004). Drawing upon a narrow interpretation of Section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act*, the federal government maintains that its mandate is generally limited to those with First Nations status living on-reserve while provincial governments argue that federal jurisdiction encompasses all Indigenous peoples (Hanselmann,

⁸⁴ For example, in the late 1950s Winnipeg officials pressured (and then forced) residents of an urban Métis community located in the southwest area of the city—commonly known as Rooster Town—to relocate. This was done to clear land for what is now the Grant Park Mall and higher-income housing. Many of these uprooted residents moved to the inner city (or were *moved to* the inner city by social service agencies). This act of colonial dispossession forced families into inadequate housing and disconnected them from vital employment and social/cultural resources. The remaining physical structures of Rooster Town were destroyed in 1959. See Peters, Stock, and Werner’s (2018) *Rooster Town: The history of an urban Métis community, 1901-1961* for an in-depth history of this community (which was forcibly erased from city maps—and public memory—for decades).

2003; 2001). Indigenous (specifically First Nations) political organizations also often prioritize reserve populations (Silver, 2006a, p. 12) and, consequently, municipalities and local organizations are left to fill critical gaps in social support (FitzMaurice, 2012). This reflects deeper colonial assumptions that underlie dominant approaches to urban development and discursively construct Indigeneity as the antithesis of civilization (Peters, 2005, 1993)—thereby reflecting broader colonial justificatory regimes (LaRocque, 2010; Spurr, 1993). This masks colonial policies that were designed to segregate Indigenous peoples away from urban centres (Fournier & Crey, 2011; Miller, 1991) and is reflected in a tendency for municipal planners to ignore Indigenous rights and circumstances as well as the persistence of overt and systemic racial discrimination in urban centres (Findlay, et al., 2014; McCaskill, 2012; TRC, 2012; Environics, 2011; Silver, 2006a; Peters, 2005). Consequently, while more recent (post-1990) community development efforts have led to improvements in the social welfare of residents, socioeconomic inequality and marginalization continue.

Indeed, while rich urban networks of Indigenous community development and mobilization organizations operate in Winnipeg (Peters & Andersen, 2013; Silver & Toews, 2009; Silver, 2008, 2006a), these actors are often under-resourced, ignored by policy makers, and embedded in a broader context of inequality (Toews, 2018; Silver, 2006a; Loxley & Wien, 2003). In recent years, many of these organizations have faced significant economic and governance challenges which have led to a reduction in services as well as the temporary or permanent closure of community spaces—a trend which reflects the continuance of colonial dispossession and socioeconomic marginalization (Toews, 2018; Newhouse et al., 2011; Silver, 2006a). Further, more recently, the community began to experience another demographic shift as more newcomers (recent immigrants and refugees) moved to the area (or were “settled” there by social services). This has led community and service organizations (as well as funders) to modify their practices so as to account for these changes.

These successive waves of demographic change, the persistence of racialized inequality, and the efforts of community organizations are all physically *present* in the area surrounding Eaglecrest, as depicted in the following set of photos. The majority of these sites are situated within a 15-minute walking radius of the school.



Figure 3 Passing trains from the nearby railyards
 These train tracks physically and symbolically separate this
 area from the rest of Winnipeg
 (Photo: J. M. Hyde)



Figure 4 Local space under threat
 One of the Indigenous community spaces (also a site of local employment and symbol of
 urban Indigenous community development) whose existence came under threat when
 businesses were closed in 2018 due to financial challenges. Most of the building's space sat
 idle until 2020 when it was leased to a non-Indigenous non-profit social enterprise
 (Photo: J. M. Hyde)



Figure 5 Closed restaurant

This local restaurant, now closed, was popular and frequented by Eaglecrest school staff members. I also spent a great deal of time here during this project's data collection stage.

(Photo: J. M. Hyde)



Figure 6 Now closed

Closure sign for restaurant depicted in Figure 7

(Photo: J. M. Hyde)



Figure 7 The German Society of Winnipeg (established in 1892)
(Photo: J. M. Hyde)



Figure 8 The Ukrainian National Federation (established in the early 1900s)
(Photo: J. M. Hyde)



Figure 9 The Ethiopian Society of Winnipeg Cultural Centre (established in 1984)
(Photo: J. M. Hyde)



Figure 10 Mural on the side of a popular Jewish bakery
This bakery opened in 1937 and was owned and operated by the same family until 2019
(it remains open but was sold to new owners).
(Photo: J. M. Hyde)



Figure 11 Local mural
(Photo: J. M. Hyde)



Figure 12 Missing persons poster

Poster requesting the public's assistance in locating Claudette Osborne, who went missing in 2008. Along with the case of Tina Fontaine (see chapter one), Osborne's disappearance was one of the more well-known Winnipeg cases addressed by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry.

As of the end of 2020, her whereabouts were still unknown (Bergen, 2020).

(Photo: J. M. Hyde)

Eaglecrest Community School: The primary research site

The selected school (Eaglecrest Community School⁸⁵) serves approximately 280 students from Nursery to Grade 8, the majority of whom are from the surrounding neighbourhood and nearby social housing development.⁸⁶ While staff informed me that the student population is primarily (90%) First Nations or Métis, they also noted that many families do not to complete the school division's Aboriginal Identity Declaration form, which leads to inaccuracies in the

⁸⁵ A pseudonym.

⁸⁶ The housing complex opened in 1967. The school itself opened in 1922.

division's records.⁸⁷ In addition, there is a small but growing population of recent immigrant and refugee students (which accounted for about 9% of the total school population at the time of this research). This school was also funded by the Community Schools Program (and, therefore, has a full-time CSP Coordinator) and was identified by current and former personnel at the Indigenous Inclusion Directorate (formerly the Aboriginal Education Directorate) as an “active” community school program site.⁸⁸

As discussed in chapter two, the school has made a concentrated, explicit effort to engage with the province's and school division's call for “infusing” Indigenous perspectives in various aspects of school life. This has included a variety of initiatives, such as: Building Student Success with Indigenous Parents (BSSIP)⁸⁹ projects; an annual “Gathering of Friends” event (although, in recent years, the focus of this event has shifted away from Indigenous cultural celebrations); and the development of school and classroom “Treaties” (which operate as classroom and school “codes of conduct”). Other programs offered at the school have included: a breakfast program; community walks; a summer learning enrichment program; an academic program that focuses on students diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD); career education initiatives; the Families and Schools Acting Together (FAST) program⁹⁰; and the CHOICES gang prevention and intervention program (operated by Manitoba Justice). Despite these efforts, the school has struggled to maintain its enrollment (which largely determines the amount of provincial funding it receives), partly due to competition from a nearby Indigenous-focused elementary school.

Process of selecting, accessing, and navigating the research site

After receiving approval for this study from the University of Manitoba's Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board, I contacted three principals from elementary and elementary/junior high

⁸⁷ School documents suggest that the Indigenous population has been quite high for decades—consisting of at least 70% of the total student body since the 1970s.

⁸⁸ See pages 36-37 for information on the Community Schools Program.

⁸⁹ Initiated in 2004, this provincial program provides funding for schools to implement projects meant to “increase the involvement of [I]ndigenous parents in education” (Government of Manitoba, 2020).

⁹⁰ This program was developed in the late-1980s by American psychologist Lynn McDonald. It is described as “an internationally-acclaimed parent engagement program that supports the family bonding necessary for children to thrive” (FAST, 2020). The basic FAST program involves multiple families coming to the school, “to spend time together, eat a meal, play games, and get to know other families” (FAST, 2020).

schools (including Eaglecrest)—all of which fell under the auspices of the school board’s Inner City District. These emails provided a basic overview of my intended project, discussed my interest in volunteering, and requested a meeting to speak further. Responses to these initial requests were mixed; two of the principals were willing to speak with me, but one was not open to further contact until I received approval for the project from the school division’s Research Advisory Committee. Given that I wanted to engage with the school prior to submitting my application for this approval, I eliminated this school as a potential site. After follow-up conversations with administrators at the remaining schools, I selected Eaglecrest as the research site because it fit my selection criteria and was easily accessible to me via public transit.

I also chose this site because my initial impressions suggested that the school’s administration would be very supportive of my work. In my field notes I state that I felt very “welcomed” into the school space during my initial meeting with the school’s principal and resource teacher. The principal spent a significant amount of time speaking with me and learning about my interests and intentions for the project, even sharing a bit of his own experience doing similar child/youth-centered work. He also took the time to give me a tour of the school and struck me as quite forthcoming regarding the challenges faced by students, school staff, and community members. I was nervous at the prospect of undertaking this complex work in an unfamiliar setting and found that the rapport and level of comfort established helped to settle some of these anxieties. This support proved invaluable as the research progressed; I had to learn many formal and informal rules about operating in the space (e.g., how to book rooms, phrase permission forms, order food) and, as an external actor, was often dependent upon the goodwill of the administration and staff for guidance and assistance.

Indeed, I was in a position of relative dependency while operating in the space (as the completion of my research was dependent upon the voluntary help of staff) and believed that it was important to minimize the extent to which I burdened others or caused disruptions in day-to-day activities. One example of this dependency was in relation to room bookings. On several occasions I had to shorten or cancel work with students because the space that I needed was suddenly required for a more pressing concern (e.g., a meeting with a family). Recognizing my place within the school, I believed the onus was on me to adapt to these realities and accommodate the needs of others. Admittedly, this did lead to scheduling challenges and reduced my opportunity to work with some of the focus groups/students. That being said, I found that I

was able to successfully navigate the research site and benefitted greatly from staff help (e.g., I was able to confer with various staff members to attend to logistical issues and clarify the design of the project). I believe that the time I spent building relationships as an in-class volunteer—so as to have a regular presence in the school—was a vital part of establishing the connections that made this work possible (while also helping me develop a deeper understanding of formal and informal institutional rules and adjust my approach to participant recruitment and data collection).

In addition to these on-site navigational challenges, I also faced barriers while seeking to (formally) access the site—first as a volunteer and later as a researcher. To become a volunteer, I first had to provide (and pay for) an updated Child Abuse Registry Check and Police Information/Vulnerable Sector Check. I also had to attend a one-on-one interview with the school division’s volunteer coordinator—who was located at a school in a completely different part of Winnipeg (and more than a thirty-minute bus ride away from the inner city). At this interview I had to present my registry checks, proof of payment for these documents, two pieces of identification, and the contact information for two references. While the application process for those who actually have a child or grandchild attending school are not nearly as stringent—and while I recognize that these measures are in place primarily to prevent abuse—I could not help but reflect upon how these “gatekeeping” practices would differentially impact an individual with more limited access to funds, transportation, identification, and professional connections, let alone someone who may have had any previous involvement with the criminal justice system. This experience came back to me later in my data analysis process, as I identified various “micro-barriers” that make schools inaccessible to many community members.

The process of gaining approval from the school division’s Research Advisory Committee also proved more challenging than anticipated. The application itself was rather straightforward and seemed primarily concerned with ensuring I had ethics approval from my university and that the research would not cause significant disruptions to classes, teachers, or student progress. However, the wait period involved was extensive, leading to a six-month delay that, in addition to the summer holidays, pushed the data collection into the next school year. Eventually, and after sending several emails requesting clarification, I received a response. The approval letter did not make any comment on the study design itself, but did note that:

[a]s a result of the Division's participation in the study a copy of your research reports should be submitted to this office at its completion. The division also reserves the right to request researchers to provide a presentation and/or workshop regarding the results of their study as required.

Reflecting now upon this letter, and the approval process more generally, I see it as another manifestation of institutional gatekeeping and boundary maintenance. I also see it as an example of the flexibility and give-and-take negotiation required of those (positioned outside of the formal education system) seeking to conduct research in schools.⁹¹

These challenges did impact the flow of my research process. I had initially wanted to begin my research with the Eaglecrest students and to then engage with adults—using the initial findings from the young people to refine the adult interview guide. However, due to the delay with the school division's approval, I ended up conducting interviews with community-based organization representatives first (as I only needed approval from my institutional Research Ethics Board to begin this process). These initial interviews led to an expansion of my student participant sample (discussed below) and, while I did not alter my research methods or initial interview guides, I do think that this initial work with CBOs influenced some of my follow-up questioning and analytical sensitivities by attuning me to themes that arose from these interviews (e.g., I was interested in hearing about why and how students engaged in community organizations and how these spaces differed from school).

Selecting and recruiting participants

Recruiting the different sets of research participants (students, caregivers, school staff, and CBO representatives) required a variety of strategies that accounted for the way participants were situated both socially and institutionally. Participants had differential access to resources (e.g., technology) and were embedded in relations of power and risk that either facilitated or hindered my capacity to interact with them, thereby impacting my sampling procedures. See Appendix three for a summary of participant demographic information.

⁹¹ It should also be noted that I have not received any further correspondence or requests from the division.

Selecting and recruiting student participants

I opted to focus on middle-years students (Grades 5 to 8) primarily in light of research suggesting that these transition years are a critical point in a young person's journey through the education system. It is around this time that students may begin to "disengage" from school, thereby opening up the possibility of identifying and supporting these individuals earlier so as to (as the logic goes) increase their chances of completing high school (Proactive Information Services, 2013; Friesen & Krauth, 2012). Further, this demographic has not often been the focus of existing research, leaving gaps in analysis, policy, and practice (Proactive Information Services, 2013).

While I had initially intended to only work with a very small sample of eight to ten students who self-identified as Indigenous (which, given the demographics of the school, would have meant focusing on those who identified as First Nations and Métis), I reconsidered this after my initial interviews with CBO representatives, a period of time volunteering at Eaglecrest, and completing the analysis for my literature review. I became interested in how the shifting demographics within the school and surrounding community—with its small but growing proportion of newcomer (immigrant and refugee) families moving into the social housing complex and surrounding neighborhood—may be influencing student life and staff perceptions. I also thought there might be some benefit to making comparisons between differently situated students. Consequently, I more than doubled my sample size (to twenty-three). Ten of these participants were Indigenous (eight which identified as First Nations and two as Métis), nine were newcomers (recent immigrants or refugee), two were White (of European heritage), and two identified as "mixed(-race)" (and suggested that they had one parent who was Métis).

To recruit participants I employed purposeful sampling, self-selection, and teacher recommendations. I was invited to give presentations in two Grade 6 classes where I provided basic information about the research and asked students to complete a short form on which they could indicate their interest in learning more about the project. I also asked classroom teachers to recommend potential participants (this was done to identify students in Grades 5, 6, 7, and 8). In addition to my grade- and identity-based criteria, I also limited participant selection to: those who were able to understand and provide their assent to participate in the research; those who had parents or guardians available to provide consent for participation; those who had fairly

regular school attendance; and those for whom time spent out of class would not impact their academic progress.

These restrictions did create limitations in this study because they prevented engagement with students who may have been classified (institutionally) as being more “at risk” for school failure (e.g., due to absenteeism). For example, there was one student who was very keen on participating (and whom I was very interested in hearing from), but after a series of suspensions for in-class behavioural issues his attendance became more irregular and the classroom teacher suggested that he should not be involved in the project. In another instance a student for whom I had received caregiver consent (via a social worker) was reported as a missing person for a period of time, after which the adult consent was (understandably) withdrawn. I sought to address these limitations through observations at the research site, discussions with adult participants, and engagement with existing research (specifically those that explore the experiences of “early school leavers”). These instances also influenced my data analysis (e.g., by illustrating some of factors which impact a young person’s ability to complete schooling) and impacted my own affective connections to the work. These types of limitations are common to research with children in school settings (e.g., see Baydala et al., 2020).

Overall, I spoke with a pool of thirty-five potential participants briefly (outside of class) in small groups or one-on-one. Each potential participant was invited to one of three luncheons (one for Grade 5 students, one for Grade 6 students, and one for Grade 7/8 students) wherein I gave more detail about the project. All luncheons were held in the school’s library and I provided pizza, drinks, and snacks. In total, twenty-nine of the original potential participants attended these events. I provided attendees with a package that included the caregiver consent form and an additional information letter. I could not contact caregivers directly as this information was not made available by the school and had to work through the delivery mechanisms that were made available to me (sending information home with the student in the hopes that it would be passed along and returned)—a limitation common to school-based research (Barker & Weller, 2003). However, I did provide my own contact information and spoke (via phone or in-person) with seven caregivers who requested more information. Twenty-four luncheon participants returned the caregiver consent forms. One participant was withdrawn, leaving a total of twenty-three.

These twenty-three participants were then invited to a second luncheon where we talked more about the project, reviewed the student assent form, and talked about their rights as

research participants (e.g., by discussing the meaning of “confidentiality,” the limitations of confidentiality, and the “right to refuse” in more accessible language). I then provided and reviewed the Student Assent Form. I wanted to limit the extent to which the young people would feel pressured to sign the form (either by peers or me). So, after talking as a group, I asked students to find spots in the room where they could sit by themselves. I then went and spoke one-on-one with each person to see if they had any additional questions. I told them that they had the right to sign or not sign and that they should put the forms in a bin that I had set up in the library. All of the participants signed the student assent form, although two requested that they not be audio recorded. I believe this process did help to clarify the student's understandings and also served to develop our relationship. Hence, it was an important part of the process, worthwhile even if several of my assent forms ended up smeared with pizza sauce.⁹²

Overall, the process of selecting, accessing, and recruiting student participants required that I engage and receive approval from a variety of gatekeepers, including caregivers and classroom teachers. This challenge had both pragmatic and ethical implications. While the necessity of adult consent is an important mechanism designed to protect young people who are participating in research, it does limit which voices end up being heard, potentially silencing those situated in more marginal or vulnerable social positions. In addition, it impairs the ability of the researcher to keep the young person's participation in the study strictly confidential. Responding to this, I sought to be very cognizant of the need to protect their confidentiality in the writing and dissemination of research findings.⁹³ Overall, while working “through” the school for this specific study was, I believe, necessarily for its completion, in the future I would consider out-of-school contexts (e.g., Community-Based Organizations) as channels for recruitment (although even this would still require organizational and caregiver consent).

⁹² The process of assent did not end with these meetings and forms. I always asked students if they wanted to join me for focus group session and paid attention to other “signs” of assents (e.g., non-verbal behaviour when they saw me and feedback from classroom teachers).

⁹³ In addition, the findings from this study will not be disseminated until after all of the students have graduated from (or otherwise left) Eaglecrest.

Selecting and recruiting adult participants

The process of selecting and recruiting adult participants⁹⁴ was somewhat less complex, but still impacted by how individuals were socially and institutionally situated. Recruiting caregivers (wherein the only selection criteria was that they had a child attending Eaglecrest) was the most challenging (Keim et al., 1999, note that this is a common phenomenon). Opportunities to engage with caregivers directly were rare and it was suggested that I work through the school's Community Schools Coordinator to contact individuals. She sent information about the project to caregivers along with my contact information. I then met with these potential participants one-on-one to discuss the project and determine if they would like to participate. Interviews occurred immediately after these meetings.⁹⁵ One additional parent was recruited directly by me through a chance meeting at an in-school event (making for six participants in total). All of the participants were persons who were more regularly involved in the school as either volunteers or program attendees—a fact which placed limitations on the diversity of perspectives available. I recognize that these recruitment techniques were less than ideal, but, at the time these appeared to be the only viable mechanisms for operating with the formal and informal rules of the research site.

All of the participants were mothers of children currently in the school. All but one had at least two children currently enrolled and had been involved with the school for multiple years (four or more). One parent was also a former student. Two of the participants mentioned that they were married and one participant stated that she had completed post-secondary education. While I did not ask information about racial identity specifically, two participants identified themselves as Indigenous, one spoke of being unsure of her heritage (due to adoption), and one mentioned that she was the child of European immigrants. Given that the focus of these interviews was on their perceptions of their children's experiences at Eaglecrest, and given the small size of the participant sample, I did not emphasize the collection of in-depth demographic

⁹⁴ School staff and CBO representative participants each received a \$15.00 Tim Hortons giftcard for their participation. This was a token of thanks and they were not aware that they would be receiving it prior to completing the interview. Caregivers received a \$25.00 Soby's giftcard. They were aware that it would be provided (see note below).

⁹⁵ I recognize that holding the interviews immediately after these initial contacts was problematic (reducing the time a participant could consider if they wanted to participate and potentially applying pressure). This approach was suggested to me as the most appropriate means for accommodating the participant's schedules and I made it clear that the participants would receive the gift card compensation even if they declined participation or stopped the interview midway.

data. In future work I intend to employ larger samples and to collect more specific information to allow for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between a caregiver's situatedness, personal experiences, and perceptions of school.

Recruiting school staff was done primarily via email. I composed an introductory message (including my contact information) that was sent out to school staff via the school's internal listserve. I was also invited to speak at a staff meeting and had several informal conversations with individuals. Five staff members participants (four classroom teachers and one administrative staff member) were recruited through this method. The grades represented by the teachers ranged from the early years to junior high. Three of the staff participants had been working at the school for less than three years. The other participants were long-time employees (working at Eaglecrest for over five years). While I did not ask questions about specific racial identities, all of the participants identified themselves as White during the course of the conversation. Four of the participants were female and one was male.

To recruit CBO representatives, I emailed twenty organizations operating within (or supporting young people/families living in) Winnipeg's inner city. I also developed a printed letter which I physically dropped off at various offices (following up later via email).⁹⁶ Nine individuals contacted me expressing interest in participating and all were interviewed over the course of the project. Participants varied in terms of their respective positions (including three administrators, five program or project managers, and one support worker), the population that they work with (three stated that they work primarily with Indigenous young people/families, two with "newcomers" [whom they defined as recent immigrants and refugees], and four with a mixed demographic), gender (five identified as men, four identified as women), and racial identity (two identified as Indigenous, five as White/European, and two did not discuss their racial identity during the course of the conversation).

Interestingly, while I developed the process for contacting CBOs in a manner that would allow individuals the opportunity to participate without having to inform supervisors of their intent to do so (thereby maintaining their confidentiality), two of the participants requested that I contact the Executive Directors of their organization to inform them of the project. One

⁹⁶ I also designed and offered an online survey for CBO representatives to anonymously complete (with the intention of developing additional surveys for school staff and caregivers). Response to this first survey, however, was minimal (only two were fully completed). I realized early on in the data collection process that interviews were more suited to my (largely exploratory) purposes and opted to drop the survey as a method for this particular study.

additional participant also required that I complete the formal research approval process used by her organization. I was surprised that, even in these instances where working through gatekeepers or internal processes was not necessary in order to access participants, for some individuals this was still a formal or informal requirement.

Hence, in all cases (albeit to very different degrees), I had to work through gatekeepers in order to recruit research participants. While this did place limitations on the number and type of participants available, I also interpret these processes, in themselves, as data that provides insight into the boundary maintenance practices employed by both organizations and individuals. These practices operate in complex ways that are influenced by: how potential participants are positioned in terms of their respective access to information and technology; the relations of power and vulnerability within a given context; and the informal and formal rules which govern organizations. In addition to these central research participants, I also had semi-formal and informal interactions with numerous students, caregivers, community members, and school staff. This occurred throughout my volunteering (at the school and at a nearby community organization), during a discussion that I facilitated with the school's Student Leadership Committee, and at the P.A.T.H. planning event. While not part of the formal research process, these interactions did result in collaboratively produced brainstorming documents and/or reflective researcher fieldnotes that were reviewed during the data analysis process.

Selecting and applying data collection methods

Literature on the process of conducting research with children and youth emphasizes the importance of employing data collection methods that are accessible and developmentally appropriate (Wells, 2014; Twum-Danso, 2009). Hence, I knew it would be necessary to employ approaches that differed somewhat from those used with adult participants. However, in both cases, I wanted to ensure I could invite the telling of stories and allow for the collection of description-rich data.

Data collection with young participants: Combining methods

Working with the young participants required the use of multiple methods, including mental mapping, focus groups, and one-on-one semi-structured interviews. I had originally intended to use photovoice as the primary method for this project (see McIntyre, 2008, for

description); however, safety concerns raised in early conversations with school staff and the potential challenges associated with having this method approved by the school division led me to eliminate this as a method (although I intend to use it in future research projects).

Still wanting to employ some form of visual data collection strategy, I opted to utilize arts-based “mental mapping” in place of photovoice. Mental mapping includes a wide variety of visual/arts-based methods of data collection (ecomapping, timelines, etc.) and, as with other art-based methods, allows for the depictions of thoughts, feelings, and experiences that cannot be accurately captured in words, engages with participants on an affective level, and can be used as impactful examples within data dissemination (Tolia-Kelly, 2007; Finley, 2005; Spaniol, 2005). Two mental mapping activities were employed with the student participants to provide the foundation for the follow-up one-on-one/paired discussions and focus groups—the Tree of Life and educational journey mapping.

Developed by Denborough and Ncube (2008), the Tree of Life process has participants use the image of a tree to visually represent various aspects of life. Specifically, participants are asked to describe their skills, knowledge, and personal characteristics in the “trunk,” their hopes and dreams in the “branches,” gifts and special people in the “leaves,” daily activities in the “ground,” and sources of strength in the “roots.” This method was originally designed as a therapeutic tool to help young people tell a “second story” about themselves that redirects attention away from discussions of problems and deficiencies and toward a narrative of strength and capacity (Ncube, 2006 as cited in Denborough, 2008, p. 74-75). Hence, in addition to being used as a method for triggering storytelling, it is also intended to facilitate reflection and capacity development.⁹⁷ I discuss how I applied (and modified) this tool in chapter five.

The second method employed was “educational journey mapping.” Described by Tuck et al. (2008), this involves visually depicting schooling experiences (challenges, successes, etc.) in a manner that shows the connections between different life events. I modified this method to incorporate a broader discussion of experiences, asking students to depict significant moments in their lives. I tried to keep the parameters around the activity as open as possible, generally asking them to depict their early life, current life, and future hopes and dreams. In some respects, I saw

⁹⁷ In the version developed by Denborough and Ncube, these trees are then shared amongst a group of participants in a manner that leads into discussion of the various challenges that young people in the community face (Denborough, 2008; 2007). However, scheduling issues and confidentiality concerns made this broader sharing too challenging to implement in practice, although I would be interested in employing the collective aspect of this method in the future.

this as a way to provide the young participants with a chance to create their own depictions of the educational landscape from their particular vantage point (see Figure 13 and 14 on page 139).

Two data collection sessions were dedicated to completing these visuals (there were three participants who, due to scheduling issues, only completed the Educational Journey Map). Afterwards I spoke with each participant one-on-one about the various elements they depicted in their visuals. I asked them to “walk me through” what they had produced and used a variety of prompts to encourage further elaboration. These discussions operated like semi-structured interviews and, thusly, allowed me to “gather descriptive data in the subject’s own words” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 103) while also providing opportunities for unexpected insights and offering participants considerable control over the research process (O’Toole & Beckett, 2010; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). I found that these discussions would often naturally trigger the telling of stories about the students’ lives, past and present educational experiences, and future aspirations. With the exception of two participants who did not assent to audio recordings, these one-on-one discussions were audio recorded and transcribed by me. For the unrecorded sessions I relied on my own handwritten notes.

In addition, I employed a “mask decorating” activity as a data collection method (wherein participants were asked to depict how they believed they were perceived by others and/or how they perceived themselves). Scheduling made it difficult to have all participants complete this activity (by the end of June sixteen masks were fully or partially completed) and I found that participants were more inclined to use the activity as an opportunity to depict something that they found aesthetically appealing or that depicted their hobbies and interests⁹⁸—and, often, students would compare their masks to others and copy/borrow elements from each other’s designs (see page 140). That being said, I did have conversations with participants about their masks (the transcripts of which were used as data) and I found that completing the activity was a beneficial relationship-building exercise. After I had photographed every visual, participants were given back their work to keep, along with a small gift (art supplies and a sketchbook).⁹⁹

I had to make several “on-the-fly” adjustments to these the Educational Journey Map and Tree of Life methods. There were three participants who did not want to draw their own

⁹⁸ There were exceptions to this, including Asim—who came to Canada as a refugee from South Sudan—who wanted to show how other people “see him as sad” all the time (even though, as he stated, “he isn’t.”).

⁹⁹ Given that participants were not aware that they would be receiving this gift until after the research process was completed, it was not an incentive to participate.

Educational Journey Map but agreed to talk about the various elements one-on-one with me. One of these participants specifically stated that he did not want to draw the map because it would mean drawing things that represented “a bad time” in his past. The other two participants did not state why they did not want to visually depict their map and I did not press for an explanation (so as to respect their right to refuse). One of these participants preferred that I “scribed” our discussion and, collaboratively, we produced a map that she then kept.

In addition to these one-on-one discussions, I held focus groups with participants. I wanted to include this method because it can provide space for dialogue, collective critical reflection, and the co-construction of knowledge (Kamberelis & Dimitradis, 2005; Chiu, 2003). Focus groups would also provide an opportunity for students to hear, challenge, and reflect upon the perspectives of their peers. The size and length of these groups varied depending upon participant availability (e.g., if students were not in attendance at school that day) and, in some cases, took a form more akin to a paired interview. Two of the participants were only available for one data collection session and one was only available to meet twice, but otherwise I met with each group of participants three to five times. In addition, given that two participants had not assented to audio recordings, I had to schedule a separate session to accommodate this. All other focus group sessions were audio recorded and transcribed by me. While these variable numbers fall short of the ideal common in focus group research (wherein consistent groups of six to eight participants are generally considered preferable), I found that the small size of the groups often improved interpersonal dynamics by permitting more time for engagement with quieter participants, reducing the amount of off-discussion cross-talk, minimizing distractions, and helping to increase the general level of comfort.

In addition, holding smaller, shorter, and more frequent sessions allowed me to member-check my developing analysis with the participants. Given that these participants were not able to review typed transcriptions, I relied on reviewing the overall themes that had come up in previous discussion to confirm the accuracy of my phrasing and interpretation. I also kept a record of common ideas on flipcharts that were reviewed during each focus group session. Further, when discussing the topic of school completion more generally, we worked to develop a collective summary of the various facilitative and inhibitive factors identified through the use of a “tree image” (which I roughly sketched in my field journal). The length of these sessions



Figure 13 Rose's Educational Journey Map
(Photo: J. M. Hyde)

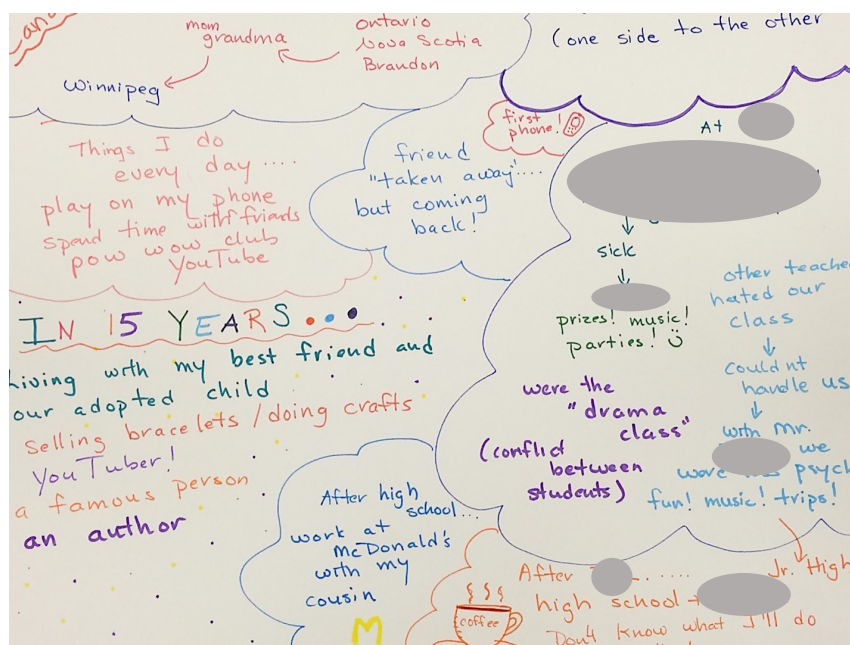


Figure 14 Cassandra's Educational Journey Map
Constructed with my assistance as scribe
(Photo: J. M. Hyde)



Figure 15 Emily's Mask (focus group four)



Figure 16 Tanya's Mask (focus group four)



Figure 17 Halima's Mask (focus group two)



Figure 18 Mia's Mask (focus group two)

During the mask decorating activity, participants would often borrow design elements from each other. "Anonymous" masks were also popular (see Figure 1). Similarly, participants would often co-construct narratives and their answers to my questions.

(Figure 15 to 18 Photos: J. M. Hyde)

varied depending upon the students' schedule and the availability of room bookings, but generally lasted around 40 minutes. All of these occurred at the research site in either a small conference room or the school's art room (spaces which provided privacy and ensured clear audio recordings). I generally kept the groups homogenous in terms of gender, but in one instance had a mixed group as the female participant expressed a preference for working with male students with whom she had a good interpersonal relationship. To garner basic demographic data, I employed a short survey that I completed with each participant.

Overall, these sessions were fast-paced, productive, and—according to several student participants—“fun” (a sentiment which I also shared). At times it was difficult to balance the need to maintain “structure” (and to abide by general school rules) with the ethical imperative to minimize coercion and respect the participants' right to refuse. As discussed by Morgan et al., (2002) this issue is to be expected when working with younger participants. Reflecting upon their own use of focus groups with seven- to eleven-year-olds, they state that,

[a] key task for the facilitator is to maintain an appropriate balance of power in terms of directing and controlling the group, and creating an atmosphere in which participants feel free to discuss. This task poses a greater challenge with children, in view of the inherent power imbalance and the tendency to view the facilitator as an authority figure, such as a teacher, and respond accordingly. This relationship therefore requires to be re-defined, and an atmosphere created that encourages spontaneous contribution. (p. 8)

Addressing this power imbalance and constructing a different relational space between the young participants and I required a complex, on-going re-negotiation of power. There were a few times where participants “pushed the boundaries” of this relational space (playing with the tape recorder, asking if they could go out early for recess, teasing or physically poking each other, etc.) and it was common for our discussions to veer off into very unexpected directions.¹⁰⁰

Drawing upon the suggestions of Morgan et al., (2002), Eriksson and Näsman (2012) and my own experiences working with young people, I employed a variety of strategies for “working with” (rather than against) this dynamic. This included: discussing my own positioning in the school as an “outsider” and volunteer; having the students call me by my first name; having the focus groups develop their own list of guidelines and using these to create a visual reminder that

¹⁰⁰ In one instance, at the start of a session (while I was handing out materials) one participant made a comment to another (in jest) that they found upsetting. In this instance I separated the two students and spoke with each individually. The student who felt insulted opted not to continue with that specific focus group and our subsequent meetings were one-on-one (I later found out that this exchange was the outcome of a longer series of classroom and recess interactions of which I was unaware).

was displayed in each session (see image on page 181); keeping sessions relatively short and ending them early if participants were having difficulty focusing (in these instances we would play games together); using humour; paraphrasing student responses to check my understanding; posing similar questions multiple times using different wording (and/or on different days); changing activities regularly; modifying activities as needed¹⁰¹; allowing participants to casually draw and/or “fidget” during discussions (which can be calming and help maintain focus); being attentive to interpersonal dynamics both within and outside of the focus group session (e.g., ensuring participant had at least one friend in the group help to foster participation); ensuring I had snacks and water on-hand; and observing nonverbal behaviour (e.g., watching for signs of boredom or a participant’s need for a “movement break”¹⁰²).

Suffice to say, employing these various strategies while also being attentive to my goals as a researcher required significant focus on my part and was physically, mentally, and emotionally *exhausting*.¹⁰³ I would be very hesitant to attempt this type of data collection strategy *by myself* in the future and suggest that this work is best accomplished by at least two researchers working in collaboration. This being said, I found these engagements—*especially* the ones that did not go quite as I had planned—offered rich insight into how young people negotiate relational power (with adults and each other) and work to achieve their goals.

Data collection with adult participants: Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted face-to-face with caregivers, school staff, and CBO representatives. For the parent/caregiver interviews I was permitted to use the school's Family Room (although I also met one participant at an off-site location). Interviews with school staff occurred in their classroom, the Family Room, or at an off-site location of the participant’s choosing. Most interviews with CBO representatives occurred at their places of work and often included a tour of the facilities (one also occurred at an off-site location). These interviews varied in length depending upon time constraints. School staff and caregiver interviews were generally 40 to 60 minutes while CBO representative interviews were around 60

¹⁰¹ For example, at times it was helpful to have participants write or draw short answers on “sticky notes” that were then shared and discussed collectively and in other instances I framed the questions as short hypothetical “stories.”

¹⁰² The term “movement break” was part of the discourse used by teachers and students. It refers to a short physical activity meant to help students “release” energy so they can focus in class.

¹⁰³ The various embodied physical and affective aspects of this research will be discussed further in future publications.

to 90 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed (by me) and submitted to the participant for review.

As defined by Elmir et al. (2001), “good interview questions are open ended, clear and aimed at eliciting responses that reflect the participant’s experiences” (p. 14). I sought to reflect that in the development of the interview guides created for each set of adult participants. I also employed a variety of probes (e.g., those suggested by Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) to encourage elaboration. I also noted each participant’s name, position, and gender as well as the exact date, time, and location of the interview.

Throughout the data collection process with adult participants, I noticed that interviews were often impacted by interpersonal relationships, time factors, and the extent to which individuals were generally familiar with academic research processes. Discussions with CBO representatives were often long with the participant leading our conversation. Many stated that they had participated in research before and were familiar with how it would proceed (e.g., they already knew the purpose of consent forms). One CBO participant even noted that I “wasn’t the first” and that he often “wonders what happens to the work that’s produced” by those who have spoken with him (George). Interviews with school staff were often much shorter so as to accommodate their busy schedules but were also more efficient due to our pre-established rapport and my existing familiarity with the school.

I did not have the same existing relationship and pre-established trust with the caregiver participants. Additionally, most of these participants did not have first-hand experience with academic research processes and I had to be mindful of the need to clarify how the research would proceed and the purpose of consent processes. I do not think that this created discomfort or negatively impacted the interview process; however, I did find that and, more generally, found that I had a larger role in guiding the interview process through the use of follow-up questions/probes (notably, I did not find this to be the case with the participant who also had a post-secondary education). This process reaffirmed to me that the onus of ensuring comfortable, equitable, and respectful interactions is primarily on the researcher and that it is necessarily to consider how each individual participant may approach the interview process based upon their own experience and positionality.



Figure 19 Posted focus group guidelines

This visual was used for one focus group. It provided an easy way for me to remind everyone of their right to confidentiality (which I explained in terms of privacy) and their right to refuse.

(Photo: J. M. Hyde)

Other data collection methods

In addition to the methods discussed above, I also kept my own descriptive and reflective fieldnotes when engaging with participants, after completing interviews/focus groups and other data collection activities, and while visiting the school. Following the advice of Bogdan and Biklin (2007), these notes included descriptions of physical settings and activities, the reconstruction of dialogue, descriptions of interactions, and researcher comments. Throughout the data gathering process I explored issues of interest and concern via the writing of analytical memorandums.

One unique aspect of these fieldnotes involved my participation in a visioning process—specifically a P.A.T.H. (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) Process— undertaken by the school that I also helped organize and fund. This was a day-long event that involved bringing together staff members, caregivers, students, community members, representatives of local CBOs, and three facilitators trained in the P.A.T.H. method. I was tasked with helping to generate student feedback and preparing three students (who were also participants in this research project) for the event. This involved conducting three lunch-hour sessions with the students and one brainstorming session with Eaglecrest's Student Leadership Group. Drawing upon the work of O'Brien, Pearpoint and Kahn (2015), I asked the luncheon participants to construct a rich vision of the future for their school and community. The in-depth work with the three participants was then fleshed out further in discussion with the leadership group. This information was shared at the P.A.T.H. event and incorporated into the visioning document. The general discussion notes, final visioning document, and my own fieldnotes from the event became part of the data corpus of this study.

Lastly, I examined official internal and external documents produced by the schools, the Winnipeg School Division, the Government of Manitoba, and associated community organizations. These included school newsletters, meeting minutes, policy documents, annual reports, and websites (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The purpose of engaging with these documents was to better understand the public narratives that are constructed regarding schools, the community, and CSP programming. Many of the findings from this work was incorporated into the literature review presented in chapter two.

Completing data analysis

This study led to the generation of a plethora of data sources including: transcripts from interviews and focus groups; extensive field notes; photos; student-produced work; and various documents and artifacts (school newsletters, meeting minutes, etc.). The data analysis process employed for this report¹⁰⁴ was characteristic of that commonly employed within grounded theory and thematic analysis methodologies. This involved an inductive process of identifying,

¹⁰⁴ I briefly experimented with other methods (such as narrative analysis and situational analysis) and am interested in further examining this study's data (using these different approaches) for future publications.

codifying, and articulating key themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Neuman, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999) that was undertaken both after and during data collection (so that the patterns identified could be used to shape subsequent interactions with participants) (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Neuman, 2000). There was also an element of participatory data analysis that occurred during the student focus groups (McIntyre, 2008; Cahill, 2007) wherein I regularly reviewed the arising themes at the start of each session and requested feedback.

To complete the analysis for this report, I reviewed all pieces of the data (to familiarize myself with the entire corpus) and then focused my attention on the transcripts, fieldnotes, and student-produced visuals. I then coded the data for potential themes relevant to the research questions—employing intensive (often line-by-line) coding on written materials. To work with the visual data, I began by moving the images into a word processing document, leaving ample space around each image so that I could engage with the images in writing and apply codes to these as well. This coding work was done completely by hand using printed documents and coloured pens.

Drawing upon Braun and Clarke (2006) I approached the data at the “latent level” so that I could move “beyond the semantic content of the data” and discern “the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations—and ideologies—that are theorized as shaping or informing” what was directly expressed by participants (p. 84). Further, employing Boeije’s (2002) approach to constant comparative method, I sought to read data transcripts, excerpts, codes, and developing themes both *with and against* each other and in light of the various sensitizing concepts (Bowen, 2006) discussed in chapter three (e.g., by considering discursive repertoires, public and hidden transcripts, and micropolitical negotiations) and my growing understanding of the dominant map of the educational landscape (discussed in chapter two).

I also drew upon narrative research (specifically narrative inquiry) when looking at the Educational Journey Maps and reviewing the related stories told by participants. This involved highlighting specific elements, including: “epiphanies” (descriptions of transformative events, moments of revealing insight, traumatic events, etc.); figurative terms and imagery; the manner in which the narrator connects the past, present, and future in their stories (the “temporality” of the narratives); the relationships described (the “sociality” of the narratives); and the places/contexts within which the stories occur (physical, social, cultural, etc.) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Chase, 2007).

After working through the entirety of the data set, I reviewed my developing code list, condensed these, and sorted them into potential themes. Each potential theme, associated codes, and relevant quotations were kept in a separate word processing document. These were fleshed out into memos that helped with the articulation and clarification of the emerging findings. I then used a variety of thematic maps to visually explore the potential relationships between codes and themes. These potential themes were reviewed, refined, combined, eliminated, or expanded until I was able to develop my final set of themes and excerpts from the data set. These themes were then further refined, named, and used as the basis for the finding chapters included in this report.

4.5 Summary: Best Laid Plans...

Conducting this study required numerous deviations from my original design to account for institutional gatekeeping, the formal and informal rules of my research site, and my own realization of my dependency on others (particularly school staff) for assistance. Navigating these challenges while achieving my own goals and maintaining my methodological and ethical commitments required significant flexibility, negotiation, and investment in the formation of interpersonal relationships. That being said, by the end of the process I had accumulated a rich body of written and visual data to draw upon.¹⁰⁵ The findings of my analysis are presented in the following chapters.

¹⁰⁵ One additional challenge that I faced in producing this report was the reproducibility of some of the visuals. Some of the images simply did not photograph well (e.g., were too faint or unclear). This is an issue that will be addressed when employing this method again in future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

MOVING FROM STORIES “ABOUT” TO STORIES “OF”: LEARNING TO (DOUBLE-)LISTEN

5.1 Introduction

Up until this point I have presented this study as though it proceeded in a linear manner—but this was certainly not the case. As is consistent with grounded theory-oriented research, the process was largely recursive. I went back and forth through the processes of collecting, analyzing, and writing up my findings (as memos and then draft chapters), sifting through a large and rich body of data that was often challenging to manage. Complicating matters was the fact that I could see multiple avenues for constructing a coherent analytical narrative. In some respects, this was like trying to solve a Rubik’s Cube that was constantly changing colours—I would establish the pattern on one side, only to have the others re-organize in response. I spun the data (and myself) around like this for several months—much longer than I anticipated. Eventually this analytical centrifuge allowed me to identify several critical concepts (e.g., the educational landscape) that I could then employ to develop a more refined set of research objectives and sensitizing concepts, thereby establishing a more coherent foundation for constructing this report.¹⁰⁶ In this chapter I present two of these critical concepts—*stories about* and *stories of*—detailing how they were developed, why I found them useful, and how they give shape to this report’s subsequent chapters.

5.2 A dilemma posed by rootless trees

As discussed in chapter four, when working with the young participants I employed arts-based research methods which, I believed, could help participants share and reflect upon their stories of lived experience. This included two main activities—the Tree of Life and Educational Journey Mapping. My intent was to have participants begin with the Tree of Life and follow this with the Educational Journal Map—thereby starting with a more abstract depiction of their self-concept and moving toward more concrete stories of experience. Having used the Tree of Life

¹⁰⁶ Overall, I found it difficult to articulate this messy and often very organic research process within the framework required by my degree-granting institution. I give much credit to my advisor, Dr. Jessica Senehi, for helping me work within and press against these parameters.

myself in numerous storytelling workshops with various age groups (including very young children), I anticipated that this would be the most effective way to implement this data collection strategy.

However, early on in the process it was quite clear that I would need to adjust my approach. I began using the Tree of Life in three of my focus groups and found that, while participants readily discussed their aspirations, personal characteristics, and skills, they were quick to shut down any discussion regarding their sources of strength and support. Visually this resulted in a host of rootless trees (depicted on page 190) while our debriefing conversations resonated with a striking sense that, when asked directly about their sources of strength, the young people defined themselves as existing in a state of isolation. Ethan, for example, suggested that this is something he reminds himself of daily:

JULIE: Why did you decide to draw your roots like this?

ETHAN: Oh—cause “me, myself, and I.”

JULIE: Me, myself, and I?

ETHAN: Yeah. Like—when I wake up, I open my window and I go like—I look out my window and I’m like—mmm—like, it’s on me.

JULIE: Like, “It’s *all* on me?” [*makes a downward “pressing” motion with her hands*]. Or, like, “I got this” [*gives a double “thumbs up”*].

ETHAN: Both, like both.

Jordan, meanwhile, was less specific. He emphasized that he was a “strong person,” but when I asked where his strength comes from, he stated, “I honestly don’t know. I just, like, I just moved different places. That’s all I know. I just moved to all these different places and I don’t even know.” Others completely pushed aside my questioning with firmness or a kind of humorous exasperation—implying, perhaps, that their statements should be self-explanatory. In some instances, money and material goods were included as roots with participants emphasizing that they could use money to buy treats or other goods that would make them (temporarily) “feel better” (e.g., Kennedy stated, “Well, I can get myself something, like a RockStar [energy drink] and then I’ll feel a bit better”).



Figure 20 Jamal's Tree of Life
 Roots: "To Myself"

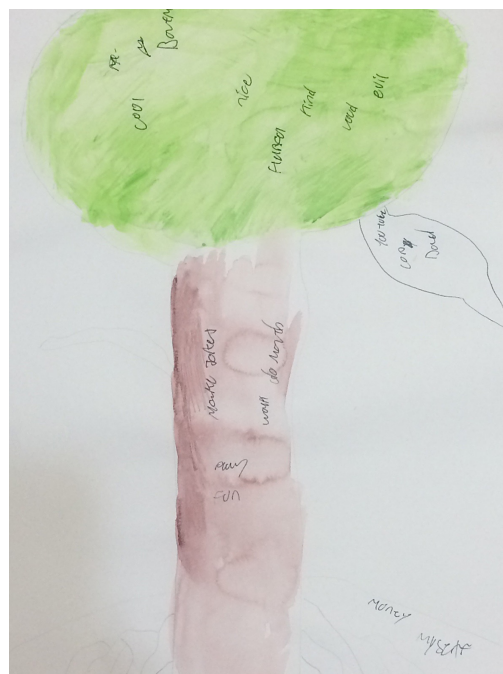


Figure 21 Ethan's Tree of Life
 Roots: "Money" "Myself"

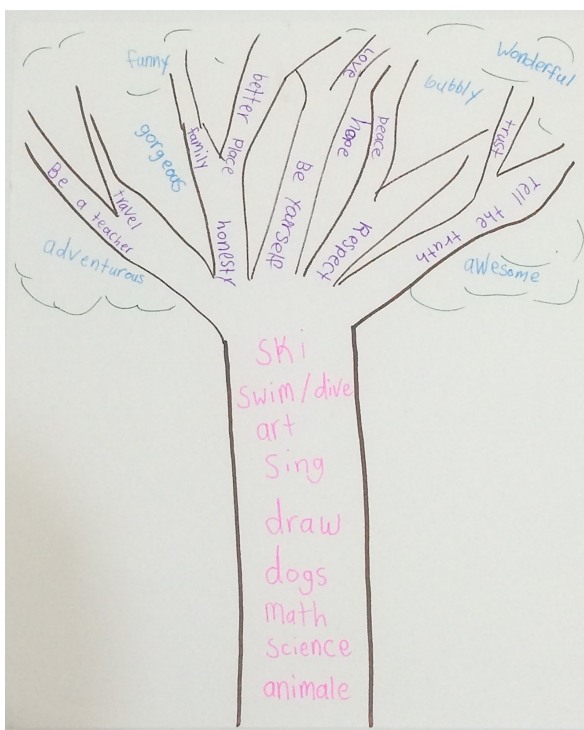


Figure 22 Tanya's Tree of Life
 Did not want to include or discuss roots



Figure 23 Kennedy's Tree of Life
 Roots: "Money"

(Figures 20 to 23 Photos: J. M. Hyde)

Perplexed by these interactions, I shared this observation with several school staff members. They offered two main interpretations: on one hand, staff suggested that this occurred because the students found “thinking in abstractions” very difficult. It was common for adults to suggest that this was due to the presumed age-based developmental capacities of young people *as well as* the specific circumstances faced by Eaglecrest students. For example, one staff member noted that “it’s hard for any kid to think that way” while also suggesting that Eaglecrest students, “live their lives very much moment-to-moment” and that these daily experiences of instability and crisis make undertaking personal reflection very difficult. The second interpretation suggested that the students’ “difficulty” with this activity was due to experiences of personal trauma and dislocation. One staff member stated that students find discussing their “roots” very painful “because, for many of them, their roots have been cut” (e.g., due to the death of a parent or involvement with child welfare services).

While I could see how these factors (age and development, experiences of constant crisis, trauma/pain, and disconnection) could be at play, I did not believe they were sufficient explanatory theories. Numerous practitioners (including myself) have used the Tree of Life (and other narrative methods) with very young children,¹⁰⁷ people who have experienced (or are experiencing) trauma and crisis, and people who have developmental differences and/or neurological impairments (Lee, 2017; Stiefel, Anson & Hinchcliffe, 2017; Lyons & Mundy-Taylor, 2012; Painter, Cook, & Silverman, 1999); indeed, the Tree of Life activity is designed for working with individuals in these circumstances. Further, I found that the young participants would readily discuss difficult events and challenges *as well as* sources of strength (e.g., family, friends, pets, religion, and music) if these subjects came up naturally within conversation (e.g., while we were reviewing their Educational Journal Maps); hence, they would discuss their roots indirectly, but would respond to direct questioning by closing off further dialogue.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Further, existing scholarship on the capacities of young people suggests that while age and development do impact a person’s capacity to express abstractions and use narrative in a manner that corresponds with formal language rules and expectations, even very young children can think and speak symbolically if provided with a supportive context (Smeed, 2012; Phillips, 2010; Reese, et al., 2010; Nicolopoulou, 2008; Davis, 2007; Farmer, 2004; Mallan, 1999; Berman, 1995). That being said, the descriptive and affective “richness” of these narratives may be impacted by the young person’s experiences (Fivush, et al., 2010; Weeks & Pasupathi, 2010)—a phenomenon discussed further in chapter six.

¹⁰⁸ This finding suggests that the issue with the activity was not (as one might presume, and I certainly considered) due to my own actions or relationship with participants.

A similar pattern was evident when exploring the student's perceptions of the Eaglecrest community as a whole. For example, in one session I asked Dawn and Avery how they envisioned a "good place to live." Dawn responded by foreclosing further conversation:

DAWN: I don't really know what a good neighbourhood would be like because I'm used to hearing about murders and stuff happening around here. So, I don't really know what a good community would be.

AVERY: What would be the opposite of it?

DAWN: I don't know.

AVERY: There's always something good about it.

DAWN: Maybe, there would be more police cars driving around? [Which she later explained would help to keep the community "safe."]

In this manner Dawn defines the Eaglecrest community as a violent place requiring police surveillance while also *defining herself* as someone who has never lived in a "good neighborhood" and who was, therefore, incapable of envisioning how this might look.

However, later on in the same focus group, Dawn provided a far more nuanced description of the community and her interactions within it. This occurred when I asked her and Avery to brainstorm what kinds of activities or resources they think should be offered to young people in the area:

AVERY: We could, like, do sports and stuff.

DAWN: They have that at the Recreation Centre. The gym will be open for kids who want to play hockey or basketball and stuff. And then there is another room open for like arts and crafts and stuff. And sometimes there's the library for girls to do their nails.

AVERY: Really?

DAWN: [*nods*] And then, at the Friendship Centre they have pool tables. They have some computers. They usually play a movie. Both centers, they both give out food. They'll make supper for kids that are there. Yeah. And they take kids out with sleds and to Powwow and stuff.

Dawn continued to describe what was available in the community at various points in our conversation, interjecting again:

AVERY: Maybe, we could have, like, a community get-together, that would be good.

DAWN: Oh, they already do something like that at the Recreation Centre. Like, every so often, that big thing in the field? They invite, like, the whole community to come and they have like a bouncing castle for the little kids and face painting. Most of the time it's in the summer, but sometimes in the spring.

And then, again, a few minutes later:

AVERY: Maybe, like, we could have more like cultural stuff?

DAWN: They already do a lot of stuff like that. Like how to use a hand drum. And some places take kids to sweats and Powwows and every now and then they'll have people come in and teach them Powwow dancing.

And *again*:

DAWN: Sometimes, in the mornings, you can smell like this really horrible smell and it's, like, from the factory on Cane Street.¹⁰⁹

AVERY: Oh! It smells bad.

JULIE: Oh! Yeah, I smell that in my neighbourhood sometimes too.

DAWN: But what I *do* like is the smell of bread. Fresh bread. Cause, like, on Saturday and Sunday morning you can smell fresh bread cause the bread store that's, like, right over there [*pointing*], they make their own bread.

JULIE: You mean the North Bakery¹¹⁰?

DAWN: [*affirmative*] mmhmm. They make their own bread and then—the back part of it is where they make their bread and then, the first part is the store, that's where they sell it. It smells really good. You can mainly smell it on Saturday mornings, depending on where you live. I smell it cause I live closer to it.

Thus, Dawn contradicts her original story about the community by describing all of the places, people, programs, and even smells that she has directly experienced—offering a counter-narrative that also highlights her own knowledge and ability to navigate various community spaces (which challenges her original closed, deficit-driven story of self). In this manner she reframes the Eaglecrest community as a place possessing a wealth of accessible, child/youth-friendly experiences, people, and places. This does not discount the extent to which violence impacts the day-to-day lives of residents, but rather adds nuance to the existing story—thereby

¹⁰⁹ Quotation was modified to maintain anonymity of research site.

¹¹⁰ A pseudonym.

de-stabilizing the reductionist narrative which defines the community *by* this violence and forecloses visions of the future.

Similarly, the informal stories participants told while discussing their Educational Journey Map activity (and within the context of general conversation) offered a counter to the reductionist narrative of isolation triggered by the Tree of Life activity. Realizing this, I went back to the comparably thinner initial stories and sought to identify nuances which suggested the existence of more complex narratives. I noticed that these initial stories often implied the existence of other people, places, and resources that participants regularly draw upon (who was Jordan moving with and how did he get to all of those “different places”? Where does Kennedy buy her Rockstar?). Further, many of these stories offered a narrative of self that highlighted the teller’s capacity and desire to act as a self-determinizing subject (e.g., consider Ethan’s story of “me, myself, and I” and his daily “I got this” ritual).

At this point I faced a dilemma as a researcher. I could have just continued with the Tree of Life process as I had originally intended, allowing these circumscribed narratives of self and community to sit—unexamined—in my conversations with participants and in my data corpus. However, this approach would contradict the underlying ethical principles which governed my methodological approach. As stated in chapter four, my study design reflected the philosophies of John Dewey and Paulo Freire and, thus, was meant to help “generate a new relation between a human being and her environment...that opens up new possibilities for being in the world” (Clandinin & Rosiak, 2007, p. 39). This underlying purpose, along with the pedagogical thrust of Youth Participatory Action Research, meant that I was tasked not only with exploring how participants made sense of their world, but to also help develop new understandings of self and society that can guide future action. This, I decided, necessitated a second exploration of the initial stories told during the Tree of Life activity and led me to adjust how I approached the discussion of supports and roots in subsequent focus group sessions.

5.3 Insights from narrative therapy

Seeking direction on how to proceed, I reviewed literature on the theory and practice of narrative therapy (the field from which the Tree of Life activity is based). Scholarship in this area suggests that individuals and collectives (e.g., families, communities, and nations) often hold “dominant stories” regarding personal and social experiences (Morgan, 2000). These

dominant stories significantly impact one’s sensemaking frame¹¹¹ and, consequently, direct future action. While largely shaped by lived experience and social interaction, these stories are also impacted by contextual factors and broader discourses and, if unchallenged, may help replicate existing relations of power by justifying the status quo and circumscribing envisioned alternatives—much like how the dominant map of the educational landscape (discussed in chapter two) obfuscates the operations of colonialism and neoliberalism while also limiting research, policy, and practice.

These dominant stories are often reductive and “thin”—centralizing personal and/or collective deficit and reinforcing dehumanizing labels at the expense of more complex, nuanced understandings of experience and identity (Combs & Freedman, 2012; Morgan, 2000). These internalized frames can lead to (what Lerner, 1986, terms) “surplus powerlessness”—a constraining,

set of beliefs and feelings about ourselves [that] leads us to feel that we will lose, that we will be isolated, that other people won’t listen, and that in turn leads us to act in ways in which these very fears turn out to be true. (p. 13)

In other words, these thin stories are adopted to the point where self-imposed limits on action serve to tighten those constraints already put in place by structural conditions and personal circumstance, creating a reinforcing cycle of self-fulfilling prophecies. This concept is not meant to personalize oppression, but rather to illustrate how it may be internalized by individuals and collectives—a phenomenon that reduces resistance to exploitation and helps to maintain the power of the privileged (Freire, 2011; Memmi, 1965). Consequently, thin deficit-oriented narratives can be understood as a key component of biopolitical power.

This does not, however, mean that individuals are without agency. Rather, people construct meaning from their experiences through engagement with the discursive repertoires and narrative frames that are available to them. Cense and Ganzenvoort (2019) use the term “storyscape” in reference to the totality of these resources. More specifically, this is “the surrounding landscape of interconnected stories with which we inevitably interact” (p. 572), it is

the combination of the narrative repertoires and normativity provided by the social and cultural context and the narrative audience to which the narrator responds. It is not limited to specific contents within a person’s narratives but *asks which narrative world is presented to an individual and how she or he constructs a life narrative to respond to that world.* (p. 572, my emphasis)

¹¹¹ The overall frame which shapes “the meanings we place on the events in our lives” (Davis, 2008, p. 2).

This broader “narrative context” (p. 572) (or “narrative world”) shapes how an individual constructs meaning and takes action. The authors suggest that this is a two-stage process¹¹² wherein,

[f]irst, against the backdrop of the storyscape, individuals develop a life story by reflecting on their embodied experiences and the perceived “reality” around them (“emplotment”). In this “referential negotiation” people turn material reality into narrative. The next negotiation is the “performative negotiation”, in which people turn narrative into material and behavioural reality and facilitate new experiences and changes in reality, interacting with their narrative audience (“enactment”). (p. 572)

Hence, the capacity of individuals to reflect upon and interpret reality (their capacity for “referential negotiation”) is largely determined by the storyscape they are drawing upon (as one can only “emplot” experience within an existing narrative frame). This, subsequently, shapes the “enactment” of the narrative within the world, which itself involves “performative negotiation” with material and social realities.

Cense and Ganzenvoort’s (2019) conceptualization of the meaning-making process resonates strongly with Freire’s (2011) description of the “constant dialectical relationship” between subjectivity and objectivity (p. 50), further elaborating the mechanisms of this interaction. Essentially, these storyscapes shape each individual’s sensemaking frame, impacting how one interprets and articulates both their own experiences and those of others (which, in turn, shapes future action). Further, one’s access to resources and opportunities (which is largely determined by social location) directly affects one’s lived, embodied reality (including affective and bodily sensations such as fear, hunger, and joy)—thereby impacting the types of experiences that one can draw upon to derive subjective meaning.¹¹³ In other words, the landscape shapes the storyscape, and vice versa. Further, again resonating with Freire (2011), Cense and Ganzenvoort (2019) suggest that storyscapes (like landscapes) are not natural, but rather social constructions—that is, the product of the “storyscaping” (p. 572) undertaken by various social actors (e.g., through the construction of policy, educational initiatives, and social advocacy

¹¹² While I find the distinctions made between these stages conceptually helpful, I do not believe this should be interpreted as a clean, linear process.

¹¹³ I find the symbol of a Geoboard (a common tool used in elementary-level mathematics classes) useful for explaining this connection. The pegs of the Geoboard are the individual’s experiences, while the shapes made by the elastic bands constitute the meaning they derive from their experiences. However, people have differential access to both pegs (experiences) and rubber bands (narrative resources), which can place limits upon the shapes (the meanings) they are able to construct and display.

work).¹¹⁴ Individuals are, therefore, actually “embedded in multiple storyscapes defined by different and often contrasting audiences” (p. 572) who require that the narrator follow specific conventions in order to be understood (or “legible”).¹¹⁵ I would further argue that these various “audiences” differ significantly in their access to the power and resources required to undertake storyscaping, with more privileged actors (individuals and collectives) having the capacity to make far stricter *legibility demands*.¹¹⁶ Consequently, a more privileged position on the landscape increases one’s capacity to undertake storyscaping—which one can then use to justify existing relations of power. This being said, individuals still possess “narrative agency” (Ungar, 2001); they construct their stories, even though the components they can use to do so are determined by the narrative world(s) within which they are embedded.

Narrative therapy is meant to help participants challenge and change dominant narratives, sensemaking frames, and storyscapes by identifying the various “subordinated stories” (that have been obscured) and then enriching, complexifying, and “thickening” these alternative sensemaking frames (Combs & Freedman, 2012). To do so, the therapist acts as an “outsider witness” (O’Dwyer & Ryan, 2012, p. 234) who approaches these stories with an “engaged curiosity” (p. 235)—listening deeply, asking questions, validating and retelling stories heard, and inviting further elaboration by the participant. This often means engaging in a kind of “double listening” that is attentive to the explicitly stated as well as the “absent but implicit” (Carey et al., 2009)—that is, the “out-of-focus background against which the expressed experience of distress is discerned” (p. 321). This means listening for resistances, responses, resources and “clues to what people treasure” (Combs & Freedman, 2012, p. 1038). The therapist draws attention to these features and then invites the participant to incorporate them into the new or modified story (or stories) being developed (O’Dwyer & Ryan, 2012, p. 235).

These “preferred” stories offer “evidence that counters the dominant narrative” (p. 236) and provide language and frames (alternative storyscape elements) for re-considering one’s self-

¹¹⁴ The term storyscaping is largely associated with the field of marketing. Cense and Ganzenvoort (2019) defines this as “the purposeful activity of creating a meaningful and multidimensional ‘landscape’ of meanings that invite the audience to envision themselves as inhabiting that landscape” (p. 572).

¹¹⁵ Wanzo’s description of the conventions required for “sentimental political storytelling” could be interpreted as an example of one such storyscape.

¹¹⁶ I am suggesting the term *legibility demands* to connote the discursive parameters that one must adhere to in order to be “heard.” Those subjected to stricter legibility demands must work harder under stricter conditions. This concept resonates with Spivak’s (1988) discussion regarding the exclusion and misrepresentation of the experiences of the subaltern.

concept, personal history, and potential for future action. As suggested by Stolorow (2013),¹¹⁷ this requires both a “loosening” of existent frames and the articulation of the previously unspeakable:

[a]s the tight grip of old organizing principles becomes loosened, as emotional experiencing thereby expands and becomes increasingly nameable within a context of human understanding, and as what one feels becomes seamlessly woven into the fabric of whom one essentially is, there is an enhancement of one’s very sense of being. (p. 387)

This process of re-narration also serves to recognize and foster the participant’s “narrative agency” and sense of “discursive empowerment” (Ungar, 2001)—that is, to develop their capacity to negotiate meaning and “weave” together their life story (Benhabib 1999, p. 344) so as to help them “[resist] the problem-saturated identities imposed on them” and their communities (Ungar, 2001, p. 144; Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014; Cense & Ganzevoort, 2019).

However, narrative therapy also requires a fundamental re-consideration of the patient/therapist relationship—one which differs significantly from the “Cartesian doctrine of the isolated mind” (Atwood & Stolorow, 2016, p. 106) that dominates psychological practice. The goal is not the objective assessment of a patient’s experiences or perceptions, but rather the formation of a “relational home” through the creation of a dialogical space wherein emotions and experiences may be placed, “held,” and subsequently processed (Stolorow, 2013, p. 385; Mitchell, 2016; Stolorow, 2014; 2012; Hvidt, 2013). In her work with young people in the foster care system, Michelle (2016) suggests that the creation of this relational home requires that the person’s experiences be “enfranchised” (in the sense of being set free and granted status) and that this requires the meeting of basic needs, direct communication, affirmation, and recognition/acknowledgement of what the storyteller considers to be “matters of significance” (p. 8). Thus, overall, helping an individual develop thicker, preferred stories requires attentiveness to the cognitive, affective, and relational nature of experience.

¹¹⁷ While Stolorow (2014) does not explicitly label himself a narrative therapist, his dialectical and contextual approach to therapy resonates with this field. He suggests that “therapeutic inquiry is a dialogical process in which each participant, in varying degrees and at different times, engages in reflection upon three interrelated domains—the meanings organizing one’s own experience, the meanings organizing the other’s experience, and the dynamic intersubjective system constituted by these interacting worlds of meaning. Furthermore, in this dialogical process each participant...continually draws on his or her own experiential world in search of analogues for the possible meanings governing the other’s experiences. Empathic (-introspective) understanding is thus grasped as an emergent property of a dialogical system, rather than as a privileged possession of an isolated mind” (p. 81). This is consistent with the relational and constructivist orientation of storytelling practice and narrative therapy.

5.4 Stories about and stories of: Complexifying narrative(s)

Several central concepts from narrative therapy are readily applicable to what had transpired during my early focus group work. The stories of personal isolation and community scarcity and violence indicate a powerful—but also thin and reductive—dominant story of deficit that reflects broader storyscapes (and landscapes) which have impacted the Eaglecrest community for over a century. Elements of this story reverberated across the young participants’ descriptions of self and community and were also evident in the staff members’ perceptions (which suggested presumptions about both Eaglecrest students and the developmental capacities of children as a whole). Indeed, these *stories about self* and *stories about place* were often linked, with individuals (like Dawn) defining themselves in terms of their physical and/or social locations—hence, the stigma and labels associated with the sense of place were transferred onto the sense of self. These dominant stories subordinate depictions of experience that do not fit their discursive parameters and forecloses¹¹⁸ the possibility of alternative sensemaking frames. Thusly, the agency and capacity of both the people and the place—and the root causes of the violence and harm that they are experience—are rendered illegible and incomprehensible to both the storyteller and the audience (hence, silencing is best understood as a contextually-embedded, relational phenomenon). From the perspective of narrative therapy, this suggests the existence of surplus powerlessness amongst the research participants, which has made it difficult for them to recognize, articulate, and employ strategies that would address the “limiting situation[s]” (Freire, 2011, p. 49) that they encounter.

While the concepts of dominant stories and surplus powerlessness offer a helpful frame for interpreting my observations, they also pose the risk of reinforcing notions of essentialized deficit (locating the cause of disempowerment within individuals who have uncritically internalized certain social messaging). To counter this, I suggest, one must also consider—through the use of “double listening” (Carey et al., 2009)—the indicators of narrative agency that were also apparent in the participants’ stories. For example, one can re-read the active shutting down of conversations, the pushing aside of questioning, and the descriptions of coping behaviours and daily rituals as a means through which the young people worked to maintain (and

¹¹⁸ The term *forecloses* is used here in a double sense—as both a *ruling out* of options and having one’s alternatives *repossessed* by more powerful actors to whom one is indebted.

perform) a coherent identity while also validating their own acts of self-reliance and self-determination in the face of difficult circumstances.

Ungar (2001) suggests that this type of self-validation is common amongst young people experiencing challenges. They do not, he argues, simply accept limiting narratives; rather, they engage with storyscapes in active processes of self-narration and identity selection that “maximize their discursive empowerment and ensure self-perceptions as resilient” (p. 150) and, by doing so, they are “purposefully seeking ways to enhance whatever self-definitions they can control as healthy and powerful youth” (p. 147). They are not, therefore, simply parroting the essentialist and reductive messages that they have internalized; rather, they are using their agency to work with the limited discursive repertoires and narrative frames that have been made available to them in order to establish a coherent sense of self and to articulate that which has been largely rendered illegible.

The cause of surplus powerlessness is, consequently, not located within individuals (that is, within their own false consciousness¹¹⁹) but rather within the paucity of narrative resources available to them via the narratives worlds within which they are embedded¹²⁰—even though it is the individual’s subjective perceptions toward which interventions are generally directed. Consequently, it becomes important not to completely dismiss or pathologize dominant stories, even if these are limiting and problematic; rather, one must recognize that these still serve key functions for the individual and that the very existence of these stories provides evidence of the teller’s capacity to interpret and respond to the world.

Subsequently, I found it more helpful to primarily apply the terms *stories about* and *stories of* in place of *dominant stories* and *subordinate stories*—and to modify how the latter concepts were used. I employ the term *story about* in reference to any narrative that seeks to define the meaning or characteristics of a person, place, or phenomenon. These stories generally simplify what is being described and, in doing so, may erase complexities and contradictions that would call the proposed definition into question. These types of stories often draw upon

¹¹⁹ Generally associated with Marxist theory, the term false consciousness refers to “representations of reality [held by oppressed classes] that conceal or obscure their own subordination, exploitation, and domination. Such representations reflect the internalization of beliefs held and disseminated by, and to the benefit of, the dominant classes in society” (Newman, Johnston, & Lown, 2015, p. 328).

¹²⁰ Much in the same way that “sentimental political storytelling” (Wanzo, 2009) is limited by the discourses which determine what forms of suffering and action are capable of generating affective responses in the intended (comparatively privileged) listening audience.

hegemonic social discourses but can also challenge them (much like how the *story about* education told by an adherent to neoliberalism would differ from that of a critical pedagogue). In contrast, a *story of* is a descriptive recounting of lived experience. These stories are generally told chronologically and are often *messy* constructions that leave much of the interpretive work up to the listener—whereas the teller of a *story about* is more directive and didactic in their performance.

Both types are (like all stories) constructions, although I argue that *stories of* are far more improvisational and dialogically developed, with the teller and listener collaboratively seeking to make meaning from the events being described. These two types of stories are also interrelated, with *stories about* largely structuring the frames used to interpret experience (that is, to interpret *stories of*); and, hence, I would classify a *story about* that has significant impact on one's sensemaking frame as a *strong* or *dominating* story. In tandem, *stories of* that contradict dominating *stories about* are generally *subordinated* (rendered invisible, pathological, unimportant, or illegible) because of the challenge they pose. In this sense both *stories about* and *stories of* can be interpreted as actants—as forces which *act upon*¹²¹ individuals, collectives, and other stories—as well as constructions created by those same subjects. This relationship between *stories about* and *stories of* is consistent with a constructivist epistemology; indeed, a storyteller and listener may have very different sensemaking frames (and different *dominant stories about*) and, consequently, interpret *stories of experience* in very different ways. Consequently, researchers listening to *stories of* need to create space where there can be a dialogical negotiation of meaning “that compares and contrasts each [participant's] constructs of reality” with the goal of developing a “consensus...on a construction that is better informed than it was before” (Wilson, 2008, p. 37). This, I decided, was the approach I had to take.

Applying these concepts to what transpired in the focus groups, it is possible to identify commonly held *dominating stories about* the Eaglecrest community and the young people who live there. These stories define the community as deficient and violent and highlight *stories about* that reinforce that assessment while, simultaneously, marginalizing those *stories of* (such as Dawn's) that contradict it. While problematic, this definitional story still serves a purpose, helping people interpret their experiences of the place, as well as their own position in relation to it. One could argue, in the absence of a discourse which helps young people identify the

¹²¹ Stories, then, are active—they structure, they dominate, they subordinate, they highlight, and they obscure.

structural roots of harm, the community itself is now largely identified as the cause of it—a rhetorical move participants employ so as to avoid situating the blame upon themselves. Similarly, the *dominating stories about* each individuals' supports and roots emphasize scarcity and collective deficit (offering no space for talking about experiences that contradict this narrative) while, at the same time, productively contributing (albeit problematically) to a strong sense of self-determination. The issue of concern, then, is not the individual's lack of narrative agency, but the extent to which *narrative vulnerability* is manufactured by the oppressive storyscape and landscape.

Drawing upon these new understanding and interpretations, I sought to alter my data collection method in a manner that would help participants inscribe various *stories of* experience into their dominant *story about* self and community, presuming that this kind of “contrapuntal” (Said, 1994) storytelling would enrich and *loosen* dominating stories about, without completely dismissing or destabilizing them. Further, I wanted to respect the young participant's capacity for narrative agency—and how they exercised it by creating their *stories about*—while also expanding the array of narrative resources available to them. This called for the identification and enrichment of *subordinated stories* (of and about) and the practice of listening for the “absent but implicit” (Carey et al., 2009) in both marginalized narratives *and* dominating ones.

5.5 Adapting the data collection methods

Drawing upon the concepts of *stories about* and *stories of* as well as insights from narrative therapy, I went back to the focus group participants who had created the “rootless tress” and held additional sessions and/or paired interviews (depending upon each participant's schedule). Specifically, I sat with each student (individually) to discuss their Educational Journey Maps and asked them to tell me stories about the life events they depicted. While doing so, I asked questions that highlighted aspects of their stories that suggested personal, relational, social, material, or cultural resources that they may have drawn upon. When the student and I had, collaboratively, come up with a way of naming these features, I “scribed” them on a template tree that I had created. Often, to trigger stories of experience, I would also draw upon what I had observed in other (school or community) settings—as in the following exchange with Jordan:

JULIE: You've talked about taking care of your cousins a lot and, the other day, I saw these two little kids come up and give you a big hug—

JORDAN: [*laughs*] Yeah, those were my cousins. I take care of them all the time.

JULIE: Ah cool. So, you take care of your cousins and it seems like they, well, *like* you [*laughs*]—

JORDAN: [*laughs*] Yeah, they do.

JULIE: Okay, so what do you think that says about you?

JORDAN: I guess I like helping little kids. And I'm nice to them.

JULIE: [*writing*] Okay, helps little kids [*pause*] nice [*pause*] When I hear that I think about someone who is "kind."

JORDAN: [*affirmative*] Yeah.

JULIE: Can I add that?

JORDAN: [*affirmative*] Yeah.

JULIE: Cool. Do you see your cousins a lot?

JORDAN: Yeah.

JULIE: You can add them to the tree too if you want.

JORDAN: Oh! Yeah.¹²²

JULIE: What do you do when you get together with your cousins?

This was followed by additional discussions of Jordan's family members, daily activities, interests, and qualities. After these one-on-one discussions with individuals, I would facilitate extended discussions amongst participants about what had been discussed. At times this would actually become a means for participants to share information with each other (e.g., they would tell their peers about different community organizations).

The underlying purpose of this was to generate a "fuller" tree that provided a more accurate reflection of their lived experiences and complexify the *stories about* self and community that the participants told to me, to each other, and to themselves. This was done primarily by using the Educational Journey Map to identify specific experiences which could then be narrated by the participant as a *story of experience*. While this did not result in a plethora of additions to all of the visuals produced (although this was the case in many instances), this activity did consistently open up space for more complex conversations. For example, as

¹²² Jordan wanted his cousins' specific names on his tree, so these are obscured in the image on page 204.

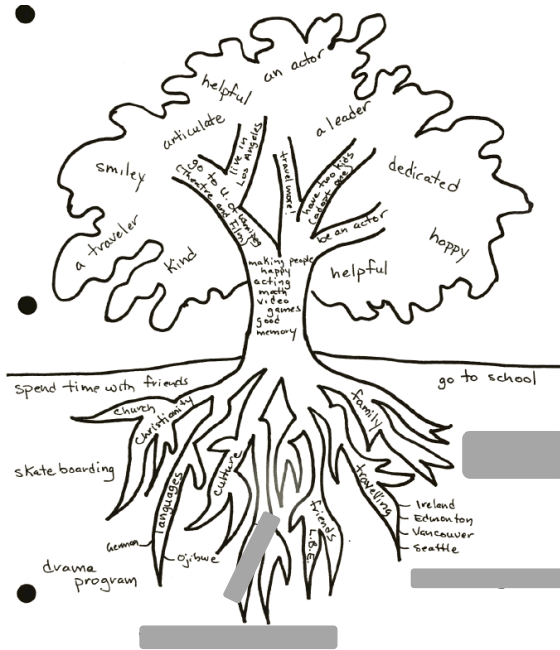


Figure 24 Dawn's Co-Constructed Tree of Life

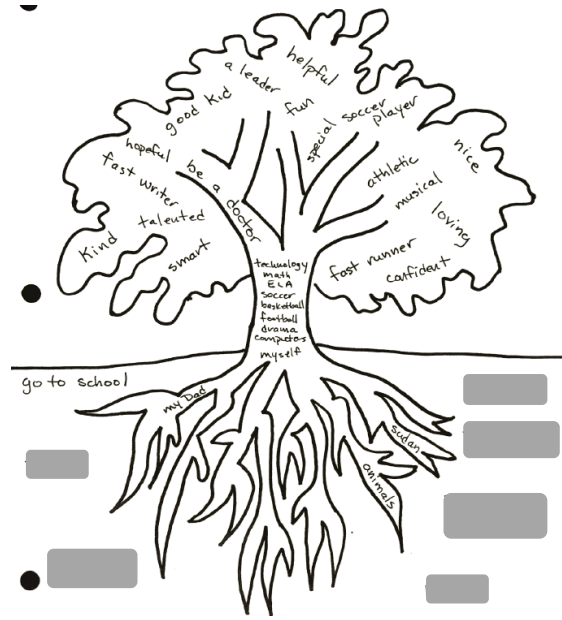


Figure 25 Jamal's Co-Constructed Tree of Life

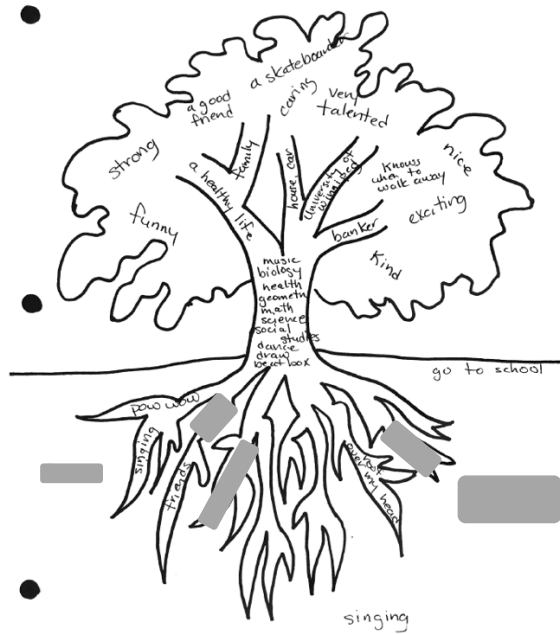


Figure 26 Jordan's Co-Constructed Tree of Life

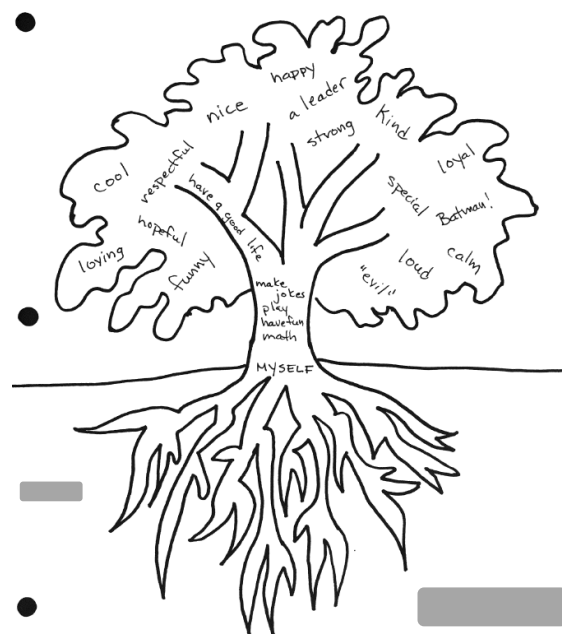


Figure 27 Ethan's Co-Constructed Tree of Life

(Figures 24 to 27 Photos: J. M. Hyde)

depicted in his Co-Constructed Tree of Life, Ethan continued to emphasize his own level of self-reliance (“me, myself, and I”), although this was then merged with stories of his engagement with various community organizations, as in the following excerpt:

There’s the Rec Centre and the Friendship Centre. The place at the back of Friendship is called the Den. At the Rec Centre I usually help clean up so I can be in the draw [a raffle wherein tickets are awarded for helping].

I hang out with lots of my friends. And there are some adults there that play with us. So, what we do there, there’s like this place where we can, like, chill. There’s like computers, a flat-screen TV. We’re getting new stuff, we’re getting two PS3 [video game consoles], more computers, more free trips. We’re going on trips, we’re going to Skyzone, we’re going Paintballing.

First, I was going to the Rec Centre, but then, my friend, he told me that there’s this place called Friendship. So, we went there together.

In addition to identifying two community organizations that provide Ethan access to opportunities, resources, and adult support, he also indicates how he and his friends navigate these different sites—sharing information and accessing spaces together. Later on in this discussion, Ethan and I were also able to discuss his daily “I got this” ritual in more depth, thereby highlighting the value of this daily practice and his associated sense of self-reliance. Other participants identified their own personal characteristics and capacities as sources of strength—noting how hobbies, personal and religious belief systems, behavioural strategies (e.g., mindfulness practices), and knowledge about the world help generate a strong sense of self.

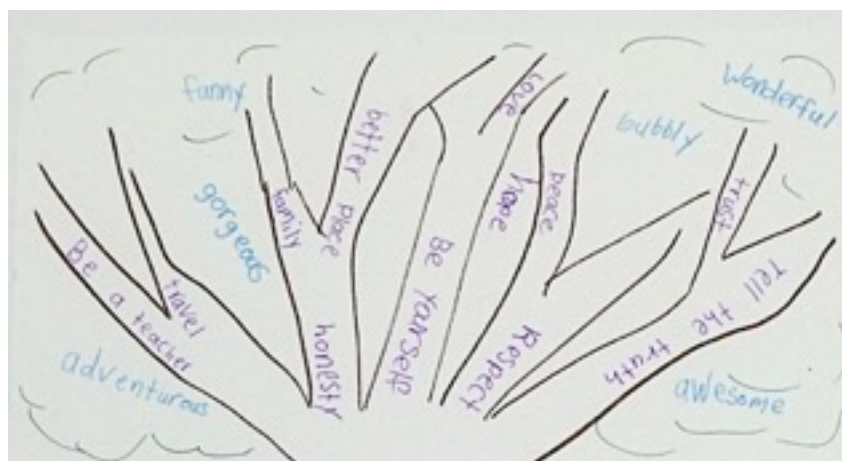


Figure 28 Tanya’s description of self
 (“wonderful, bubbly, funny, gorgeous, adventurous, awesome”)
 (Photo: J. M. Hyde)

The resources identified were many and varied.¹²³ In addition to community organizations,¹²⁴ ¹²⁵ many young people also heightened the capacities and supportive practices of their families. While these discussions often focused on primarily caregivers and siblings, many participants also made reference to extensive kinship networks consisting of grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, close family friends, animals (particularly pets), and other individuals who were considered “family”—regardless of the biological or legal relation. Many also highlighted the support provided by peers; adults who work at community, cultural, or religious organizations; and specific school staff members. Regarding the role of school personnel, some participants noted that they only find some teachers helpful, depending upon the extent to which these adults listened, avoided casting judgement, spoke calmly, and took action to address student concerns. These were identified as the characteristics of an *authentically caring teacher*—which was distinguished from those that “only try to look like they care because that’s part of their job” (Jamal). This distinction between *authentically* and *inauthentically caring teachers* is discussed more in chapter seven. Overall, participants indicated their connections to large *relational webs* (and more specific *relational homes*) from which they draw material and non-material support. These webs also appeared to be channels through which young people could access stories and shared memories, cultural and linguistic knowledge, religious and spiritual teachings, information about schooling and careers, and more general information about the world. For some, this helped link them to other places, such as their reserve community or the country from which their family immigrated (with many participants framing these as places “back home”). For some the emphasis was placed more generally on being “outside” and enjoying nature. Lastly, most participants also made reference to various popular culture, media, and technological resources—citing, for example, sports and Youtube

¹²³ A full accounting of these would require another dissertation chapter. Hence, in the interests of space, this will be an analysis reserved for future research publications.

¹²⁴ Other places in the community, including fast food restaurants and variety stores, were identified as places that young people often access with friends.

¹²⁵ In contrast, their perceptions of state-based services (which included police and the child welfare system) were more ambivalent. While some noted that these services can be sources of support, others were more critical (for example, suggesting that police do not “care” about the Eaglecrest community and suggesting that police tactics were often disproportionately violent).

personalities as sources of inspiration and ideas and social media as a means for them to maintain connections with peers and family.¹²⁶



Figure 29 Rose: I love my family



Figure 30 Rose: I lived in Tompson (Tompson)



Figure 31 Rose: I have a pet named Gepsce (pronounced "Gypsy")



Figure 32 Jamal: Car, house, my animals, dog

(Figures 29 to 32 Photos: J. M. Hyde)

¹²⁶ This was particularly true for participants who had recently moved to the Eaglecrest community (and, hence, had connections that could not be maintained face-to-face) as well as those who were not permitted by their families to spend time alone in the community (due to safety concerns).

Hence, this approach to the mind-mapping activities was far more aligned with my methodological frame and more facilitative to the research process.¹²⁷ It took the emphasis off of the production of the visuals and back onto conversation and storytelling, thereby generating far richer descriptive data and helping participants articulate the *relational webs* within which they are embedded—thereby displacing the *dominating story about the community* with a more complex narrative that accounted for the various forms of capital that young people access and draw upon. Given these benefits, I employed this practice *narrative co-construction* with the remaining focus groups.¹²⁸ In these sessions I opted to begin with the Educational Journey Map and to then co-construct the Tree of Life with each participant (rather than having them draw one “from scratch” at the onset). At the end of the research process, I placed these “co-constructed” trees into a protective cover and gave them back to the research participants.

While this approach was imperfect and limited by time,¹²⁹ I do believe it provided an ethical and productive means for working with these young people—opening up space for complexity without ignoring the lived experience of violence and struggle. Further, I found that it offered two unexpected benefits. Firstly, it gave participants the chance to serve as “witnesses” to each other; that is, there were several instances where one participant would offer suggestions of what could be included on another’s tree and, in doing so, validate their peer’s capacities and experiences (hence, we were able to work collaboratively to establish, at least in the short-term, a “relational home” characterized by affirmation and recognition) (Mitchell, 2016; Stolorow, 2014; 2013; 2012; Hvidt, 2013). Secondly, the recursive back-and-forth process actually provided a means to member-check my own interpretations of earlier conversations and observations, giving the participants the chance to expand upon or clarify what they had said, done, or drawn. In the

¹²⁷ I also think that the participants preferred the flexibility offered by the Educational Journey Map activity over the (comparably more structured) Tree of Life process (which, perhaps, within a school setting could have been read as too closely resembling an in-class “assignment”).

¹²⁸ It could be argued that my decision to change the order of activities was premature and that the remaining focus groups *may* have engaged with the activity as I had originally anticipated (or, at the very least, that I would have found additional evidence of the tendency to *shut down* explicit questioning about roots and supports). While I agree that this was a possibility (and that there is, overall, a need to refine how the Tree of Life can/should operate as a data collection method), I did not want to take the risk of further reinforcing the limiting stories about self and community with the other participants—mainly because I was not sure if I would have adequate time to facilitate the participants’ “unpacking” of those narratives.

¹²⁹ I employed a “template” tree for scribing (rather than having participants create their own) so as to navigate very limited time constraints and scheduling issues. In the future I think it would be more effective (and enjoyable) to have participants design their own visual.

future I would like to refine this method and use it with various demographics, modifying it so as to foster more of these collaborative and clarifying interactions.

5.6 Summary: Framing the findings chapters

Overall, I found the concepts of *stories about* and *stories of* very helpful frames for thinking through my rather challenging data collection and analysis processes. I also opted to use these concepts as a scaffolding device in my writing for this report. This was particularly helpful with the shaping of chapter two (which is, effectively, a description of the dominant *story about* educational inequality) and the following chapters. I had originally intended to present this study's findings in four different chapters, each of which would focus upon one research participant cluster (young people, school staff, caregivers, and CBO-representatives). My concluding chapter would then compare these different perspectives. However, in an effort to centralize my goal of highlighting "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 1980), I decided to place the perspectives of the young participants at the forefront—with the adult participants being included in the latter half of each chapter—and to then use *stories of* and *stories about* to facilitate cross-chapter comparisons. My examination of the *dominating stories about* allowed for the identification of the "public transcript" (Scott, 1990) and sensemaking frames employed by participants while considering *stories of* provided insight into the "hidden transcripts" and counter-stories that challenge dominant understandings. Engaging with the findings in this way, I found, allowed for the contrapuntal reading of the *hegemonic map* of educational inequality necessitated by my research objectives.

CHAPTER SIX

ENVISIONING THE PATHWAY: STORIES ABOUT SCHOOL

6.1 Introduction

This chapter articulates and analyzes the dominant and peripheral *stories about school* told by research participants so as to begin sketching the discourses, public transcripts, and storyscapes that influence how individuals make sense of—and correspondingly act—within the world. It begins by exploring how young people conceptualize their ideal future and how they understand the relationship between schooling and these hoped-for outcomes. These findings suggest that young people maintain complex aspirational visions predicated upon remarkably consistent definitions of a “good life.” Central to these *stories of the future* is a dominant (but implicit) theory of change which—mirroring the findings presented in chapter two—presumes inevitable linkages between school completion, employment, and well-being. Further, the extent to which young people perceive their visions as personally achievable varies considerably, demonstrating the impact of both structural and cultural violence—including classist and racist discourses—on both collective storyscapes and individual sensemaking frames.

The perspectives of adults resonate strongly with those of the students, often presenting images of young people and their families as either passive victims and/or blame-worthy (morally excluded) agents—a tendency which reflects broader notions of child-saving and parental/community deficit. However, there are also counter-stories that centralize the limitations of schooling as well as the culturally and ideologically-rooted nature of education—suggesting that it is not, as many assume, a natural or sacred enterprise, but rather a socially constructed bureaucracy. While it has become necessary for young people to engage with this technocratic system—and therefore crucial for adults to help them move through it—one must not presume students will find inherent value in this largely “lifeless”¹³⁰ enterprise.

As stated in chapter five, I have placed the perspectives of young participants at the start of the chapter so as to centralize the “subjugated knowledges” (Foucault, 1980) most commonly marginalized or ignored within the existing scholarship on educational inequality. These findings draw primarily from the arts-based activities and focus groups (particularly those

¹³⁰ A term suggested by Andrew, one of the CBO representatives.

revolving around the Educational Journey Maps), but also include supplementary data generated through my time in the field as well as my involvement with the P.A.T.H. planning process. The perspectives of the three sets of adult participants (caregivers, school staff, and CBO representatives) are included in the latter half of the chapter. Pseudonyms are used for all individuals.

6.2 Young people's stories of the future

Using the mind-mapping activities as a starting point, the young participants visualized and described their hopes for the future, articulating complex depictions of a “good life” as well as the pathway they believe must be followed to make their vision a reality. These *stories of the future* were, in terms of content themes, remarkably similar and all centralized school completion (often including post-secondary completion) as an integral component of their envisioned journey. However, these narratives differed considerably in terms of their relative complexity (their “thickness”) while it appeared that some students—despite employing the same narrative frames and discursive repertoires as their peers—were unable to “see” themselves living their story into reality; in essence, they could construct the basic plot but did not see themselves as the type of character able to perform it.

Conceptualizing a “good life”

When describing their future intentions and hopes, participants spoke about their desire for a “good,” “successful,” “healthy,” or “happy” life characterized by financial stability, having a well-paying job and/or career that aligns with their interests, travelling, and maintaining relationships with family and friends. These themes were often the elements that students wanted to have centralized on their Co-Constructed Tree of Life Maps (as depicted on page 213). Across these visions was an emphasis on the achievement of financial security and the identification of school completion as the pathway that would (they suggested) inevitably result in economic success and, by extension, a good life.

Several participants were very explicit when making these connections, noting the importance of *having enough* so as to support oneself and others. Consider, for example, Liam and Robbie's definition of “success”:

LIAM: You can't get a job if you're not educated. You can't be successful.

JULIE: So, then what does it mean to be successful?

ROBBIE: To have enough money to live, not just survive.

LIAM: Surviving is just barely making it, barely making a living or getting by.

ROBBIE: Yeah. You want to have enough to live and to help your family.

Mason reiterated the importance of *having enough*, suggesting that a good life means being “in the middle”—that is, able to meet one’s needs, but not overly wealthy:

JULIE: What do you mean by a good life?

MASON: A good life? Not being on the streets. Have a good job. Yeah, just like, in the middle—not, like, too fancy, not too little. Enough to live.

How much does Shaw [internet service] cost? I'll buy everyone that.

For many participants, *having enough* also meant being able to purchase homes, vehicles and other items (e.g., computers, clothing, and food). Dawn emphasized the importance of owning a house and being able to support oneself and one’s family, including her own parents:

DAWN: You need a job so that you can make money and get all of the stuff that you need, like food.

If someone doesn't finish school then they don't get a good job and if they don't have a good job then they won't make enough money to feed their family or own a home.

Like, some parents don't really have their kids around to take care of them when they're old. Their kids don't go to school and can't take care of them.

My parents expect my siblings to have our own place so that we can live.

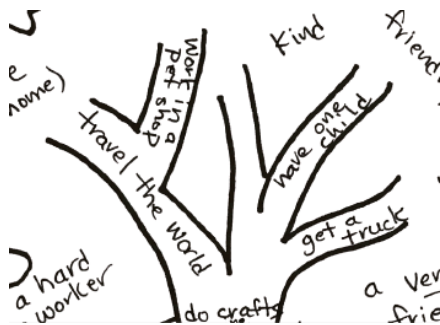
For Dawn, there is a direct connection between school completion, employment, purchasing material goods, and taking care of others. She further suggests that a main source of this understanding is her parents’ expectations. Reading across these perspectives, one can begin to decipher an underlying *story about a good life*. Central to this narrative is a desire to “live” not merely “survive”—a state achieved by obtaining a “good” (well-paying) job and financial security. This, it is suggested, will allow one to access material goods and provide for others; that is, to *have enough* for oneself and those closest to you.

Figure 33 Sample Co-Constructed Tree of Life Mind Maps (Photos: J. M. Hyde)



Mason

- have a good life (not too much, not too little)
- be famous [a famous football player]
- go to University of Manitoba
- have a family



Rose

- travel the world
- work in a pet shop
- have one child
- get a truck



Robbie

- get a job as soon as possible
- successful life
- growing, happy family



Halima

- go to college
- be happy
- have a family
- have many friends
- get a job

It was, overall, common for participants to think beyond their own personal wellbeing and imagine themselves in relation to their current (or future) family, seeing themselves as a central support to other people—hence, *providing for others* was another key element of success and living a good life. Several participants focused on parenthood, stating that they want to become a “mom” or “dad” or “have kids.” Ghani, for example, discussed the importance of setting boundaries for his children, thereby suggesting how he perceived the duties of a parent:

GHANI: You know what I want to do? I want to marry and get some kids. That’s it. Yep. I want kids. I love kids.

I’m going to have rules for my kids. Like, after one minute, no, after—I’m going to have, umm, an X-Box. If I have two, no—four kids, right? I’m going to bring two X-boxes by that time, cause I’m going to get my big brother’s X-Box. So, I’m going to bring two of them and I think they’ll be five, four controllers and then I’ll let them play until [*pause*] four hours.

JULIE: And that’s it.

GHANI: Yeah. They can play until then. And then after that, they have to do their homework and all that.

JULIE: What if they did their homework before?

GHANI: Oh yeah! That’s better! Cause then, after they do it, they get more time.

For Ghani, a “good parent” is one that not only provides for his children, but also prioritizes school (and homework)—setting boundaries and making sure rewards are earned through work. In later conversations Ghani suggested that his vision of parenthood is predicated upon his own experiences and that his parents set similar rules for him to follow. Several other participants linked their visions of family life to their current circumstances. Rose, for example, stated that:

I only want to have one kid because when there’s a lot it’s harder to take care of them. My brothers and sisters are crazy. They like to scream. And fight each other [*laughs*]. So, I only want one kid. It’s easier.

Rather than mirroring her own homelife, Rose envisions a slightly different future for herself that, she believes, will be far less challenging than her (and her parents’) current circumstances.

Several participants also stressed that they intended to keep long-term connections with their friends. In fact, some envisioned raising children with peers, rather than romantic partners. This was the case with Cassandra:

CASSANDRA: Fifteen years in the future? I'll be twenty-five and I'll be living with my best friend and our adopted child. Because she's like, "Don't ever have kids." And I'm like, "I won't. But I'm going to adopt." And she's like, "No!" But then she's like, "Okay, but we're still going to be roommates."

JULIE: Why do you want to stay with this best friend?

CASSANDRA: Because—me and her have been best friends since I was eight years old and I really really, really, really miss her.

JULIE: Is this the same friend that was taken away before [is currently involved with Child and Family Services]?

CASSANDRA: [*nods affirmatively*]

JULIE: Ah, okay. I can see why you would want to stay close.

For Cassandra, the desire to stay connected is directly attributed to the painful loss of this relationship when this friend was “taken away” by a child welfare agency. Having experienced this forced separation on more than one occasion (Cassandra herself was “taken away” by CFS and temporarily lost contact with this peer), she wants to hold on to a person that has, at times, been her primary source of social support. Dawn also talked about wanting to remain connected with peers (whom she also sees as important supportive elements in her life). For example, when talking about her intention to move to the United States to pursue her dream of acting, she clarified, “But it’s not just me. A couple of friends and I agreed to buy a big house in Los Angeles and live out there together.” As Dawn and Cassandra’s narratives demonstrate, *stories of the future* are often (at least in part) co-constructions developed in collaboration with others (including peers). Overall, this notion of *making and maintaining connections* was a consistent theme across the participants’ visions, often serving as a reflection of their current home and/or social life and indicating the direct and indirect influence of caregivers, other family members, and peers in shaping one’s aspirations.

However, it was also stressed that these envisioned family and peer relationships were predicated upon *having enough to provide for others*. Dawn, for example, makes this connection explicit, suggesting that:

A student who does well will finish high school and then, when they finish that, they’ll get, like, a good job and they’ll have money, like enough money to raise a family.

If they don't finish high school they won't be able to go to university or college. And then they won't be able to get a job—well, they won't be able to get a good job. So, they won't get much money to raise a family.

They won't have the education they need for life. They won't know, like, if they have a child [*pause*] like if they don't finish high school and they have a child they won't have the money to buy like Pampers and stuff, and clothes [*pause*] they won't even be able to buy themselves a house.

Several participants noted this connection, suggesting that completing school and securing financial stability was a necessary prerequisite for having a spouse and children (and/or supporting other family members).

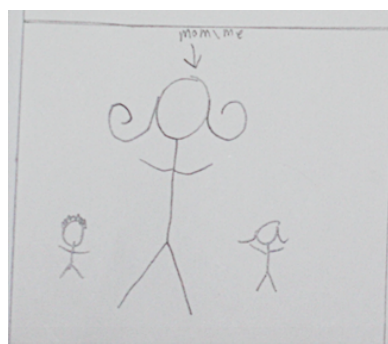
Figure 34 Selections from participant Educational Journey Maps: Making and maintaining connections (Photos: J. M. Hyde)



Rose: I wish I had 1 kid



Halima: Job. Family. Friends



Emily: This is me being a mom



Emily: This is the thing, you know, where you cover your hair [a wedding veil]

In addition to these financial concerns, Dawn suggests that being a “school leaver” may also have direct social ramifications:

Like, sometimes people who don’t finish school, they’ll start losing trust of family and friends. Because if they don’t finish, their friends aren’t really going to want to be with them because that person might start trying to get their friends to stop going to school, like to start ditching school.

Yeah. And then maybe they’ll start losing trust in family, like, their family will, like think they’re, like, a bad person because they’re not going to school, they have a child but they can’t take care of it.

They’ll start losing trust of their family. Their parents won’t really help them out. Siblings don’t really help them. They’ll start losing contact with friends.

Hence, Dawn suggests that individuals who “don’t finish” may also face social ostracization—being identified as untrustworthy, a bad influence, and unworthy of social support. Other participants either described or demonstrated this “moral exclusion” (Opatow, 2001a) of school leavers, suggesting that these individuals are choosing to follow “the wrong path” (Jordan) and are consequently responsible for and/or deserving of negative financial and social repercussions. Hence, being able to make and maintain relationships was both directly and indirectly related to the achievement of financial stability, which (by extension) requires school completion and employment. Further, there was a tendency by the participants to frame access to food, housing, relationships, and other necessities as something that is earned through one’s own efforts, rather than as a basic right to which one is entitled. The cause of “failure” is therefore individualized, even though its impact extends across one’s web of relationships.

For several participants, having sufficient financial resources was also considered important because it can facilitate travelling and help them “experience new things” (Liam). Variations of the phrase “I want to travel the world” appeared on several Educational Journey Maps and/or were mentioned in conversation (see images on page 220). When asked why they wanted to travel, participants often spoke about specific intended destinations, the choice of which often reflected their previous experiences. Common locations included the homes of favourite sports teams (e.g., Kennedy wants to visit Boston to see the Bruins play), places they have learned about in class (Halima wants to visit California because in class she learned that “there is gold there”), places they have been to before (Dawn wants to “for sure go back to Dublin because it’s awesome there”), or places they have come from (e.g., as an immigrant or

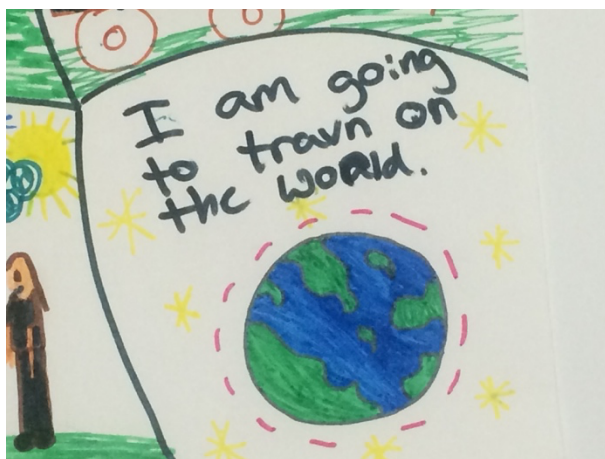
refugee). For example, Rose—who states in her map that she wants to “travel on the world”—had very familiar locations in mind when we discussed her aspirations in depth:

JULIE [*referring to Rose’s map*]: When you grow up you want to “travel the world.”
Where do you want to go?

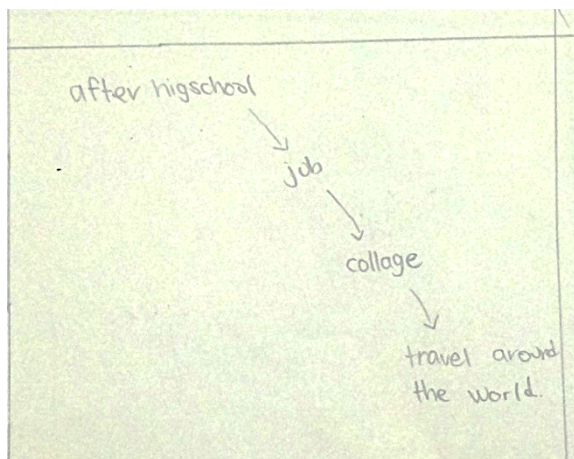
ROSE: [*pause*] To my reserve, Oxford House. I want to see my grandma. And I’d like to go to back to Thompson. That’s where I was born.

As Rose’s comments exemplify, while *accessing places and experiences* was commonly positioned within the participants’ *stories of the future* as a valued activity and element of a “good life,” the specific descriptions of these intentions were largely predicated upon each individual’s past experience and/or present situation¹³¹; although, in some instances, participants also mentioned the influence of family or teacher “travel stories” (e.g., hearing about their teacher’s experience “teaching abroad”). Despite these variations, across the board it was stressed that being able to *access places and experiences* was dependent upon one’s future financial resources—or, as Mason put it, “You need to have lots of money to go places.”

Figure 35 Selections from participant Educational Journey Maps: Accessing places and experiences (Photos: J. M. Hyde)



Rose: I am going to travn [travel] on the world



Halima: After higschool → job → collage → travel around the world

¹³¹ Rose’s comments also reflect the desire to *make and maintain connections*. For her, some of those connections (being able to see her grandma) require being able to *access places*.

Given the weight placed upon financial stability in their narratives, it is perhaps unsurprising that, for many participants, potential income was a main factor identified when describing their choice of occupation. For a few participants, this meant that they did not necessarily consider a specific type of career, but just wanted to “get a job as soon as possible” so they could “start making money” (Robbie). In other instances, participants stated that they wanted to pursue particular types of work because these were assumed to be lucrative. This included careers that require post-secondary education (e.g., Jamal wants to “be a doctor” and Jordan wants to “work at [and own] a bank”) and/or that offered both fortune and fame (e.g., Mason wants to be a “famous” football player, Dawn dreams of being an actor, and Cassandra intends to be a Youtube star¹³²). Hence, for some, *having enough* implies selecting the right (most lucrative) avenue of employment, which commonly means choosing an occupation that requires more than a highschool education. However, for others (like Robbie), the primary concern was more immediate—his family was in need of immediate assistance and he saw it as his responsibility to provide that support as soon as possible (which, he stated, meant that he did not see post-secondary education as something that he would pursue).

However, while financial gain was centralized, it was not the only factor that participants considered when determining their career pathways. It was, in fact, common for participants to state that, in addition to having monetary security, they also wanted to pursue careers that resonated with their interests (e.g., Emily wants to be a veterinarian and Rose wants to own a pet shop because they both “love animals” which they, in turn, connected to their love for their own pets). These choices of career ranged considerably (including doctor, engineer, fashion designer, athlete, author, store owner, banker, Youtuber, veterinarian, teacher, actor, and architect) but often either reflected the participant’s favourite hobbies (such as Davy’s intention to be a

¹³² When I asked her how one goes about becoming a “Youtuber,” Cassandra explained, “All you do, you take your phone and you record yourself doing something. And then you post it on the internet and then you get views and subscribers and that and then if you have enough you get money.” She also detailed the Youtube videos that she has already posted and further noted that, in the future, she wanted to have a show where she demonstrated “crafts and stuff.” I am including these details to emphasize that even these more fame-oriented career choices are the product of the participant’s careful contemplation and/or personal experience. Similarly, Mason detailed how he would pursue his football career (by playing on the University of Manitoba team) while Dawn has actually been involved in community drama productions for several years. Indeed, these narratives were quite “thick” (rich in detail and carefully constructed).

“straight up soccer player”) or were professions that they had been exposed to either in their daily lives (e.g., Tanya wants to be a teacher because she “liked the teachers that have been nice to her” while Ghani wants to own a small store because many families had done so “back home” in Afghanistan) or through specific career-related programs (see images on page 221).

Notably, several students connected their career decisions to involvement in specialized STEM (science, engineering, technology, and mathematics) classes offered by the Winnipeg School Division, the CanU afterschool program offered at the University of Manitoba, and/or experiences with Career Trek (a Manitoba not-for-profit that “helps young people discover the importance of education and career development by providing career oriented programming in educational settings across Manitoba”) (Career Trek, 2019). Asim made this connection directly when he discussed engineering as his “back up plan” if he is unable to have a career as a basketball player:

JULIE [*referring to his Educational Journey Map*]: So you’ve got “NBA” here, so is basketball a career that you’re interested in going into?

ASIM: Yeah, if I don’t make it, I’ll go to be an engineer or an architect. Yeah, if it don’t work.

JULIE: What is it about those things that interests you?

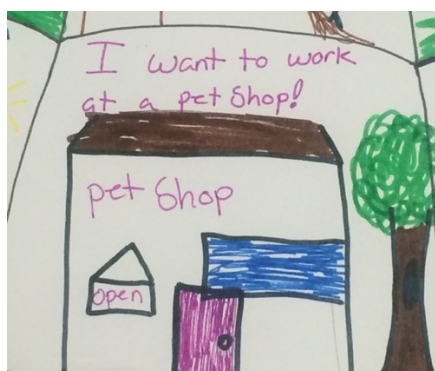
ASIM: Cause last year I went with Career Trek at the U of M [University of Manitoba]. And we did engineering, like bridges, so we started with like scrap paper and stuff. So, like, how to make the bridges and stuff.

So that’s what got me into it, and I did architecture there. I think it was U of M or—No! It was [*pause*] engineering was at U of M and the thing, architecture, was at Red River College.

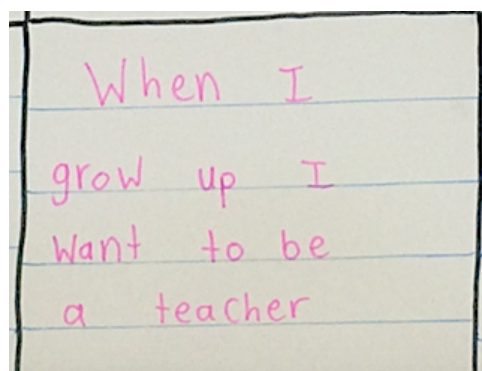
So [*pause*] yeah, it’s making the stuff. It’s fun. Even things we did first, we didn’t like, go to straight to the bridge. We had a scrap paper, in teams with my friends there. First, we started making it there, after we used toothpicks. It’s like, “Here, make a bridge, ‘cause here, see how it looks.” After then we had blocks, these things, and we had like four weeks to come and make it. Yeah, it was hard.

And that was big campus too, it was huge.

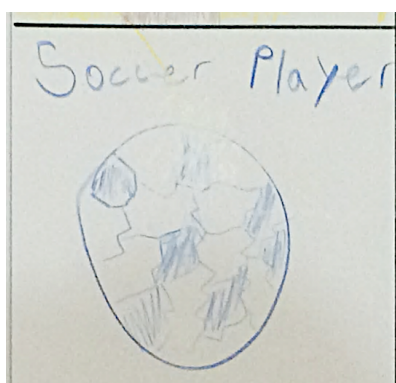
Figure 36 Selections from participant Educational Journey Maps: Jobs and careers
(Photos: J. M. Hyde)



Rose: I want to work at a pet shop!



Tanya: When I grow up I want to be a teacher



Davy: Soccer Player



Emily: Jop [Job]: Vet

JULIE: Do you think you might like to go to U of M?

ASIM: Yeah. Yeah, it's a good place to go but it's kind of far. It's a huge campus. Like I think it's the biggest campus.

Yeah, and stuff [pause] What else is in there? [pause] I think we did like operation, like animals. I don't know, what's that thing called? Like, we had a frog cut open.

JULIE: Oh! Dissections. You did that at U of M?

ASIM: Yeah, it was fun. That was the fun part. I couldn't wait to do it. I was, "I want to do it! I want to do it!" We had to wait a week to get there, and we do it.

And [pause] what else did we do that I remember? Off the top of my head [pause] Advertising! Advertising! We did that at the U of—

JULIE: U of W [University of Winnipeg] maybe?

ASIM: No. U of M—No, wait, it wasn't. I think it was at Red River College, Red River College, yeah. Umm [pause] we did that. It was kind of fun. That's, the commercial that we did, we did like advertising, posters about cars—that was fun. That was the fun part.

In addition to exemplifying how career programming can help expand a young person's perspective on potential career options (to complexify and thicken their *story of the future*), Asim's comments also demonstrate how this can establish a sense of familiarity with post-secondary institutions. In fact, only a few students explicitly named specific universities or colleges when composing or talking about their Educational Journey Maps and, those who did, stated that they had "been there" at some point, mainly for career programming (although Mason and Jordan had also attended Powwow events at the University of Manitoba). Overall, while financial security was a central concern largely seen as the source of personal wellbeing, it was not the only factor considered by participants in their career-related calculations. For some, *pursuing their passions* is also a central goal while for others (like Robbie) the pressing need to *provide for others* was presumed to foreclose other options.

Overall, the content of the participants' *stories of the future* was, thematically, quite consistent. Participants emphasized that the key to a "good life" was financial stability (*having enough*) because this allows one to *provide for oneself and others, make and maintain connections* with family and friends, and *access places and experiences*. For many, *pursuing one's passions* was also a central aspect of the narrative¹³³ although, for some, financial concerns eclipsed all other considerations. Strikingly, these *stories of the future* had a tendency to reflect the young person's immediate situation. That is, the narratives often drew upon and responded to: the explicit and implicit messages of family members, peers, and teachers; personal and family stories, rules, and challenges; incidents of stress, loss, and trauma; and personal experiences that created a sense of familiarity with and/or connection to specific places, occupations, and institutions. Hence, the present and the past shape one's vision of the future, which is a contextually embedded construction.

In addition, the emphasis on economic stability and various indicators of financial "success" listed by participants (travel, homeownership, Shaw internet access, etc.) indicate that

¹³³ This was common in (but not exclusive to) visions that emphasized the pursuit of fame and celebrity.

these *stories of the future* were framed, at least in part, through the lens of socioeconomic class and impacted by discourses which valorize middle-class lifestyles, define success primarily in monetary and individualized terms, and suggest a very limited set of pathways through which one can achieve a good life. For these participants, the potential pathways include the *linear route* through post-secondary education, the *entrepreneurial journey* (e.g., making one's own way as a Youtube star or store owner), or the *short track* from highschool and directly into the job market. Overwhelmingly, the *linear route* was the path most commonly associated with obtaining a (financially rewarding and personally fulfilling) “good job” and, consequently, a “good life.” However, while these aspirational stories all adhere to this broad narrative frame, they are also very complex (encompassing concern for others, a desire for connection, and the pursuit of personal interests and new experiences) and nuanced (reflecting each individual's specific situation and experiences as well as the influence of other people).

School completion as “the pathway”

Regardless of whether participants envisioned a *linear route*, *entrepreneurial journey*, or *short track* into the job market, school completion (often including post-secondary education) was identified as the vital “step” that must be taken in order to make one's aspirations a reality. Emily, for example, argued that, to have a good life, “You need to go to school to learn math. Go to a great college. Get a husband. Get married. [And] get a job.” Others depicted the connections visually on their Educational Journey Maps, including Mia, who connected going to university, getting a job, and being able to travel (see image on page 226).

These connections were reiterated in one-on-one and focus group conversations. This included a lively debate with Jemal, Asim, Ethan, and Kennedy, four Grade 6 students¹³⁴ which revolved upon the connections between schooling, financial, stability, and having a good life. The following is an excerpt from a session where Jemal—at times jokingly and at times seriously—challenges the perspectives of his peers. The (often frustrated) reaction of the other students illustrates the strong associations between school completion and success persistently stressed by all of this study's young participants. Notably, at several points in the

¹³⁴ Jemal and Asim identified as newcomers, Ethan as Métis, and Kennedy as White.

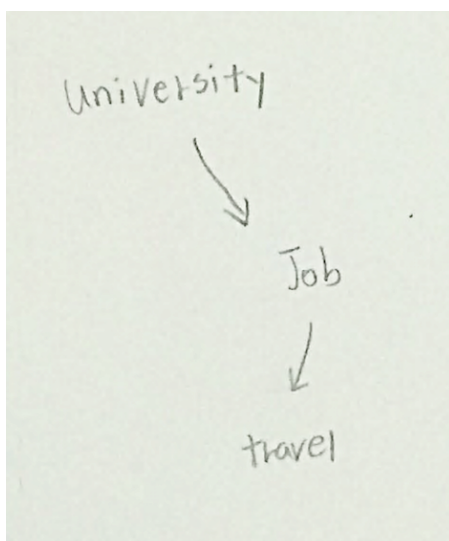


Figure 37 Mia: University → Job → Travel (Photo: J. M. Hyde)

conversation the young people look to me for confirmation, but I never have a chance to respond because someone else interjects:

JULIE: So, it sounds like you're saying you need to finish school to have a good life.

JEMAL: No—you can just have a good life without being like, a doctor. You can just play. You can have fun.

ASIM: But Jamal, *how*—how are you going to get the money?

JEMAL: [*jokingly, in singsong*] You go to your daddy or mommy.

ASIM: N—no—NO! They won't be there forever; they won't be there. [*rubbing his second finger and thumb together*] Show me the money.

ETHAN: You need to get a job.

JEMAL: Oh, I don't know. [*pause*] I'm back to "yes" [you need to finish school to have a good life]. [*pause*] But, we don't *need* money. [*looking at Julie*] Do we need money?

ASIM: No, no, NO! School's a good thing to go to because you come here every day and then if you want to get a good job and get a house then you keep coming to school.

JEMAL: Doesn't RBC [Royal Bank of Canada] give you money for free or something?

KENNEDY and ASIM: NOOOOOO—

JEMAL: There's something that gives you money, but like, less.

JULIE: Are you thinking of a loan? You'd need to pay that back. [He may have also been talking about social assistance payments].

ASIM: But school is important for me.

JULIE: Why is school important for you?

ASIM: Because if I want to get a good job then you need it—and because my parents told me to go to school every day. I don't want to, but I have to. There's no choice. [*turns to Jamal*] You want to buy a house?

ETHAN [*looking at Jamal and counting off each point with his fingers as he lists them*]: You want a house? You want a job? You want a wife?

JAMAL: You can actually get that without going to school—

[*Asim, Ethan, and Kennedy sigh collectively in disagreement and frustration*]

JAMAL: You can do cleaning and stuff! It's boring but there's still a lot of money.

ASIM [*hesitantly, but in agreement*]: A maid—yeah, a maid. My mom told me this, in the [United] States the maids get a lot of money, at like a hotel.

JAMAL: Like one thousand and two hundred a month.

ETHAN: Wait! Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait—if you don't go to university, how can you get a job? After you finish school, you still get a job? [*looking at Julie*] Or not?

KENNEDY: You can still get a job, but it's not going to be a good and high paying job. [*looking at Julie*] Is that right?

JEMAL [*stepping back from his previous position*]: And then you'll get lower pay.

[*pause*] Yo! He will get, like, low pay. If he even gets a job.

KENNEDY: Yep. You'll get lower pay.

Later in the conversation, when talking about the impact of *not* finishing high school, Jemal changed his argument, suggesting that those who do not finish school will “be living like a bad, bad life.”¹³⁵

In this conversation Jamal challenges (albeit briefly) the hegemonic discourse which positions school completion and the attainment of a middle-class (or higher) status as the only means for achieving a good life. He offers numerous counter arguments, beginning with a

¹³⁵ In another conversation he also mentioned an intention to become a doctor. When I asked him, “What kind?” He stated, “I don't know, just not one that has to do [deliver] babies—cause I don't want to do *that*.”

(sarcastically presented) affirmation of a young person's state of dependency on parents ("You go to your daddy or mommy"), a point quickly dismissed by Asim who asserts that this relationship will come to an end ("They won't be there forever"). After nearly changing his original stance, Jamal quickly challenges the centrality of money itself ("But, we don't *need* money") and then, seemingly accepting its necessity, suggests alternative means for obtaining it (getting "free money" from banks). In doing so, he indicates a general understanding of diverse banking and funding options but does not appear to have the knowledge required to present a detailed argument that would convince his peers.¹³⁶

He then concedes that it is necessary to earn money through employment but suggests that jobs which do not require advanced education may also be lucrative (an argument that Asim confirms as "true" because it resonates with information provided by his mother). This option, however, is subsequently dismissed—partly because it is framed as "boring" and partly because the group suddenly comes to the consensus that this type of employment will only afford them "low pay"—a perspective which indicates the differentiated social and monetary value granted so-called "unskilled" labour. In the end, Jamal's resistance to the dominating narrative is discounted, not by the adult present in the room (who rarely had the chance to interject), but by the other young people who re-affirmed the dominating story through a performance of the public transcript (which they persistently requested that I affirm). Although, I also contributed to the debate by challenging Asim's argument that "free money" is available from banks (not realizing until later that I had, perhaps, failed to fully understand his perspective).

Throughout this conversation the arguments discussed previously in this chapter are reiterated—framed here by participants as axiomatically true. This includes the notion that school completion is vital for obtaining legitimate ("good" and "high paying") (Kennedy) employment or, indeed, any kind of job (including those offering "low pay"). The participants thusly tie the value of school directly to its presumed future monetary rewards—a connection that resonates with neoliberal discourses of education. These financial gains are further linked to other elements of one's of well-being (e.g., Ethan asks Jamal, "You want a house? You want a job? You want a wife?"). These assumptions align with those that underpin the *school-to-work-*

¹³⁶ Finances were a common topic of discussion. Participants would often tell me (and each other) how much income their family members drew in.

to-wellbeing theory of change discussed in chapter two, particularly in terms of how school completion is expected to indirectly impact both personal circumstances and social welfare gaps.

While this underlying logic was the most common one discussed by participants, some offered additional reasoning regarding the “value” of education. This included: keeping “kids out of trouble” and/or out of gangs (both in the immediate- and long-term); giving young people “something to do” so they are not just “sitting at home” (Mason); helping students “be what they want to be” (Ethan); and helping them learn specific job-related skills (“If you want an accounting job, you need to learn math”) (Subira). These notions also resonate with some of the main logics presented in chapter two, including the assumed direct benefit of school attendance on personal welfare and the notion of “unlocking one’s potential.” Underlying all of these suggestions is the belief that school attendance is “for your own benefit” (Bachir).

Most participants also noted that, regardless of the purpose or value ascribed to schooling, they have “no choice” but to attend (Asim)—either because they are directly forced to by their caregivers or indirectly compelled to by the presumed financial and social consequences of incompleteness. These ramifications include those presented by Dawn on pages 217 to 218 (an inability to provide for others, social ostracization, etc.) as well as a host of other dire situations (including unemployment, homelessness, stress, addiction issues, and the loss of family and friends). Not completing school is thus presumed to have a *ripple effect* that not only prevents a young person from achieving their aspirations, but also sets them up for future harm and suffering. Leaving school, the participants warn, is an action that a person would “come to regret” (Jordan). Hence, the implicit *school-to-work-to-wellbeing theory of change* employed by participants actually describes two phenomena: “success” and “failure.” These outcomes are presented as binary opposites—as the end points of two differentiated pathways, that of the school “completer” and that of the school “leaver.”

In summary, by looking across the young participants *stories of the future*¹³⁷ and their additional elaborations on the purpose and value of education, it is possible to identify two interlocking, dominating stories—one is a *story about a good life* and the other a *story about*

¹³⁷ These *stories of the future* were *stories of lived experience*—including that which has actually happened and that which the participants envisioned happening at a later point in their lives. These stories were characterized by diversity, nuance, and complexity. However, these various *stories of* were placed within the frame of comparably narrower *stories about* that offered prescribed meanings for interpreting their past and making decisions regarding their future.

school. The first story takes the diverse aspirations of participants and places these within a narrow narrative frame that makes individual financial success the foundation of a good life. The second story is a life-course narrative that outlines the only legitimate path that one may follow—the *linear route* through the formal education system, through the post-secondary system, and into the job market. There were some deviations in this narrative (including Cassandra’s goal of being a Youtube entrepreneur and Robbie’s insistence that he needs to start “making money” as soon as possible), but these appear as uncommon, peripheral plotlines (which, while eschewing post-secondary education, still emphasized highschool completion as a necessity). These dominating stories provided the narrative templates which participants used to emplot their past experiences, future aspirations, and general understandings of “how the world works.” By doing so, these frames shaped how participants derived meaning from their lived experience, subsequently impacting their capacity to understand and describe the world and posit visions for their own future. Specifically, non-linear progression through the education system was rendered invisible while alternative pathways towards (and conceptualizations of) a “good life” were de-legitimized, an act of exclusion resulting in strong affective reactions toward those questioning the value of schooling and employment (as indicated by the frustration expressed by Jamal’s peers) and a tendency to morally exclude school leavers as somehow deserving of detrimental circumstances.

6.3 Thin stories of the future and inaccessible aspirations

Throughout the data collection process, the young participants—regardless of differences in race, age, gender, and grade—shared thematically and structurally similar *stories of the future*. This indicates the existence of a storyscape which—dominated as it is by the aforementioned *stories about a good life* and *stories about school*—offers a limited discursive repertoire and set of narrative frames from which participants (the storytellers) may draw. Some young people—such as Asim—were able employ these resources to construct “thick” aspirational stories rich in description, detail, and variation.¹³⁸ However, some participants shared *stories of the future* that were, comparably, “thin.” Others, meanwhile, indicated that they found it difficult or impossible

¹³⁸ However, this does not guarantee that these visions will be fulfilled or that they will remain stable over time. In fact, I had an opportunity to speak with Dawn a year after our interview and she expressed a far more limited perception of her potential future.

to actually imagine themselves living the future they had imagined. Examining these cases illuminates the impact of both class-based and racialized discourses on the storyscape—these hegemonic notions render certain experiences and structural dynamics “indescribable” (for the teller) and “illegible” (to the listener).

In some cases, the “thinness” of certain stories was depicted visually on Educational Journey Maps as actual blank spaces or question marks. Peter, for example, stated that he wanted a “family, life, and job” and expressed an interest in taking computer classes in highschool (“Because I want to learn how to hack someone”); however, when asked what type of job he wanted to have, what he wanted to do after highschool, and how he saw his life “turning out,” he persistently stated, “I have no idea.” He depicted this on his map as a series of question marks (see image below).

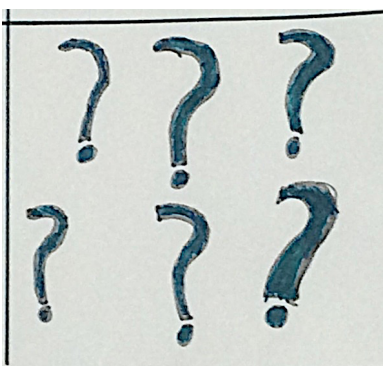


Figure 38: Peter: I have no idea (Photo: J. M. Hyde)

Ethan’s Educational Journey Map was characterized by similar gaps, even though he stressed the importance of finishing school, going to university, and “getting a job” in the aforementioned debate with Jamal, Asim, and Kennedy. When asked about these “blanks” on his map, he stated:

I want to find a job that’s right for me. Sometimes I want to be a spy or something, because I know about codes and stuff, but I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t really know. Just getting a job, I guess. I don’t know what I see myself doing.

Again, for Ethan and Peter, the “value” of education and school completion is not called into question; they have aspirations and see these as being linked—somehow—to schooling. However, they appear to find it nearly impossible to conceptually “map out” the pathway forward. This differs slightly from Robbie’s story, which completely sidesteps any discussion

of career choice, emphasizing instead his intention to “get a job as soon as possible” so as to support other family members. While it may be tempting to read Robbie’s story through a completely deficit-oriented lens (e.g., he is limiting his own potential), I would argue that his story also highlights his personal values and desire to care for and support others. “Getting a job” (after completing highschool) is simply the most apparent, accessible, and conceptually clear means through which he sees himself doing this. Similarly, Ethan and Peter both express a desire to *pursue their passions*, but have trouble articulating a workable pathway towards them (leading Ethan to turn to the *short track* pathway of “just getting a job”).

Perhaps the most strikingly explicit example of a participant having difficulty seeing himself living his *story of the future* was offered by Jordan—who also opted out of drawing an Educational Journey Map, citing that he did not want to visually depict early negative experiences. In the following excerpt, he makes reference to a period in his early life when he lived in a reserve community with his Auntie. During this time, he missed an extensive amount of formal schooling (which in previous conversations he attributed to having “no one there to wake me up and get me ready”). While he sees this past experience as something that makes it less likely that he will graduate from highschool (and consequently fail to achieve his other stated goals of attending the University of Winnipeg and working in/owning a bank), he also sees his own probable pathway as a continuation of broader trends within his family. During our conversations, when asked if he saw school as valuable and important, he stated, “I don’t know.” After I inquired further, he offered the following explanation:

JORDAN: I don’t know, because my whole family failed, yeah. So obviously I’m gonna be the one failing too. My sister failed too. My dad’s forty and he didn’t finish so he has to go to school.

JULIE: He’s going back then?

JORDAN: He didn’t do it yet. He’s turning forty-one soon, probably next year he’ll go. And I didn’t go to school for, like, three years [*purses his lips together and then makes a loud popping sound*].

JULIE: Yeah, you mentioned that last time we talked.

JORDAN: [*affirmative*] mmhmm. It felt like three months. Then four or five or six. [*short laugh*]

JULIE: Time went by a lot faster than you thought?

JORDAN: Yeah. Like I was just lying there, like, “Okay, is it school?” I went outside and nobody was there. And I was like [*puts his thumbs up, “Fonzie-style”*] “Eh!” So, I just kinda hung out.

But I *might* finish because—[*pause*].

Honestly, actually, like nobody in the family actually finished—except my uncle John, but he's White. And my whole family's, like, Native.

In a subsequent focus group session, Jordan further explained that his family was unable to finish school because of their financial situation and issues with addiction (which also impacted his school attendance):

JULIE: So, why do you think they didn't finish school?

JORDAN: Well, you need a lot of money to do that and they spent all their money on illegal stuff. They were just crazy about that stuff—drugs and stuff. Pot and stuff. Illegal stuff. [*pause*] I didn't go to school for two, two to three years because my Auntie was like getting drunk. And she didn't want to do stuff because she was lazy. That's the only reason why I didn't go to school for two years, because my Auntie was drinking.

However, while Jordan had difficulty envisioning himself completing school, he still made use of the dominating *story about school* (the legitimized public transcript) later on in our conversation:

JULIE: So why do you think some students don't graduate?

JORDAN: Yeah, they think they're all cool and they don't—sometimes they just want to be really lazy. They just want to sit there and not do anything instead of doing work. But once they're older, they're going to say into their head, “I did a stupid choice. I should have stayed in school.”

JULIE: Okay, is it just, like, they're just being lazy? Or—[*pause*] why would people think, “It doesn't matter what I do, I just want to stay home?”

JORDAN: They don't want to have a good life. [*laughs*]

JULIE: So, you're saying now that, yeah, school is important because you need to finish school to have a good life?

JORDAN: Well, yeah. You can make it a decision if you don't want a—if you don't want a good job. And if you do want a good job and if you want a lot of money you need, you need to do good in school for basically every single grade so you don't fail.

Jordan also stated that he “wants to live a healthy life” and did suggest that, to do so, one should take the *linear route* through schooling (highschool and university) and into employment. He just did not believe that this was the pathway he would be able to follow because of his experiences and those of his family.

I had the opportunity to speak with Jordan the following year at an in-school event. He showed me a piece of art that he had completed as part of an assignment wherein he was asked to visually depict some aspect of his identity. The image—which bore a rather striking similarity to an Educational Journal Map—showed, on the left, a wide assortment of images which, he explained, depicted his current life and future aspirations. Prominently featured was a local community-based organization (CBO) that provides significant educational support to inner city students, with the underlying intention that they would pursue post-secondary education. The drawings were diverse and vivid and he spoke at length about his “plan” for achieving his goals. The right side of the page was blank—just a big empty white space. He told me that this represented his past and that he did not want to draw or think about “the bad things that had happened.”

Jordan’s story is an extremely complex example of a young person attempting to “make sense” of his experiences using the limited narrative resources available to him. Citing the examples of his dad and sister, he suggests that “failure” is endemic to his family and presumes that he will follow the same pathway, regardless of his intentions—indeed, the inevitability of failure should be “obvious” (“my whole family failed, so obviously I’m gonna be the one failing too”). He also suggests that he has been set up for failure due to circumstances largely beyond his control (in other conversations he noted that he expects he will not “do well in school” because he has missed so much and has had a “poor education”). He further suggests the impact of both race and class on his prospects, suggesting that completing school requires “a lot of money” and noting that the only member of his family who has completed highschool is White (“nobody in the family actually finished—except my uncle John, *but he's White*. And my whole family's, like, Native”).

However, when identifying the proximate factors which have led to his family’s situation, he emphasizes the role of individual choice (his family members chose to spend money on drugs, his Auntie chose to drink and “didn’t want to do stuff because she was lazy”). He reiterates this notion of individual responsibility when talking about school leavers more generally, suggesting

that they make “stupid” choices, “don’t want a good job,” “don’t want to have a good life” and would rather “be really lazy” and “sit there and not do anything instead of doing work.” School leaving is thereby framed as a decision made by individuals who *don’t care* about school, work, employment, or their own wellbeing (and, perhaps by extension, the wellbeing of their family). If you want a good life (“a good job” and “a lot of money”) then, not only do you need to attend school regularly, but you also “need to do good...for basically every single grade so you don’t fail.” Simply being at school, then, is insufficient, one must also work hard (all the time). This centralizing of individual choice and the *linear route* through schooling serves to cast his father’s (and his own) *indirect educational pathway* as somehow deficient (rather than as, say, an indicator of persistence) and further pathologizes the behaviour of his family members (particularly that of his Auntie¹³⁹).

Arguably, Jordan’s narrative indicates how a *story of* a young person’s/a family’s schooling challenges may become subordinated by the *dominating story about school* and the operations of neoliberal, colonial, racist, and classist social discourses—all of which have structured the storyscape that Jordan (employing his own capacity for narrative agency) draws upon to perform a “legible” narrative of experience. The family dynamics described indicate the impact of long histories of continuing colonial violence as well as class-based socioeconomic stratification. These factors, however, are rendered invisible—they cannot be named (due to limitation in the available discursive repertoire) or emploted (because the narrative frame does not offer room for their inclusion). Jordan is seeking to understand the racialized and classed patterns which he has observed—including the felt, material impact of structural inequality—but can only make meaning using the narrative resources which has been made available to him. These limitations were, perhaps, further reinforced by the setting of his storytelling performance; he was speaking to a White adult, in a school space, while being recorded,¹⁴⁰ factors which may have influenced the content and performance of his story.¹⁴¹ Consequently, he locates the causes of school leaving within personal or family deficits, individual choice, class, and race.

¹³⁹ This is not to justify his Auntie’s behaviour or ignore its impact on Jordan, but rather to draw attention to how this particular framing forecloses further discussion of its underlying causes.

¹⁴⁰ While sharing these stories he was only with one other student—who was also male, Indigenous, and one of his good friends (who listened intently, never interjecting or challenging anything that Jordan said).

¹⁴¹ This does not, however, mean that he was “lying” or that his story was “false.” Rather, it suggests that—perhaps—he was seeking to frame his experience in a manner that was more aligned with the public transcribed legitimated with that institutional and social context.

Jordan is, narratively, seeking to negotiate two contradictory implicit theories. One on hand, he sees his own failure as inevitable (destined or fated) because of his past and own presumed (“inherited”) limitations. On the other hand, he sees failure or success as a choice, as something which can be attained through one’s own hard work. While both are problematic, the latter offers a greater sense of self-efficacy and control—if his family members have chosen to fail, then he can choose to succeed. He is, to draw upon Ungar (2001), “purposefully seeking ways to enhance whatever self-definitions [that he] can control” (p. 147) and to “maximize [his] discursive empowerment” (p. 150), even though—to do so—he is required to morally exclude his own family members. My exchange with Jordan the following year suggests that he has continued to exercise his narrative agency, but now has a thicker “preferred” story of how he intends to progress toward his aspirations due (in large part) to the influence of the identified CBO—which has appeared to have the same impact on Jordan as Career Trek’s programming had on Asim.

However, Jordan’s thicker *story of the future* did not indicate a more nuanced discussion of his past. The various *stories of* these experiences—which, if explored more consciously, could offer insight into both Jordan’s strengths and the root causes of the challenges he faced—remains subordinated under the weight of a thin story which frames this as a “bad time” better left unarticulated. Arguably, then, while his richer *story of the future* may be personally empowering and beneficial, it is not necessarily emancipatory (as it is predicated upon personal success and not social change). Jordan has become better able to employ the dominating *story of school* but does not challenge this as an organizing frame. Further, Jordan is still impacted by the racial and class-dynamics which have impacted his family; continuing toward his aspirations will require on-going support (material, social, etc.)—which, hopefully, will be provided by the helpful CBO.

Overall, considering the *stories of the future* offered by Jordan, Peter, Ethan, and Robbie¹⁴² indicates the impact of the *storyscape* on their capacity to develop narratives which help them derive meaning from their experiences and take action in the world and indicates the interrelationship between subjective and objective realities. The dominating *stories about school*

¹⁴² In addition, it is notable that three of these participants (Jordan, Ethan, and Robbie) identify as Indigenous (Peter is mixed race with one Indigenous parent) and all are male. This draws attention to how gender and race intersect to situate young people on the landscape, shaping their access to opportunity and the manner in which they are positioned within social discourses. As stated in chapter two, statistical findings suggest that Indigenous boys often have lower educational attainment rates than Indigenous girls (see Appendix two: Statistical data).

and *stories about a good life* which were expressed across the participants—which, in many respects, mirrors the logics and underlying *paternalistic metanarrative of deficit* identified in chapter two—substantially circumscribe the narrative frames and discursive repertoires available for ascribing meaning to one’s experiences. In addition, the transformation of Jordan’s narrative (and the comparable richness of the stories told by other participants) suggest that an individual’s overall sensemaking frame is largely impacted by their/their family’s access to opportunities and resources that more readily “fit within” the dominant *story about school*. Access to these resources, however, is largely determined by how one is socially located. Further, experiences which do not fit within the narrative frame (including experiences of violence, trauma, social inequality, racism, and colonialism) are rendered as invisible, illegitimate, or pathological—thereby preventing the young person from either identifying their own (and their family’s) strengths and capacities for perseverance or considering how their personal experiences link to collective struggles and structural forms of oppression. The (historically and politically constituted) *storyscape*, thusly, *mystifies* experiences and phenomena that could call the underlying *landscape* into question¹⁴³—fostering surplus powerlessness and maintaining regimes of biopolitical control.

Extending this notion of *mystification*, I suggest that the way the young people conceptualized the underlying purpose of school and envisioned their future is significantly impacted by—to draw upon terminology from Peace and Conflict Studies—both structural and cultural violence. That is, various structural conditions impact a young person’s access to resources, thereby shaping their sensemaking frame and (largely) determining the types of lived experiences that they will engage with when seeking to make meaning about their lives and the world. That being said, these students have had rich and complex experiences—including experiences of support and strength as well as oppression and violence. However, the *storyscape* has been formed (through the intersections of various discourses) in a way that devalues and delegitimizes these realities. This *storyscape* therefore, serves as a form of cultural violence which naturalizes and justifies harm as well as a form of “epistemic violence” (Spivak, 1998) which erases certain forms of knowledge and ways of perceiving the world while also being

¹⁴³ These stories of are the focus of chapter seven.

employed to facilitate practices of othering (e.g., the moral exclusion of school leavers) (Dotson, 2011).

6.4 Adults telling stories about school

The perspectives of the adult participants largely resonated with those of the young people. These caregivers, school staff members, and CBO representatives largely affirmed (but at times did challenge) the dominating *story about a good life* and *story about school* while also presenting various discursive conceptualizations of young people and their families—often framing them as either passive victims and/or blame-worthy (morally excluded) agents—a tendency which reflects broader notions of child-saving and parental/community deficit. However, some told counter-stories that centralized the limitations of schooling as well as the culturally and ideologically rooted nature of education.

Caregivers

Caregivers emphasized that they value school and school completion and see themselves as playing multiple roles in their child's success. For example, when asked about her hopes for her child's future, Candace said that she wants her child "to have a good education. To be successful, independent" and that, to do so, they needed to complete school because "you need an education to apply for a job. I don't know what else." Penny, meanwhile, emphasized that she wanted her children "to finish school—on time." She further noted that this was so that "they turn out to be good people. That they're better than me I guess." Further, when asked what advice she would give her child's teachers, she stated that it was important for teachers to "not to give up on them," stating: "I know my kids are a lot to handle sometimes. But, if you give up on them, then they're never going to get *anywhere*." Later in our interview, she stated that she herself had gone back to complete highschool as an adult, so as to ensure her children "at least have something to look up to."

This notion that you need school to "get somewhere" was reiterated by Kimberly, who suggested it as means to both achieve one's personal goals and to avoid negative life outcomes:

I want [my children] to achieve their goals. I want them to further their education and go on and, you know, be like an officer or doctor, you know? Something.

And be proud of—be proud of what they did for themselves, right? So, we [my husband and I] help, we like to help our kids go through.

Reflecting further on her hopes for her children, she states:

I'd like to see them still in school.

Actually, if you did research on the amount of kids that drop out of school that's still pretty high and I don't want my kids to be one of those—

Like, I'd rather see—I'd rather see them in school and learning than out in the streets trying to be a gang member. Because, actually, I don't want to bury my child.

And if you want to run in the street, that's what's going to come of that.

This suggests that she and other participants define school as *a means to an end*—as a *pathway* that leads toward a *good life* and away from violence, economic hardship, and other difficult situations. Helping your child *go through* school, therefore, becomes a central element of one's broader duty as a caregiver.

Central to fulfilling this *caregiver duty* is the setting of expectations for one's child. Lena emphasizes the importance of this message, connecting her current parenting to her own upbringing:

We come from an educated background, school was important. We went to school. We went to university.

Our kids know that that's important and so it's just—you know, they have expectations.

I'm first generation, so my parents—they didn't do university. But it was always this, you know, my father was [always]: “No you're going to finish school. You're going to go to university. You're just going to go do it, do it, do it.” And there was a push. You were expected to go to school.

Hence, for Lena, setting expectations is the primary means through which a parent can encourage their child to value school, which she later stressed needed to be combined with other forms of support (talking with your child, providing resources, etc.) so as to ensure one's child has the sufficient “infrastructure” to complete their education. While Kimberly does not have the same educational history as Lena, she also emphasized the importance of the parental “push”:

We tell them every day, you know, “You need to go to school. You need to graduate. And if you want to further your education after that, by all means. We'll still be proud of you.

And my daughter hums and haws right now because she's like, [*sarcastically*] “Oh! More school.” Right? My son on the other hand he just kind of does his own thing—

And I explain that to my kids and they watch the news with me—and they'll be like, “Well, why did that happen?”

And I'll be, “Well, okay, you heard that he was involved in crime. And that's because he didn't stay in school. He wanted—he wanted to be cool and run with this group because they weren't in school.”

My daughter's like, "I don't want to be like that." "So, well then, you have to—that's your choice. You don't want to be like that? You need to stay in school."

So, she goes, "But do I have to finish and then continue when I graduate?" I said, "It's up to you." I said, "By the time you graduate you'll probably need to have to go to university to get a job. Because a lot of places now, you need to have more than your Grade 12." The way I see it with society, it is what it is.

But if, you know, my child chooses to drop out once they're in high school and get involved in crime, I've already told them, "You call me once and tell me you're in jail? I'm leaving you there. You're gonna learn."

Kimberly's statements resonate very clearly with those expressed by the young people. There is the same emphasis on the role of choice—with leaving school (and subsequently becoming "involved in crime") being attributed to a kind of *misdirected affect* ("he wanted to be cool"). She stresses that, as a caregiver, it is her responsibility to ensure her child stays on the right pathway (at least until highschool). At the same time, she notes that a young person who "chooses to drop out...and get involved in crime" does not have the right to continued support, employing a kind of tough love logic which suggests that individual's learn correct behaviour through consequences. Further, both Kimberly and Lena suggest that completing highschool is not sufficient to guarantee employment—one must also push forward into post-secondary studies.

Caregivers also noted that school is a place to learn specific skills (such as handwriting, speaking an additional language, and reading) and to develop certain qualities/capacities (honesty, respect, hard work, collaboration, and listening) that are deemed vital for success as a (working/employed) adult. However, overwhelmingly, they emphasized how completing school provides access to other opportunities. The purpose of school *is to complete it*, thereby putting oneself in a position where you can "get somewhere"—get a job, obtain financial security, and be proud of who (and what) you have become.

School staff

Staff members also expressed the same faith in school completion as the *pathway toward a good life* (and *pathway away from violence*), further indicating that they see themselves as agents granted the (at times heroically framed) task of *breaking cycles* of poverty. Consider, for example, Bryce's frustration with what he interprets as the irresponsibility of some Eaglecrest parents:

Do I get frustrated with some of these parents sometimes? Absolutely. You know, It gets me really worked up sometimes about, you know, when you have that conversation with the parent and say, “Your kid needs to be at school.”

“Well, yeah, they just kind of slept in.”

And it’s like, you can’t put the ownership on your kid, your kid’s in grade four, like—But, at the same time, I’m not angry at them, I’m just angry at the situation that everyone is in.

He then describes this “situation”:

It’s a downward spiral that they [parents] are doing what they learned—as they were brought up and so on and so forth. And it’s all just a cycle of poverty, of government issues, of inequalities, of stereotypes, of racism, you know?

All these things that just kind of funnel into this, “Here you go. This is probably going to be your life.” And you’re going to live in the developments, you’re going to probably squeak by junior high, you’re going to maybe make it [through junior high] and then hopefully, just hopefully, you get a high school degree so you can work a minimum wage job somewhere.

Or, you fall off the path and you’ll, you’ll fall into gangs and go that route.

Or you’ll just go on assistance and live that lifestyle and it’s—and those are kind of these cookie cutter paths that society, that our, that society gives communities like the this—you know?

Hence, he attributes (what he identifies as) a parental *deficit of responsibility* to broader social dynamics, positioning families in the community as trapped in a cycle of poverty. He suggests that “society” constantly sends messages which convinces individuals of the inevitability of their situation. Facing economic challenges and, perhaps more importantly, believing in this negative messaging, students are likely to following pre-determined “cookie-cutter paths.”

Using additional spatial metaphors, Bryce suggests three potential options for students: to “break the cycle”; “squeak by” (get their highschool diploma and a low-paying job); or “fall off” the path (into gangs or social welfare dependency). It is implied that “breaking the cycle” requires not only high school, but some form of post-secondary schooling (otherwise you will just be “squeaking by”). This is similar to the perceptions of many caregivers and students but, rather than attributing failure to individual choice, he suggests that young people in the community are, largely, the passive victims of circumstance. For Bryce, young people *fall off* paths and *fall into* gangs—they do not actively choose this direction.

Other staff members employed similar logic, as indicated in the following excerpts from Margaret and Tracy:

MARGARET: I think the fact that [students] get out of bed and come to school every day is pretty special. Because, in a lot of our families, in a lot of our homes, I think the reality is that it's really not encouraged unless they just want them out of the house.

But, I mean, when you get parents phoning saying that their kid's not coming to school that day because they're going to help them grocery shop—like, those, those are tellers—sort of saying it's not that important to them.

And yet, over the years, when we've had, you know whatever, you're asking the kids what they want to be and that I mean and they're teachers and lawyers and doctors and policemen and firemen and, you know? So, I mean, it's not that they don't have any dreams, it's just—will they realize those dreams?

TRACY: I guess for this group in particular I found there's a lot of [*pause*] independence given to them. I don't necessarily know if that's a good or bad thing, But I—at home, so if they're, you know, outside, they're very independent in making it to and from places themselves without people walking with them. Whether or not, I mean, they might not make the best choices along the way, but—. They have a lot of freedom, I guess, as compared with other students in other areas that I've worked.

Some cultures are a lot more free with their children and they let them kind of run around and do what they want, whereas some others are very strict. So it really depends where they're coming from and their families.

A lot, I guess I've noticed there's—it's not, I don't really want to group it into one—but there is some students that, you know, coming to school is a big struggle and their parents don't seem to—I don't want to say “care”—but it's not top priority for them.

As with Bryce, Margaret and Tracy suggests that school failure is not due to a lack of student aspiration, but rather the caregiver's *deficit of responsibility*—which is rooted in a *failure to see* school attendance (and school itself) as important and *failure to care*. Tracy further links these assumptions to cultural differences (although she avoids making specific attributions). Later on, Margaret further noted that, while young people have these aspirations, by the time they have reached junior high, they also suffer from a lack of vision:

I'll chat with them—the older one's especially—you know, “What do you think you're gonna do with your life? What are your plans? If you can't even get through to grade eight, what do you think you're going to do?” And most of them don't know. They don't know.

These deficits of responsibility and vision, she suggests, propel an intergenerational cycle which “breaks her heart”:

When kids come back to see me I'm always happy. Well, not always cause sometimes they come back pregnant and then I tell them what I think. I've never pulled punches with the kids, you know.

There was one in the other day that broke my heart. I had such hope—we all did—we had hopes for her, really had hopes for her, and now she's fifteen and pregnant—and *happy*.

And that's the weird thing—the parents are excited cause their babies are having babies. I just don't get it. I don't understand it. I don't understand it at all. Like, don't you want more for your kids? Like, no matter what you come from, don't you want more for your kids? But—it's just different.

Again, she frames this cycle in terms of a *failure to want* more and as a kind of *misdirected affect* (being “happy” with what she conceptualizes as a “heartbreaking” failure to achieve one's potential). She also maintains that parents do not share her own sorrow at this situation (their affect is also misdirected), which she finds bewildering.

For both Bryce and Margaret, the solution to this pattern—which is considered endemic to this community—is “education.” Making reference to his own upbringing in Winnipeg's inner city, Bryce suggests that it is through education that one can *break the cycle*. He notes that he was raised in similar circumstances but, that he was also “raised with an educated background.” He then connects this to his own role as a teacher:

And so, for me, for my mindset, that is the biggest difference in upbringing.

And so if you can teach these kids the value of education and what it can provide you with, they can have the exact same thing that I have and not be in that cycle.

Whereas my next-door neighbours [growing up], they weren't so fortunate—didn't have the same education—and they were, you know, CFS was in and out of the house, they—police were in and out of the house.

Hence, he suggests his parents educational background—and their capacity to teach “the value of education”—was the central distinction between his experience and those of his peers (and, notably, does not attribute it to other factors such as racism). He also positions his current work within this dynamic, suggesting that his job is to “teach these kids the value of education and what it can provide you with.” At another point in our discussion, he expanded upon his own role in this process:

And it's, I guess it's—my job and—why I got into it—was to try and break that cycle, to try to get them out of that mindset. That “that” is their only option, that these are the things that they have.

But I guess now I won't know until ten years down the road. It's kind of—it's heavy. It's a heavy thing.

Hence, his central goal is to “change the mindset” of students so as to *break the cycle* of intergenerational (educational and socioeconomic) impoverishment. However, he finds it unlikely that he will actually witness the outcome of these efforts.

Margaret also centralized the role of education in *breaking the cycle*, suggesting that it is the educator’s role to “hook the kids into wanting to learn and wanting to aspire to something.” However, she notes that schools must also engage with caregivers, otherwise these efforts will most likely be futile:

It’s really important to try and get the parents on board, and sometimes they resist. Like, they just—and you know when you think about it, I mean if you’re fifth generation—as some are—on social assistance—you know? You just have kids and collect a cheque, it’s hard to break the cycle. And, umm, I don’t know what it’s going to take to break that cycle, you know?

And some of them you just want to take home. There’s been lots over the years that I would take home. It’s just—

And you never know—none of us knows—that there’s something we might have done or will do that will affect a child’s life forever. And if you do find out about that—you’re *blessed* to. But lots of—you just never know. They’re always watching, they’re always listening.

Again, school is positioned as a mechanism for “breaking the cycle” (in this case, of welfare dependency). However, the young person’s lack of vision and (what she terms as) the caregiver’s “resistance”—which she later attributed to their own negative experiences of schooling—poses a nearly insurmountable challenge. Further, as with Bryce, she also notes that the educator’s efforts to “change the mindset” of students may not be evident until years later and that it is rare to receive word of these outcomes. Despite these challenges, however, educators must continue to try “breaking the cycle” because (as Margaret stated) “you never know—none of us knows—that there’s something we might have done or will do that will affect a child’s life forever.” This, to borrow Bryce’s wording, is a “heavy” burden.

In essence, it is suggested that the role of educators is, largely, to make up for the caregivers’ deficits and to offer the young person a model and message that they otherwise would not receive. Both participants locate the source of the young person’s failure in the actions and inactions of caregivers (including their “resistance” to schooling), although they suggest that the underlying cause of this behaviour is complex—rooted in negative experiences (including racism and the history of residential schooling). Although Margaret also implied that caregivers—by virtue of being caregivers—should “want more” for their child. Both of these

participants, therefore, largely frame young people and their families as the passive victims of powerful social forces. They see themselves as actors capable of mitigating the impact of those forces and making up for the resulting individual and familial deficits. While, in some respects, this does offer a slightly more nuanced analysis of educational inequality (in that it locates the root causes of individual deficits within historical, structural, and societal factors), it also casts young people as inherently passive and in need of corrective (cognitive and affective) tutelage from “enlightened” professionals.

While this general logic, I argue, was the most prevalent one shared amongst school staff, there were variations within the local discourse. For example, Vanessa suggested that students are “hungry for and thirsty for knowledge” and that the key to *breaking the cycle* is to nourish these traits. She suggests that in the student body,

There’s a lot to dig into, there’s a lot of talent, there’s a lot of passion, there’s a lot of interest—which is cool. Like a lot of enthusiasm—

I think that the students are a strength [here]. I think that they—when they come it’s because they want to be here and a lot of them have the choice, you know? A lot of them could not show up and some of them don’t.

But the kids that come, they come because whether they’re aware of it or not, they want, they want *something* and that’s pretty special. That’s pretty dynamite. That’s the kind of context, the kind of situation you get at a university when people are signing up for graduate-level courses, right? People being there because they want to be. And I feel like we have that here.

Hence, Vanessa offers a perspective more aligned with the notion of “unlocking students’ potential,” suggesting that—while they might not be aware of or able to articulate it themselves—students are naturally motivated to seek enriching opportunities (which teachers are then tasked with providing). Further, while subtly implying a lack of caregiver engagement (suggesting that many students “have the choice” to not attend school), she does not call attention to any specific kind of familial deficit. In fact, later in our discussion, she suggested that it is vital for the school to “listen to” and “learn from” parents and community members (stating, “that’s where our strength needs to come from...that’s where we need to look”). Hence, one must focus on “the strengths” of students and the community, which provide important resources for the school. This paradigm, she suggests, is the position held by the school administration—an argument with which, based upon my own interactions and observations, I generally concur. Further, while Bryce and Margaret’s explicit comments are based upon problematic assumptions, it should be stressed that both of the individuals were widely

recognized by student and caregiver participants as genuinely caring and helpful individuals. Indeed, in many respects, their lived practice suggested a far more humanizing and complex understanding of the students' situations than what their explicit comments suggest. So, perhaps, their embodied and intuitive understandings were far more complex, but could not be easily articulated due to their own limited narrative resources (which led them to fall back on well-worn tropes and narrative frames).

Overall, the perspectives of staff members suggest two different circulating *stories about* the Eaglecrest students and families: one which emphasizes their deficits and vulnerabilities and one which emphasizes their strengths. Both of these stories, however, demonstrate a ubiquitous faith in the potential of school to foster long-term (individual) wellbeing. Educators, consequently, are granted the role of changing students' mindsets, helping them foster "appropriate" visions for the future (wherein one "achieves more"), redirecting their affective commitments, and unlocking their potential. This is justified both in the interests of "breaking cycles" and responding to the students' innate drive (their "hunger") for this type of engagement. However, many admit, educators largely fail in their efforts because too many (non-school related) factors impact a student's life. Broad social change is, therefore, beyond the scope of an educator's work; but, nonetheless they can continue the Sisyphean task of trying to "affect a child's life forever." Even if the root causes of educational inequality are social, economic, and political, one can only be effective by working at the level of the individual—personal success is the goal, not structural change.

Community-based organization (CBO) representatives

There was a fair amount of variation amongst the perspectives of participants working for community-based organizations (CBOs), some of which resonated with the *view from above* and others that challenged the expressed faith in schooling. George, for example, maintained that school completion is the primary means through which young people can improve their lives, but notes—in the same vein as school staff members—that this potential often not fulfilled:

Unfortunately, when they get older or are adults, or teens—the choices they make can catch up with them and the light kind of goes out in their eyes. Whereas, with the younger kids—even though you're around long enough to know, to be able to sort of actively predict the future, there's always the, the chance of—that things might be different, or they might rise above their circumstances, or—something.

They're still, you know, to a large extent still open. There's still a chance. There's still possibilities. I think they're just still young. Like life hasn't—you know.

Young people, he suggests, are still “open” and “hopeful” and there is still the potential that they may “rise above their circumstance” (wording which resonates with the concept of *breaking the cycle*). However, the window for undertaking this individual transformation is rather slim, as they will soon be impacted by the cumulative impact of their own poor choices and resulting loss of hope (“the light kind of goes out in their eyes”).

While emphasizing the impact of individual choice, George nonetheless attributes the decision-making practices of young people to their social circumstances, he states:

I mean people often say, “Well, why do kids turn out this way?” And they say, “Why don't you have more successes?” And you kind of say, “I'm often surprised that they're aren't more [failures] given the obstacles and the challenges and the things that these kids have to often get—the cards they get dealt with—it's surprising they do as well as they do.”

The older ones, kids with so much potential and then—I run into them, these girls that—could have accomplished so much and, “Oh I've got five kids” and they're in, barely in their twenties.

And you gotta go—[sighs deeply]. And then, I know, often it's, “Oh! Here's my kids. Here's my baby” or whatever. I've gotten to where I say, “You must be very happy”—because I can't bring myself to say that “I'm happy for you.” Because I just see it as a tragic loss that—that if you had, you know—

Cause once you have one then you have two, and three, and the system actually rewards you to have more kids.

Later in our conversation he also talks about the “successes” that he has seen, framing these as valuable, but limited:

It's not like they've become doctors and discovered the cure for cancer, they've grown up and they might be single parents but they're making a go of it. They're trying, there's still challenges but they're, you know—They're, they're not drinking or, like, they take good care of their kids, that type of thing.

And that's all you can really hope for.

In many respects George's perception mirrors Margaret's as he—in a strikingly gendered way—comments on the “tragic loss” of the potential of young women while also framing success as simply “making a go of it.” Success does not necessarily mean fulfilling one's potential (conceptualized in terms of specific professional and class-based achievements) but does require that one avoids “falling off the path.”

Such success, however, is unlikely given the “cards they get dealt with”—which he also associates with cycles of poverty, welfare dependency, and a lack of parental engagement in education. Thus, he largely attributes these “tragic losses” to the deficits of families and he suggests that, in order to have “major impact” on the lives of young people,

We have to—we have to stop unhealthy parents having unhealthy kids, which then have unhealthy kids, which then have unhealthy kids.

I mean, we need to, we need to do interventions all the way along the continuum, but at some point we’ve got to move upstream to where the tap is and start playing with the tap as opposed to putting diversions and dams along the way. And I mean that’s a lofty goal, but I think that’s, that’s where it is.

Hence, for George, school completion is the means through which a young person can *rise above their circumstances*; however, the deficits of caregivers/families impede this, resulting in a continuing cycle of “parents having unhealthy kids.” What is needed, he suggests, is more intervention into families (specifically, school-based programs such as Head Start and the use of community schools) that can “play with the tap.” He suggests that “we can’t get the kids into the schools early enough” and that, by waiting “we’re closing the barn door long after the cow is gone. The die is cast, you know?” Hence, again, school and school-based interventions are presumed to be the mechanism through which young people can *rise above their circumstances* and *break the cycles* that they and their families are trapped within (a sentiment which paradoxically frames young people as agents who can choose a better life and as the passive victims of circumstances beyond their control).

Other CBO representatives do not necessarily share the same faith in schooling—even though all of these participants identified school completion as a valued goal that they (directly or indirectly) helped young people work towards. For example, Aly, who works primarily with older youth and young adults, suggests that school completion does not necessarily lead to a successful life, primarily because of a failure to teach non-academic life skills. She describes how her workplace developed a program to address this gap:

We did some brainstorming around what’s, what’s essential to actually being able to be successful in your goals and it comes back to life skills. So even through—for our employment and education—we start with the life skills. Like, “Show up for three of these workshops. You’re gonna go to anxiety. You’re gonna go to how to build a resume.” And we have, like, cooking workshops, budgeting workshops, mental health workshops, recreational workshops.

And we just find that, like, as soon as they have some of the knowledge around these things and how to handle them and how to feel confident in doing them, then

there's just a lot more success down the road as far as being able to keep employment and, you know?

And I mean, lots of them didn't grow up learning any of that. They didn't have somebody to look up to, to teach them that kind of stuff. So that's what we're trying to do now.

Again, she associates the challenges faced by young people as associated with deficits in their early home life—which failed to teach them the essential life skills required for long-term success.¹⁴⁴ However, she also identifies a deficit in schools, suggesting that current curriculum foci do not reflect what young people need for long-term success. Schools, therefore, must also be transformed. She suggests the following for middle-years instruction:

I think that the, the training that they're getting at that age should not be just academic. I think that there should be way more sort of hands on, life skills training in school. Like, a focus on hygiene and physical health and how to feed yourself and how to budget—something, like, even budgeting. How to do your taxes? [*laughing*] Like, those kinds of things.

They come out of it knowing their algebra and a little bit of history but that doesn't mean that they're gonna become successful adults immediately. They're missing an entire piece and if they're not learning that outside of the classroom—

Thinking about how much time you spend at school in your life, I think that that's a huge missing piece. But I think it's a missing piece from, like, Kindergarten.

So, I think that teachers need to be more educated on not just the curriculum, but we want to build strong individuals. And that looks a little different than just making sure that they get an A on their test. I just think the focus is a little backwards and inside out.

Hence, Aly suggests that while a young person's success or failure is, in part, due to a lack of early capacity development, it is the responsibility of schools to address these gaps—which, she suggests, they largely fail to do. This institutional failure is due to both a lack of resources (a cause which she identified later on in our conversation) as well as the misplaced priorities of both the school system and educators. In doing so, she *relocates* the responsibility for failure and success onto *school* itself. Further, she calls into question the *school-to-work-to-wellbeing theory of change* by noting that even if a young person does manage to complete school, they may still lack the capacities required for achieving their aspirations.

This general notion that *school completion is important—but not enough* was repeated by several CBO participants, with many identifying the failure of schools to address the

¹⁴⁴ Although, this was generally meant in reference to young people who had grown upon in the child welfare system. So, she was not critiquing caregivers, but rather the system which, she has found, often denies young people access to supportive adults.

“opportunity gaps” in academic, personal, and professional capacity development that young people in Winnipeg’s inner-city face. For example, some noted that *getting through* high school does not necessarily mean one has been able to develop the necessary academic capacities for post-secondary education while others emphasized the disconnect between schooling and career development. Nate, reflecting on his work with newcomers, suggests that:

I think that there can be sometimes a bit of a gap and some of the youth who do graduate from high school have, they sometimes say, “Well, where do I go now?” And so, I think a bit of that is making sure that we’re preparing those kids or helping them as best we can to make sure that they’re ready for when they graduate high school that they have a bit of an idea of maybe where they want to go or at least a bit that they’re able to gain employment and maintain employment.

The underlying thrust of these arguments is that while school completion is an important aspect of overall success, simply getting through the system is not sufficient. Further, many CBOs noted that, regardless of the source of a young person’s struggles, it remains the responsibility of the school and educational professionals to address them. Failure, therefore, is systemic and institutional, not the result of the personal failings of young people, their families, or their communities.

In addition, other CBOs called into question the assumption that school is “the answer” to social inequality. Andrew, for example, shared his own experiences in post-secondary education so as to denaturalize the dominating *story about school*—especially the discursively exalted *linear route*. He stated,

I was like one of the few Brown [Indigenous] people on campus in my undergraduate. Then seeing, in contrast, twenty-three-year-olds who didn’t have a clue of who they were or what they wanted to do and understanding that undergraduate and college is for, is socially where you’re supposed to find that stuff out. That’s kind of the trajectory for a lot of people that I went to school with.

Whereas from an Indigenous standpoint these things, if you’re not, if you’re in that condition—at twenty-three—you’re good for *nothing*, you might as well not [*pause*]—you’re helping *nobody*. So, people were finding awareness and identity and instilling values so that a person who reached puberty, that *that’s* a point of adulthood.

And, of course you see today, I mean that’s—all of our programs are trying to keep kids out of trouble because there’s been nothing for them to *do*.

Referring specifically to the young people that he works with, he further suggests that a student may have difficulty seeing him or herself following this specific educational pathway (through

highschool and into the post-secondary system) because it is *mystified* through public discourses (including those expressed through media representations):

So, we just see that if a student can understand, see that big picture, and in some cases we've seen, like, that this look on their face. And everything kind of falls away as to how simple it is. Things are already actually provided for them. School, there's a meal here, there's friends, there's people to support you.

And the specter of everything else that is laid overtop thanks to media and so forth that makes you think that, it's such a huge deal and you can't do it, that it's a mystery and you'll never quite get there—

Meanwhile across the river where it's greener over there? There are people there who still don't have a clue who they are and can't take care of themselves.

This narrative is not meant to reflect a universal Indigenous paradigm of education, but rather to offer counter-stories—two *stories of experience* (one from his own life and one from his work) that challenge the dominating *story about a good life* and *story about school*—suggesting that these are socially constructed narratives, rather than essential truths. The notion that one “finds oneself” and achieves autonomy in post-secondary schooling, he suggests, is a western cultural construction—a *manufactured delayed adulthood* that is, in his experience, not consistent with Indigenous paradigms—although education itself is highly valued.¹⁴⁵ This also draws attention to how childhood itself is conceptualized within the dominating narratives; young people are generally conceptualized not as “beings,” but as “becomings” (Arneil, 2002)—as *in development* and not yet full persons (a discourse which, as discussed in chapter three, maintains systems of adultist governmentality). By rendering young people as “depotentiated” (Jenks, 2005, p. 9) they are denied opportunities to *contribute to* their communities and to develop their capacities as social and political beings. CBOs then, are tasked with “trying to keep kids out of trouble because there's been nothing for them to *do*” (Andrew).

This *counter-story* about the future and present potential of children/youth was reiterated by several CBO staff members who emphasized that the point of their work was to recognize and foster the leadership and self-determination of young people. Sam, for example, describes how his organization conceptualizes “youth” in general:

¹⁴⁵ In a similar vein, Nate stated that newcomer students often express a desire to get a job (rather than attend school) because, they are “used to working at home [in their country of origin]—they're used to having little jobs in a kiosk or something. And so, they want to work to help support their families.” This is further evidence that the dominating *story about a good life* and *story about school*—and the conceptualization of “childhood” that they are predicated upon—are culturally-embedded, not universal.

I think all of us have this basic understanding of what “youth” is for us. Lots of people here are parents and they have their own kids.

So, when a youth or a kid comes in, into the organization—whether it’s to be, to access a program or to be there as support for a program or they’re a foster kid or they’re here for day camp—everybody treats the youth as, “That’s who’s going to take care of me. That’s who’s going to take care of me as I get older. I need to, I need to make them as strong and as honest and as relevant as possible to life in the future. Because if I don’t take care of them, they’re not going to take care of us.”

There’s this really strong understanding that youth are our next leaders. And we must, we must make them the most, the strongest that we can.

So, and I don’t, people don’t put it in those words, in that sort of wording. But they don’t need to. Because whether they’ve, they’re raising their own kids or whether they’ve seen their siblings struggling—they know that, that is what we have to do.

There’s just this inherent understanding of what we have to do for the youth and why we have to do it. So, while we all might all have different backgrounds, different cultural beliefs, but we all have this one clear understanding—whether they’re able to enunciate it or to put it into words that that’s what we’re here for. [*chuckles*]

Sam further suggests that this specific framing of youth as “leaders” and “those who will care for us” is maintained, regardless of the young person’s circumstances:

It is very diverse [here]. We’ve got transgendered kids, we’ve got foster kids, we’ve got homeless kids, we’ve got kids who grow up in affluent families, we’ve got every sort of youth. You’ve got drug users, alcohol users, we’ve got athletes, scholars, like—we just have such a range of kids and youth that come that are part of all the programs here. We’ve got teen moms, like, girls that are thirteen years old that are getting pregnant—for whatever reason, right?

That’s—those are our future. Those are our leaders. Those are our mothers, our fathers to come down the line, they’re going to have our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren.

This conceptualization was also expressed by Erin (who defined the girls that she works with as “the future” and “the leaders of tomorrow”) and also appeared to be a central belief of CBOs operating from an Indigenous paradigm (Andrew, Sam, and Erin all work for organizations that define their work this way). However, there was also resonance amongst those who work with newcomers and in mixed demographics; these participants discussed the importance of recognizing the depth of the (commonly unrecognized) capacity of young people and their families (“they do have knowledge and they do have things they can bring to the table”) (Christine) while also often defining their work as helping people “come into their own” (Nate).

While not as common, other adult participants drew attention to the capacities of young

people. For example, Kimberly (a caregiver), noted that the young people with whom she connects also serve to protect her property:

When they [kids] get that attention, they don't want to lose it. So, they start respecting you and then they look out for you. And, you know, yeah, they're *kids*, but they'll see other kids trying to vandalize your property and they're right there, like, "Hey! Don't do that! They're nice!" You know what I mean? So, I just love it around here.

In a similar vein, Penny highlighted the "kindness" demonstrated by Eaglecrest students when she goes to the school, noting, "Even though they don't know me, I'll be walking by and [they'll say], "Oh look! That's Grants mom! Hi Grant's Mom!" Or, "Hi Chelsey's Mom!" Both statements suggest that young people are also seen as contributing (albeit in a limited way) to the Eaglecrest school community (helping to create a "welcoming" atmosphere) and the surrounding area (providing a sense of security). Further, both school staff and CBO representatives would often discuss how much they enjoyed and benefitted from working with young people. Vanessa emphasized that the Eaglecrest students themselves "are a strength" of the school while Tracy noted that, "I think I've learned—as cliché as it is—a lot from the kids, hopefully as much as I've taught them. Or, if not, they've taught me more"). This suggests the rather widespread perception that young people can have an impact on both adults and their local environments—although the type of impact identified is rather limited (e.g., emphasizing how *good kids*—out of a desire for attention—will help discipline the *bad kids* and how working with young people helps to further the personal development of (comparatively privileged) adults. In comparison, the conceptualization of young people's capacities and agency was expressed far more comprehensively by (certain) CBO worker participants.

Overall, these perspectives suggest that the work of these CBOs is not (in practice) based upon the *school-to-work-to-wellbeing theory of change* or notions of *breaking cycles, rising above circumstances, or making a go of it*. Rather, it appears that their efforts are directed toward helping young people *come into their own*—to develop their sense of self and their capacities so that they may fulfill broader social roles as future caretakers and leaders (rather than as simply workers and consumers). This understanding is based upon framing the relationship between adults and young people as one of *mutual dependency*—adults are dependent on young people to ensure future care and support, while young people need adults to provide the resources and

opportunities necessary for them to become strong people and leaders. For many CBOs, this means avoiding the labelling of young people as somehow deficient and, instead, recognizing their agency and leadership capabilities (e.g., by including them on CBO governance and advisory bodies).

That being said, school completion was still a key objective sought by these participants. However, rather than framing schooling as a *sacred enterprise* or a *cure for social ills*, they described it as a *right* that young people are often denied due to both social inequality and the storiescape (or what Andrew terms “the specter”). These forces serve to make education appear inaccessible to (particularly Indigenous) students. Addressing these factors necessitates providing young people with on-going support (financial, social, emotional, etc.)—throughout their public schooling and beyond—as well as efforts to *demystify* the education system itself. Andrew, for example, suggests that those working with young people should not operate from the presumption that the *linear route* is natural or presume that resistance to schooling (by students or families) is somehow indicative of a perceptual or affective deficit. Rather, many of the young people that he works with simply have no reason to *buy into* the dominating *story about school*, primarily because their own and their family’s experiences (their own *stories of*) provide ample evidence contradicting this narrative. He states that many of these students do not hold “the same value over a diploma in the same way that, say, the general public of Canadian society would. That it means this better life, that it means a better career, a family etcetera.” However, rather than seeing this as an evidence of perceptual deficit, he challenges the fetishization of these bureaucratic elements of schooling. He notes that while his organization has a very high “success rate” in terms of highschool completion, these *markers of success* (this “lifeless stuff”) are treated as secondary concerns rather than primary goals. Rather, these overt (institutionally validated) markers are just the outcomes of a deeper process of building relationships and helping young people develop “a fuller understanding of why you do all this” so that,

When we turn around and leave the table, what’s left, I think, is truly the lifeless stuff. Which is the work—the credit, the report card, the assignment the grade letter—there’s no life to that. And leave those people out there in systems who think it is to then take it up and do something with it.

Hence, he suggests that appealing to the hegemonic *story about school* (with its narrow definition of success) is not an effective means for supporting young people through the

schooling system. This is not because young people (and their families) do not value education, but rather because the specific *markers of success* used in this system do not, in themselves, hold meaning. Rather, the schooling system grants meaning to these objects—such as diplomas, grades, and school records—arguably turning these into fetish objects and casting the essentially bureaucratic exercise of school completion as a kind of sacred enterprise—as something only accessible to the chosen (those in positions of social privilege) and the worthy (those who make the “right choices” and do not pose resistance). This mystification is reinforced by other social and cultural factors (“the specter of everything else that is laid overtop”) in a manner which leads to the moral and social exclusion of school leavers as well as the “surplus powerlessness” (Learner, 1986) experienced by students who see formal education as *out of reach*.

This suggests, overall, an alternative implicit theory of change. The presumption is that by *recognizing* the capacity and agency of young people, helping them to expand this capacity by providing support and opportunities (that is, ensuring their *human right* to education and personal growth is fulfilled), and *demystifying* the schooling system itself (recognizing it as a construction and helping young people navigate their way through it) it is possible to not only help students complete the bureaucratic process of school completion, but to also develop the relational infrastructure (the *relational home*) and sense of self-efficacy/self-determination that they will need to chart their own pathway toward a good life—however they imagine it. The goal is not to remove or alienate a young person from his or her existing capacities, experiences, relationships, or home, but to “enfranchise” these aspects of self (to draw upon Michelle, 2016)—so as to help them *come into their own*—while also making school completion accessible by addressing the societal and institutional factors which deny young people their *inherent right* to education and a good life. While an important challenge to hegemonic understandings, this theory of change still centralizes individual empowerment over social change. Indeed, while all CBO representatives recognized that the root causes of educational inequality were structural, they also stressed that their day-to-day work centres upon supporting individuals. While this approach and its related practices can (and to a limited extent do) serve to de-stabilize and de-naturalize the oppressive storyscape and landscape, these remains uncommon. They are peripheral approaches and practices—a hidden transcript (Scott, 1990)—that find expression primarily within local community organizations and in the context of on-one-on interactions.

Comparing the adult participant clusters

Comparing the perspectives offered by these three sets of adult participants indicates a shared sense that school completion is the pathway (or at least part of the pathway) towards a good (or at least better) life—and, for some, the only means for escaping a life of violence and poverty. However, while most participants naturalized the connections between school completion, employment, and individual wellbeing, a notable minority challenged this theory of change. Some argued that success in life is not guaranteed because the school system itself does not provide young people with what they need for long-term success. Others suggested that what is commonly understood as education is actually a kind of bureaucratic construction—the structure and meaning of which has been shaped by culture and ideology in a manner that disempowers young people and communities. While, within the existing system, it has become necessary for young people to engage with this bureaucracy, it is not something to be naturalized or valorized (because this only serves to mystify school completion and pathologize students and families who resist or disengage from the system).

Intersecting with these discourses of school are various conceptualizations of young people and their families. Some suggest that young people have agency, but question whether they will use that capacity to make the *right choices*. For these participants, there is only one legitimate path to success and, while the young person is significantly shaped by their family and social circumstances, it is still up to them to choose that path. For others, young people are passive victims of circumstance, trapped in cycles, downward spirals, and streams that direct them towards either *falling off* or *squeaking by*. Regardless of the cause, this failure is seen as an often inevitable “tragic loss.” Caregivers and families, meanwhile, are perceived with considerable ambivalence. On one hand they are seen as victims themselves (of negative school experiences, racism, and cycles of poverty) while, on the other hand, they are framed as the primary cause of their child’s failure or success—depending upon whether they *care about* school and demonstrate this *affective connection* (this *properly oriented affect*) by setting expectations and boundaries for their child. Subsequently, it often becomes necessary for professionals (e.g., educators) to either make up for these parental deficits or to undertake more extensive interventions—the solution is “more school” in more facets of life.

Some, however, suggest an alternative perception—one that centralizes the agency of young people and positions them as future caregivers and leaders, regardless of circumstances.

Following this logic, adults must work with young people (and their families/communities) to both draw out and build up their existing strengths. The solution to school failure lies within these relationships and the young person's own capacity for self-determination—which is always present, but often discursively delegitimized and suppressed by both inequality and the various “threats from the system” (Andrew) that impact their day-to-day lives. Overall, the more prominent *story about school* told by adult participants revolves around notions of *child saving* and *parent/community deficit* wherein the goal is to rescue young people from their circumstances, their inadequate families and communities, and themselves. Within this story, young people and caregivers are positioned as either passive victims or blame-worthy (morally excluded) agents while adults (primarily external professionals but also engaged caregivers) are heroically positioned as actors capable of making (limited) change. On the other hand, there is a (peripheral and subordinated) *counter-story about school* and an alternative theory of change that centralizes the capacity and strengths of young people, their families, and communities while denaturalizing both the storyscape and the landscape which maintains educational inequality.

6.5 Summary: Sketching out the storyscape

Comparing and contrasting the findings from the young and adult participant clusters, it is evident that there is a *dominating story about school* which is predicated upon an implicit *school-to-work-to-wellbeing theory of change*. This *story about* appears to resonate across not only academic scholarship and policy (as discussed in chapter two), but also within the messaging received by young people from the various adults in their lives (including caregivers and teachers), their peers, and other channels (e.g., media narratives). This story, however, is thin and deterministic, offering very limited means for understanding and responding to the various challenges that these young people (and their families) face. Further, it is a story that: reverberates strongly with classist, neoliberal, adultist, racist, and colonial discourses—morally excluding those who do not complete school (positioning them as deficient and/or deviant); framing young people and their families as either passive victims or agents who choose to fail (and are therefore in need of external intervention to make up for their failings and to *reoriented their affect*); prioritizing individual success over collective change; and defining the value of education in terms of its monetary rewards. This constitutes the “public transcript”—the official,

hegemonic, publicly “performed” discourse—about education that impacts everyday interactions (Scott, 1990).

This story, the *story about a good life* with which it intersects, and the broader storyscape do not provide the narrative resources (the frames and discursive repertoires) necessary for many young people to make sense of their experiences and the dynamics which impact their lives.¹⁴⁶ Rather, these forces serve to de-legitimize conceptualizations of a good life that do not reflect the neoliberal ethos of individualized success; the indirect pathways through the education system often taken by Indigenous and inner city students; and understandings of childhood that challenge the western emphasis on dependency. Further, these serve to mystify and justify inequality—obscuring how the structure of the landscape denies many young people access to the narrative, material, and social resources that one needs to move through the schooling system. The causes of failure (defined as school leaving) are consequently located within individuals (young people and/or their caregivers and families) who are presumed to lack a sense of responsibility, vision, care, or aspiration and/or to have *misdirected affect* (valuing or finding joy in de-legitimized events and activities, such as young motherhood). As a result, it becomes difficult for some young people to envision and articulate their own *stories of the future*. This is not because they themselves are deficient, but rather because the storyscape that they are drawing upon delegitimizes many of their own experiences, strategies, and capacities—framing their own knowledge and cultural capital as less valuable than that of the privileged (e.g., that of middle class, White, “state-created Canadians”) (LaRocque, 2010, p. 7).

Consequently, the storyscape (which can be understood as a manifestation of cultural violence) serves to legitimize and naturalize the landscape and the structural violence which it maintains. By rendering certain experiences and perceptions unspeakable, the storyscape erases certain forms of knowledge and ways of perceiving the world and, therefore, may be seen as a manifestation of “epistemic violence” (Spivak, 1998) that serves to maintain existing relations of power. While alternative *counter-stories about school* (that denaturalize both the storyscape and landscape) do exist, these generally manifest within spaces located on the periphery of the education system (e.g., within community organizations).

However, at the same time, it must be stressed that this does not mean that young people are without agency—including narrative agency. As their complex *stories of the future*

¹⁴⁶ Arguably, this also limits the ability of adults to understand the young people that they work with.

demonstrate, they actively construct the meaning of their experiences and compose their visions by drawing upon the storyscape as well as the perspectives of their peers and the various adults with which they interact. They draw upon the *story about school* and *story about a good life* because it provides a means for them to garner a sense of control over their own life trajectories (even though this means morally excluding others). Given this, it is perhaps unsurprising that participants would often indicate their affective investment in these narratives and seek to defend them from challenge. Similarly, adults (particularly caregivers and school staff), appeared to employ these *stories about* to construct and perform their own identities as *good parents* and *good teachers*—emphasizing their sense of duty towards the young people with which they work. Hence, while the storyscape is extremely problematic, it is also being used by various participants (including young people) in a manner that helps them develop a sense of identity, self-efficacy, purpose, and hope. The cost of adhering to these stories, however, is quite high—requiring that young people be dispossessed from their own/their family’s experiences, knowledge, and ways of being and often leading to the moral exclusion of others and, at times, oneself—a form of dehumanization that appears to be readily directed against Indigenous students and families. Further, the extent to which faith in these stories will actually result in the fulfillment of one’s hopes is—as indicated by both statistical data and the perceptions of educators and CBO representatives—highly unlikely. CBO participants stressed that young people, as they age, will continue to be impacted by the violence of the landscape and storyscape—indeed, these forces will most likely intensify as they move through school and transition into “adulthood.” And, lastly, the success that is envisioned is defined primarily in monetary and individualized terms—one is to fit within the status quo rather than challenge it or seek collective emancipation.

CHAPTER SEVEN
ATTRIBUTIONS AND ACTIONS:
YOUNG PEOPLE MAKING IT THROUGH

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how participants *locate* the causes of school failure and success (that is, upon whom or what they attribute these outcomes) as well as the various causes of educational inequality which are indicated by the *stories of experience* that they tell. It begins by exploring how young people understand educational failure and success, demonstrating how this is impacted by the *storyscape* that was sketched out in chapters five and six. While these participants largely attribute the causes of school failure to the deficits of individuals, families, their community, and their school, listening to their stories for the “absent but implicit” (Carey et al., 2009) allows for the identification of other discursive and structural factors. I suggest that these participants conceptualize themselves primarily as *workers without rights* who need to embody a particular subjectivity (that of the *good student-worker*) in order to *stay present* in school. These efforts, however, are hindered by a host of interpersonal, structural, and discursive dynamics—all of which manifest within the micro-political operations of *the everyday*. The perspectives of adults generally resonate with those of the students, with school failure being commonly understood as either a *failure of affect* or a *failure of access*—although opinions regarding who or what has caused this differ.

By considering the stated and implied causes of educational inequality, it is possible to begin identifying features of the educational landscape which should be incorporated into the explanatory map and, subsequently, addressed through practice, policy, and structural change. As in the previous chapter, the perspectives of the young participants are centralized while the data generated through engagement with adult participants is condensed, serving mainly to provide further nuance to the identified themes.

7.2 Young people locating the causes of success and failure

As discussed in chapter six, the *storyscape* that the young participants draw upon to make sense of their experience also provides the lens through which they view the causes of school success (read: school completion) and failure (school leaving). Given the extent to which the

dominating story about a good life and *story about school* privileges individual action, it is perhaps unsurprising that, overwhelmingly, study participants reiterated arguments that correspond with the “individual deficit model of failure” defined by Clandinin, Steeves, and Caine (2003). That is, they had a tendency to personalize success and failure, attributing these to either the choices or inherent characteristics of individuals. Consider, for example, the following selection of responses (drawn from multiple focus groups sessions):

ASIM: Some people, in highschool, they bully people. So, they took the other way. [*He puts his hands together, palm on palm, and wiggles them forward. The movement is like a fish going down a stream*]

A person who finishes school, they continue on their way. They don't stop, they don't take a break. They continue. Follow their dream. I'm going to follow my dreams. The other ones? They smoke weed—for real! Alcohol—crazy, crazy.

Me? I am active. I play outside. Play basketball. But *they*? They want to, like, play on their phones, cause trouble, grease people—like, steal.

MASON: It's cause they want to act all cool. Don't do their work. Don't go to class.

SUBIRA: They don't do their work. They don't work in school. They get pregnant, at like sixteen years old. We're smarter than them. They don't care. They don't want to get a good life.

HALIMA: They bully. If you're a bully, how can you be a good student? Like, if you're a bad kid, how can you be—? I'm a good kid.

KENNEDY: The only reason they don't finish is because they get knocked up in high school and then they have kids and then they can't finish. Maybe they get into drugs. They took the wrong way 'round. I'm smarter.

JEMAL: They get pregnant. They fight. They miss school. They don't do their job. *They* make bad choices. I'm a good kid.

MIA: They don't show respect. They do inappropriate things trying to be, like, funny. They smoke.

They treat us [Mia and her friends] in a way that we don't like. Yeah, they're talking and they're telling us to—Yeah they say, “Stop talking!” And I said, “I am not talking.” And they talk so much more than us. They aren't respectful but then you get in trouble.

CASSANDRA: They're rebels. They don't really care. They get expelled or suspended.

ROSE: They don't finish their work.

PETER: They don't do their [*in singsong*] werk, werk, werk, werk, werk!¹⁴⁷

JORDAN: They stay up late and don't listen to their parents. So, like, they want to stay up because they don't want to go to school or they just want to be really stupid and sleepy and they don't want to do their work.

DAWN: [They drop out of school because of] bad choices. I know lots of people that already are smoking cigarettes. Maybe because of their other friends are already doing that, or family. Yeah. Smoking sometimes makes people want to start doing weed and stuff like that. And after trying weed other people might want to try something else, something stronger.

LIAM: Could be gang-related. Like, they could skip because of that. Or they don't know, they don't know how important [school] is.

These *attributions of fault* all revolve around the making of (what is normatively classified as) *bad choices*—both in school and in life. Indeed, poor school outcomes were often attribute to various *out-of-school* behaviours (being in a relationship; using tobacco, drugs or alcohol; having sex and getting pregnant; becoming involved with gangs; and staying up late at night). Hence, being a *good student* means being a *good kid*. When articulating these attributions, the participants also draw upon broader discourses associated with adolescent sexuality and pregnancy, bullying, and substance abuse—which have each been critiqued as serving to problematically frame, morally exclude, dehumanize, and oppressively discipline those cast as deviant (e.g., see Cense & Ganzevoort, 2018; Lavin, 2017; Sims-Schouten & Edwards, 2016; Winton & Tutters, 2014; Barcelos, 2013; Fonda, Eni, & Guimond, 201; Tupper, 2008; and McDermott & Graham, 2005).¹⁴⁸

Participants also commonly contrasted these *bad choices and behaviours* with their own, so as to indicate what they do—and, just as importantly, do *not* do—in order to be successful.

These behaviours centered upon being a *good student*, which largely meant *doing your work*:

JEMAL: You just do your job! Finish it every day. That's all you need, most of the time. Failing is not doing your work. Not listening. Talking. Making bad choices. Doing something you're not supposed to do.

SUBIRA: I'm doing my job. Listening. Being quiet. Not talking loud. Like, reading. Our teacher gets mad when we don't read. You can read or sit quietly or just finish your work.

¹⁴⁷ Peter is imitating a popular song by Rihanna entitled *Work*.

¹⁴⁸ Indeed, an entire analysis could be constructed revolving around how these three specific discourses operate within the storyscape. This will be a topic of future publications.



Figure 39 Anti-bullying t-shirt on display (Photo: J. M. Hyde)

PETER: That's what it means to do well in school—stay on task and work.

NOAH: You need to get more education. Don't get distracted easily. Pay more attention.

BASHIR: It's about coming to school every day and respecting the teachers.

ROBBIE: Always doing your work. Not getting distracted by friends. Some kids in class, they like, talk.

MIA: Some students, like Marcus¹⁴⁹, they don't care. They don't care what they do. With writing, it's like, two sentences and then he says, "Done!" And then, with reading, he sleeps!

DAWN: I don't really like talking in class, mostly I'm just listening to the teacher. If you're sitting somewhere where you might talk over the teacher, you should move somewhere else. Cause if you're not paying attention, you're not going to learn anything. The more I pay attention. The more I know.

LIAM: You listen. That's how you're a good learner. If you don't listen, how can you learn? That was my big issue, being around other kids that don't listen or aren't on the same level so the teacher would have to hold back. So, like, being in grade eight and doing mainly grade seven work. Last year in grade seven, they were a lot smarter and paid more attention. It depends on the kids. You do get harder work in junior high.

¹⁴⁹ A pseudonym.

Overall, there was a general consensus amongst participants that being a *good student* means being a *good worker*. To be a *good (student-)worker*, one must: be present in class (come to school); listen passively and attentively; pay attention (not allow oneself to be distracted); follow directions; be productive (stay on task and finish your work, but do not “rush”); and be respectful (meaning, not disruptive and in control of oneself). Further, Liam notes that being in a class with students who were not as (presumably) capable or dedicated made for a more challenging work environment wherein the teacher has to “hold back” the progress of some students to accommodate others.

Participants further suggested that it is important to perform as a *good worker*, even if you do not necessarily see the value of the work that you are doing.¹⁵⁰ For example, the following excerpt depicts a focus group exchange between Mason, Cassandra, and Ghani¹⁵¹:

MASON: [Students that don't finish school] don't pay attention in class.

JULIE: So why do you think a student might not pay attention in class?

MASON: Because they think they're so cool.

CASSANDRA: And it's BORING!!!

GHANI: [*nods in agreement*] They think school is boring.

CASSANDRA: Because it IS!!

GHANI: [*laughs*] Yeah. They do too much writing, too much reading.

CASSANDRA: Well—I *like* reading.

GHANI: I don't. And I don't like ELA [English Language Arts]. You have to write about things that you hate. Write note and notes and notes.

JULIE: So why do you think teachers want you to do that?

GHANI: So that you can get an education. So, you can be successful.

JULIE: So, wait [*pause*]—writing all those notes means that you can get an education and be successful?

GHANI: No, no, no, no—you have to do ALL the things that you have to do with education to be successful. Writing's the worst. Math sucks.

¹⁵⁰ Although a few students did make some explicit connections between school subject areas and future careers (e.g., Subira explained, “If you get an accounting job, you need to learn math. Or if you're cooking, in a restaurant, or if you're a teacher.”)

¹⁵¹ Mason and Cassandra identified as Indigenous (First Nations and Métis) and Ghani immigrated to Canada from Afghanistan.

Oh, you know, my teacher? He made it a rule that if we don't finish our work, right? Then we don't get choice time. That's why I don't like math. Yeah. We get grade six math, right?¹⁵² So it's really hard too. We get the same math as the [grade] sixes.

In this exchange (and several others) participants express their lack of enthusiasm for teacher-prescribed learning activities—an emotional state that they attribute to the perceived pointlessness, repetitiveness, and/or uninspiring nature of the tasks. As Ghani demonstrates above, in many instances, they expressed that even though they did not see the point of the specific tasks or content area, it was nonetheless important to complete it because of the task's *indirect link* to the overall process of “getting an education.” In addition, several noted that if they did not complete their work, they would be punished in some way (they would have their recess withheld, they would not get a “choice time”¹⁵³ break, their caregivers would be informed of their behaviour, etc.). Overall, these participants suggest that it is not “learning” that is valued in school/by school authorities—rather it is their overall performance as a *good student-worker* that is recognized and legitimated.

This emphasis on *performance* rather than *learning* was also identified by Mason and Jordan, who discussed the importance of “doing your work” so that you can get “good grades” and have a “good record”—which is what you need to “get places”:

MASON: If they don't work, they might have bad grades. But they need, like, a good record on their files, right?

JULIE: Why is that?

JORDAN: Because you need a record to go, like, places.

JULIE: Like, different schools?

JORDAN: [*nods*] It's like, like say a police record. Like, if they get caught by a police person then they give you a record and then you can't be a cop.¹⁵⁴

JULIE: So, same with a student record?

MASON: Yeah. At Central Tech you gotta have, like a good GOOOOOD record.

¹⁵² Ghani is in grade five, but he is in a grade five/six split class.

¹⁵³ This is the term usually used to denote “breaks” or “play time.”

¹⁵⁴ The linkage between a school record and a police record is telling—I suggest it further reflects the associations between school failure and presumed delinquency.

JULIE: So, like, by when? Like, if you don't do well in grade five, but really well in grade seven—

JORDAN: Well, grade five it really won't affect that much.

MASON: Cause it's like a long time ago.

JULIE: So, when does it start to matter?

JORDAN: Grade seven and then—grade seven to grade twelve. Because grade seven is, like, basically high school. So, if you want a good job and you want money, you need, you need to do good in school for basically every single grade so you don't fail.

MASON: Yeah, but, in grade five and grade six they [a hypothetical student] starts acting up—and then in grade seven and eight, like—

JULIE: So maybe it actually does matter in grade five?

MASON: Yeah. Except if you want to be an athlete. Then you just have to be really good.

JULIE: I think you still need to keep your grades up if you want to be a college athlete.¹⁵⁵

MASON: Oh yeah. Yeah [*hangs head*] [*sighs*] [*laughs*]

Mason and Jordan suggest that the impacts of not adequately performing as a *good student-worker* can be significant and long-term, affecting one's ability to access specific schools and "go places." Hence, a student's *failure to perform* can have immediate effects (the student is disciplined by the teacher) as well as long-term, cumulative outcomes. These long-term effects, as Jordan and Mason suggest, begin to accumulate quite early in a student's career (to the point where grade seven is "basically highschool"). This creates a sense that young people are working under a *compressed timeline* wherein they must quickly set themselves on the right pathway for future success—indeed, Mason (who was in grade six) is already aware of the requirements of the highschool that he wants to attend and seeks to adhere to these the best he can. Thus, participants suggested the following logic: to be successful, one must complete schooling (including post-secondary schooling). To do this you need to *stay on your path* and obtain what you need to *go places*. To stay on the path and maintain a good record, you need to make *good*

¹⁵⁵ Reflecting back, I noticed my own (rather compulsive) need to reinscribe the discourse that they were in the process of critiquing.

choices both in and out of school (e.g., abide by socially sanctioned codes of behaviour) while also preforming as a *good student-worker* every day—no matter how you interpret the relevance or value of the task being prescribed by the authority figure. Overall, participants conceptualized themselves primarily as *workers*—not as learners or students—engaged in a particular kind of bodily performance.

Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *habitus* offers a useful means for interpreting these findings. The term *habitus* refers to the various taken-for-granted, socially learned bodily dispositions, mannerism, habitual practices, “gut feelings,” and skills that individuals come to (unconsciously) perform in a specific social setting. *Habitus* both influences and is influenced by an individual's social positioning and, consequently, is a means through which social norms and stratifications are reproduced. To offer a personal example, the years I spent in the Toronto District School Boards (so-called) gifted program (as discussed in chapter one) changed the way in which I held myself, engaged in class, spoke, and dressed—while also shaping my subjective perceptions and tastes. In highschool, this bodily performance (I believe) granted me (automatic and undeserved) privileged access to the attention and good will of my teachers. Similarly, these participants suggest the importance of maintaining particular forms of bodily performance that are valued within the classroom setting (being a *good student-worker*) and beyond (being a *good kid*). This performance requires passivity, productivity, attention to detail, self-management, emotional-management, and compliance.¹⁵⁶ During my time at Eaglecrest, I also noticed how elements of this local discourse reverberated constantly within staff-student interactions. For example, teachers and other staff members commonly employed the phrases, “do your work,” “do your job,” and “make good choices” when seeking compliance in various school spaces (most commonly in classrooms, but also in hallways, at recess, and in the gymnasium). In addition, the students largely saw themselves as *workers without rights*—as generally powerless and unable to question assigned tasks while also being subjected to authority figures granted the power to deny breaks and leisure and/or employ other sanctions if their expectations are not met.

Again, I do not believe that students are simply parroting this discourse; rather these adult-employed phrases become part of the students' discursive repertoire, which they use to

¹⁵⁶ Interestingly, several participants also identified the spatial aspects of this performance, suggesting (for example) the distinction between what is permitted in classroom space versus “gym” and “recess”—as Mia suggested: “Those times, we don't have to sit down. We're free.”

interpret both their own behaviour and that of others (including that of teachers). Specifically, those who did not generally abide by these norms—that is, did not perform appropriately as a *student-worker*—were perceived as being either somehow deficient or Other. Various kinds of disruptive behaviour (swearing at the teacher, being “rude,” bullying, not staying in one’s seat, not “keeping one’s hands to oneself,” etc.) were read as indicators of either innate delinquency, a *failure to care* about one’s future, or some other deficit or defect. For example, consider how Emily distinguishes between her own behaviour and those of others:

EMILY: I just be myself.

JULIE: And what does it mean to be “myself”?

EMILY: I try not to be anyone else. Don’t try to be someone else who you think is more popular.

JULIE: And why do you think that’s a good thing?

EMILY: Cause, then you’re sort of being a copycat and no one likes that.

JULIE: Ah.

EMILY: And then sometimes they do wrong stuff. Like, I get bullied by all these kids. And then some kids, that *were* nice, they see them [the “bullies”] and they’re like, “Man! I want to be cool!” So, then they be mean to me. It’s happened for five years, but I’m used to it now.

JULIE: [*sympathetically*] Hmmmm—

EMILY: And, like, it’s people who think they’re really, like, cool—and they, they like, they think they can do whatever they want.

In my classroom a lot of people just walk out. Like, “I don’t have to do this, learn this. I’m too cool for this.” And then they just wander the hallway.

I don’t know what their report card says, I always wonder.

Here, Emily is trying to “make sense” of her own difficult experiences. She does so by linking being a *bad kid* (or “a bully”) to being a *bad student* (with a poor report card). A similar argument was presented by Subira and Halima:

SUBIRA: Ugh. Those boys, Devon and Mackenzie?¹⁵⁷ They try to get our teacher so mad and then they *laugh*.

HALIMA: I know, right?

¹⁵⁷ Pseudonyms.

SUBIRA: Our teacher uses, like, a point system. Like, he [the teacher] gets a point when he gets mad or if we don't listen.

HALIMA: He said it's supposed to be a whole class thing—

SUBIRA: It's teacher versus student.

HALIMA: He said it has to be for the whole class. But then, three or four [students]—

SUBIRA: They ruin it for *everyone*. They don't even care.

In this instance, Halima and Subira interpret the behaviour of “those boys” through a lens that emphasizes conscious choice and *wrong (misdirected) affect*. These students are not supposed to enjoy (to “laugh at”) the impact of their behaviour, they are supposed to “care” about the fact they are “ruining it” for everyone and “making their teacher mad.” This dismisses other possible interpretations (e.g., that these students were trying to undermine—to resist—a disciplinary practice that they saw as problematic) and positions these misbehaving and *misaffected* students as outcasts who are a threat to the class as a whole. Overall, those who engage in these behaviours are understood to be making poor, shortsighted choices and *misdirecting their desires and affect*—choosing to be “cool” and “popular” rather than a good student.

Criticisms of “coolness” and “popularity” were common, with these traits being associated with defiance and a desire to be with one's peers. This suggests a kind of discursive dismissal of the agency and sociality of young people (as well as their resistances, frustrations, and other emotions). Personal self-determination/independence and social activity (including collective opposition and resistance) are framed as incongruent with the idealized notions of a *good student-worker*. While some of these desires are contained—that is, are to be indulged only during specific segments of time (at recess) and within certain spaces (outside)—others (e.g., overt opposition) are considered wholly inappropriate and in need of tight disciplinary monitoring and control. In class (“when you are supposed to be working”) students are expected to suppress these desires (to self-monitor and self-regulate). Those who do not, are marked by other students as *bad kids* and, consequently, morally excluded—that is, often deemed undeserving of support, resources, or a good life (Opotow, 2001a).

In addition to these notions of choice, proper affect, and self-management, students who engaged in “disruptive” or “non-compliant” behaviours were often also identified as having

some kind of innate defect or being otherwise deviant. For example, Bashir shared the following story in which he overheard staff members talking one of his classmates:

Is this true? I heard that Carlos¹⁵⁸ is—you know—they say he is mental. And I heard a teacher talk to my teacher before, saying that he [Carlos] could actually kill someone if he gets mad. And it's like—[sarcastically] grrrrreat.

Everybody says Carlos is mental. He has ADHD and he has an anger problem. That's why I decided to make him one of my best friends. Because I got him into anime and stuff.

This particular perception of (what is interpreted to be) mental health issues was quite common; students who were identified as displaying anger in class, for example, were sometimes referred to as “crazy” or to “have problems.”¹⁵⁹ The idea that these behaviours may stem from situational factors was sometimes identified, but often subjected to debate, as in the exchange between Subira and Mia:

SUBIRA: The student might be under pressure.

MIA: No!

SUBIRA: [to Mia] Yeah!

JULIE: [to Mia] Why do you think they would not be under a lot of pressure?

MIA: Because they're only *kids*.

JULIE: They're only kids and kids don't have that kind of pressure?

MIA: Yeah.

SUBIRA: No! Kids *can* have pressure.

Hence, for Mia, the notion that young people (“kids”) are subjected to significant pressure is absurd. These idealized notions of innocent childhood also found expression in statements by participants who stated that “bad kids” do “adult stuff” (like smoking, having, sex, swearing, etc.). Thus, a young person may be classified as deviant because they are either *experiencing adult pressures or exhibiting adult behaviours*.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ A pseudonym.

¹⁵⁹ Further, while, in some instances, participants noted that a student's behaviour might be in response to unfairness (e.g., they “act out” because they received a bad mark on a test or because the teacher took away certain privileges), these were generally conceptualized as “overreactions.”

¹⁶⁰ One common probe I used in the focus groups was to ask students to explain a) why a teacher would yell at a student and b) why a student would yell at a teacher. Participants commonly attributed the teacher's response to “pressure” and “stress” or as a response justified by student behaviours. Meanwhile, they most often attributed a student's behaviour to innate characteristics and “overreactions.”

For some participants, discussions of innate ability and behavioural tendencies revolved around particular notions of gender. Several participants suggested that it was primarily (but not exclusively) boys who engaged in disruptive behaviours (e.g., Subira, Halima, and Mia would often use the term “those boys” to refer to the disruptive students in their class), while girls were generally considered more well-behaved and, for some, more capable. Consider, for example, the following exchange between Jordan and Mason:

JULIE: So, you don't think teachers treat boys and girls the same?

JORDAN: No—no, no, no, no. Not even close.

JULIE: Why do you say that?

MASON: Because girls are, like, a bit smarter than boys.

JORDAN: Okay, okay, so here's the thing: girls rule, boys drool. Because some boys and stupid and some girls are just, like, crazy, crazy smart.

MASON: [*disagreeing*] But Albert Einstein was crazy smart.

JORDAN: Well—[*pause*], that's Albert. He was really old.

MASON: Abraham Lincoln was smart. JFK was kinda smart. That musician with the big hair—

JULIE: Bach?

MASON: [*shakes head in disagreement*]

JULIE: No? Beethoven?

MASON: Yeah! He was smart.

Amongst the teasing and humour, these participants presented commonly articulated understandings of essentialized gender differences that reverberate—albeit often very subtly—across the data.

Essentialized notions of race were also employed by participants in their attributions of success and failure, thereby indicating the influence of colonial and racist discourses upon the storyscape and sensemaking frames of individuals. For example, in one of the focus groups—in this case with three newcomer students—participants suggested that they believed Indigenous students were more likely to fail and leave school:

HALIMA: Well, it's like—[*sighs*]. Like—[*she turns and whispers something in Subira's ear*]

JULIE: It's cool if you don't want to say—

[*Halima looks at Subira, who gives her a nod that, in my interpretation, meant, “Go ahead and say it”*]

HALIMA: Like, well, Aboriginals fail mostly—Please don’t tell Mr. P!!! [her classroom teacher]

SUBIRA: [*to Halima, teasingly*] Shhhhhh!!!

Taken aback, I pressed them on why they believed this. In response, they began to talk about specific *individuals* in the school who “skipped class,” “didn’t do their work,” and did “adult things” (like smoking). This included making references to personal experiences of “bullying” which they felt were directed against them by Indigenous students who were being “racist”:

HALIMA: They picked on Mia so much.

MIA: They kicked rocks at me when I first came here.

SUBIRA: Racism. Like, there’s a group of, ummm, Aboriginal kids that are so rude to us.

HALIMA: They hate her [*motioning to Mia*]

SUBIRA: Because we’re different.

Hence, they not only personalized the issue of school failure but also interpreted the behaviour of specific individuals through a racialized/racist lens. In doing so, they positioned the so-called *bad kids* as deviant not only because of actions that broke certain presumed standards of behaviour, but also because of their Indigeneity. Similarly, in another session Subira told me that her family intended to transfer her to a different school, stating their reasoning for this switch:

SUBIRA: This area’s dangerous and we heard that Preston¹⁶¹ is a good school.

JULIE: Why is that?

SUBIRA: [*shrugs*] They just say that it’s a good school, better than here. [*pause*]

They say there’s too many Aboriginal people here.

JULIE: Why is that an issue?

SUBIRA: [*shrugs*] Cause they do adult things.

Her statements indicate how these racist, colonial, and (to some extent) adultist attributions of blame are also located spatially and geographically—within particular schools and communities, sometimes leading individuals to make changes to their own material realities (e.g., where they

¹⁶¹ A pseudonym for the school Subira actually mentioned.

are living). Further, this suggests how the perceptions of immediate family members within newcomer communities may influence a young person's perceptions.

This was reaffirmed by adult participants—including CBO staff members working at newcomer organizations—who suggested that Canadian immigration agencies generally do not (formally) provide much information about Indigenous communities in Canada and, in many instances, may actually propagate racist stereotypes. This helps to maintain racist discourses which circulate amongst Winnipeg newcomer (and non-newcomer) communities.¹⁶² Program director Christine noted that:

So, prior to arriving—I don't know if you know this—like, refugees get, like, a brief orientation and I believe there's only like one or two lines on Aboriginals. This is what I've been told from newcomers who come here. There's only like one or two lines on Aboriginals and they're often negative.

And, so—I'm sure you've probably found this—that there are conflicts between Aboriginals and newcomers, because, I mean, nobody wants to be on the bottom right? So, there's a lot of issues that we've seen with youth.

This implies that the cause of this dynamic is not simply a lack of cultural understanding; rather, it has multiple roots, including the immigration practices of the Canadian state and the structural forces which position these communities in conflict with each other. In fact, during the years that this research occurred, the community around Eaglecrest was experiencing intensified conflict due to the practices of Manitoba Housing. Essentially, Indigenous families were being removed from social housing units so as to free up these spaces for newcomer settlement. This was justified through policy which prioritized a family's previous housing stability as a key indicator for determining eligibility. Newcomers, often being given access to transitional housing upon arrival in Canada, are generally more able to demonstrate “stability” than, say, inner-city Indigenous families, as explained by one Eaglecrest staff member:

Families are, in a way, being forced out of their homes. You see, part of the requirements for getting access to Manitoba housing is to show [*making “air quotes” with his fingers*] “stability.” Now, if you're a newcomer and you're coming from Welcome Place then it's easier to show stability.

If you've been moving around—not because it's your fault but because every house you live in is crap—then that can make it very hard to get access. So, families are getting kicked out of their homes.

¹⁶² In addition, students suggested that there is a significant amount of informal messaging amongst families and communities. Halima, for example, that she had been told that by “someone” (“I don't know. I think it was my mom or someone else”) that there were “going to be bad people” in Canada and that “like, if you go outside by yourself, like, bad people could take you and kill you.”

So, you submit an application to Manitoba Housing, and they see that you have a different address and it's just, "Nope!" You get lost in the system. And that is leading to some conflict where families may be targeted.

The staff member further explained that this dynamic—which, I argue, reflects the continuing practice of Indigenous dispossession—had led to intensified conflicts amongst students, although these manifest in complex ways:

I think there is more tension right now, more negativity. For a while there, newcomer families were replacing families that were removed—so there was a lot of anger there, families being targeted. Then it subsided for a bit, but now I think, this year, there is a bit more.

But it's not a simple thing. I mean, there is no definitive "this is a Muslim family, this is an indigenous family." I mean you might have a Muslim kid hang out with Aboriginal kids to go after the Filipino kids. And then you get kids like Clarissa¹⁶³ who can go between groups. [*chuckles*] Nothing sticks to her.

Overall, during this exchange, it was suggested that these interpersonal conflict dynamics are shaped primarily by the relative level of social capital held by individuals within the student body—which is somewhat, but not totally, contingent upon race. This also helps to draw attention to the complex navigational and identity work that many young people undertake as they seek to develop social relationships and accrue some measure of social capital within the context of conflict—a capacity that some students, like "Clarissa," have developed considerably.

I present these details so as to prevent interpretations of these dynamics as being only about the relationship between two racially and socioeconomically oppressed populations—a misreading which allows the operations of the Canadian colonial re-settler-state to pass unseen. This is a complex "both/and" situation wherein newcomer students, while experiencing racism and marginalization themselves,¹⁶⁴ are also beneficiaries of colonial structures and discourses. Hence, the perspectives expressed reflect not only anti-Indigenous racism within newcomer communities (which, at least in part, stems from formal messaging that reflects re-settler-state discourse), and not only the dynamics of conflicts between Indigenous and newcomer communities (which are created by the continuance of Indigenous dispossession by the Canadian state), and not *only* interpersonal conflicts between students (which are shaped by micro-level

¹⁶³ A pseudonym.

¹⁶⁴ And, further, the reasons why they come to Canada is most often tied to the challenges they face in their home country—challenges (such as armed conflict and genocide) that are themselves largely attributable to European imperialism.

structural and social vulnerabilities)—but rather a complex intersection between all of these dynamics which, underneath it all, serves to maintain the dominance of colonial powers over the colonized and the overall structure of the landscape.

These relations are also maintained within schools through a culture of silence that exists around issues of race—which reflects a nationalist narrative of Canadian multiculturalism (thereby demonstrating resonance with the *fostering intercultural understanding and enriching “our” collective national heritage* logic discussed in chapter two). I suggest that this is evident by the way students were hesitant, initially, to share their thoughts with me, not because they felt there was anything inherently negative about their beliefs, but because they were afraid of me “telling on them.” This reflects the manner in which open discussions about race are commonly considered taboo—at least when one is under the surveillant eye of the teacher. Indeed, many participants expressed an aversion to talk about issues of race in general and Whiteness in particular. When I would make a comment about my own racial identity (that is, refer to myself as “White”) students from all demographics (and including the students in the focus group above) would often gasp and, on occasion, whisper “that’s racist” under their breath. This suggests that, while colonial discourses of race shape the storyscape that young people use to make sense of their experiences, a kind of colour-blind liberal multiculturalism is also at play which presumes equality, makes “Whiteness” a taboo subject of discussion, and masks the existence of racist/colonial assumptions. Within the context of the public transcript these topics become the “undiscussables” (Caruthers, Thompson, & Eubanks, 2004).

There were a few exceptions to this, including the following exchange between Jordan and Mason:

JULIE: Do you feel like you talk about Indigenous issues, Aboriginal issues at school enough?

[*Jordan and Mason shake their heads vigorously*]

JULIE: No? Why do you say that—

JORDAN: They don’t even—they don’t really treat Native people right.

JULIE: Who’s “they”?

MASON: Teachers.

JORDAN: Yeah. Some do. Mr. D is cool. Ms. T does stuff. She’s nice. She’s cool. Mr. K is cool and nice.

MASON: Yeah, he's [Mr. K's] nice. He came to my house. Like, he walked me home once after I fought someone, and he kept talking to me like—he told me that he'd had a bad day too. Yeah, but—like, if the teacher is doing it—like, picking on them [Indigenous students] only—

JORDAN: Or they think they're powerful because they're, like, a teacher.

JULIE: So sometimes teachers pick on Native kids more than non-Native kids?

JORDAN: Yep. Cause they're being racist [*laughs incredulously*].

MASON: It's um—

JORDAN: Racism.

MASON: No umm—

JORDAN: Racism? Fascism?

MASON: Fascism.

JULIE: Why fascism?

MASON: Cause you've got no power.

In this instance, the participants were far more upfront with their critique of racial dynamics within schools (which, as we later discussed) included experiences both at Eaglcrest and in other institutions. Hence, even though these (and other) participants have had numerous positive interpersonal interactions with non-Indigenous (primarily White) teachers, they shared a kind of apprehensive weariness—a heaviness—based upon their own passed experiences (and, perhaps, those of other family members or peers). A similar sentiment was shared by Asim, who told the following story about his interaction with a teacher from a previous school:

ASIM: They were mostly good [teachers]. Yeah. There was one mean one, it was Mr.—Roblan—or Roben—or [*pause*]—Roben, yeah. He was kinda old.

I was just telling my friends a question and [he says,] “You have to stay here for five minutes if you talk!” And they were all saying, “No, it's not fair” and so, he gave half the class five minutes.

Yeah, then after, one time I was, one time I was telling my friends to be quiet because he was quiet and he said, “Nope!” I had to stay in, but not them. Like, was it because of my race or something? [He runs his finger along his forearm]

Hence, while Asim is not sure that this teacher's treatment was racially motivated, he is—like Mason and Jordan—well aware that it potentially *could be*. They know that, within the racially stratified institution of school, they are always positioned as vulnerable to the racist attributions (and subsequent actions) of (primarily White) adult authorities. This suggests that, even if the

majority of day-to-day interactions are relatively positive, schools are never completely safe spaces or sanctuaries for young persons of colour. This phenomenon, perhaps, is further intensified by the comparatively higher changeover and teacher absenteeism rates at inner city schools (which means that greater numbers of adults are interacting with students on a less consistent basis). Indeed, most of the negative interactions I witnessed at Eaglecrest were between students and substitute teachers.¹⁶⁵

In a latter interaction, Asim also shared what he produced as part of the mask making data collection activity. He specifically noted that many people assume that he is “sad” because he has had a “hard life” (as a young refugee from Sudan). He depicted this on his mask by highlighting the eyes and showing that he was crying. However, he resists this label, instead emphasizing his own sense of responsibility, leadership, and other positive traits (terms which he inscribed on the inside of his mask). In this instance, Asim suggests that he is often *reduced*

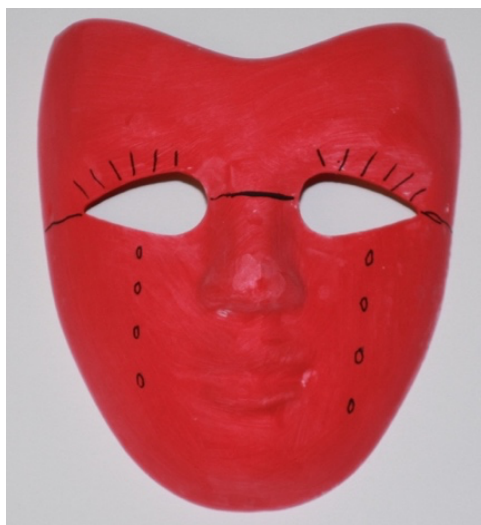


Figure 40 Asim’s mask (front)

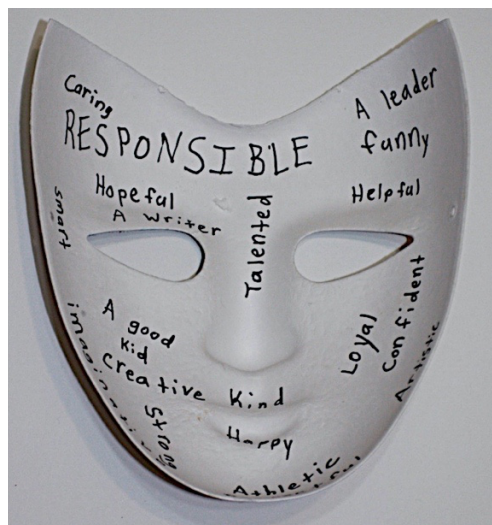


Figure 41 Asim’s mask (inside)

(Figure 40 and 41 Photos: J. M. Hyde)

to his experiences and presumed traumatic past—an act of dehumanization that he subsequently seeks to challenge through his assertion of his own capabilities. Indeed, Jordan and Mason also

¹⁶⁵ In one instance a substitute insisted on pointing out to me a student whom she believed “looked like” she had fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. She did this fully within earshot of said student (who was Indigenous). I also noticed that this substitute consistently asked me (a White classroom volunteer) questions, while completely ignoring the (Filipino) full-time Educational Assistant who was in a far better position to address her queries.

sought to resist this dehumanization—calling attention to the way adult authorities (including teachers) reduce them to a stereotype of their racial/cultural identity.

Cockburn's (1998) distinction between *identity work* and *identity hurt* provide a useful frame for interpreting these findings. Drawing upon her own fieldwork, she suggests that women often experience *identity hurt* within the context of ethnopolitical conflict. This was characterized by a “pain” caused by the “friction and disjuncture between a women’s sense of self and the identities with which she was labelled, that she was held to account for, or felt seduced by” (pp. 9-10). These women were “assailed by identities that contradicted their politics, that seemed to position them uncomfortably [and that left them]... bereft of [the] identities they would have liked to have” (p. 10). With the context of their peacebuilding work, however, they resisted these circumscribed identities, “knitting, unraveling, texturing and tearing of the space between them” (p. 9)—both to foster their own sense of self and to engage in cross-identity dialogue. Cockburn (1998) terms these efforts to undermine this oppressive foreclosure *identity work*. Similarly, these young people find themselves “assailed by identities” (p. 9)—some of which they “labelled” with, some that they are held accountable for, and some that they have been “seduced by” (p. 9-10). The *stories of experience* told by research participants provide indication of the *identity hurt*—the pain—caused by this reductionism and dehumanization as well as the *identity work* they undertake.

Characterizations of innate ability were also present throughout the data, with many students comparing their own intelligence to others using very specific indicators drawn from current learning assessment practices. One common indicator employed was performance on tests and math drills (that latter of which is also related to the speed of completion)—in these instances, “second place” was understood as “second smartest.” Ability groupings (such as level-based math or reading groups) were another means through which the participants interpreted their capability. This suggests that these measures of ability carry a significant amount of social and symbolic currency for students and, I argue, impact how they perceive themselves and others. These indicators can also lead to totalizing perceptions of—that is, limiting *stories about*—self, such as when Emily defines herself as being “a little bit bad at math” (a characteristic she wanted to have written on her Co-Constructed Tree of Life) because:

Like, on my report card, my teacher, he shows us one thing about it and it says, “Science” and Math.” I look at my math and then it says I’m in grade two. But! I’m still working. So, I’m a little bit bad at math—right now.

The phrase “I’m in grade two” means that, in mathematics, she is “working at a grade two level” even though she is in grade five. Emily interprets being “behind” others in her grade level as being “a little bit bad” at math. While Emily appears hopeful (she is still “working” on it and might improve in the future), she still included “bad at math” as part of her self-concept.¹⁶⁶

I observed this tendency to conflate specific signs as indicators of one’s broader capacities throughout my time at Eaglecrest (e.g., one student told me that he is “bad at writing” because his printing is messy and numerous students told me that they “sucked” at math because they did poorly on math drills). Other students discussed “being behind” or “being ahead” of others—particularly in terms of grade levels and reading levels (which, for students who have had disrupted early schooling experiences, leads to a sense of starting off and remaining *permanently* behind others).¹⁶⁷ This is not to imply that all of these pedagogical methods are inherently problematic (although, arguably, this case could be made), but rather to call attention to the way that these are used by students as a mechanism to mark and stratify themselves as well as others—hence, for young people, these practices are not simply unbiased instruments of learning and assessment. This suggests a need to re-evaluate the ways in which these methods are employed and the level of value they appear to be granted within the classroom setting—a finding that provides further evidence of the fetishization of the “lifeless” elements of schooling and how this serves to mystify and manufacture inaccessibilities within the overall education system. Further, this indicates that despite a rhetoric (and many practices) of cooperative learning and community-building employed by teachers, classrooms nonetheless remain very competitive spaces.

¹⁶⁶ She reiterated this self-assessment on more than one occasion.

¹⁶⁷ Further, two research participants informed me that, due to earlier disruptions in their schooling, they were actually two years older than their other classmates. So, in some respects, they were “behind” others (academically) but “ahead” of their classroom peers (developmentally, socially, etc.).

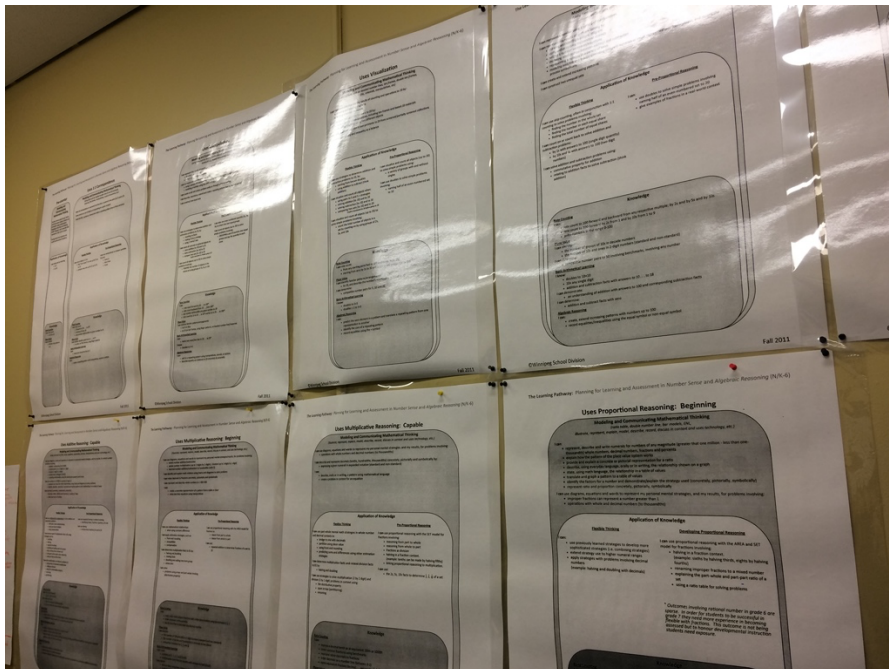


Figure 42 A pedagogical fetish object

A photo of the Winnipeg School Division's Mathematics Pathway.

This was meant as a means for teachers to “track” a student's development of key math skills and capacities (they are expected to literally “check off” each student’s progress on a document which is passed along through the elementary grades. This photo depicts an enlarged version of the Pathway document which was laminated and posted in the school’s conference room. It took up one entire wall. This is yet another indicator which marks a student’s progress and shapes their perception of their own capacities. I found that the size of this display symbolic of the value placed upon these types of *pedagogical fetish objects*.

(Photo: J. M. Hyde)

This discussion of ability and self-concept was also raised by the student participants, who attributed school failure to a “lack of confidence”:

DAWN: If a student doesn't want to finish school sometimes it's because they think they're stupid. If, like, they they don't want to come to school then maybe they don't have confidence. They're not—they can't finish their work. They get, like, a bad grade on their report card. Or maybe, like, on a test, they won't be able to answer some questions. Or they're marking the test [“taking it up” as a class] and they'll be like, “Oh” [*sighs, hangs her head*].

LIAM: Some kids are self-conscious about themselves, are not always super confident.

DAVY: Maybe [he dropped out because] he couldn't answer the question and people picked on him.

BACHIR: Maybe he left school because he thought he wasn't good enough. Because, like he couldn't answer some of the questions maybe. And maybe there wasn't good teachers who would, like, help you. If they make a mistake, they wouldn't say, "It's okay, everyone makes mistakes."

These discussions suggest linkages between legitimized markers of ability, social dynamics, and the development of an individual's self-concept—here framed in terms of “confidence.” Students also discussed non-academic measures as indicators of their innate characteristics, as Ghani did while explaining why he has been prizes at Eaglecrest's anti-bullying assembly (generally known as Pink Shirt Day):

GHANI: I won four, wait—[*counts on his fingers*] yeah four times—a Pink Day t-shirt.

JULIE: So, what does that mean to you?

GHANI: I'm a quiet person. And I don't let bullies bully other people. Stop bullying. I keep my hands and feet to myself.

While, for Ghani, this official recognition of his “good behaviour” helped to reinforce a specific conception of self, others identified disciplinary measures (specifically, being kept in at recess, detentions, suspensions, and expulsions) as the markers of a *bad student* who undertakes actions which draw the negative attention of school authorities (for example, Cassandra suggested that “rebels [who] don't really care...get expelled or suspended”). Some participants also suggested that they have been—due to, in some cases, past behaviour—*marked* as a *bad student* by staff members, a label which they find difficult to shake:

BACHIR: One time, we were planning a game. And, [the teacher] was like, when my friend took his turn. It was my turn but he took it. And she says to him—she was like, “Bachir! Sit down! You're out!”

JULIE: Oh—so even though your friend did it, you got in trouble?

BACHIR: [affirmative] Mmmhmm. Yeah. And after that I told her what happened and she was like, “Oh, sorry. I'm used to you getting in trouble.”

JULIE: Ouch.

BACHIR: So mean.

Although Bachir readily admitted that he “gets in trouble a lot” due to his own behaviour, he also finds himself the target of what he sees as unfair treatment. While, unlike Jordan, Mason, and

Asim he did not describe this as a manifestation of racial prejudice, he does see himself as someone who has been labelled as a troublemaker who is regularly singled out for punishment or humiliation—regardless of his actions. In this way, he was *marked* as a troublemaker and largely *reduced* to this limited identity. Hence, while in some instances (like Ghani’s) being “marked” by authority can serve to strengthen one’s self-concept (in that it can reaffirm one’s *preferred story of self*), in most instances it serves as a form of dehumanization. Further, those who are labelled (e.g., as racialized others or deviant troublemakers) often saw themselves as being more *visible* to authority figures—more likely to be *seen as the cause of trouble* or more likely to be “picked on” and judged. This *hypervisibility* situates them within the scoping eye of power, leaving them insecure and, to some extent, always aware of that they may be targeted.¹⁶⁸

In summary, participants, when explicitly asked to identify the causes of school failure, largely attributed it to *going the wrong way*—taking the incorrect path laid down by an individual’s own accumulated bad choices and failure to adequately perform the role of either a *good kid* (wherein one stays within the bounds of socially legitimized childhood behaviours) or a *good student-worker without rights* (who is present, passive, attentive, productive, and able to control their body and affect). It was important to perform this self-disciplining role regardless of the value of assigned tasks—partly because it was taken on faith that these were part of “getting an education” and partly because not acquiescing could lead to punishment or the loss of future opportunities. In fact, for some, there was a sense that they were on a *compressed timeline* and that they needed to quickly identify and follow the correct pathway toward success.

Participants employed this local discourse to classify and evaluate both their own behaviours and those of others. It provided an explanatory lens for understanding the actions of young people who *go the wrong way*—those who (the participants suggested) do not think of their long-term future, engage in “adult” behaviours, or who challenge classroom norms. These behaviours were taken to indicate a *failure to care* about school and *misdirected affect* (e.g., finding disruption humorous, displaying anger, or seeking social connection). These behaviours—and the students (real and hypothetical) who demonstrated them—were presumed to be deviant or deficient in ways that resonated with hegemonic understandings of race, gender, age/childhood, and mental health. Participants often used these discourses to help them

¹⁶⁸ There did appear to be a gendered component to this hypervisibility, with boys more likely to discuss this sense of insecurity. That being said, girls also experienced the phenomenon.

distinguish between themselves (*the good kid/the good student-workert*) and others (*the bad kids/the bad students*) and to make sense of their own experiences and observations. Young people drew further evidentiary support for their assessments through reference to the various indicators of ability (math drills, grade levels, etc.) that hold significant symbolic currency within their social world.

While students actively *labelled* others, many also found themselves the targets of these discourses; some suggested that their gender, race, and/or past behaviours *marked* them as troublemakers or otherwise situated them in a vulnerable place within the (racially, class-based, etc.) stratified institution of school—leaving them always wary and never fully safe (and, consequently, drained and *weary*). As a response, many experienced *identity hurt* and undertook various forms of *identity work* to challenge these dehumanizing prescriptions and craft their sense of self. The demands of this work, arguably, are not equitably distributed, with those who find themselves socially and morally excluded being constantly subjected to these discursive forces and denied access to the validating and empowering narrative resources. Numerous forces worked within the Eaglecrest school and community to maintain and reinforce these micro-level dynamics, including an ideology of colour-blind liberal multiculturalism; the invisibility of Whiteness and colonial dynamics; state-based and provincial policies which position communities in conflict with each other; continuing practices of Indigenous dispossession; complex interpersonal interactions and differing levels of social capital/social vulnerability; dynamics which create high rates of turnover and absenteeism at Eaglecrest; and the use of explicit disciplinary techniques (suspensions, etc.) and *pedagogical fetish objects* (tests, etc.) that are used to reify notions of innate ability while marking and stratifying students.

Locating causes in peers and social groups

While participants largely individualized the causes of school success and failure, at times they also extended their analysis to encompass a young person's selection of peers and the resulting dynamics of peer pressure. For example, Dawn suggested:

If, like, one student decides to stop coming to school sometimes because, like a friend—it's because of peer pressure sometimes. Like, sometimes, like another friend will start ditching school, stop going.

Yeah, being with friends will also help if you're friends with someone who goes to school every day and finishes their work and stuff like that. Then, that person who's thinking of not going, of stopping school, then, like, they can like spend time with that

one friend and that one friend can help them out—like, listening in class better, finishing their work.

Hence, Dawn suggests that peers can be a negative or positive influence, depending on the extent to which the peer adheres to particular behavioural norms. Subsequently, young people should choose to associate with other *good kids* and *good student-workers* if they want to succeed. Mason, meanwhile, suggested that intimate relationships can also be detrimental, noting that a student may fail out of school if,

They have a girlfriend and she's like, bossy and stuff and, like, "Don't go to school." Or [the girlfriend] is like a drug addict. They smoke pot and they try and get you to stay home.

Subira reiterates this emphasis on negative peer pressure, explaining how (she claims) specific students intentionally plan to not attend school:

Mark and Casey.¹⁶⁹ They're—they're together at the MacDonald's and then they text each other, make a plan to not go to school. And then they tell each other, "Don't go to school tomorrow. Come to this instead." Sometimes I think they message each other, "Don't go to school. Go tell Devon that, 'Don't go to school.' Tell Kelly, 'Don't go to school.'"

In these instances, peer influence is highlighted as an important variable that impacts whether a student chooses to attend school and how they behave in the classroom setting. A *good student-worker* spends time with others who *care about school* and *demonstrate their care* by, for example, "listening in class better" and "finishing their work." Underlying these discussions were criticisms of those who sought "coolness" and "popularity"—notions which, as I have suggested previously, reflect a kind of discursive dismissal of the agency and sociality of young people (as something that is incongruent with the idealized notions of a *good student-worker*).

The *stories about* and *stories of* told by participants, however, suggest that the connection between peer interactions and school success is very complex. On one hand, navigating social relationships can be quite challenging with young people having to deal with interpersonal (and at times intergroup) conflict as well as social pressures. Consider, for example, the following excerpts from multiple focus group sessions:

AVERY: When you walk into a classroom—when kids look back to see who's coming in—they're like, judging. Like, when I walk into a classroom and kids look back at me, I can kind of tell who's judging and who isn't just by the look on their faces.

¹⁶⁹ All names are pseudonyms.

CASSANDRA: The class I was in last year was literally the *drama* class. Everyone that goes in there is going to have some type of drama. Because, last year, the girls that were in my class were having a fight and that and then, this year, there is this girl that goes to my daycare, she's always having fights with another girl that goes to the daycare and there's always just lots of drama in the class.

LIAM: I remember being in grade four and there was this group of White girls and this group of Black girls and they would always fight and swear and interrupt class. Stuff like that. But bullying just includes everyone. You could be in the same cultural group and there's still conflict and teasing.

Davy: Sometimes, when we're doing like games—like Manhunt or math games—we go like, “Black” and “White” to pick teams. But like, if there's two African people and one White person, they say—to the African person if they get picked for the white team—“He's out because he's black!”

GHANI: My brother's friend, right? He's seventeen. He drinks right now and has drugs. These kids, they keep on telling my brother, “Come and have some with us.” My brother keeps telling them, “Oh, I need to—I have boxing on weekends.” You know? Even if he doesn't have boxing. He was just using it as an excuse.

MASON: I was popular. But I know I'm not popular anymore. It's cause I don't want to hang out with some kids cause they just hang out and get in trouble. Yeah. I don't go outside as much because people are mean—mainly people that are older.

These various *stories of experience* highlight the daily, felt impact of micro-level social conflict. For Avery, Cassandra, and Liam, conflict and “drama” can directly impact classroom interactions—creating a sense of insecurity (“feeling judged”) while also causing other forms of disruptions (“interrupting” class). As Liam points out, while these conflicts do at times align along racial or cultural lines, this is certainly not the only dynamic at play (recall, for example, the notion that vulnerability is linked to a student's access to social capital as well as how the practices of Manitoba Housing were intensifying conflicts between newcomer and Indigenous students). Ghani and Mason's stories, meanwhile, suggest how young people must often engage in complex relational navigation. Ghani's brother is trying to maintain some of his friendships, while also seeking to avoid participating in certain activities (drinking and drug use). He navigates this by lying to his friends, using his involvement with a community boxing club as a means to justify himself. Mason, meanwhile, notes the potential *social cost* of such navigation work. In his statement (and within later conversations) he discussed how he has been trying *stay out of trouble* by avoiding several of his good friends and *stepping back* from certain

relationships. This has placed strain on their relationship and, he admits, has cost him his previous social standing (“I’m not popular anymore”). This issue is further intensified by the more general sense of insecurity that he sometimes feels in the community, which limits his movements (“I don’t go outside as much because people are mean”). Other participants talked about using *social withdrawal* as a relational navigation strategy. For example, Cassandra states that she has found it difficult to make friends at Eaglecrest because “people are mean. The other kids are mean.” To deal with this she tries to avoid students her own age and, during recess will “go sit in a corner and not talk to anybody.”

In addition to peer relationships, a few participants also discussed the impact of pressures and complications associated with dating, sex, and intimate relationships. Ghani, for example, sees his behaviour as inappropriate for young people his age:

GHANI: You know what I don’t get? Like, our age, there’s kids that are young, like—our age. And they’re daring each other to date someone. That’s like so stupid. But you don’t have to do that. They do it to be cool.

Thus, for him, dating is considered a more *adult behaviour* inconsistent with (as was suggested by him and other participants) being a *good kid* and *good student-worker*. Further he suggests that “dating” is another means through which young people try to acquire more social standing in the community. Emily makes a similar point, but also connects how this can also lead to “mean” interpersonal behaviour:

EMILY [referring to her relationships with male peers]: Sometimes they’re nice to me but when they’re around their friends they—One of the guys asked me out, he was mean to me. But then he said, “Just kidding! Why would I go out with you?” Yeah. I didn’t even say yes.

I was about to say no because I know that when his friends come, he’ll just be like, “Eww!” And then—it’s a joke thing then. I realize that but—

JULIE: But it still hurts?

EMILY: Yeah.

In addition to drawing attention to some of the gendered dynamics of these pressures, Emily suggests how intimate relationships are perceived with ambivalence; someone may use dating as a means to garner popularity, but it can also open one up to further teasing. A very nuanced discussion of this topic occurred in an exchange between Jordan, Mason, and I. In the following

excepts they discuss the issue of sexuality activity and dating, appearing to make some critical distinctions between what they consider acceptable and unacceptable behaviour:

MASON: You know there's, like, thirteen-year-olds already losing their virginity? It said on the news. Thirteen- fourteen-year-olds already, like, losing their virgin—in-ity.

JORDAN: [*laughing*] Virgin-in-in-ity.

MASON: [*laughing*] Virgin-in-in-in-in-ity. At thirteen years old! And they said [on the news] that it's affecting the community.

JORDAN: Cause one person does it and then they talk about it and other people get the idea. They're like, "Oh, yeah. I want to try that."

MASON: I want to wait, like, twenty years at least. Like, at least until nineteen or eighteen.

JORDAN: My brother, he's seventeen. My brother is seventeen and he actually, like, lost his virginity at, like, before he became fifteen. And, like he just—did it. Like, actually *did* DO IT.

MASON [*to Julie*]: Jordan's got a girlfriend [*laughs*]. I never dated anyone.

JORDAN: I have [*dated*]. Maybe five, six people? I dated this girl for like three months. No—actually longer. Probably five or six.

But you know what's weird? That girl that I was dating for five months? She broke up with me on New Year's and then wanted to get back with me. She broke up with me and—on Valentine's Day—wanted to get back with me! [*pause*]

There's a girl at the Rec Centre that likes you [*motioning to Mason*]. She acts normal but then when she's around you she's flirting. When she comes around you her voice is all high pitched and she's flirting with you.

MASON: How old is she?

JORDAN: Around your age probably.

MASON [*indicated disinterest*]: Naw.

In this instance the participants frame dating as a normal, everyday action while depicting sexual activity (specifically sexual intercourse) as something not appropriate for young people. Rather than seeing dating and sex as something that young people do in order to be "popular," they attribute it more to interest and curiosity. That being said, they do seem to suggest the importance of "waiting" to "DO IT do it" and frame this as a personal choice (although, as

Jordan's story suggest, dating itself can be complicated). Interestingly, Mason also notes how sexual activity has received media attention and is seen publicly as a community problem. They also suggest that social networks become a channel for learning about and being interested in sexual activity. Overall, while these perspectives suggest differences in how intimate relationships are viewed, it is clear that these are a common matter of concern and another social dynamic which young people navigate.

At times, these social conflicts and pressures will result in more overt interpersonal altercations, as discussed by Emily and Bachir:

EMILY: I'm not really with a group. And [if others tease me] I try not to do something back. Cause I think if I try to punch them then their friend will stick up for them and beat me up.

Bachir: This boy? He tried beating me up and then he slammed me to the wall when we were playing foursquare just cause I said—he was laughing at me because I got out and I said, "Be quiet, you're no good" and then he's like, he got all mad and then he's like, "Pass the ball! Pass the ball!" And he took it, he tried to throw it at me, he hit it at this kid with a broken arm, hit him right on his arm.

Then he got mad at me and then he grabbed me and then he slammed me to the wall. And then we were like, right there [*pointing to the area in front of the main office*], and then I went to go get ice with the teacher and they took him to the office. And I was there with my ice and he was sitting in the office, like right by those chairs where you can see outside, like [*into*] the hallway, and then Miss R was like, "We're going to separate you guys. Go to the library—to sort of separate you guys."

So, I was walking past the, the office and then I was walking. I was really mad. Something just pushed me, like—and then I went into the office and I threatened him and I told him, "You go after kids younger than you! Try going after kids older than you! Like, the same age as you!" And then I was like, "My brother will take care of you!" And then he got all mad and then like four teachers had to stop him and then, umm, I got suspended. And now he's afraid to go outside [*for recess*].

Both of these excerpts indicate different strategies often employed by young people when dealing with tense social situations. Emily prefers to avoid escalating situations, primarily because she knows that she will end up on the losing end of any altercations—which, is, she suggests is primarily because of her own limited social network ("I'm not really with a group"). She does not have anyone else to *back her up*. In contrast, Bachir's story describes how he engages with conflict overtly and aggressively—actions which he justifies by calling attention to the deviant behaviour of his opponent ("he hit it at this kid who had a broken arm") and his own emotional state ("I was mad. Something just pushed me"). His story also suggests that he as a stronger

social network to draw upon—referring specifically to his older brother whom, he believes, would readily help him deal with any concerns (his brother will always *back him up*). Further, while he notes that he was disciplined (which, he later stated, he thought was “fair” given what he had done), he still suggests that his actions were justified; he managed to put this “bully” in his place (“You go after kids younger than you! Try going after kids older than you!”) and (apparently) “scared” him enough to prevent future confrontations (“And now he’s afraid to go outside”). In some respects, both Emily and Bachir’s strategies are self-defeating—Emily’s *conflict avoidance* leaves her vulnerable to future attacks and Bachir’s efforts to *stand of for himself* resulted in disciplinary actions by school authorities (which, as he discussed in other interviews, sometimes led to him being labelled as a “troublemaker”). But, at the same time, they also indicate the agency of these participants; they see themselves employing the best strategy available to them given their own social resources. It is also notable that the discipline strategies employed by the school primarily involved separation and suspension—neither of which help to develop a young person’s capacity for managing social relationships. While these are not the only strategies employed by the school,¹⁷⁰ I did find that they were the most commonly used.

While navigating social relationships was often a challenge, participants also stressed the value of their own social networks. Dawn, for example, suggests this dual potentiality of peer relationships in the following excerpt:

DAWN: There is conflict between students here. There’s, like, lots of groups.

Like me, I have a group. But we all get along with everybody. My group is just, like, all my friends and, basically, I’m friends with everybody in my class. There’s a few students in grade six that I’m friends with. And there’s a few in other classes that I’m friends with. My group is basically just all of my friends.

I don’t really like to take people out of the group. If they don’t want to be friends with me, that’s fine. I don’t really care about that. But some of them [groups] are, like, kind of small where they don’t let anyone else in. Some groups are small. Some groups are like, bigger.

There’s this group that used to be here. And it was like these six girls and they would always, like, talk about other people behind their backs. They would spread rumours. But that doesn’t really happen anymore because a lot of those groups are gone. But, like, now, there’s starting to be more groups like that—which I think is bad. Students are being left out. They’re being called names that aren’t good.

¹⁷⁰ In some instances, dialogue and various restorative practices were used. However, it depended upon which staff members were involved in the disciplinary action as well as other factors such as the availability of time and the severity of the incident.

My group is different. We don't talk about people or stuff like that. Most of the time we help people. And sometimes we, I don't know—we do lots of stuff. Like we help others a lot. We help each other all the time.

As suggested by Dawn, while tight-knit peer groups can lead to conflict and exclusion, they remain invaluable sources of interpersonal support—often proving more “understanding” and helpful than caregivers or other adults. Thus, peers are a very fundamental part of a young person's *relational web*, often providing key forms of support, assistance, and information (e.g., in chapter five Ethan describes how his friends share information about community resources). Maintaining these connections—keeping this *social capital*—is thus a vital need that young people seek to fulfill.



Figure 43 Rose: I Love to make firends [friends]
(Photo: J. M. Hyde)

Their efforts, however, are often challenged by the relational and structural dynamics within which they live. Several participants told *stories of dislocation* wherein they lost access to important peer relationships. Consider, for example, the following excerpts:

DAWN: [talking about the transition from her on-reserve school to the first Winnipeg school that she attended]: I didn't really like it cause it was different. Because on my reserve, like in the school, I knew everyone there because my reserve was pretty small, so I knew everyone and like—at Martingrove it was hard to make friends. I didn't really know anyone, and I didn't know who I would be able to talk to.

Jordan: Maybe someday I'll be Anonymous. Maybe, maybe. Right now, I'm just anonymous. There's not many people that know me. Other places they know me, but not that many know me here. I came from East Side. It's tough getting to know people here because they're kind of crazy.

BACHIR: I have friends here [at Eaglecrest], but they're not my best friends. I have better friends back in my country [Sudan] who know more about anime.

KENNEDY: [Describing images on her Educational Journey Map] This is my first house and I lived here when I was just a baby. Then we moved to a bigger house with my dad and my mom. And we lived in a big house. But then my dad and my mom got divorced. And then my mom and us moved into a duplex in The D here [the colloquial term for the Eaglecrest community].

I'm not sure if I'm going to be here [at Eaglecrest] next year, so I'm going to have to stop coming here. It's just that my mom ended up in the hospital and I might be moving in with my dad. So, if I'm living with my dad, I might end up at Collingrove.

But there's this kid there that I hate and I really don't want to go there. He will *ruin* my life. His stepdad actually ripped off my little brother five bucks from a Pokémon card sale. My brother gave him the five bucks, [but he] didn't give him the card.

PETER: At my old school we had to wear a uniform. Plus, it cost a lot more money, and my mom doesn't have no money.

But I liked that school better because, there, everyone was my friend except for a few kids. Here it's just—different personalities.



Figure 44 Moving around
Image of Kennedy's Educational Journey Map depicting the various places she has moved from and to.
(Photo: J. M. Hyde)

In each of these cases the participants describe how physical movement (from one's reserve to the city, from one country to another, to a different part of the city, and between schools) can impact a young person's access to social relationships. And, of course, the decision to make this move is beyond the young person's control. It is, arguably, also harder for young people to maintain connections across distances because they also have limited access to transportation, financial resources, and technology. As a result, many employed social media as a means to stay connected to both family and friends; even though, legally, they are not permitted to hold accounts because they are considered too young to give their consent—so, of course, they commonly lie about their age when setting up their accounts.

These excerpts also indicate how some young people are more likely to experience *social dislocation* due to their intrafamily dynamics and/or socioeconomic positioning. Kennedy's parents, for example, are divorced and, as a result, she may need to switch schools due to the sudden illness of her mother. Peter, meanwhile, had to leave his preferred school because his mother could no longer afford the tuition (which suggests that he had been attending a private school previously). Bachir's family left Sudan as refugees and had to move to various locations around Winnipeg during the "settlement" process.¹⁷¹ Indeed, the Eaglecrest community generally experiences high rates of mobility (people moving in and out of the community) as well as (what is sometimes termed) "churn" (movement by First Nations residents back and forth from reserves)—dynamics which are both connected to housing instability and socioeconomic insecurity. However, mobility itself (particularly churn) is not necessarily the "cause" of social dislocation; if the young person (and their family) has the resources to maintain connections, then movement can actually be a facilitative and positive experience. For example, Dawn describes the impact of her own family's mobility:

My mom had to travel for work, so I moved a lot. She used to be a nurse. So, she would travel a lot because they would need her in different places. So, my family had to move a lot. We've lived in a few places. I lived on my reserve, I lived in Toronto, and then here. [In Toronto] my dad wanted to move into a house that he used to live in when he was a kid. So, we lived in an older house.

¹⁷¹ In another incident I had an impactful exchange with a student commonly identified as *at-risk* or a *trouble maker*. I found him starting at the wall near the main office. I walked over and he pointed to a hole in the wall and asked, "Do you know where the thing that was here when"

So, I travelled a lot. Which is awesome though. I started travelling when I was four. And eventually we moved back to my reserve for a while, like from Toronto. We lived there for like three years. Then we moved back to my reserve and then we came here.

So, every now and then I would always end up back in my reserve. Which is great because all my cousins and, like, a lot of my siblings—or some of my siblings—are there. So, like, they hardly get to come out for summer break or winter break—so I hardly get to see them anymore. So, I love going back to my reserve every now and then just to see them.

This suggests a distinction between *movement by choice* (for travel, work, or to see family) and *movement by force* (due to violence, housing issues, family challenges, and other factors) as well as how a young person's/their family's relative access to financial resources can impact their ability to maintain a relational web across distances.

In addition, other social forces—such as the practices of the child welfare system and the justice system—often lead to young people be suddenly dislocated from the existing social connections (a phenomenon discussed later on in this chapter). Interpersonal violence, increased rates of health challenges, and other elements of insecurity also increase the chances that a young person will experience a loss of connection. For example, in another incident I had an impactful exchange with a student commonly presumed to be *at-risk* or a *troublemaker*. This was detailed in my fieldnotes:

I found Marcus staring at the wall by the main office. I walked over to him and he pointed to a hole in the wall and asked, “Do you know where the thing that was here went?” I told him “No” and he continued: “It was like a feather thing. It was for a kid that died a while ago.” He then paused and said, “He was my best friend.”

Later on, I learned that the child in question had been killed in an accident several years ago—when he—and Marcus—were in Kindergarten. While I was told about the impact that this death on the Eaglecrest staff, there was no discussion on how it had impacted members of the student body.¹⁷² Marcus, it appears, has been carrying this sense of loss for many, many years and now has found that the item commemorating his “best friend” was gone (it was later replaced by a plaque won by the school for an art-related contest). As with this instance, it appeared that while experiences of loss (of peers, family members, and other important persons) was a common experience (e.g., students often spoke about others who had been “taken away” or were suddenly

¹⁷² This is not to say that the impact on students was not addressed at some point/at the time. It just did not seem to be part of institutional narrative regarding this event.

“gone” from Eaglecrest/the community). Child/adolescent therapists Hardy and Laszloffy (2005) would identify many of these as cases of “tangible loss [which] creates a void in the relational world of the young people who are left behind” (p. 85). Further, given that it appears that these losses generally go unacknowledged, it may also be understood as a form of “dehumanized loss” that “remains unacknowledged, unmourned, and therefore unhealed” (p. 91)—loss that has been “stripped of its meaning” (p. 91). Hence, while these experiences of loss are themselves painful, the manner in which they are rendered invisible serves to further emphasize the “devaluation”¹⁷³ (p. 35) of those who experience them.

Overall, while a *dominating story about peer pressure* suggests that the cause of school failure may be attributed to the selection of *bad friends* (those who are not *good kids* or *good student-workers*), the *stories of experience* suggest that young people at Eaglecrest actually undertake engage in complex practices of social negotiation—weighing their needs for support, recreation, and personal security; their intention to *stay out of trouble* (and the relational costs of this commitment); the social norms of appropriate behaviour; the on-going impact of social conflict; and their own relative social status and access to social capital. While this, in and of itself, is a challenge, these young people are also impacted by various other familial and socioeconomic forces which makes them vulnerable to being dislocated from their *relational web*. These forms of “tangible loss” appear to go unacknowledged within the social world of school, resulting in “dehumanized loss” and further “devaluation” (Hardy and Laszloffy, 2005).

Locating causes in families and homelife

It was very common for participants to locate the causes of school failure within a young person’s family and homelife. Several suggested that students could be struggling due to “issues,” “problems,” or “craziness” at home and/or involvement with child welfare services (referred to as Child and Family Services, or CFS), as in the following excerpts:

MASON: [The problem is] family issues like, where you like, get into arguments. Like, you get into a lot of arguments. And then, your family, your dad and mom split up. My dad almost split up from my mom.

¹⁷³ Hardy and Laszloffy (2005) suggest that “[w]hen a person is devalued, he or she is objective, stripped of his or her beinghood” (p. 92).

LIAM: Parents could be in a relationship that they don't want to be in, but they stay together for the kids. But that hurts the kids because there's fighting, like, that could end up being harmful to the kids because maybe they're being physically abused or mentally abused.

And then if you're raised with one parent or no parent and you have to go to CFS or something like that then you're raised without being loved, without someone there.

According to both Mason and Liam, problems in the parental relationship can cause instability in the home, which makes it harder for a young person to do well in school. Poverty and work/time pressures were also identified as forces which can cause intrafamily distress.

Other participants suggested that parents¹⁷⁴ impact young people by providing or failing to provide adequate role models. For example, Mason suggests that kids drop out of school,

Cause those kids are like—the Dad's a parent and, well, he's had a bad life too and they get like that too. And as they get older, they keep getting bad, like with drinking and stuff. And then, yeah, and then they try and act tough too. To act cool in front of their friends—cause they want to be part of a group and they're not.

In this manner Mason suggests the impact of intergenerational links between parents and their children. Further, he argues that young people engage in *bad behaviours* (acting “tough”) out of a desire to “be part of a group”—which resonates with the *peer pressure* argument presented in the preceding section and further indicates the extent to which the fulfillment of social needs is often seen as contradictory to school success (social needs, which Mason implies, are keenly felt by those without strong familial bonds).

School failure was also attributed to deficits in parental responsibility more directly. For example, Liam suggests that young people “have no self-control” and, therefore, require that parents help them make *good choices*:

The parents might not be responsible, or they might not take their electronics away so they stay up all night using their electronics or watching TV. Or doing other stuff because they don't know when to go to bed. Kids have no self-control—that's why there are parents.

But some parents don't care or don't have time to get their kids to bed and they end up staying up until four in the morning and then they're tired.

Also, they might not have any positive influence or encouragement. So, they're not motivated to do well. They don't know how important it [school] is for their future, so they don't try.

¹⁷⁴ While I have primarily used the term “caregiver” throughout this report, in this section I am employing the term “parent” to reflect the terminology used by the research participants. It should be kept in mind that this refers to both biological and non-biological family members who are in the primary caretaking role.

Hence, in addition to providing discipline that a child cannot provide him or herself, Liam suggests that parents need to have a “positive influence”—to teach their children how important schooling is “for their future.” Parents may be unable to perform these tasks (due to, for example, time pressures) or be unwilling to because they “don’t care.” This sentiment was reiterated by Avery, who suggested that “sometimes parents don’t really care and that’s something that their kids pick up on. It’s the attitudes that some kids have.”

The importance of parental responsibility and support was also indicated indirectly in some of the *stories of experience* told by participants. Dawn, for example, shares the following story of an early schooling experience (from grade two), framing this by making reference to the influence of his parents and her brother:

My family, we—like my parents they don’t think about themselves all the time. They think about others. So, I grew up knowing that it was important to care about others, like even if I don’t like someone, I would still try to help them out. I knew that teasing someone, saying bad things to someone, making fun of someone was wrong because my parents were always like—they aren’t *strict*. They are nice to others.

So, I grew up knowing to be kind to others. Some other kids, like their parents might not be like that, they might be mean.

I remember one time I was having a hard time getting myself to school. I remember fighting with my mom. She was trying to get me out of bed. I had a bunk bed, because me and my sister had to share a room. So I was, like, grabbing on to, like, the board part—while she was trying to get me out of bed.

Like, my dad woke me up at like 7:30am because he knew he would have a hard time getting me up and ready for school. And it took me like a half an hour—yeah, half an hour—just to walk to the school. Because every now and then I would just fall down. I would, like, sit down and be like, “NO!” Cause it was a new school, so I didn’t really want to go. So, every now and then I would sit down and be like, “NO!” But they got me there.

I started doing that because my older brother, he did that the first day too. He started the day after me, no, the day before me—because my school started, he started on the seventh and I started on the eighth. My dad wanted me to walk with him so, like, I did. I didn’t have to dress all nice or anything because I didn’t have school. We were just walking and my brother, he just kept saying, “NO!” to my dad. So that’s where I got that, because I saw my brother doing that. He’s five years older? Five or six years older.

But I’m so proud of my big brother. He’s graduating high school this year. And my older sisters are proud of him too and so is my mom. Because he did it in *one shot* and, like, my mom and my two older sisters, they had to—they stopped school. Like they stopped high school for a while. Like, my mom finished high school a while ago, cause like they do high school at the Rec Centre for adults and my mom finished high school and my older sister finished after she had her first baby—like she went back to school and she finished. And my oldest sister is going to go back to high school and all that. She’s going to be living in the city.

My second oldest sister was pregnant, so she had to stop going to school for a while, but then she ended up going back. My oldest sister, I don't really know why—Oh! Yeah, she was also pregnant with her second child, so she had to stop going to school for a while. But then she hasn't finish and now she's going back to school.

And then my mom, like, she had to stop because she was offered an internship somewhere. So, she had to stop highschool. So then once we moved to the city and she moved here too, she finished highschool at the Rec Centre. She finished highschool after.

This long and detailed narrative—told in one fell swoop during a focus group session—highlights the multitude of ways in which parents and siblings can impact a young person's perception of self, school, and what it means to be a good person. She details some of the micro-level challenges that parents face when helping their children go through school, highlighting how her own parents' *gentle persistence* and *careful strategizing* (“my dad woke me up at like 7:30am because he *knew* he would have a hard time”) have helped both her and her siblings. As the second youngest in a large family, Dawn also notes how both her mother and siblings have served as models for educational success. While she does privilege the *linear route* taken by her brother—who completed his schooling in “one shot” (that is, graduated “on time”)—she also draws attention to the *indirect pathways* taken by her mother and sisters. The experience of Dawn's family suggests the possibility of many *pathways through school* and suggests that pregnancy and other (so-called) *delays* do not necessarily result in failure, so long as one remains persistent and is provided with the support and opportunities require for success (which, in this instance, included supportive family members and adult education opportunities). It should also be noted, however, that Dawn's family is fairly socioeconomically stable while she herself has been afforded many extra-curricular opportunities that her Eaglecrest peers have not (which have helped develop her confidence and passion for theatre). This suggests that while intrafamily dynamics are central to a young person's progression through school, it is important to remember that these occur within a broader context. That being said, many participants discussed how their family members provide tangible support (food, educational resources, etc.); emotional support; inspiration, boundaries, and expectations; and cultural, religious/spiritual, and linguistic teachings. Several participants also noted that they wanted to do well in school in order to make their family members “proud.”

In other *stories of experience* participants draw attention to how familial relationships provide young people with the narrative resources required for developing a strong sense of self and purpose. In many instances participants noted how family relationships connect them to

cultural, linguistic, religious/spiritual traditions, and familial stories of place (e.g., *stories of back home* on the reserve and country of origin). In addition, family members also help young people frame and make meaning from their daily experiences. For example, Emily describes how her parents helped her deal with a (to use her common terminology) “bully”:

EMILY [after another focus group participant complimented her on “how cool” her mask design was]: Thank you! Thank you. My art runs in my family because—my parents say—because everyone in my family is an artist.

Do you know one time I got so sad because I was drawing and colouring a picture and some girl just walked up to me and said that it looked ugly. Then I went home crying because I love doing art.

And then I looked at my picture and then I’m like, “I’m going rip it!” And then my parents stopped me and said that it’s too good. And then I told them what happened.

Here, Emily describes how her parents both helped her deal with negative emotions and reaffirmed her artistic abilities—which reinforced their general message that she was born to be an artist (by suggesting that talent “runs in the family”). This incident (which is very much a micro-level “everyday” interaction) appeared to have made a strong impression on Emily; she actually told me this story twice—once in reference to how her parents support her and (in the excerpt above) how and why she sees herself as “an artist.” In some instances, there were indications that family members were a key means through which young people garnered a sense of their younger self—as these adults would relay *stories of experience* that pre-dated the participant’s capacity to remember. Indeed, in some cases it was difficult to distinguish between what the participants themselves remembered and what they had been told from family members. Hence, the limitations of human memory leave young people, to some extent, in a position of *narrative vulnerability* wherein they require access to adults who can tell those *stories of experience* that occurred in their early years. Arguably, denying a young person access to these *stories of* (by impeding their access to the adults who can tell them [e.g., through child apprehensions by welfare services] is akin to *manufacturing amnesia*.

Other *stories of experience* described very challenging intrafamily relationships. These narratives indicated not only the impact of systemic factors on families, but also the capacity of young people to actively navigate these relational dynamics (to engage in *relational work*). For example, Jordan described various family relationships—both positive and problematic, that have directly impacted his life:

My mom dropped me off for no specific reason. Because she thought it was too hard because she had like two babies already. I kinda got dropped off at a rez—because my Auntie took me. And then I lived with her ever since—like for five years probably, like six probably. It's far. It's like, even past Selkirk—and that's like a friggin one hour drive. You have to go over a bridge. Then you have to go down, then you have to go up a big hill. And then you have to go down and then it's just like flat. Bumpy though.

When I lived with my mom, well—like, when I was six I kinda wanted to live with my mom. And then I seen my two sisters there too and I was like, “Oh, okay.” I was like, I was just havin' fun. And then, and then she started drinking—well she was drinking when I went there. I was like, “Eh, I'm okay with it.” Cause my dad—my supposable dad used to be, used to smoke a lot, like and not, not like tobacco—illegal stuff. So does my Auntie still.

But my dad [the current male caregiver in his life]—the person that took care of me—he doesn't smoke that. He smokes tobacco now.

Yeah, and then I went to my mom's and she was drinking. And I stayed with her for probably three years and then I moved back to my auntie's and then moved somewhere else after that. That was around East Side. And then, I was like, “Okay, this is better.” And I met some friends there and I lived there for three years then, like, and then my dad kind of dropped out and then I was like, “Okay, I'm coming with you.” But it was like, two months later, cause they started getting all mad and everybody was fighting and I was like, “‘F' this man, I'm out.” And then I called my supposable dad and then he's like, “Yeah, come over then.” And I'm like, “Alright. Pick me up.” And he's like, “How?”—cause he doesn't have a car. He's kind of poor [*laughs*]. That's what I say.

I don't know my real dad anymore because he's said [that] I'm not his son anyway. And, I was like, “Okay then. Bye, I guess” That's when I was like, ten.

Jordan's story is characterized by constantly shifting family relationships—changes which also led to physical relocations and alterations in his peer network. He shifts and adapts with each change, assessing each situation and working to improve his own immediate circumstances within the scope of his own limited resources. This draws attention to the *relational work* that young people in order to build their own webs of connections—not only with peers but also within their families. Further, underneath this story is the implied impact of racism and colonial dispossession, deeper structural dynamics which have—often intentionally—destabilized Indigenous family systems and communities (which subsequently place greater demands upon both adults and young people to maintain relational connections).

Lastly, many participants described the various roles that they play in their families, emphasizing how they serve as a support and resource to (most commonly) younger siblings and cousins. While many participants saw this *care work* in a positive light, some suggested that this can also be a burden (e.g., taking up their time, preventing them from completing homework or

participating in social activities, and draining their energy). This was the perspective of, for example, two grade seven students who were part of the Student Leadership Group. They both suggested that, out of all the possible supports available, students would benefit the most from accessible childcare services that would give those who commonly serve as unpaid babysitters the “chance to focus on school.” This does, to some extent, give credence to arguments made by some adult participants, who felt that young people in the community were often required to take on more (presumably) adult familial roles (e.g., taking care of themselves and young children, helping with grocery shopping and other home tasks). CBO worker Erin, when discussing the day-to-day realities of the Indigenous girls and young women that she works with, employs the term “parentification”¹⁷⁵ to describe this dynamic:

[My program]—the major thing is giving the girls a safe place to come and feel secure and, like, they don’t have to worry or be “parentified” or, like they can just come here and not be what they are at home, or around their neighbourhoods. They sort of have a chance to just *be* young girls.

When I say parentified I mean that these girls usually come from huge families, single mother families where they—it’s their responsibility to take care of all the younger siblings and, basically, they don’t have the opportunities to be kids at home.

So, they go straight to school, trying to be older at school, go straight home having, being forced to be older at home. They can come here and just be themselves.

To help them “be themselves,” Erin states that she makes space for “lots of silliness” and stresses the importance of “just allowing them to regress sort of into being juvenile. Not having to be cool or impress each other, you know?” The framing of her statement is telling—and reflects that of school staff members who thought Eaglecrest students are often *too independent* for their age (as one individual put it, “they are too much in charge of their own lives”). While recognizing the impact of these daily demands on young people, I suggest that the framing is problematic—

¹⁷⁵ Drawn from the field of child/adolescent psychology, parentification refers to situations wherein “adolescents take on adult- and parentlike roles and responsibilities that are not normally entrusted to children and not consistent with their developmental stage and level of psychological maturity” (Hooper, 2018, p. 2296). This is generally understood to involve “role reversal, boundary distortion, and inverted hierarchy...in which adolescents assume [what is classified as] developmentally inappropriate levels of responsibility in the family of origin” (p. 2697). While most research on the subject has focused on the negative outcomes of parentification, there is a small body of evidence suggesting that it can also foster more constructive capacities such as problem solving (Hooper, 2018). Consequently, some researchers (e.g., Jurkovic, 1997) have distinguished between constructive and destructive parentification. The latter phenomenon is more common situations wherein the child perceives the demands placed upon them as unfair and if their contributions are not acknowledged and validated by others. It is also more common in cases of emotional parentification (which involves the child acting as an emotional support for their parent) than in instrumental parentification (wherein children take on adult tasks) (Hooper, 2018). Notably, research on parentification is primarily based upon White (American) demographics.

calling upon westernized/middle-class notions of idealized (passive and dependent) childhood and reflecting the valorization of *delayed adulthood* discussed in chapter six. Hence, in addition to dealing with the day-to-day challenges of managing family responsibilities in challenging circumstances, these young people (and their families) are also discursively positioned as deviant and misaligned. Generally, I found that young people demonstrated an overall desire to contribute to their social worlds (including their families, the school, the community, and the world in general).¹⁷⁶ This can be defined as a need for *generativity*.¹⁷⁷ However, there were also instances where participants felt that the demands placed upon them were too heavy (or oppressive), unfairly allocated, or unrecognized by the adults in their lives. Hence, the young person's perception of this care work appears to depend upon whether it is given *consensually* or if it is *forced*.

The caring and the uncaring: Directing affect

Across these discussions of the roles played by individual students, peers, and caregivers/families was the notion of *care*. Within this local discourse there was a tendency to construct a binary between *the caring* and *the uncaring* and to then use this as a frame for explaining what differentiates educational success and failure. The most common means for articulating this was to link the caring of parents and their children. Several participants offered statements mirroring the following logic:

HALIMA: Students fail cause they don't care about school.

JULIE: Why don't they care about school?

HALIMA: Cause their parents don't care about them and don't care if they don't do well in school.

¹⁷⁶ In fact, at several points during my own research and volunteering at Eaglecrest I was provided support and care by young people. For example, often, during luncheons, participants would ask if I had enough to eat. During my volunteering young people would often invite me to play with them and offer little "gifts" (pictures, etc.). During the focus group luncheons students often made a point of asking me if I had had enough to eat.

¹⁷⁷ Originally coined by Erikson (1963), the term generativity has come to the processes through which one seeks to make an impact on the world (e.g., by caring for other people, mentoring and/or parenting future generations, and accomplishing tasks that improve the world). Being able to fulfill this need for generativity is generally associated with other positive outcomes (e.g., mental wellbeing). While, originally, generativity was presumed to only be a need expressed by adults, more recent research suggests that it is also a concern of young people (e.g., see Lawford & Ramey, 2015).

This notion that a *child doesn't care about school because their parents don't care about them* reverberated throughout the data, along with various descriptions of *caring and uncaring parents*. For example, when asked to describe a parent who “cares,” Halima suggested the following:

They help [their kids] do homework and stuff.

And, it's like, if there's a field trip, and they tell their parents that they want to go, the parents go, “What are you going to do there? What kind of stuff are you going to do there?” And they want to know everything that they're going to do there. And then they send you. So, like with everything, they talk to [their kids] about everything.

Hence, for Halima, a caring parent is one who helps their child with schoolwork and wants to know details about various facets of their lives, including school. Numerous participants also suggested that a caring parent is one that *forces* a child to go to school (and/or forces them to “care about school”) if the child seems reluctant to do so (e.g., “You're forced to, or you want to. If you don't want to then parents can force you”) (Subira). Relatedly, others suggested that “parents who care” also set boundaries because, as Liam suggests, “some parents give their child too much freedom.” This included setting behavioural boundaries to ensure young people are adequately rested for school as well as to prevent them from getting involved with drugs, gangs, bullying, and theft. Hence, *good kids* and *good student-workers* come from *good caring parents* who will prevent or correct their child's bad impulses and choices and help *steer them in the right direction*.

Further, many participants identified a particular style of *protectorate parenting* as very important—primarily because their community is seen as an inherently dangerous place. Jordan makes this claim by drawing upon his own experience. When asked to describe *good caring parents* he stated:

They're not, like, strict. Not like strict—but they really want to take care of their kids and they don't want anything to happen to them.

Cause one time I did that [went out without telling anyone where he was going] and my Auntie, she was crying because she thought I got kidnapped. Yeah, because the place that she lived around was pretty dangerous. Well, around here it's pretty dangerous too because there's like shootings and then there's, like, kidnappings.

Many participants reiterated Jordan's perspective on the need for *protectorate parenting* because of the perceived high level of danger in the community. Hence, parents are understood as demonstrating care by placing restrictions on some activities (going out into the community) and

enforcing others (such as school attendance). Underlying this is the assumption that *good caring parents* are always acting in their child's best interests. By extension, parents that do not fulfill this role—who “don't care” about school and “give their child too much freedom” are analyzed using the same discursive repertoires used in reference to *bad kids* and *bad students*—that is, they demonstrate *misdirected affect*, make *bad choices*, and otherwise fail to embody a particular conceptualization of *idealized parenthood*. Several participants (most of whom were newcomers who had recently moved to the Eaglecrest community) stated that, they believed, most parents in the area do not meet these expectations—to quote Asim, “The parents are not good. Cause this area is not good. Kid's don't care. Kid's don't care.”

Locating cause in the community

Following upon Asim's comment above, several participants (more commonly, but not exclusively, from newcomer demographics) linked school failure to the broader characteristics of the community surrounding Eaglecrest. There was a general sense that this area represents a very distinct setting, characterized by particular geographic parameters and socioeconomic characteristics. Kennedy, for example, discussed the physical/spatial elements of the community—which she (and many other students) referred to as “The D” (for “The Developments”):

KENNEDY: Some houses in the D only have half of the house. They don't have a front door and a back door. But his house has a front door and a back door. So, I know [*pointing at Jamal*] how your house looks like, cause all the houses in The D are the same.

JULIE: So, what *counts* as The D? Like, where—?

KENNEDY: The D is like, the school and this corner and around [*draws an invisible map with her fingers on the table*]. And then it goes all the way around to where they have the exact same houses. They're all the same. It's like a giant square going around. We call it “The D” for “The Developments.” I heard it from some kid. Yeah. It's been going on for a long time now.

Hence, “The D” is defined as a bounded community with specific characteristics (primarily related to the standard design of the residences within the central social housing complex).

In addition to these physical markers, “The D” was also conceptualized as a particular kind of socioeconomic space characterized by poverty, criminal activity, and a lack of “community feeling.” Consider, for example, the following statements from different focus group sessions:

JAMAL: Worst thing man. I don’t know why my parents moved me here. I was so good when I was back there¹⁷⁸ [in his previous neighbourhood]. This is a bad place man, the D’s a bad place. This community’s a bad place. I swear man. I swear I left my bike for five minutes to go to the quad and it was gone. After five minutes. Yeah. They stole my piece. I even locked it up. Five minutes man!

ASIM: One day I was walking to my house and this guy said, and this guy said, “Do you want some push?” “Do you want some push?” I said no. And people throw, like, people throw like eggs at your house. They egg your house and run. Hit the cars, like who does that? Sometimes the kids in the neighbourhood, they yell and they smoke—I’m being honest, every time I see gangs at nighttime, I get scared.

So, yesterday, okay—I go—I get scared. Cause at nighttime they’re walking around. So, I try to act like I’m going somewhere else—I don’t want to say the names, but—It’s like, they’re like thirteen years old, there’s like twenty of them together. [*nodding his head toward Ethan*] We know them. But I go out in the daytime. It’s just daytime. That’s why. It’s not that scary in the daytime.

KENNEDY: You know what? I’m really scared my new bike is going to get jacked. I got this brand new bike from Canadian Tire, 600 bucks. Yeah—Yeah. I’m been getting lots of compliments from people around The D and I’m super scared. But I’m lucky I have a lock for it, I’ve got two locks.

EMILY: One time I was going to the park with someone—I took two friends. So, we were playing on this spinny thing—where you climb on it and its spins. And then we went on the swings and then a guy, who just—on the field. We were the only ones playing at the park he’s like, “Hey you! Come over here.” So he was riding his bike closer to us and then he was carrying a big, like human-sized, bag. And then, like, we ran inside like, just hid in the girl’s washroom. It was a boy.

HALIMA: One time, it was winter, we were new here. My mom went somewhere, she was pregnant and a man a woman was driving a car and then they stopped and asked her if she wanted to come to the car, “We’ll take you home.” And my mom said, she didn’t say anything. Then the guy again, he came again. And she was just like walking to her house.

In my country [Eritrea]—there’s no bad people in my country. You can go anywhere by yourself. You can even go like into the mountains by yourself and come back by yourself. Like, my friend, we would go play into the mountain and play there a little and then come back.

¹⁷⁸ This particular phrasing—“I was so good when I was back there”—could suggest that Jamal has found that his own behaviour as changed since moving into “The D.”

DAWN: You know what I think should happen? You know that really, really long line of like bars on Main Street? I feel like it should get rid of some of those, cause there's like, too many and there's like, umm, a lot of people are getting scared to walk down on Main Street because of how many drunks there are on there. They should get rid of some of the bars, cause there's like so many and a couple of them aren't even being used.

Each of these statements indicates a complex interaction between subjective understandings and lived experience (which sometimes includes, as in Halima's excerpt, comparisons with previous experiences of safety and security). On one hand, these participants express a sense of personal insecurity (often linked with the loss of material goods) and discuss some of their strategies for navigating the community on a day-to-day basis. In most cases, however, the source of that insecurity is located within the (presumably essentialized) characteristics of the community itself and the people who live there—including other Eaglecrest students. However, Dawn also suggests that the impact of physical/structural factors (the presence of bars) as a factor. These participants draw a strict line between themselves and these "others" (often by making reference to indicators of their own higher economic status [e.g., high-priced bicycles]) and suggesting that the behaviours of *bad people* and *bad kids* is the natural outcome of living in a *bad place* (those students/kids are bad because *this place is bad*). Several students conceptualized "The D" as a dangerous place, often citing news stories of violent incidents and a higher-than-average police presence as indicators of the community's endemic problems.

In addition, these statements indicate the extent to which young people in the community have developed various *self-protection strategies* to both avoid and deal with threats. These included certain forms of bodily performance ("I try to act like I'm going somewhere else" [Asim]; only going out during safe times (daytime) or to safe places (where there are supervising adult staff); keep personal items secure ("I've got two locks" [Kennedy]); only going out when accompanied by other friends; avoiding communication with those who appear threatening; and running away/hiding. Indeed, several participants demonstrated a very sophisticated understanding of both the *safe and unsafe aspects of the community*. For example, in the following exchange, I was reviewing a series of community photos with Jordan and Mason. They easily identified several key sites in the community (community spaces, the senior living building, etc.) as well as areas they try to avoid. At one point, Mason stops and points at a particular house (located right on the edge of the school field):

MASON: Oh! That's the gangster house.

JULIE: How do you know that's a gangster house?

MASON: I see people going in and coming out. And then there's people that sit outside that look like gangsters.

JORDAN: Trap house. It's called a trap house, not a gangster's house.

JULIE: What' a trap house?

JORDAN: A trap house is where a lot of people are—go and buy stuff and they just chill there. Like drugs.

MASON: [*shakes head*] No. That's not a trap house. A trap house is when, like, that's where they party and stuff, not just chill there. They don't live there. They just—they leave there and have a trap house away from their original house. This is where they go to party.

JORDAN: Yeah—and THAT [*he points at the photo*] is a trap house.

While I was not able to dive further into the source of their understanding (e.g., it would most likely be quite illuminating to further unpack how they came to define and be able to identity “trap houses”) this does suggest that young people in the community have their own set of specialized knowledge—developed through personal experience, discussions with peers and adults, engagement with media, and other methods—that they use to conceptually *map out and navigate* local spaces.

Other participants reflected this notion of community deficit but focused more on a lack of community feeling and pride rather than a sense of danger. Avery, for example, suggested that this leads to increased conflict:

I don't see a lot of people helping each other. Most people they, if they have a problem with you and you want to help they're just going to look down on you if you want help. And if you like, if you have a problem, they're not going to try to fix it. They're going to try and fight. And it'll turn into this big storm. It also happens in the school.

Further in our conversation, Avery and Dawn noted several aspects of the community that they felt demonstrated a lack of community care and pride, including graffiti, a lack of greenspace, and poorly maintained buildings. They further suggested that there was a need for more

community events and opportunities for people to get to know each other. They suggested that it was often “too quiet” (Dawn) which gave a sense that “it’s like no one lives around here” (Avery). Although, as noted in chapter five, this argument was also contradicted by Dawn who identified the presence of several such events and opportunities. That being said, overall, a profound sense of boredom was often expressed by many young participants.

These notions of community danger and deficit were also often connected to the socioeconomic status of its residents. For example, when I asked Jamal, Asim, Kennedy, and Ethan why they thought someone might steal a bicycle, Asim replied, “Look, look, LOOK, uhhh—Miss Julie these all—umm—houses, are *rent*. They’re *rent*. They’re not like paid, they’re rent houses. So that’s why people can’t afford stuff”. Thus, the housing status of the community is taken as an indicator of poverty and as an explanation for theft. These participants further suggested that this economic situation can lead to “jealously,” which then leads young people to engage in crime (or, as Ethan put it, “These kids. They can’t afford stuff. They want other stuff. They’re jealous”). Hence, the young people are drawing upon particular discursive conceptualizations of class which marginalize and vilify those with fewer socioeconomic resources.

A similar opinion was offered by Jordan, who suggested linkages between poverty, alcohol use, and “trouble”:

JULIE: What else makes it easier or harder for a student to finish school?

JORDAN: Well, there is poverty and then there’s too much drunk people too. They, they bring it to other people meanwhile [those people are] just like, sitting there.

JULIE: What do you mean?

JORDAN: [*pauses*] So like, too many drunk people, they bring it to other people so like—They bring it to the people that don’t want anything to do with it.

JULIE: So, someone that doesn’t want to start drinking, they’re pressured into it?

JORDAN: [*disagreeing*] hmmm—No, like, trouble.

JULIE: Oh

JORDAN: Yeah. Drunk people always bring in trouble to the people that don’t want trouble.

JULIE: What do you mean by “trouble”?

JORDAN: Stealing things, breaking things, fighting. And it affects—it'll affect the next day and it'll affect, it might be affecting your whole life. It's hard to deal with.

Hence, while noting diversity in the community (not everyone wants or causes trouble), he still links socioeconomic inequality and violence, locating both as underlying causes of school failure. In many instances these discussions centered upon specific incidents (e.g., school lockdowns, violence near the school, and the disappearance—and presumed murder—of individuals). These were, in most cases,¹⁷⁹ descriptions of real events that the participants have either experienced directly or heard about through, family, peers, or news media. As discussed in chapter five, the participants seek to understand their various experiences by drawing upon a broader storyscape, including a metanarrative (a *story about*) the community that forefronts overt forms of violence and presumes social and economic scarcity.

Many participants also suggested that they were well aware of the community's city-wide reputation and some suggested that this public perception also impacted how the area was treated by law enforcement and media. During one exchange between Ethan, Asim, Kennedy, and Jamal, I was told a story about a violent incident at the nearby recreation centre. I told the participants that I had not heard about the incident in the news and, they suggested, this was because news media (and police) care more about other areas in the city than "The D." Specifically, they compared the media and police response to that surrounding a series of burglaries that had been occurring in a more affluent area of Winnipeg (here referred to by the pseudonym Creek Lofts):

ETHAN: That's cause they're rich [the people in another communities].

JULIE: So, why do you think those burglaries are on the news, but the thing at the Rec Centre wasn't?

ASIM: Look, that's like a rich area, so they actually care. And, look, it wasn't like a Sandy Hook.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ There were two incidents where a participant began talking about an event that, upon further discussion, was identified as having happened in another part of Winnipeg.

¹⁸⁰ Sandy Hook Elementary School was the site of a mass school shooting in 2012 that was widely covered by both American and Canadian news media (the school itself is located in Connecticut). Asim's comment is meant to suggest that the specific incident in his community was not as serious as this. This suggests that, for Asim at least, incidents of mass violence provide the foil against which local events are judged. The recreation centre incident was simply not news worthy because it was not as severe.

KENNEDY: Because those are, like, rich people. They actually care about them.

ASIM: The cops care, the cops care. They have money, BIIIG houses. Here, they're [*the police*] are just, "Naw" [*brushes the air with his hand dismissively*]. Those are rich houses. People have money.

JAMAL: The rich people are going to pay them [the police] more money.

KENNEDY: They have money! They *have* money.

ASIM: One time I went to, ummm—Look! Creek Lofts, I saw a big house, like a mansion. Those people are, like, rich people. *They live there.*

In this exchange participants suggest a sense that the Eaglecrest community is socially devalued due to the socioeconomic status of residents—which, they suggest, has the direct impact of shaping both the actions of law enforcement and the extent of attention paid to the area by news media. This excerpt also draws attention to the tricky narrative maneuvering that participants employed when talking about the community; that is, on one hand, they emphasized how they were personally trapped in an inherently *bad place* which negatively impacted their lives. However, at times, they *relocate* the cause of the community's problems on to broader structural and discursive factors—suddenly making themselves *a part of the community* which, as a whole, was being subjected to discriminatory treatment by those with more financial and social power.

This is not to imply that the participants characterization of the community was completely negative. Indeed, some participants (all of whom had lived in the community for four years or more) also expressed a sense of familiarity with the community, noting the location of—and speaking favourably about—the various places and people that they liked to visit. These included descriptions of various community organizations, with most young participants noting their connection to at least three to five specific CBOs. These included religious organizations (e.g., churches and mosques); cultural centres; various community service providers; newcomer organizations; Indigenous-focused organizations; education or career-oriented programming; recreation centres; specific clubs or lessons (e.g., sports clubs, drama programs, music programs, art programs); and summer camps. In addition, students also discussed green spaces/parks,

specific businesses (e.g., Dollarama and McDonald's), and other inner-city organizations such as Aboriginal Youth Opportunities¹⁸¹ and the Bear Clan.^{182, 183}

In addition to providing both physical and emotional supports, these community organizations were also an important source of cultural, religious, and skills learning; offer safe place to be (Ethan, for example, noted that while the community is sometimes unsafe, he still goes out because at these organizations “there’s staff”); often provided access to travel, volunteering, and other opportunities; and helped to build a young person’s social capital by facilitating connections, as in the following examples:

CASSANDRA: I’m learning how to powwow dance. It’s all the way, it’s sort of downtown. My mom’s friend was like, “Do you want to come with us to the powwow thing?” And I was like, “Yeah sure” and then we went. And we started learning to dance. And there was a cute boy, but he has a girlfriend. *[laughs]*

There’s just a bunch of people dancing there. And there’s this one lady, she was teaching us how to dance. And I used to shawl dance. And she was like, “Next time I come I’ll bring my shall so that me and you can dance.” And her son goes to this school. I think he’s in grade five.

MASON [referring to his involvement with a prominent Indigenous service organization]: I just volunteer. Every time they have like a powwow or something I go and help them and they pay me, like, \$300 for it. Cause, Chris [a worker at this organization], he used to know me and my big brother and my who family. And then, he’s like, “You would come volunteer.”

Both of these excerpts draw attention to how these community organizations foster relationships, allow for connections to art and culture, and (in Mason’s case) provide opportunities for young people to contribute (and be paid for their labour). However, as discussed in chapter five, drawing out these *complexifying counter-stories* required a significant amount of in-depth reflective work with the research participants so as to challenge the *dominating story about community deficit*.

¹⁸¹ A youth-led inner city movement that held weekly gathering. It recently ceased operations.

¹⁸² An Indigenous-led patrol group who also operates a drop-in centre. This organization has recently faced numerous governance challenges.

¹⁸³ In one rather insightful and amusing exchange, Mason described a local community activist as someone who “takes kids protesting and teaching people how to make bannock.” Dawn identified the same individual, relaying the following: “Oh! That guy! I remember! He donated twenty bucks to my program. We were doing a lemonade stand for two weeks for those Fridays so we could raise money, for like food money for that and he donated like \$20 bucks both Fridays.” Hence, many of the connections young people made to types of community “activist” organizations revolved around personal connection and experience.



Figure 45 Rose: Now I live in the D
(Photo: J. M. Hyde)

In addition, many participants noted that they sometimes face challenges accessing these organizations. For some this was because their parents limited their mobility (out of safety concerns); consequently, their community connections involved more formal clubs, private lessons, or through online interactions with friends. Other students emphasized that accessing community resources depended upon both their social and navigational capital—that is, their ability to access resources depending upon the extent to which peers and families provided information and support as well as the own individual's capacity to physical navigate the community. Asim, for example, noted how access to transportation provides a barrier to community engagement. Specifically, he differentiates between two community recreation centres. The closer of the two, he suggests, is not suitable for young people his age. The other, however, is located too far away:

Well, I go to this other Rec Centre sometimes to play basketball. They have like different things you can use to play games. Sometimes I go there to play games, play basketball with my friends. There's like a sports area. I always play in that area. That's the first something I saw.

And then I, I used to go more often, but now? Nah, it's too far and sometimes it's cold outside. To go on the bus transit to get there—it's pretty far away.

But I go there and not to [the closer recreation centre] cause, like, nobody would play basketball there. Like, at *that* one it's all adults. The other place, it's like, people my age. We play basketball—five on five, three on three, four on four.

The closer place, yeah, my house is right there [*pointing*]. And if I go to the other one, it'll be like an hour and a half to get there, cause of traffic.

This suggests that the accessibility of community resources is highly contingent upon the appropriateness of the programming available as well as physical proximity (which is further mediated by the quality of public transportation). Dawn further identified how the quality of programming at different organizations differed, reiterating Asim's perspective that the recreation centre closet to Eaglecrest—while physically convenient—does not provide services that are of interest to her:

I don't really go to that Rec Centre. I used to. But I didn't really like to go there. It looked boring. Like, they didn't really do anything there. Like, the gym will be open but—like they would have different activities—and they didn't—but the workers there wouldn't really watch the kids that were doing it. They would have crafts, arts and crafts, but a lot of their crafts were really simple stuff. Like for kids.

These comments suggest that the mere presence and close proximity of community organization does not mean that they will be seen as relevant, interesting, or valuable by young people. In addition, this suggests that accessing these resources is heavily depending upon a young person's access to transportation as well as their own personal and social navigational capacities. Indeed, it should be emphasized that young people display significant navigational agency as they both seek out, attend, and evaluate the resources available—determine which services are of most interest to them. Further, many participants identified key gaps in available services. Specifically, most participants noted that (secular) organizations were more focused on providing recreational activities than support. This was identified as a problem by Avery, who suggested that the young people in the community required more direct access to academic and mental health supports:

Cause most teenagers don't get, like, a lot of support from their parents. Maybe like have them, kind of—like some days teenagers can go in, like, counselling maybe? Cause some teenagers get like really bad stress from homework and stuff—and cut themselves. So, like, support from other people who help.

And, many, not really tutors because you'll have to pay them—but like volunteers from high schools, like grades eleven to twelve—they come in and help, like, junior highs with their homework. But, like, one-on-one—like one volunteer for like each

Overall, these participants demonstrated the keen capacity of young people to map out and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the resources available to them. This points to a need for the increased involvement of young people in community development planning.

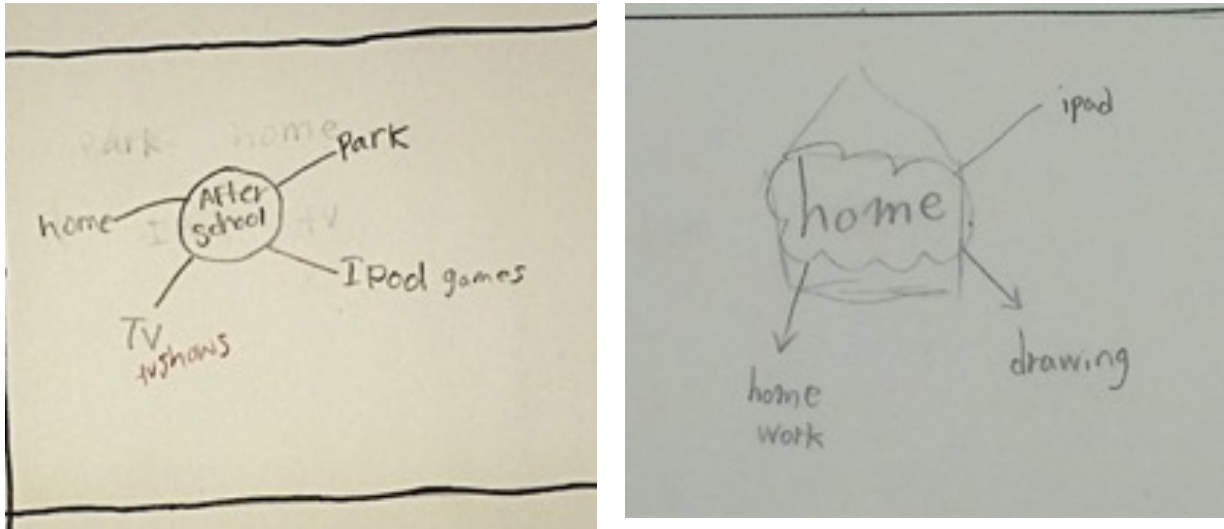


Figure 46 Selections from participant Educational Journey Maps: Being stuck at home
 These two Educational Journey Map images depict what Halima (left) and Mia (right) do during non-school hours. Both suggested that they are most often “stuck” (Mia) at home—although Halima also noted that she goes to the park with her family.

(Photo: J. M. Hyde)

Overall, there was a general sense that the area in which the Eaglecrest students live (“The D”) was a bounded (indeed, segregated) space characterized by significant socioeconomic challenges. These challenges are often conceptualized—both by the research participants and, I argue, the general public—as endemic to the socioeconomic status of residents. Further, it appeared that participants often employed their narrative agency in an effort to make sense of their own positioning with the community. On one hand, they positioned themselves as a part of the community and, consequently, as marginalized and socially/morally excluded from the rest of the city that *doesn't care* about them or the place where they live. On the other hand, they attempted to separate themselves from the community, constructing a metanarrative of place that often relied upon dichotomies between *good kids* and the *dangerous others* (which included outsiders like “drug dealers” and “kidnappers” as well as their own peers). As discussed in chapter five, this suggests that young people seek to construct and perform a coherent and validating sense of self but find their efforts restricted by the limitations of the storyscape.

Locating causes in “School” and “the school”

The participants descriptions of *good versus bad communities* were often linked to their discussions about the role of school in fostering or hindering a student’s progress. This was particularly evident when participants explained their desire to change schools or to attend particular highschools after they completed grade eight. Perceptions of dangerous places and people were reflected in the characterizations of different schools, as in the following excerpts from different focus group sessions:

HALIMA: I’m going to McGregor next year because this area’s dangerous and we heard that [McGregor’s] a good school for me.

Emily: I don’t know about going to McGregor because a friend told me that a girl got shot there. And my big sister goes there, so I’m worried.

ASIM: I want to go here [to TCI] cause, I want to make some new friends. A lot of my friends are going to St. Xavier and all that stuff. I want to go to a good school. Like, new friends, good friends. Cause, some friends, they say St. Xavier is not good. They say—I don’t want to say it—that it’s not a good school. There’s a lot of gangs there. And I don’t want to have anything to do with that. But my parents want me to go to TCI cause my older sister, right now she’s nineteen, she’s going to school and work and stuff. So, she went there. My other sister’s seventeen, she went there. So, [my parents] want to put me there.

GHANI: Actually, my brother, right? My mom wanted him to go to Cornergrove, but then my brother said, “I can’t go there. There’s a lot of people who drink, do drugs.” Cause my brother’s friend, right? He’s seventeen. He drinks right now and has drugs. Now, my brother goes to Meadowlark. He tried to go to St. Xavier and last year he put his form in before everyone, but they didn’t give him a spot. St. Xavier is very big. But I want to get a house on Markham street, because then it’d be really close to our house. It’d be really close to us. Actually, my coach, right? His son is in my grade. He wants me to go to St. Xavier next year. He’s gonna come pick up my brother and my friends, right? To go to St. Xavier.

In each instance the participant indicates that they (and/or their parents) have made a particular judgement calls regarding different schools often based upon the reputations of the surrounding area and the student population—with older family members (e.g., siblings and cousins) often being the sources of this knowledge. In some instances (as discussed in chapter six), these distinctions also intersected with racialized discourses (recall that Subira justifies her and her family’s intention to switch schools by drawing upon racist conceptualizations of Indigenous persons). In addition, it is notable that the specified schools are often located quite a distance

away from the young person's home, which means that many (such as Ghani) will need regular access to transportation in order to attend class (which Ghani may be able to acquire by drawing upon his social capital [his relationship with his coach]). Ghani's statement further suggests that accessing a school located outside of one's jurisdictional catchment area can be challenging, requiring the completion of additional paperwork and the school's permission. Jordan and Mason made a similar case when discussing the importance of maintaining a "good record."

Other participants suggested that they wanted to attend schools that would provide a *quality educational experience* characterized by, for example, various learning opportunities, good teachers, and challenging academics:

KENNEDY: I want to go to the same school that my Dad went too. Lots of people on my Dad's side went there. My uncle, my brother, my other brother, my Dad.

And cause there was a photography class that my sister was in and I really liked it cause one day she took me there. And, um, yeah, I really liked it. They have cheerleading and stuff there.

MASON: I'm going to TCI because my parents think it's a good school with good programs. And my Dad will give me a ride there.

JAMAL: I'm going to another school next year. My dad thinks it'll be better than here because you do more work there. You get homework there.

ETHAN: I want to go to St. Xavier, not Cornergrove because it's boring over there.

GHANI: I don't want to go to McGregor because my cousin been there and she's like, "All the teachers are a little bit mean and once in a while there are fights and stuff." So, me and my uncle, we'll both leave here [Eaglecrest] and will go to St. Xavier together.

As in the first set of excerpts, these participants all draw attention to the role of family members in helping to provide information about different schools and making key decisions about enrolment. This indicates that these students, and their families, actively seek out and interpret information about different schools so as to make, what they see as, *informed choices* about where to enroll. These decisions are shaped by how they conceptualize safe/dangerous schools (and communities) as well as educational quality and rigor—with the use of homework often standing out as a kind of touchstone concept that carries significant symbolic weight. These perceptions of educational quality often overlapped with discussions of funding and the overall

wealth of different schools and their surrounding communities. Certain schools were defined as “richer” than others and, therefore, able to provide more to students.

Notions of safety and quality also served as the general criteria that participants used to evaluate their past and present schooling experiences. They often made comparisons between the different institutions that they had attended, noting key differences between institutional resources and funding. Participants often judged schools based upon specific structural elements (e.g., the size of gymnasiums, the number and size of fields and play structures, the presence of science labs, and the availability of technological resources) as well as program availability. For example, many participants indicated that they wished Eaglecrest had a music program; additional language instruction; more athletic teams, extra-curricular activities, and leadership opportunities; and more varied programming options in general. Other participants indicated that a *good school* was also one that held special events, provided numerous and varied field trip excursions, and were places that students felt “proud” to attend. Probing these discussions further, some participants suggested that the differences between school were primarily based upon funding, which was further tied to the relative size of different schools and the socioeconomic status of the surrounding areas.

While there was variation in how the young people differentiated between *good/rich and bad/poor schools*, there was an overall sense that *some schools have “more” and some schools have “less”* and that this results in the differential opportunities afforded to—and achievements obtained by—different students. In a few instances participants also suggested that this shaped the abilities and work ethic of different populations. For example, Liam noted that he sometimes felt “held back” by other Eaglecrest students and Subira drew an explicit comparison with students at her former school, stating:

If we had a spelling test, at my old school, like our whole class finishes. And our whole class finishes, like, their math drill. Here (at Eaglecrest), only four or five people.

Overall, it was the expressed hope of many of these participants (and their families) that they would be able to access *good (comparably well-resourced) schools* that would provide the clearest and smoothest pathway through schooling. Thus, many participants identified how the presumed deficits of specific schools hinder the success of students. In some cases, this involved reference to Eaglecrest specifically, with its presumed lower status and quality being invariably connected to its economic status—which was believed to reflect that of the surrounding

community. However, it is hard to determine the extent to which this was a perception or a material reality.¹⁸⁴ Regardless, participants suggested that they were not being given a fair chance at success while some (often reflecting their family’s local discourses) employed a rhetoric of *school choice* to describe how they intend on correcting this deficit in the future.

While it was more common for participants to link schooling success or failure to the *good school/bad school* dichotomy (that is, the problem is not “school” per se, but “this school” in particular), there were also instances wherein they challenged certain aspects of educational practice more generally. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this included the perceived pointlessness,¹⁸⁵ repetitiveness, and/or uninspiring nature of many learning tasks and curriculum content areas—which, participants suggested, one had to nonetheless complete in order to be “successful” and to avoid disciplinary actions by the teacher. Some suggested that this kind of *pushing through* was made more challenging by the intensity of physical regulation placed upon their bodies and the limited chances they had to take breaks. I was quick surprised by the extent to which young people were aware of their own bodily states—knowing, for example, that they were behaving more erratically (or, “acting silly” [Jordan]) because they were “hyper” and being able to attribute this directly to being tired, consuming too much sugar, or not having a chance to express energy. In one instance Jamal specifically informed me that he and his peers were having trouble focusing because, “We didn’t get gym today. Yesterday we had gym and we were fine.” Ghani also noted: “I like recess because I can get a break. And then my mind works better. My thinking is better.” They also noted, however, that the breaks they were offered were insufficient, and that even access to these was largely determined by the teacher. This was particularly true for students in grades seven and eight (junior high students); unlike their younger peers, these students do not have scheduled recesses. For example, when asked what would improve schooling practice at Eaglecrest, Avery suggested,

I know that this is probably not really possible, but more breaks. We’re supposed to take fifteen-minute breaks. In the morning and afternoon. We only get a break every Day Five and that’s only, like, once a cycle. We don’t even really get that—they [teachers] only do it when they’re feeling nice.

¹⁸⁴ This would necessitate comparing school budgets—which was beyond the scope of this study.

¹⁸⁵ Some also questioned whether they were being adequately prepared for highschool, such as Avery who questioned that lack of opportunity to develop keyboarding and computer skills. She suggested that teachers, “just expect us to know it. But some of us struggle.” She also saw this as impeding her ability to complete highschool assignments because most of these are completed using computers.

Hence, breaks are generally framed as privileges rather than rights (which further reflects the discursive construction of the *good student-worker*); and, consequently, these are often the first things withheld when students are subjected to punishment.

Indeed, the intensity of the regulation of student bodies was quite striking, involving particular forms of regimented bodily comportment (sitting at one's desk or in one's "spot" on the class carpet, keeping one's "hands and feet to oneself," only speaking at "appropriate" times, etc.), social regulation (e.g., being separated from one's friends if your collective behaviour is considered a detriment to classroom order), and significant affective self-monitoring and control (learning how to "self-regulate," containing one's anger, etc.). For example, in one instance (recorded in my field notes) I noticed a staff member speaking with a young student (younger than grade three) in the hallway. This student had been walking in line when she hit one of her peers. The teacher noticed this and had the student walk back several feet and stand still. After the rest of the class entered the room, the staff member told the student that she had to "try it again" (walk down the hallway a second time "properly." While the student was walking, she stated (to paraphrase),

I like that you're holding your hands behind your back. It's showing me that you have self-control. When you get here [*pointing to a spot in the hallway*] you'll tie your laces.

The student then walked to the stop and the teacher continued:

Tie your laces please my dear. [*She watches the child tie her laces*]. No—what's going on. Try again. Two bows—get two little ears, two ears—crisscross them over. Put only one through. There you go. Pull them tight. Nice work.

Okay—put your hands behind your back. Put your hands behind your back when you're walking. That's what I expect from you now on.

While not denying that some form of action was needed to address the child's actions towards her peers, the specific form of discipline employed in this case is profoundly biopolitical and embodied—being predicated upon the intense surveillance and control of the young person's body. Rather than addressing the affective or social causes behind this student's behaviour, the cause of her actions is located within her own *lack of self-regulation*—a deficit which is then addressed through an intensification of (biopolitical) disciplinary control. While this was one of the more extreme cases of this form of discipline that I witnessed, it is reflective of a general paradigm which—even while recognizing the additional challenges faced by Eaglecrest students

that may make it more difficult for them to *embody the good student-worker/good kid subjectivities*—still targeted the students mind, affect, and body as the primary sites of intervention. This included various other coercive practices (removing students from class [often phrased as “kicking” students out], “time-outs,” etc.) as well as subtler means of biopolitical control (exemplified, I would argue, by how “mindfulness” practices have become a standard approach to addressing student behavioural challenges and mental health concerns). Even spaces which students described as being comparably “freer,” such as the school gymnasium, were still dominated by very strict regimes of control (e.g., students had to sit in particular places, perform certain activities only as directed by the teacher, etc.).

In addition to this, the strict enforcement of certain school rules also provided another means through which students were subjected to constant monitoring and surveillance. Reflecting upon my experience in various classroom settings—and my own personal history attending a school with a comparably more affluent population—I had a sense that these regimes of control were, in fact, tighter at Eaglecrest than many other settings (although, I should note, certain staff members were comparably looser with their means of control than others—often preferring discussion and other more relationally-oriented disciplinary measures). This sentiment was also shared by some of the research participants who had recently switched schools (Subira, for example, suggested that Eaglecrest was “stricter” than her previous school and suggested that she “learned more” at this other institution *because* she had more opportunity for breaks and “choice time”—which gave her something to “work towards”). In my discussions with staff members, it was also common for them to suggest that this control was done in the students “best interests.” For example, Vanessa when discussing the various mechanisms staff members use to “build relationships” with students, suggested that (amongst other strategies),

You build relationships by being, by being strict. By setting boundaries. That’s how you build a relationship. You can build a relationship by hanging out with them at the community centre after school and playing basketball, but you also build relationship with them by saying, “No” and kicking them out of class. And that builds just as strong a relationship, and even maybe a healthier relationship than being the, you know—

The first year I was here my students told me to be stricter. They said, “Be harsh, be harsh, crack down on us, be strict.” They said, they said, “It’s good.” They don’t say it to me anymore. So maybe I’ve figured it out, I don’t know. But I do feel, like, I do feel like that, that’s been a part of my learning.

I always conversations with them afterwards. Once they've had a chance to cool down and we talk about how we feel and stuff. But what's even more interesting is that they'll start off, I think, by being really angry but then, right, like not wanting to talk to me or whatever and then—and then as they day progresses you can tell that there's a new level of respect.

Yeah, I mean I think we all want—we all do want boundaries. And I think I think this school has also done a very good job of creating the expectation for students, you know? That, students know that when they come into the school there will be boundaries and they will be firm. So, they want it. Perhaps? I don't know.

Vanessa's comments are notably peppered with hedges and other indicators of self-doubt. To her this approach was counter-intuitive, but she has found it to be more consistent with the general approach employed at Eaglecrest (part of the “firm boundaries” set), effective, and (she suggests) desired by students themselves (although I did ask several young participants about the value of “strictness” and they all suggested that it is actually detrimental—both to their affective states and their learning).¹⁸⁶ In a sense, it appears that Vanessa has been socialized into following a specific form of disciplinary practice—which is generally justified as being “good for” Eaglecrest students because they are, perhaps, assumed to be *more* in need of boundaries because of the presumed *lack of boundaries* within their home life. These beliefs are reinforced by the responses of students to these disciplinary actions, which she sees as demonstrating a “new level of respect.” I suggest an alternative reading of the students' responses; I consider this, perhaps, an attempt by a young person to re-establish a relationship that has been destabilized. That is, they are seeking to re-connect with the teacher (which whom they are depended upon in various ways) by performing deference and the *good student-worker subjectivity*. This is, then, a *micropolitical renegotiation of power*. At the same time, however, being in the tight confines of the classroom space with twenty students or more, I observed how the lack of enforcement of bodily regulation would often lead to escalating behaviours *amongst* students—which, I noticed, created (for some) a sense of fear and insecurity.¹⁸⁷ The problem, then, is not necessarily with the teachers' efforts to *maintain and regulate a certain relational space*, but rather with the structural conditions (e.g., class size) and the strategies teachers employ (often out of a perceived necessity) in order to maintain order and reduce interpersonal conflict.

¹⁸⁶ Participants also noted that these strategies are largely ineffective. In an exchange between Bachir, Davy, and Peter, they noted that suspensions and detentions are “not a good solution” (Bachir) because they do not actually result in changed behaviour and because students will often just “go home and watch TV and play games” (Peter).

¹⁸⁷ One could also consider how the lived reality of insecurity (experienced by many students) would shape their reactions to these escalating dynamics.

The strictness of this regulation regime, at times, would be resisted by students—often escalating to the point wherein they would be *pushed out* of the classroom space. I had one exchange with a staff member that exemplified this phenomenon, which I described in my fieldnotes. I stopped by to see Devon (a middle-years student) in Mr. M’s class. When I came to the door Mr. M appeared exasperated and then explained to me that Devon had been sent home for refusing to remove his sweatshirt hood in class. He stated (to paraphrase):

I told him—“Look, this is something you have to do. This is the way we do it at this school.” So, he takes it off and—ten seconds later—I look back and it’s on. So, this happened a few times and I called his dad and just said, “I just can’t today.” So, by time number five I said, “That’s it! One more time—.” Of course, ten seconds later it’s on again. So, I said that he’s welcome to come back, but—So they [his parents] kept him until recess and he came back. About a half an hour later he’s sitting and talking when I’m trying to lecture. So, I said, “Do you want to go to the office?” He says, “Okay.” So, yeah—he hasn’t been back yet. My guess is he’s not going to come back. My guess is he sitting at home.

Calling back to Dikar’s (2008) analysis of student resistance, Devon’s actions could be interpreted as initially taking the form of “infrapolitical resistance” (Scott, 1985) (wearing his hood when he knew he was not supposed to) which—due to the overt actions of the teachers, escalated into more direct opposition. Further, drawing upon Giroux (1983), this action—which a form of “micropolitics” (Ball, 1987) that sought to challenge power relationships—was not necessarily emancipatory because it resulted in the individualized ostracization of this student. That being said, it still (arguably) served a valid purpose for this student by allowing him to assert his own agency and maintain his sense of self-determination/self-efficacy.

Throughout my time at Eaglecrest I also noticed various forms of both overtly opposition and infrapolitical resistances (generally understood here as *micropolitical* and *resistance work*), including (to draw from Dikar, 2008) “excuses, over-stated obstacles (I don’t have pen, paper, a book, a partner, etc.), lateness, chatting, note-passing, taking the hall pass, foot-dragging, and so on” (p. 142). These various actions can be interpreted as means to “limit the demands of the powerful” (p. 143), reduce “the amount of time students [are] required to give themselves over to...authority” (p. 142) and increase the amount of energy and time expelled by authority figures seeking to force or compel student acquiescence—while also “call[ing] attention to the contradictions and inconsistencies in school authority and student relationships with school” (p. 143). One common strategy employed by Eaglecrest students (and not identified by Dikar, 2008)

was to “shut down”—that is, to suddenly stop completing the assigned tasks and refusing to communicate. While these various actions would rarely escalate into more overt micropolitical conflicts between students and teachers, they did at times lead to more subtle forms of disciplinary control (e.g., the loss of “choice time” or recess).

Beyond these more explicit forms of regulation were subtler elements of the hidden curriculum that served to regulate the students’ time, attention, and energy levels. The school days were structured according to regimes of time—with specific learning tasks and regimes of bodily control being tied to a per-determined schedule. Students (both those I worked with informally and research participants) commonly commented on these distinctions—noting the differences between *work time*, *gym time*, *recess time*, *lunch time*, and *home time* as well as the expectations associated with different *subject times* (e.g., *math time*, *English language arts time*, *social studies time*, etc.). Students could often recite their schedules for me and specify the specific types of activities that they were currently undertaking in each unique subject area. For some (particularly those in junior high), the schedule/time regime was particularly tight, as described by Dawn:

DAWN: So, we switch—we’ll go between Mr. K and Ms. M and we’ll do, like, either Math first or Science first. If we do Math first it’s mostly like percentages and stuff, that’s what we’re doing right now. But if we do science first it’s like highlighting and reading, stuff like that. We don’t really get a break from that in Mr. K’s class because he wants to finish. Get stuff done.

Yeah, we don’t really get a break. Like, every once in a while. We really don’t get fresh air anymore and teachers don’t really stop and let us clean up. Like, we were writing right up until 12:00 right? So, we’ll read from 9:00 until 9:30 and then we’ll, then we’ll either do English or Social Studies from 9:30 to 10:30. Then at 10:30 we switch.

And then in the afternoon there’s either—both classes [the two different junior high classes] have different stuff. So, in the afternoon I’m with Miss J all afternoon. And, so we’ll either have like options right at 1:00 or have gym or, like, shops even sometimes. And, like, and then sometimes, there’s Reading Buddies or there’s library.

JULIE: And you go straight through?

DAWN: If we have gym right at 1:00, we come in and go straight right there. We just head to the gym right away. That's basically like every other day sometimes. We get gym almost, like, every other day basically.

So, kids, by what I've seen, some of them will feel tired, some of them will feel—I don't know. A lot of us feel tired at the tired of the day. Because there is a lot of writing, running around. And once you're in junior high you start getting, like, homework. And it's hard to get outside sometimes. And sometimes you have programs that are inside. And then you have chores and stuff like that. So, it's really hard to be outside when you have all of this other stuff to do.

Dawn's statement highlights not only the regimented nature of the school day (which was further maintained by various prioritized *actants* such as clocks, bells, visual schedules), but also the continual *pressure to perform*. Junior high students are expected to *push on* while, at the same time, dealing with mental and physical exhaustion, a lack of recreational time, increased work demands (which now encroach upon their *home time*), and the time and energy demands of both (valued) community programming and home care tasks. Dawn suggest that this serves to restrict the time for more unstructured recreation and serves to keep young people (literally) inside of these highly structured spaces (it's really hard to be outside when you have all this other stuff to do). The other junior high participants—Liam and Robbie—reiterated these arguments, further adding that the examination requirements of these grades.

While it appeared that junior high students were more likely to clearly identify and articulate the *pressure to perform*, all ages of participants indicated that this was a something they experienced on a day-to-day basis. Hence, in order to embody the *good student-worker* subjectivity, young people are required to engage in intensive cognitive, affective, and corporeal self-management. They must also respond to work to *stay present in school* (attending and being constantly attentive) and meet the on-going *pressure to perform*. While this is a herculean set of tasks in itself, many students faced additional challenges associated with trauma¹⁸⁸ (from both specific experiences and more gradual harm caused by [for example] a persistent sense of

¹⁸⁸ For example, I had one interaction with a student who appeared to be experiencing a kind of traumatic “time collapse” (Volkan, 1998, p. 35) wherein he began a past experience of violence as if he was currently experiencing it (talking to me about it in the present tense and showing significant signs of physical distress).

insecurity); mental, learning, and physical health challenges; constantly worrying about one's visibility as a *troublemaker* or as a member of a dehumanized/discriminated group; not having one's basic needs met (e.g., for sleep or food); and the host of additional challenges of which they were at an intensified risk due to their socioeconomic positioning. I argue, further, that dealing with these intersecting challenges is profoundly taxing (physically, emotionally, and psychologically)—often requiring these young people to *spread out their limited time and energy* in a multiplicity of ways, thereby *spreading themselves far thinner* and *working harder with less respite* than young people who are comparably more privileged (although, to some extent, all young people/all those positioned as “students” experience many of these dynamics).

Locating causes in “Teachers” and “some teachers”

Participants also suggested that some of the stated and implied challenges that impacted a young person's capacity to succeed at school could be, at least in part, mitigated by the actions and characteristics of teachers. Student used remarkably consistent language when describing current, past, and hypothetical teachers, generally using three main criteria for assessment—they could be: *mean or nice*; *serious or fun*; and *boring or active*. Additional questioning helped to unpack the meanings of these complex terms. Distinctions between *mean teachers and nice teachers* usually revolved around perceptions of teachers as either *caring or uncaring*, which was further associated with perceptions of respectfulness, fairness, approachableness, and helpfulness. This was often closely connected to the distinction between *serious and fun teachers* in that *fun teachers* are personable (e.g., telling jokes and playing games with students) while *serious teachers* were seen as more distant and unapproachable (although a *serious teacher* could still be *nice* if they were also respectful, fair, and helpful while a *fun teacher* could at times be serious if the situation warrants). These characteristics were commonly articulated by various participants, as in the following set of excerpts from different focus groups:

LIAM: Nice teachers? They're respectful. They care about you. [You know they care] by the way he talks. By the way he speaks to you. Teachers that don't care, they don't listen.

Some are annoying. They're repetitive. Sometimes they're rude. I guess they don't know how the kids feel, so they can't relate to the kids—so they don't know what they're talking about. Like, if a kid doesn't want to participate [in an activity] than perhaps you shouldn't talk to them in front of the class, you should pull them aside. It's embarrassing.

AVERY: Most of the time when teachers are mad at a student, they take them out in the hall—but their voice is practically yelling. They're not calm. And it just makes the problem worse. Having a teacher yell at you—sometimes it's not even your fault—but having a teacher yell at you and saying that it's private? Well, it's not private! They [the other students] can hear.

Yeah, sometimes they just don't realize. They get stuck in their own minds. But they should talk calmly—not, like, yelling. Plus, it's okay if, you know, you [the teacher] got upset, obviously you [the student] did something wrong. But sometimes teachers get too carried away.

And like, when the teacher hears one side of the story and they go to talk to the other person, they don't ask for their side of the story. They just assume you did it and teachers just get mad. They should listen to both sides of the story before straight up yelling at a child.

MASON: Sometimes teachers just don't care. He'll just—if someone gets hurt it's just, “Are you okay?” And they're mean. Yelling at me for just walking down the hallway.

ROBBIE [describing a nice teacher]: If you tell them something they don't share it with the whole class.

TANYA: A nice teacher? She's respectful. They don't yell at you. They don't get mad really easy. And they never yell at you for no reason. They respect your privacy.

And if you have something to say they always listen and not, like, just, like, talk to someone else.

SUBIRA: Nice teachers don't yell. They care. They help you with math and problem solving.

BACHIR: Ms. P is really nice—and funny. And she reads books to us and she always makes me laugh. She even invited us to her birthday party. She's really nice. She offered us ice cream and cake. And she lets us do fun stuff.

MIA: A teacher who cares about you will ask you how you're doing. Like, “Are you doing okay?” That kind of thing.

JEMAL: Sometimes teachers say that they're going to do something about this, but then they never do. They always just forget about it. They just leave it. Uh, if somebody gets beat up and then they tell the teacher—but then the teacher says, like they're going to stop it, but then they never do.

And some of them [teachers] they just like one student. They do, like, good things for that student and they get their way easy. But they're mean to the class.

DAWN: A nice teacher? Cause they're like—they will take something seriously. But, like, sometimes, they'll act a little silly sometimes to make a student feel better. But, depending on what it is they'll be less or more serious about it.

When a teacher is being caring—when they actually, like, mean it, you can see it in their eyes. They way they’re talking. They actually mean what they’re saying.

KENNEDY: Sometimes they care, but sometimes they don’t. They only try to look like they care because that’s part of their job. But they don’t really care. They go like, “Oh, are you okay?” But they don’t mean it.

Across these statements is a sense that students evaluate teachers in terms of the communication behaviours (e.g., the tone and volume of voice they use and if/how they listen); how they deal with disciplinary and other issues (e.g., do they help the student maintain his or her dignity by, for example, keeping the issue private?); how *fairly* they treat students (e.g., do they “listen to both sides of the story” in situations of conflict? Do they unfairly place blame? Do they grant certain students unearned privileges? Do they *mark* some students as *troublemakers* and then *pick on them*?); the extent to which they provide useful help and support (e.g., can they actually be trusted to take action on issues of concern?); how personable and “fun” they are (e.g., offering treats, creating enjoyable events, and acting “silly” [Dawn] so as to make students laugh or feel better; and if they regularly seek to connect with students on a personal level (“ask how you’re doing” [Mia]). Underlying this is the sense that teachers can improve a young person’s educational experience by respecting their dignity and humanity, treating them fairly, fulfilling their adult responsibilities, and working to reduce the hierarchical student-teacher power relation by being open and relatable (which, other participants noted, could also involve a teacher sharing stories of mistakes they had made and/or their past more generally). Some (like Kennedy) as suggested that some teachers simply *perform care* as “part of their job”—thereby questioning the authenticity of their actions and claims.

In these various discussions, participants also told numerous *stories of experience* (their own and those of others) involving *mean* or *rude* school staff (at various educational institutions). Many of these stories described behaviours that, I suggest, can be accurately classified as *microaggressions* that serve to maintain hierarchical relations of power. I also witnessed a few such exchanges. While, from my observations, these incidents were relatively rare, they were nonetheless something that young people experienced and remembered. Notably, as discussed earlier in this chapter, those students who found themselves *marked* in some negative way, appeared more likely to both experience and remember such engagements. Beneath these *stories of experience* was also a more general awareness of unequal power

relationships,¹⁸⁹ which leads to teachers engaging behaviours that would not be tolerated from students, as demonstrated in the following exchange between Dawn and Avery:

DAWN: During [the singing of] *O Canada*, like, a lot of the time I'll see the teachers talking. Like, they'll tell the students not to talk during *O Canada*, but then they'll talk.

EVERY: Or—you'll be like, trying to concentrate and all the sudden you'll hear teachers giggling. Like, if two teachers are talking and then one of them comes in and you have a question you have to wait. And they'll keep adding—keep talking. They don't get to the point. And it just takes even longer. And then you wait for them to finish and they're *still* talking.

DAWN: Like, when teachers are talking to each other, they forget that they're at school. And they concentrate on their own lives and they forget about their students.

EVERY: Or when teachers are telling us to be quiet in the halls and they need to talk to us in the hallway and they're basically, like, yelling at the student and they're in the hall.

Similarly, Asim noted that

We don't have power here. Not at all. Not even one percent. Only teachers. And they only say, "Do work." They say every time, "If you're done work you should go on the computer or do something that you want." But then they say, "Do this work. Do this work. Do this work." But it's school, you can't argue about it.

And I see them play with their phones. They all say, "No phones" to us, but on their break they go to, like, computers, phones—yeah. It's not fair. They should follow the rules.

In both of these instances, it is suggested that students perceive teachers as taking unfair liberties with their power—using it as a means to eschew the rules which students are then expected to follow. The students, further, are made to work, to wait, and to remain silent. Despite seeing this situation as unfair, these participants do not see any means for challenging these actions—or, Asim phrased it, "it's school, you can't argue about it."

Some students also noted that staff turnover at Eaglecrest was high, with many noting that their previous teachers had left (at times during the middle of the school year). There was a perception amongst participants that this was because the teachers found working at Eaglecrest too

¹⁸⁹ Some students also discussed differential relations of power between teachers—noting, for example, that "substitutes don't have any power" [Halima]).

difficult—that they get “too stressed out” (Bachir) or because “they don’t like us” (Cassandra). Jordan and Mason further attributed this to the socioeconomic status of the community:

JORDAN: Teachers change a lot here.

JULIE: Why do you think that is?

JORDAN: Because it’s the ‘hood [*Mason laughs*] and they don’t like the hood.

MASON: We in the ‘hood now! [*laughs*]

JORDAN: We’re part of the ‘hood. [*laughing, in a gruff voice*] We ARE the ‘hood.

This calls back to the dichotomy between *good schools* and *bad schools* discussed previously; in these statements, students express a belief that many school staff members also see Eaglecrest as a *bad school* or, at least, are unwilling to deal with the additional challenges that students and the community face. To some extent students see themselves as *hard to handle* and recognize that teacher—by choice or necessity—need to seek work in another part of Winnipeg.

While most participant emphasize the distinctions between *nice/caring/fun teachers* and *mean/uncaring/serious teachers*, some also evaluated teachers depending upon their specific pedagogical styles—generally classifying them as either *active* or *boring*. Generally, *active teachers* employed more engaging and “hands-on” pedagogical methods. *Boring teachers*, meanwhile, would use more passive, lecture-based methods or videos. Ethan, for example, stated: “Teachers that I like are active. Like, they’re fun and give us challenges. Some teachers I used to like, but now they’re just boring. They just talk.” Similarly, Avery stated,

I wish there was more “hands on” stuff. Not just, like, notes. I feel like if we were able to feel it, touch it, experiment with it, then it would be more fun—cause a lot of kids need something in front of them to help them learn, they need the “hands on” thing. And most teachers will just be like notes and videos.

Similarly, Subira, Halima and Mia spoke often about their on-going struggles with teachers who “take too long to explain things.” They inferred that this delay is not only boring, but that it can also lead some students to engage in disruptive behaviours (which, in turn, would lead to more delays and escalating conflicts). Mia found this particularly frustrating, stating that teachers should not “treat us like kids” by seeking to *over-direct the learning process or over-control their behaviour*. In a similar vein, Cassandra told a story wherein her original classroom teacher had left partway through the year because (as she stated) “she couldn’t handle us because we were too psycho.” When this teacher was replaced, she explained, “we were less psycho.” When I asked what led to this change in her class’ behaviour, she stated:

We liked him. He liked us. I don't know—probably because he was a little, like, funner. Because we would watch movies and he took us on this really fun field trip. I can't remember what it's called, I think it's Mercel Park. It's fun there.

And we would do different stuff. Not just notes.

And every Friday he has a party. Like he turns music on and almost all the kids from the classrooms go into his class.

This story further illustrates the perception that teachers who engage in more *active* pedagogical practices (“different stuff” and “fieldtrips”) are perceived to be more interesting and “fun.” This, in combination with this teacher's more positive relationship with students appeared to reduce the intensity of disruptive behaviours. Overall then, drawn out, *passive pedagogical practices* were seen as detrimental to learning—or, to draw from Mia, “if they teach in a boring way you don't even want to learn.” My own observations suggested that pedagogical practices varied considerably—although *passive pedagogical methods* were common.

Overall, participants suggested the power of teachers to help, to hinder, and to harm. While some (*nice, caring, fun, active teachers*) can create positive educational experiences, the actions of others (*mean, rude, serious, boring teachers*) are detrimental—either inhibiting learning and/or (in tandem with other elements of the hidden and overt curriculum) *pushing students out* of schooling institutions (e.g., through the use of everyday micro-aggressions and the *marking* and *targeting* of some young people as *troublemakers* or otherwise deficit). Underlying this was a more general sense that the unequal power relationships between students and teachers leads to the higher power group being afforded greater liberties in terms of standards of behaviours. Despite the attention paid to these more general institutional factors, most of these arguments were still individualized (focusing on specific teachers rather than the underlying relation of power) and continued to pivot on the *good school/bad school* dichotomy (to the point where the characteristics of the community, school, and student body would result in high turnover).

Locating causes in systems: The often unnamed but always implicit

While the majority of discussion around the causes of school success and failure centered upon individuals, peers, parents, the community, teachers, and the school, it was common for students to also mention the impact of structural factors—most notably poverty and the child welfare system. However, descriptions of how these factors operated focused on individualized

(often physical) manifestation of class difference. These discussions commonly revolved around not having access to the material resources which are considered important for success at school:

MASON: Welfare problems. You're on welfare and stuff. Some people are too poor to afford it [school]. One kid's got, like, poverty right? People can laugh at you, bully you. And then, there this other one [kid] who goes to school and they're, like, rich and they finish their stuff right?

LIAM: You could be hungry. It could be hard to sleep because they could be cold in the winter, or not have good clothes. Or you can't afford to have any resources at home to study.

ROBBIE: They don't want to come to school because they don't have, like, clean clothes sometimes. I don't know—you just sort of feel bad for that kid.

JORDAN [*after I asked me why he thinks poverty is a big factor*]: [*snorts*] It just is. There was also a general sense that school completion was only accessible to those with significant financial means (recall, for example, Jordan's comment from chapter six: "Well, you need a lot of money to do that"). This suggests that there was a general indication that students saw socioeconomic inequality as a factor which impacts a young person's ability to succeed in school; however, discussions of how this structural factor impacted one's educational journey were relatively thin. This is unsurprising if one factors in the limited discursive and narrative resources available through the *storyscape* for undertaking this kind of analysis.

However, examining many of the *stories of experience* told by research participants helped to illustrate—albeit often implicitly—the impact of structural factors. Consider, for example, Emily's describe how her father "mean boss" impacted her birthday party (which she forwards by talking about how her family "worked hard" to find a safe home):

We went to three different places where there were just lots of murders—murders all the time. Cause I asked my parents about where I lived when I was younger before—cause I was really curious and they said, "We can't tell you but we'll tell you why we moved week after week." And then I was like, "Oh my God! Thank you for moving!" And so I don't know what my first home was and I don't know if I traveled anywhere.

It took us a year, then we moved here. My parents worked hard.

But, do you know the sad thing? On my ninth—my eight birthday—my dad used to work at something called Market Home. He missed all my birthday party cause his boss was so mean. And then I—we were about to open presents but then my Dad wasn't home and—though I saved him a big piece of my birthday cake. And then I like, and then my mom was like, "Time to open your presents."

And then I just yelled at her, "Were not opening the presents without Dad!"

And she was like, “Okay! You’re the boss today.” And then we just watched TV and played outside when it was late.

And then Dad came home. He said, “I’m very sorry. My boss was so mean.” And my mom said, “Emily was so adorable. She didn’t let us do anything with the presents. She didn’t even let us touch it—until you get home!”

And then I, then I gave him my birthday piece [of cake]. I had the biggest piece and then I gave it to him. And then I ate, like, part of it cause it was a cake that I don’t like. I only like the frosting of it. So, I licked the frosting I ate a little bit of the cake part then I gave the rest to my Dad! [*laughs*]

And, his hands were so cold he made me drop the cake! [*laughs*] He was like “Hey Emily!” And then “KOOSH!” [*she mimics dropping the cake on the floor*]

This story depicts not only the impact of economic inequality (which placed Emily’s father in a situation of precarious labour that required long hours and little control over scheduling), but also indicates how both Emily and her parents responded to this situation. The story begins with a discussion of how Emily’s parents sought to garner the economic resources to obtain adequate housing in a safer community (“my parents worked hard”) as well as how they controlled the narrative told to Emily (“we can’t tell you why we moved week after week”).¹⁹⁰ The story then suggests the limitations of their current situations—which, while improved, has left the family vulnerable to the demands of (what Emily describes as) her father’s “mean boss.” Emily, however, refuses to exclude her father from her birthday plans—demanding that they wait for him to come home and saving him “the biggest piece” of cake (although, she admits, she ate some of the frosting and accidentally dropped the entire offering). While she begins the story by framing it as “sad,” she laughed when describing her own actions and was proud of her act of defiance (which, her mother also affirmed as a positive action, calling it “cute”). Arguably, this story depends not only the everyday impact of social inequality, but also describes an act of *micro-level resistance*—which, while not emancipatory, served to mitigate the impact of structural factors.

Stories which both implied the impact of structural factors and highlight the capacities of families and young people were quite common. Consider, for example the following stories told by newcomer participants:

¹⁹⁰ I observed other examples of caregivers *controlling the narrative* told to young people. For example, I had one interaction with a grade three student who was commonly identified by staff as being particularly “at risk.” Speaking to her, she explained to me that she regularly moved houses and changed schools. When I asked her why she thought that was the case, she stated: “Well, my mom says she wants us to meet lots of new people and see new place.” While I do not want to eliminate this as a possible justification, additional engagements with this young person suggested that the cause was more likely due to housing issues and conflicts with schools.

HALIMA: You know why I came to this country? Lots of people died in my country. I remember my grandma—she was nice. We used to play president [a card game]. I miss her. We stayed in many places. We stayed in one place for, like, twenty days. It was a place where we'd rest and stay for a few days. My auntie? She went to a country where the flag was white and black—I forgot it. It started with an "A" I think. My dad's sister went to Australia.

ASIM: So, we were in Africa, in my original country. So, we went to this [refugee] camp. In the Sudan, yeah. After my mom was getting tired of sitting there. So, we were at these [refugee] camps and, in the Sudan, and so there were sign-up places. Like, there was this big list of places you want to go. So, my mom signed these places there.

So, the first place we arrived was Russia. So, we were set up for like a couple of days, two days. After that we were in the States. We got on a plane to the States, we went to Portland, Oregon. That's where I first started school there because my mom liked that place. We were there for a couple of weeks, couple of months, yeah. Then after, Toronto—Toronto, Ontario. Where we stayed for a little bit. Like a couple of days. So, after then I arrived here—Canada. So that, so I liked it.

GHANI: When we came to Canada, the house that we lived in, right? There was a building. And that building, right? It had too many mices and all that. Yeah. And we had a new baby.

So, my mom, right? She got on the phone right away and told them, "We need a house in about a week." And we actually got a house in a week! Yeah, and then we moved here [to the Eaglecrest community].

Didn't have no problems. But, first night I got so, so scared. I'm like, "My God. This house looks so scary"—cause there was nothing in there. And I go so scared. I just took my blanket and I put it over my head and I was like, "Oh my God. I hope nothing happens." And I started like, sweating. I went to my mom's room and I slept there. Yeah.

SUBIRA: I went to [name of a newcomer housing complex and support organization]. First, we stayed at a place, but something happened at our first place. Then we moved to a new place. There was only one room and five people. Yeah, and then they found out that we were sleeping five to a room. I wrecked it. They asked me if five people lived here and I said, "Yes." But I was little.

And we moved some place for one month and then to another place for three years. Cause the owner, she didn't let us use the washroom or drink water. Nothing. When she went to work, she locked the washrooms. She turned the taps off. She locked the washroom. The owner of that house—that was my dad's friend's wife. When my cousins came here, we wanted to live with them, but they were like, "No, you cannot go into this house." It was private, I think.

BACHIR: We came here I went to this big place—it was like a big apartment [most likely the same housing complex that Halima stayed at].

But, you know that's the funny thing—like they said—like my brothers and the people that talked to us and stuff—said that [in Canada] there's, like, going to be robots. Everyone will have their own mini-fridge. Everyone's going to have their own pool.

And then I got here, I remember waking up and going to the window and going—my brother was up and he asked me, “Why are you up?” And I remember thinking, “Where’s my robot? Where’s my swimming pool?”

Each of these stories provide insight to the everyday experiences of newcomers in a manner that implies the impact of structural factors. Halima and Asim’s story suggest the extent to which newcomer families are *pushed and pulled* by war, humanitarian operations, and the immigration/settlement sectors—illustrating the manner in which families experience separation and constant mobility. Ghani and Subira’s stories provide insight into housing challenges faced by newcomers upon arriving in Winnipeg. Subira’s story appears to highlight, in particular, the vulnerabilities experienced by families who are privately-sponsored (which, as some of the CBO participants suggested, is a settlement classification which restricts their access to support services and leaves them vulnerable to predatory landlords and other challenges). Finally, Bachir’s story indicates how newcomers often come to Canada with inaccurate expectations what their lives will be like upon arrival. Across each of these stories is further indication of the young person’s capacity to observe and make sense of their complex lived realities. These stories also draw attention to the capacities of families to survive very difficult circumstances prior to and after arrival—as demonstrated, for example by the work undertaken by Asim’s mother to survive and navigate out of a refugee camp and Ghani’s mother’s self-advocacy to acquire better housing for her family.

These stories, however, must also be read alongside those told by Indigenous young people; these various narratives¹⁹¹ draw attention to the continuing operation of colonization with the Canadian [re-]settler state—demonstrating both the historical and contemporary impact of policies (meant to—directly or indirectly—eradicate/assimilate Indigenous Peoples and nations and disrupt Indigenous families for the purposes of land acquisition), structural conditions (which maintain the colonizer-colonized dynamic through socioeconomic marginalization), and discursive/cultural elements (which reinforce racist dehumanization and seek to undermine the

¹⁹¹ See, for example, Jordan’s stories of his/his family’s schooling experiences, Jordan and Mason’s stories of racist microaggressions in school and their discussion of the trap house; Dawn’s description of her family’s direct and indirect pathways through school; the impact of changing Manitoba Housing policies described by Eaglecrest staff; and the story of Marcus’ loss of his best friend.

concept of Indigenous sovereignty). As suggested in chapter six, it is vital that that we do not allow the operations of the Canadian colonial re-settler-state to pass unseen and to remember that newcomer students and families, while experiencing racism and marginalization themselves, are also beneficiaries of colonial structures and discourses (which grant them access to land, a pathway to citizenship, and many of the resources that were employed in the stories above to navigate challenging circumstances. Indeed, I was often struck by the differential levels of support offered to Indigenous and newcomer young people—both within the schooling system and with respects of social welfare services more generally. I also noticed this within the context of Eaglecrest itself, particularly when there was a small influx of Syrian refugees into the student population. I had the general sense that newcomers (and particularly those who came to Canada as refugees fleeing situations of war), were more readily conceptualized as, to draw upon Wanzo (2009), “sympathetic objects for...concern” (p. 2). They were (calling upon Fontan, 2012) “worthy victims” (p. 68) more readily accepted into the moral community (of the school and the state)—and, therefore, more deserving of resources and support (a discursive dynamic reinforced by the perceived importance of newcomers to the Manitoban/Canadian economy).

One common system element discussed by most participants was the impact of Child and Family Services (CFS). It was extremely common for participants to discuss both how this system serves to disrupt peer networks, but also how it operates as a kind of ambiguous, omnipresent threat within the community. Consider, for example, the following excerpts:

JORDAN: Oh! One of my friends from CFS—well, not friends *from* CFS—is coming back from CFS next week. Yeah. And me and her have been friends ever since I moved here actually.

BACHIR: I know my friend went to CFS just because—well I don’t know if he even *went* to CFS—because he was trying to steal a phone and he got caught by the cops and he was adopted and those parents didn’t want him. I don’t know man, it was just a *phone*.

EMMA: Someone threatened to call CFS on us. Like, my sister, some of her friends were going to call CFS on us because she [my sister] accidentally tripped and accidentally pushed a girl and she’s like, “We’ll call CFS on you!” And then she pushed. But they didn’t come.

SUBIRA [telling a story about a girl that she “heard about” from other family members: This girl, she came. And then she lived with her dad with one sister and three brothers and then her mom. Her mom was at Sudan I think, and then they, they were

having some trouble with her dad cause her dad locked the fridge and didn't let them eat. And then, that little girl, She's short. She wasn't in grade five but then her dad didn't care what grade she was, so he just put her in any. But now, she was in grade five and then, umm, and then like—that was like 2013, I think. And then, something bad happened, the next day—that was after they stayed for like two months—that old girl, she was in sixth grade. She told her teacher that her dad was being mean and then someone from CFS—the president—took that, took those two, three kids. One was in grade six, grade three and grade seven or eight and then they wouldn't let them see their dad. Until their mom came. That girl? She was too skinny. She was skinnier than my finger. Yeah, and she had lice. And her dad would even lock the washroom.

These various excerpts (and my own fieldwork within Eaglecrest) help to illustrate the sheer commonality of CFS apprehensions within the community (a phenomenon confirmed by CBO worker participants). In addition to having a felt impact on the daily lives of young people, this system has also become of family stories (as in Subira's narrative) and a taunt used within interpersonal conflicts (as in Emily's). The most comprehensive depiction of the impact of CFS, however, occurred in one of the focus groups wherein Cassandra described her personal experiences within the system. This account is presented in full below:

CASSANDRA: When I was around two or three, I moved into an apartment. And then I moved to another. And then my best friend moved here, and I was happy. Until she got taken away. And then she came back last August.

And then in October I got taken away. Until a little bit—three days before Halloween and then it was Halloween. And then a little bit later, Christmas! And then five days later, my birthday! Yay!

MASON: Is that why you had to go to two different schools:

ROSE: I wondered why I didn't see you.

CASSANDRA: [*affirmative*] mmhmm.

JULIE: How did you feel when you found out you could come back?

CASSANDRA: I didn't really know. I just—because I go to the daycare thing and my friend was like, “You're getting taken home today!” And I'm like, “Are you playing around with me?” And she was like, “No.” And usually my shelter would pick me up at 4:30 and at 4:30 my mom came. And I was like, “YESSS!!!”

JULIE: How long had it been since you had seen your mom?

CASSANDRA: Yeah. Well, I *did* see her because I went on visits.

And I felt bad for the other girls in my first shelter because they *didn't* get to see their mom or dad. They hated it like—because their brothers were in, like, the next-door shelter part and then all of the girls were in the same shelter as me.

And then I got taken away to a different shelter. It was something weird. Even my social worker doesn't know why. I asked her and she's like, "I don't know."

JULIE: Didn't anyone tell you what was going on?

CASSANDRA: [*shakes head vigorously*]

JULIE: That doesn't seem very fair.

CASSANDRA: But then, a few months ago, my uncle bought me my phone!!

JULIE: Oh, that's nice!

CASSANDRA: But, well, my friend—her brother—her brother was, I think he was, two [years old] and he ran onto Main Street with no adults or anything and it's because of him that him and his sister got taken away.

And my cousin told me [that] and she ruined my weekend—or my summer. Because I was going to go back to my uncle's—cause I always go to his house during the summer—and she was like, "Your friend got taken away." And then I started crying. And I was like, "Wow." and then I started crying.

JULIE: How did your cousin find out?

CASSANDRA: Because she was there. [My friend and her] were hanging out at my cousin's house in the yard.

JULIE: Ah. [*pause*] So what does it look like when someone gets taken away?

CASSANDRA: Basically, well, so—I don't know but, [for me], like my social worker came to my house and said that I couldn't be in my house anymore.

So, I went to my friend's because she lives at her house. I slept there. And I stayed there for a couple of nights. I think it was on a Wednesday.

And then my social worker—I got called down to the [Eaglecrest school] office with my stuff—and then my social worker was like, "I'm sorry but you can't stay at your friend's anymore."

So, we had to go into my house. I got like my [Nintendo] DS and stuff and clothes and then I got taken to the shelter, which was really close.

And then like a month later I got taken to *another* shelter which is farther away. Cause I could walk here from the [first] shelter, but the other one I had to drive.

JULIE: So, like, when you were there—you said you walked to school. Did you have to get yourself to school? What adults were around to help you?

CASSANDRA: There was the staff. Like we had to get up in the morning, get dressed, go downstairs and have breakfast and then we could watch TV until around the time we had to go. And then the staff would take me and the girls to school.

And I would always get dropped off with one of my favourite girls. But she moved to the country with her rich foster parents. [*pause*]

JULIE: What about homework and stuff?

CASSANDRA: I don't get homework. But if I did, I would have to do it on my own.

Yeah. Afterschool they pick me up and I just go in my room and hide from all the other people and play on my [Nintendo] DS. Or, because this girl, I wanted to have a radio like hers, and she downloaded one like hers and I was like, "Do you want to switch radios?" And then we switched radios and I—we blasted the radio and then I asked the other girls if they wanted to have a party, but we weren't allowed to have other kids in our rooms. And I was like, "What?!!"

And I couldn't sleep over at a friend's if I wanted to or do anything. I couldn't have friends visit.

And—my friend that got taken away—me and her were in the same shelter. Because the second shelter that I went to, that was the first one *she* went to. And I was like, "Yeah I went to this shelter!" And I think it was 36 Muller Road and she was like, "I went to this one too!" And I was like, "Which room were you in?" And me and her were apparently in the same room!

And at the second shelter—there was only one other girl—and almost every day—I actually started getting a little annoyed—we went swimming almost every day. It was fun though. Except for the one pool we went to, it made my eyes like really, really red and it stinged.

And one time we sneaked into the deep end of the pool because they, like, switched staff and this lady was like, "Can you do your laps? And I was like, "Yeah."

And then I went on the slide. It was fun. So, I was just sitting on the side like, “Can we go?” And the other girl was like, “Okay!”

And my friend? The one that got taken away? She’s going to this school [Eaglecrest] next year. She used to in grade three, but then she had to go to another school. So, I’m happy.

This richly described *story of experience*—like the others discussed above—highlights both the impact of systemic factors and the manner in which the young person navigates their situation. Cassandra highlights how child apprehensions suddenly disrupt peer networks (describing the emotional impact of her best friend being “taken away”) as well as the various elements of the system which serve to disempower and harm young people. These include the lack of information that young people are provided regarding the details of placements and the reasoning for change (“even my social worker doesn’t know why”); the suddenness of transfers from one location to another (Cassandra stayed at two different shelters as well as a friend’s house); the limitations placed upon family contact (with some young people not being able to see parents and others being separated from their siblings due to the separation of genders); the seemingly trivial nature of some apprehensions (“her brother...ran onto Main Street”); the remove of apprehended young people from their own social networks and familiar surroundings (“you can’t stay at your friend’s anymore,” “I couldn’t sleep over at a friend’s...I couldn’t have friends visit”); the impact of the physical distance between shelters (which sometimes means the young person has to attend a different school); the regimented nature of daily activities; the lack of support for homework and other school-related needs (“I would have to do [homework] on my own”); the denial of the young person’s need for social connection (“we weren’t allowed to have other kids in our rooms”); and the overall commonality of this (arguably) traumatic experience (with Cassandra and her friend realizing that they had shared a room in the same shelter).

While trapped within this system, Cassandra nonetheless sought to find ways to connect with others and maintain her own sense of autonomy and to meet her needs for social connection. She regularly asks questions, finds ways to make herself feel secure (“I...hide from all the other people”), develops new friendships (especially with her “favourite girls”), finds ways to have fun (“we blasted the radio”), and finding little ways to assert her autonomy (sneaking into the deep end of the pool so as to use the slide). Notably, she also continually draws attention to positive events that happened during this time (such as receiving her first

cellphone and the strange coincidence of staying in the same room as her friend) and compares her own experiences to others whom she “felt bad for” because they were, from her perspective, in an even worse situation (not being able to see their parents or siblings). In addition, this story also suggests how young people share information about CFS and those who are “taken away” amongst each other (e.g., she finds out about her friend’s apprehension from her cousin). Hence, on one hand, this story depicts a young person being aggressively *pushed and pulled* in and out of relationships and to and from places¹⁹²—with only her clothing and Nintendo DS in tow. She is in an extremely vulnerable position in this system, being cut off from her peers and denied information (but, as she notes, others are even more isolated, being cut off from their families). Indeed, the overall systemic dismissal of her right to information, dignity, and connection is striking. Nonetheless, she continues to persist through this experience, finding ways to connect with others, maintain her sense of self, and assert her own (albeit limited) agency. This *story of experience*, then, serves to undermine two *dominating stories about*. Firstly, her description undermines the notion that the child welfare system operates in the *best interests* of young people—suggesting instead that it commonly insults both their rights and personal dignity. Secondly, she challenges the notion that young people in CFS are without agency—she identifies various ways that young people may retain this capacity, while also noting how *the system itself* which undermines it.

Overall, these participants did indicate a basic awareness of how systemic factors—particularly poverty and the child welfare system—impact the ability of young people to progress through school. However, their explicit descriptions of these connections were relatively thin—focusing more upon how overt signs of poverty (e.g., a lack of resources) can make *staying present in school* more challenging. However, the various *stories of experience* that they told present a very rich description of the micro-level impact of these structural factors. Indeed, any of the stories presented throughout this report can be read in a manner that draws out the “absent but implicit” (Carey et al., 2009) (or, the *present absence*) of socioeconomic

¹⁹² This notion of being pushed and pulled should be distinguished from other experiences of mobility. For example, Dawn has also been relatively mobile in her young life—travelling extensive for her mother’s work. However, for her, these experiences were enriching—partly because she would often have the opportunity to return to her reserve and reconnect with friends and family. Hence, it is not mobility itself which is problematic, but rather how the landscape makes movement more risky for some.

inequality and the relations of power within schools as well as the operations of colonialism, racism, adultism, and neoliberal capitalism.

It is also worth noting that these participants also demonstrated their interest in—and desire to better understand—the operations of national and global politics. This was first demonstrated to me during an informal exchange while volunteering in a grade one class, which I described in my fieldnotes:

I was sitting with Josh today. We had been tasked with completing a project on a Canadian animal. He had found a book on his animal of choice and we were reviewing it together. At one point we turned to a page with a world map. He stopped suddenly and said, solemnly, “You know what?”

“What?” I replied.

“Siri is still in danger.”

I paused for a moment. “Do you mean Syria?”

He nodded and then pointed to the map—at South American. “It’s here.”

“No, I think it’s over here,” I said, pointing to the Middle East,

“NO. It’s HERE.” He pointed again.

Deciding that geographic accuracy was not worth an argument, I went on to ask him how he knew about the situation in Syria. He explained that he and his dad watched the news every morning before he goes off to school and his dad goes off to work. We talked about the conflict for quite some time—until we realized the class period was almost over and he had to complete his assignment.

This exchange helps to illustrate not only the capacity of young people—even those in early grades—to contemplate global politics, including situation of war. It also helps to identify some of the practices that young people use to develop their understanding—in this case, watching the news with his father. Many of the research participants also identified news media as a main source of information—although this was most often a family activity (and therefore reliant upon these adults having a consistent schedule). Young people also indicated that they drew information from discussions with family members and teachers as well as Youtube videos.

In addition to the war in Syria, the impending United States presidential elections was also a common topic of conversation, as in the following exchanges (which were not the result of

direct questioning but rather arose during the course of casual conversation). The first exchange deals primarily with the issue of the proposed United States-Mexico boarder wall:

CASSANDRA: I just want to say one thing: I hate Donald Trump. And you know why I hate Donald Trump? Because he hates Mexicans.

GHANI: I heard that Donald Trump, if he becomes—I don't know, is it President or Prime Minister?

CASSANDRA: President.

GHANI: I heard if he becomes President, he wants to kick out all of the Muslim people. I think he's going to start World War III.

CASSANDRA: One time—I was joking around—I sent my friend a picture of Donald Trump and she wrote back, "He's a horrible sexist pig!" And I said, "Well, I was just joking with you." [*laughs*] Maybe he's going to try taking over Canada.

GHANI: Who?

CASSANDRA: Donald!

GHANI: WHAT?!!

CASSANDRA: He'll try taking it over and kicking out Justine Trudeau.

GHANI: I'm going to take over America!

CASSANDRA: Yay! And then break down the wall between there and Mexico!

MASON: If Donald Trump became president, he'd be like, "All obey me now!"

The second exchange draws attention immigration issues as well as the actions of the hacktivist group Anonymous (another common topic of discussion):

BACHIR: I don't get this. If you kick all of the immigrants out of the USA, there won't be hardly anyone left. He hates black people, he hates everyone.

DAVY: I made a song about Trump—[*singing*] Old Mac Donald Trump—he's so evil.

EMILY: He is! Like, someone made this video thing I saw on YouTube and then he's like, not letting any Muslims, I think, come into the country.

PETER: I thought Obama works through Anonymous.

BACHIR: No he doesn't! They were trying to get *him*!

PETER: To work for Anonymous?

BACHIR: No, they were trying to get him, to do something bad to him.

PETER [*in agreement*]: Oh yeah.

These various excerpts—drawn from conversations that arose spontaneously and were eagerly engaged with—draw attention to how young people in this community are drawing upon the (limited) informational resources available to them in order to develop their understanding of politics and, more generally, “how the world works.” During my fieldwork, I noticed that many of these world issues also came up in conversations between teachers and students and amongst peers. In fact, after the election of Trump, staff members reported that many students were in (to quote) “crisis mode”—they were genuinely concerned about the possibility of violence and mass deportations and were, on a whole, genuinely frustrated by the apparent injustice of Trump’s victory. Thus, while young people do often focus on their day-to-day realities, they are also often politically and globally engaged.

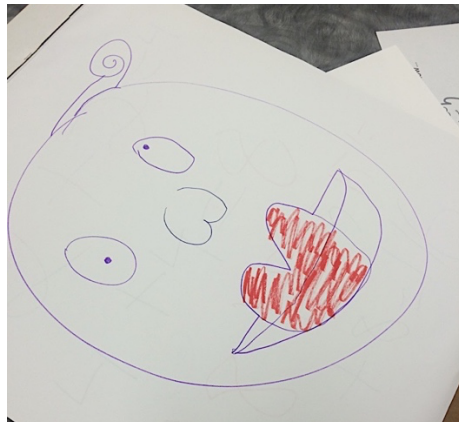


Figure 47 Cassandra’s rendition of “Donald Trump and his fabulous hair.”

(Photo: J. M. Hyde)

Summary: Classifying the work and hurt of young people

Overall, the manner in which participants *located the causes* of schooling success and failure could be organized into the following categories: the behaviour, characteristics, and choices of individual students; the influence of peers and social groups; the characteristics of communities, specific schools, and individual teachers; the general operations of “schools,” relations of power between teachers and students; and the everyday impact of systems. The participants’ explicit responses largely corresponded with the “individual deficit model of failure” (Clandinin, Steeves, & Caine, 2003), but also reflected specific discursive elements,

including idealized conceptualizations of *good kids and good student-workers without rights* who are present, passive, attentive, and productive corporeal and affective self-regulator; notions of deviant or deficit *bad students* with *misdirected affect* that resonate with hegemonic understandings of race, gender, age/childhood, and mental health as well as more localized discourses around sexuality, pregnancy, bullying, and substance abuse; conceptualizations of *caring versus uncaring* students, caregivers, and teachers; the dismissal and delegitimization of peer relationships and the sociality of young people; the use of various *pedagogical fetish objects* to mark and stratify students; the *marking* of students through reductive assumptions of their gender, race, Indigeneity, and past behaviours/experiences in a manner that situated some as *hyper-visible, always wary, and never fully safe* (and consequently drained and *wary*); the position of specific issues (race, class, etc.) as “undiscussables” (Caruthers, Thompson, & Eubanks, 2004) within the public transcript and adherence to an ideology of liberal multiculturalism; notions of *idealized parenthood, protectorate parenting*, and the presumed inherent dependency of young people (as well as the dismissal of their need for *generativity*); the pathologizing of young peoples’ independence and *care work* (which draw upon westernized/middle-class notions of idealized childhood *delayed adulthood*; the *dominating story about* the Eaglecrest community and resulting moral exclusion and social devaluation of residents; the *neoliberal rhetoric of school choice* and class/race-based conceptualizations of *good schools/bad schools* and educational quality; neoliberal conceptualizations of *high standards* and *performance/output-oriented educational practice*; and presumptions of community deficit that assume socioeconomically marginalized students require and want firmer boundaries and stricter discipline (and the corresponding notion that disruptive behaviours is the result of student’s inability to self-regulate).

In addition, these perspectives as well as the *stories of experience* shared by participants draw attention to several additional factors—aspects of the landscape—that impact the lived realities of young people. These include students’ daily experiences of insecurity caused by being *marked* and *hyper-visible*; the complexities of student peer relationships (and how these are shaped by levels of teacher support and a student’s access to social capital and other resources), interpersonal and intergroup conflict and violence; the relative stability of each student’s *relational web* (which is impacted by *social dislocation*, access to transportation, forced physical movement, restricted mobility and transportation resources); the *social cost* of

stepping back from some relationships; the *devaluation* caused by the *dehumanization* of a student's tangible losses; the social stigma associated with sexual activity, pregnancy, and intimate relationships; the micro-level challenges faced by caregivers seeking to support their children in school; the *narrative vulnerability* of young people on adults who knew them during their early lives (as the *manufactured amnesia* created when young people are denied access to these individuals); the manner in which some students face greater *care work demands* due to the socioeconomic positioning of their families; the presence, relevance, and accessibility of community resources; inequities amongst schools in terms of programming, resources, the relative strictness of disciplinary practices; the *manufactured inaccessibility* of some schools (due to physical location and gatekeeping practices); teacher turnover and absenteeism; the use of exclusionary disciplinary techniques (such as suspensions); the perceived pointlessness of many academic tasks and perceived need to *push through* one's resistance in order to be successful; the demanding *pressure to perform* and regimented school schedule (which does not provide adequate breaks or opportunities for physical activity and time outdoors); the strictness of the *corporeal control* directed against students (and the various *technologies of regulation* and disciplinary practices that enforce this); the impact of mental and physical exhaustion and not having one's basic needs met; the constant *wariness* caused by (racialized etc.) microaggressions and hyper-visibility; competing demands on a young person's time and energy; the characteristics, behaviours, and pedagogical practices of teachers; the hierarchical power relationship between students and teachers and general disempowerment and disenfranchisement of students; state-based and provincial policies (such as the practices of Manitoba Housing); continuing practices of Indigenous dispossession; socioeconomic inequality and precarity; housing insecurity; international conflict and crises; gaps in settlements services for newcomers; differences in the perceptions of and supports provided to Indigenous students and newcomer students; the omnipresent threat of child apprehensions by Child and Family Services; and the multiple operations of colonialism, racism, adultism, and neoliberal capitalism.

These perspectives and stories also highlighted the various capacities and resources mobilized by young people and their families in their day-to-day lives. For example, young people employ their narrative agency to resist the reductive and dehumanizing labels which are attached to them, building *preferred stories about self* to challenge and replace the *dominating stories* that are told about them. They also use their narrative agency to make sense of their own

positioning with the community—positioning themselves as both part of the community while also separating themselves from it and those *dangerous others* whom they see as a deviant or a threat. Both of these examples suggest that young people seek to construct and perform a coherent and validating sense of self but find their efforts restricted by the limitations of the storyscape—which vilifies and devalues the community. Young people also draw upon multiple social connections, which are vital source of support, information, and social capital as well as a key element of a young person's *relational web* and deploy technologies to maintain connections. Family and extended kinship networks are key to these webs—providing direct, everyday supports, narrative resources, models/inspiration, and various forms of tangible, emotional, narrative, cultural, religious, and linguistic resources. Young people also contribute to the relational webs of their family members and their peers while also using various strategies to address conflict.

Aspects of the community were also identified as a key resource drawn upon by participants, including valued community spaces (parks, etc.) and community-based organizations (which provide physical and emotional supports; cultural, religious, and skills learning; a safe place to be; access to opportunities; and opportunities for developing social capital). Several participants demonstrated very sophisticated specialized knowledge and *navigational capacity*—developed through personal experience, discussions with peers and adults, engagement with media, and other methods—that they use to conceptually *map out and navigate* local spaces and seek out, attend, and evaluate the resources available. Young people also employ their knowledge and capacities to navigate social institutions, including schools. This includes understanding rules and power relationships (both formal and hidden); assessing the characteristics of teachers and schools; dealing with microaggressions; and engaging in resistance, micropolitical negotiations, and relational work to meet their various needs, maintain a sense of self-efficacy, and limit the impact of forces beyond one's immediate control. Across each of these stories is further indication of young people's capacity to observe, make sense of, and respond to their complex lived realities—even though many of them are impacted by institutions and systems that place them in vulnerable positions, isolate them from others, and insult their rights and dignity. These capacities were further demonstrated by the participants demonstrated interest in global issues. While young people and their families possess and deploy

these capacities and express their agency, both their options and actions are limited by the contextual factors which impact their lives.

Woven throughout these stories were descriptions of the various strategies employed by young people (and their families) to meet their needs and respond to the various challenges that they face. I argue, further, that these strategies can be classified as different forms of *work* that young people undertake on a day-to-day basis. These specific classes of work include:

- *Navigational work*: this involves learning about, mapping out, and navigating local spaces and social institutions (e.g., identifying who and what is safe or dangerous); developing an understanding of formal and informal rules and operations of power; utilizing self-protection strategies; and accessing information and learning about the world.
- *Relational work*: building and maintain one's *relational web*; navigating social interactions and conflict; re-establishing relationships that have been de-stabilized (e.g., by performing deference to those in positions of power); dealing with the challenges of *social dislocation* and *dehumanized loss*; maintaining one's social standing (e.g., by *standing up for oneself*); using technologies to maintain connections; and stepping back from or limiting relationships that one sees as potentially detrimental.
- *Care and contribution work*: contributing to families and peer networks and providing pragmatic and emotional support to others (including younger siblings and cousins); making contributions to one's school or community; and taking time to care for and protect oneself.
- *Resistance and micropolitical work*: undertaking acts of infrapolitical and oppositional resistance to maintain a sense of self-efficacy, limit the impact of forces beyond one's immediate control, push for renegotiations of power that "limit the demands of the powerful" (Dikar, 2008, p. 143) and "call attention to the contradictions and inconsistencies in...authority" (p. 143).
- *Corporeal work*: self-managing one's affect and bodies to embody particular subjectivities (e.g., the *good student worker subjectivity*), meet the demands of disciplinary regimes, and avoid punishment; understanding and adhering to other modes of disciplinary control (e.g., the regulation of time, attention, and energy levels) and *technologies of regulation* (eg., bells, clocks, and schedules); *staying present in school*

(attending and being attentive); and responding to the continual *pressure to perform* and produce (which requires *pushing through* boredom, exhaustion, and other internal barriers).

- *Narrative and identity work*: drawing upon the *storyscape* and one's own *sensemaking frame* to understand the world and one's place within it; crafting preferred stories about self and resisting reductive and dehumanizing labels; and engaging in narrative maneuvering to maintain a sense of self-efficacy and positive self-concept.

By expressing their agency and undertaking these forms of work, young people both engage with and contribute to their social worlds. Indeed, these various forms of labour can be seen to vital to the maintenance of families, communities, and social institutions. However, the options for and means of doing this work are severely limited by how they are positioned on the landscape and the operations of the *storyscape*. These limitations often place young people in a double-bind wherein their actions—which they are pressured to undertake in order to survive within their social world and work towards a *good life*—are also a source of harm. Drawing loosely upon Cockburn (1998), I suggest the term *hurt* to identify the “pain” caused by the “friction and disjuncture” (pp. 9-10) caused by these no-win situations. Consequently, we can identify the following:

- *Navigational hurt*: the persistent sense of insecurity one feels when moving around social institutions and local spaces and the time and energy demands required to learn about and access (often irrelevant or unhelpful) resources. This hurt is attributable to/intensified by the risk involved in movement and accessing place (e.g., the risk to one's personal safety and the risk of being labelled or otherwise harmed by others when accessing spaces) and varies depending upon one's access to social capital and transportation as well as the relative accessibility of institutions and community resources.
- *Relational hurt*: the various forms of harm caused to one's *relational web* as well as the costs of maintaining or stepping back from certain relationships. These include the *social costs* of stepping back from in order to perform as a *good kid* and *good student-worker* and the subsequent loss of social standing and social capital. This hurt is attributable to/intensified by one's vulnerability to *social dislocation* (that is, *movement by force* rather than *movement by choice*); the extent to which one's *tangible losses* are

dehumanized and *devalued* (Hardy and Laszloffy, 2005); the extent to which one's actions may be subjected to social stigma (e.g., stigma around intimate relationships); and the relations of power which characterize different relationships (e.g., one may have no other option than to perform deference when seeking to re-establish fractured relationships with teachers).

- *Care and contribution hurt*: the frustration and personal costs caused by this care work (e.g., how it diverts time and energy away from schoolwork and limits access to other opportunities and recreational time). This hurt is attributable to/intensified by the extent to which the care or contribution is given consensually or either forced by circumstance and/or demanded by those in positions of power over the young person (with greater demands being associated with the socioeconomic marginalization that places greater strain on families). The young person's relationship to this work is also shaped by their assessment of the work as too heavy, unfairly allocated, or unrecognized by the adults in their lives. This hurt is further intensified by the discursive framing of this work as pathological and inconsistent with discursive norms of idealized childhood and impacted by the extent to which these contributions do or do not meet the young person's need for *generativity* and self-efficacy. This also includes the limitations placed upon a young person's capacity to care for and protect oneself (as well as the costs that are incurred when one undertakes this work).
- *Resistance and micropolitical hurt*: the costs of undertaking acts of resistance and micropolitical negotiations (e.g., being subjected to disciplinary measures and pushed out of the classroom space or school). This hurt is attributable to/intensified by the nature of common disciplinary measures, the extent to which it is undertaken individually or collectively, if and how the young person has been *marked* and *labelled* by the authorities whom they are resisting, and the relative costs of being pushed out of the classroom space or school (which are higher for students who are otherwise vulnerable and marginalized). Further, this work is most often misread as being an indicator of deviance, deficit, or a personal failure to self-regulate.
- *Corporeal hurt*: the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and other costs of adhering to a biopolitical regime (e.g., exhaustion, mental health concerns, impaired social relationships, a fragmented sense of time, the fragmentation of learning processes

This hurt is attributable to/intensified by the relative strictness of the disciplinary regime (which is generally more extreme when the subjugated population is perceived of as wanting or in need of “firmer” measures of control); the intensity of the *pressure to perform* and costs of “failure” (which are very high for those who see school success as the only pathway towards a good life and away from harm); the nature of the disciplinary method used (e.g., whether they are more overtly or subtly coercive); factors which make it more difficult to self-regulate (e.g., trauma, mental health issues, hunger, and the weariness caused by dealing with microaggressions and *hyper-visibility*); and the extent to which a young person is able to recharge through rest and recreation. Manifestations of this hurt (e.g., overt opposition, shutting down, and disruptive behaviour) were often misread as due to the failure of the young person to self-regulate, rather than as something caused by the disciplinary regime itself. As a result, these actions would often result in an intensification of biopolitical control.

- *Narrative and identity hurt*: the harm caused by dehumanizing labels, moral exclusion, and the costs of crafting a preferred *story about self* with the limited narrative resources provided by an oppressive storyscape. This hurt is attributable to/intensified by the extent to which the young person is denied access to validating narrative resources (which is depended upon their racial and socioeconomic positioning, hegemonic discourse, and the individual’s own access to adults and experiences that can provide validating resources); the extent to which crafting a preferred self-concept necessitates morally distancing oneself from other people and other places (which can include one’s own family, peers, and community); and how and to what degree one is negatively *marked* and *labelled* by others (including peers, teachers, other persons in position of social authority, and the broader public).

Hence, overall, the harm caused by the various forms of work identified are largely attributable to the operations of the storyscape and structure of the landscape. These young people must often spread themselves thinner and work harder—with less respite—than those who are more privileged—and they do so because *being present in school* (attending and being constantly attentive) and performing the role of the *good student-worker* is seen as the only pathway toward a *good life* and away from harm. Thus, the landscape places greater *work demands* upon young people while also denying them access to various resources. Meanwhile, the storyscape not only

limits the manner in which they can articulate and make meaning from their experience, but also leads others (including those in positions of authority and their own peers) to *misread* both their work and their manifestations of hurt—to see these as an indicator of pathology or deficit. Further, as a whole, the work of young people—which, I argue, is vital to the maintenance of families, schools, communities, and other social institutions—is generally rendered invisible in a manner that reflects the general externalization of certain forms of labour within neoliberal capitalism. Young people are seen as dependents upon the work of others, rather than as agents who undertake their own labour to maintain themselves, others, places, and institutions. Their work, consequently, is rendered illegible within the public transcript. Indeed, the only work which is recognized and legitimized is that which oriented toward the production of legible (and consumable) academic goods such as assignments and test scores.

7.3 Adults locating the causes of success and failure

The perspectives of the adult participants largely resonated with the explicit explanations presented by the young people, with considerable emphasis being placed upon the specific characteristics of individuals (young people, caregivers, and teachers) and the community. There were, however, notable distinctions between these clusters, with caregivers giving more consideration to the factors related to schools, school staff centralizing the role of teacher-student relationships, and community-based representatives emphasizing systemic factors and social discourses.

Caregivers: Doing my part

Caregivers often emphasized their own role in ensuring their child's success, stressing the various ways in which they *do their part*—providing support, setting expectations for success, and working with Eaglecrest teachers. Indeed, they suggested the need to conceptualize *parental engagement* in broad terms—as far more than just attending school events or helping with homework. These activities included a variety of everyday practices, such as: ensuring their child attends school; setting and enforcing boundaries (e.g., regarding homework and bedtimes); setting expectations and relaying the message that “school is important” (generally doing so in a manner that reflects the *dominating story about school* presented in chapter six); being an example for their children (completing one's own education, being employed, and volunteering

in the school); meeting their child's basic needs; and creating learning opportunities at home. In addition to these everyday practices, caregivers also sought more direct engagement with Eaglcrest, seeking out information about their child's schooling (e.g., what they are learning and what they find challenging); speaking with their child about school; working in partnership with teachers to collaboratively meet their child's needs and address issues; participating in caregiver engagement events and programming (and just regularly being physically present in the school); contributing to school life (volunteering in classes, providing feedback to administration, running special programming, etc.); advocating for their child; and communicating with other caregivers (e.g., to share information and encourage them to participate in school activities). Thus, *parental engagement* can be classified into *indirect* (everyday) and *direct* forms (each of which involves a multiplicity of strategies).

Lena further suggested that if the school was able to help caregivers get “more connected beyond just the three report card visits” it could help caregivers develop the capacity to model “the process of education” for their children. She describes this *parental modelling* as a two-step process wherein the caregiver first helps the child develop an understanding of the “value of education” and then helps them garner an “understanding how to do it.” Hence, she suggests that part of a caregiver's responsibility is to help their child *learn the rules* of the schooling system. The importance of *learning the value of education* was suggested by Penny's own *story of her schooling experiences*. She stated:

It always felt like I had to “do this, do that” but there was no explanation or nobody really to help. And I always felt—well I failed a grade because I stopped going to school. I always, never felt like I wanted to be there. [pause] I did finish, I got my Grade 12, but it took longer because I did drop out a couple of times. I went back because I got pregnant with my daughter and then finished because, like, I wanted them to at least have something to look up to.

Penny's story resonates with the young participants discussion of the apparent pointlessness of many learning tasks, which left her little motivation to *stay present in school* or to perform as a *good student-worker* (which was aggravated by a general lack of support). This suggests that the supposed *value* of school is not readily apparent to students—and, hence, the connection of these tasks to the overall process of *getting and education* must be explained by caregivers. Interestingly, Penny argued further that her presumption of the pointlessness of schooling was simply incorrect, rather than, perhaps, an astute critique of teaching and learning practices.

The emphasis on *learning the rules* was also reiterated by other caregivers, who suggested they often sought to help their child understand and respond appropriately to the relations of power within which they are embedded. Oliva does this regularly by regularly explaining and reinforcing the disciplinary actions of her child's teacher, stating

I have a bright child. He's doing well in school, so I don't have any concerns or anything with the way that they're being taught. He's doing really well. It's just behaviour outside—fooling around with friends. In the classroom. He's got to understand that there's a time and a place. Not while you're learning. So, that's it. His grades are good, he's learning. There's no issue there.

My son would be like, "I don't want to go to school. My teacher's so mean." But I was like, "Well what were you guys all doing? How many of you weren't listening when your teacher was asking you to sit down? And it's time to do this. And you guys won't listen. So, I'm sure he's punished you by taking away that activity away from you or saying, 'No. You're not going out for recess.'" And I think that's okay that the teacher does that.

I constantly tell him, "He didn't get told he has to be a teacher. That's what he chose to do because he wants to teach kids. And if you guys aren't learning then he's not doing his job right and he's not fulfilled." I just constantly do that. But I don't know if other parents are like me, if they say things like that.

I tell my son that he needs to be a leader and not to follow. And that he needs to be himself. It doesn't matter if someone else is fooling around

Other participants suggested that they try to help their child understand the role of the teacher by relating it to that of a parent. Kimberly states,

We've taught our kids, "You know what? Not only do you need to respect your parents and everybody outside, you respect your teachers. When you're at school, they're in charge of you. So, when they tell you to do something you need to do it." And I said, "It's just like being a parent. It's just—you've got to think, 'It's just like mom and dad.'" So having taught them that and taught them what respect is, they come to school and they treat the staff with the utmost respect.

Oliva shares a similar message with her children, explaining:

And that's what I tell my child. "Well, you know they're your parents while you're at school—they're in charge of you. You're their responsibility. You're not the boss here. You don't get to be the boss for long, long time."

Hence, both Oliva and Kimberly seek to reaffirm the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students by suggesting that teachers effectively play the authoritative parental role within the context of schooling institutions (and hence, the child must do what they are told, presume that teachers are acting in their best interests, and value adherence to school rules over social

interaction). They do not challenge this relation of power but seek to help their child effectively adapt to it by explaining to them *their place* within the hierarchy. Contrasting this, Bernice suggested that it is often necessary to advocate for one's child and challenge the relations. She provides the following *story of experience*:

Last week, Thursday and Friday, [my child] had a substitute. Apparently, she treated her really mean. My daughter asked for a calendar and she refused to give her one. And when I went in the classroom I said, "We're going to get one." So, I went and got one. And she's like, "Can I have a calendar now please?" She goes, "Oh, I didn't know that that's what she wanted." And I said, "Well, she asked you for it. She said she wanted to take it home to her mom and you refused to give it to her."

Later on, she challenged the notion that teachers are fulfilling a parental role, stating, "they think that they can be their parent while they're here. No, no, no—it doesn't work like that." This participant emphasized that she is quite comfortable "bumping heads" with staff members and speaking with the school administration if she believes it is necessary to ensure her child receives fair treatment. While these interactions, she states, have been generally positive, at times she has found it necessary to be more forceful in her engagements. In a similar vein, Lena encourages her children to advocate for themselves if they disagree with the teaching methods or other actions of school staff, telling them, "talk to the teacher and explain why it's not working for you and maybe they can change it"—although she also noted that this was a difficult thing for a child to do. Across these various perspectives is a shared sense that caregivers are not just responsible for helping their child with academic concerns, but to also help them learn how *navigate* the underlying structure and processes of school (to learn the "hidden curriculum"). However, there are significant differences in terms of the *navigational strategies* they suggest, with some emphasizing adaptation to *the rules of school*, and others stressing the need to challenge these.

The mythical norm of parenthood and the good worker-parent:

Some caregivers contrasted their own efforts with those of other caregivers, suggesting that their own dedication to their child's education may not be the norm. For example, Kimberly stated that,

A lot of parents—and I see it every day with my own eyes—they just don't care if their kids go to school. They don't care what their kids do in school.

So, it makes me feel bad for the kids. But at the same time, I can't blame the kids—it's the parents. So—and all of the parents that I'm friends with are the same type of parents I am. You can have kids running around at one o'clock in the morning—the parents don't care.

And I'm like, "If that was my kid? Plain and simple, you'd be grounded to the day—until you're eighteen, maybe *thirty*. And my kids *know* that. They know that up until suppertime, like, they can go out and play during the summer until supper. When supper's done they're in the house. After supper it's, "Get your chores done. Showers. Relax. Bed." So, we keep them on a routine.

I know it's strict and all, but afterschool my kids don't go outside unless I'm outside with them. Because, nowadays, you don't know—it could be a guy walking by, he could be dangerous, right? And in the back of my head—those are my kids. My kids are my life. If anything happened to them, I don't know what I'd do. So the only time when they're outside is when I'm outside. Or I sit in the kitchen while I'm eating and I'll watch them play and the minute I don't see them I'm running out the door to check where they are. Because I don't like them to roam. And a lot of parents, a lot of kids sit there and say that, you know, "You're mean to your kids" and blah blah. It's not that I'm being mean. At least I know where my children are.

Kimberly further emphasized that maintaining this routine was important even in the summer months stating, "over the summer—they have two months off? I don't care, they're doing schoolwork—cause you [her children] are not falling behind. I want them to achieve their goals." Olivia reiterated this argument and further suggested that "living in the inner city, in a poorer area, kids aren't getting what they need at home, which affects their behaviour." In response to these identified needs, she works to help not only her own children, but also others that live in the community:

I have a drop-in centre at my house basically. Like, all my son's friends are there and they're always hungry—and that's part of because they're not being fed at home.

They're not being loved and they're craving attention because they're not getting any of that. It's really sad to see. But it's a big thing about how it affects them at school—that's a definite.

Similarly, Kimberly emphasizes that her role as a parent extends beyond the care of her own children, stating,

For me it's—it's *everyone's* children—like, in the community *and* in the school. If I see an issue, something that I have an issue with—it may not be anything big, but it could be big—I'll ask, talk to them [school staff members]. Right? And that's the only way that you can find out more information or help. You never know if this child's supposed to be in school and they're not attending school and you go and you talk to somebody and they can figure it out.

Last summer, during the summer break, every weekend me and my one friend got together and we got a bunch of baseball stuff and we'd come and we'd play baseball with kids. And some weekends we didn't do it and they're at our doors asking, "Are we playing baseball?" So, I think what it stems down to is—in *my* point of view—the parents aren't spending time with their children and they're looking for that attention.

These participants suggest that a central cause of school failure is the *irresponsibility of caregivers* (their failure to engage with their child's schooling, to set boundaries and monitor their child's behaviour, and to meet their basic needs)—factors which they attribute to a *failure of affect* (a *failure to care*) and connect to the socioeconomic characteristics of the Eaglecrest community as a whole. They then contrast this with their own behaviour, suggesting that they seek to align their homelife to the rhythms of schooling (even in the summer) while also engaging in community work (which could be classified as *care and contribution work*) so as to (at least in part) make up for the failings of other adults. Kimberly's comments also resonate with the notion of *protectorate parenting*. This logic resonates with the distinctions between *caring and uncaring parents* made by the young participants—indicating that this is, perhaps, a common element of the local discourse. It also extends this discourse to suggest that, in many respects, the home is treated as an extension of the school system. This could also be seen as example of caregivers engaging in *narrative and identity work*, in that they are narrating a particular *story about self* while also making meaning from their experiences and observations but are limited by the operations of the *storyscape* (which directs individuals to morally exclude others). In addition, both of these participants tell *stories of experience* that illustrate the *care work* and leadership that they regularly undertake within the community.

While also locating the schooling success and failure largely on the acts of caregivers, she offered an alternative explanation that focuses more on a *caregiver's capacity* to help their child navigate the schooling system and provide their child with the "infrastructure" necessary for success—which, she suggests is connected to the adult's relative *access to resources*, she states:

And you *know* they're great kids. Like, you meet them, right? You talk to them and it's like, "Wow." They're all interesting.

And for the most part they have fairly supportive families. You know, like they're not—you get this image of all these absent families and there's no support. No, these are people that are loved, they have a good home. They may not have enough money, but they have parents interested in them.

But not necessarily—I don't know how the parents interact with the educational goals, right? And I know that they support them in life, but I don't know what they're telling them about *how to be* in school.

Hence, for Lena, the issue is not one of *care*, but rather one of *capacity*, which impacts the extent to which a caregiver can engage with the schooling system and help their child *learn the rules of school*. Further, she attributes this *failure of capacity* not to the inherent deficits of caregivers, but rather to time constraints, negative early schooling experiences, and the extent to which a school itself may appear inaccessible. Elaborating on this latter point she states,

I think, even for me, not knowing the school system when I was a new parent and coming to the school for the first time it's like, "Well what do I do?" But, it's like, "Oh! You can actually talk to the principal, you can talk to the vice-principal, you can talk to the librarian—they're all *people*" [*laughs*], you know? And you don't necessarily assume that. It's like, "Oh! Well, then, if you can just talk about anything then you can also talk about school-related concerns or questions.

You always feel like there's—or maybe even it's from upbringing as a kid—that, you know, there's a hierarchy, right? "Oh! You don't talk to the principal unless you absolutely have to" or something. And they're not like that. They're totally open to talking to you, but you have to have that knowledge that you should do that.

Thus, Lena suggests, lower caregiver capacity is (at least in part) due to the deep internalization of schooling hierarchies that *mystify* the operations of this institution and leave caregivers *wary* of educational professionals. She suggests that caregivers must *unlearn* these engrained assumptions while also learning how school operate—that is, one must also *learn the rules of (caregiver) engagement*. While this offers a more contextualized analysis than presumptions about *uncaring parents*, it still presumes that caregiver disengagement is due to a lack of capacity. Alternatively, one could argue that the school system—as a hierarchical disciplinary regime—legitimizes certain capacities and delegitimizes others. Indeed, disengagement from school, in and of itself, can be read as a navigational strategy (which caregivers may adopt because it appears the best strategy available to them) that requires its own set of unique caregiver capacities. That being said, overall, these participants suggested that caregiver engagement is a key determiner of a young person's capacity to complete school.

Underlying this is a mythical notion and norm of *parenthood* wherein a *good worker-parent* is defined as both an at-home (unpaid and largely unsupported) educational worker (that is, someone who orients much of their day-to-day labour around ensuring their child is physically, behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally "school-ready") as well as a self-sacrificing martyr (a "caregiver") who is affectively driven to undertake this work out of love for their child—a love which is only *legible* if it can be indirectly measured through an assessment of student learning outcomes. Evidence of a caregivers supposed "failure" is often attributed to

either their lack of capacity or a failure to care which, within the neoliberal paradigm of education reform, is commonly addressed by an intensification of surveillance and biopolitical control through the use of various *technologies of regulation* (involvement with child welfare services, circumscribed models of caregiver engagement, intensification of school outreach into private homes, etc.). This mythical norm of *parenthood* and the discursively constructed *good worker-parent* subjectivity can, consequently, be read as an element of biopolitical control and governmentality. It is a form of cultural and epistemic violence—which is internalized by individuals because of its affective currency and usefulness in developing a positive self-concept—which mystifies experiences and phenomenon that could call the underlying landscape (the operations of structural violence) into question.

Locating causes in personal characteristics, the home, the community, and the school

In addition to the presumption that caregivers may not *care about* or have the *capacity to support* their child’s schooling journey, participants emphasized numerous personal, community, and school-based factors that may impact parental engagement. Some noted that it was not necessarily in their nature to connect with school staff and that they will only connect if there is an identified need or if their child’s teacher requests their involvement. Consider, for example, Penny’s explanation for why she does not regularly engage with school staff:

If I want to [speak to teacher], yeah I could. I don’t particularly like to talk to the teachers about the kids cause it just kind of—[*pause*] makes me feel like I’m bothering people. [*laughs*].

My daughter has accidents sometimes, so we had to kind of talk and see what were the best options for her. And we did work out something and she hasn’t had many accidents since then. So that was good communication on our part. But I need them talking, I guess. Cause if they’re not gonna approach me first, I won’t approach them. That’s the way I am.

Similarly, Candace described herself as “shy” and noted that she can count on her teachers to “call...if anything’s wrong.” She further notes, “I’ve never really had to go talk to the principals about anything. Like, if they need anything, they’ll call me.” While, it should be noted, both of these participants regularly engage with parental programming opportunities and spend time in the school’s Parents Room, they are unlikely to actively seek engagement with school administrators or teachers. They attribute this, in part, to their own characteristics (as shy or reserved) and presume their own sense that more intensive engagement would be seen as an

intrusion or a “bother.” Similarly, those who were more regularly engaged often noted that they were generally more social people who are comfortable initiating conversations.

Participants also highlighted the impact of time and family pressures that may limit parental engagement. For example, Kimberly stated that she wanted to participate in a new program being offered in the Family Room but was unable to do so due to her work schedule. In fact, while she maintains her self-definitions as a *caring and engaged parent*, she notes that her work schedule impacts not only her engagement with Eaglecrest, but also the extent to which she is able to support her own children. Stating,

With my work schedule—I’m working evenings. So I’m at work before they [her children] even get out of school and then—when I get home—they’re already in bed. So, I don’t really have that chance to communicate with them after school.

She further notes that caregivers may not participate due to “family issues at home” or because they are “busy.” Similarly, Penny noted that her involvement with programming has “slowed down a little bit” due to “family [and] home stuff.” This suggests, albeit indirectly, how economic and labour precarity and other intrafamilial and socioeconomic pressures may impact both indirect (everyday) and direct forms of caregiver engagement.

Some also noted that caregivers may be reluctant due to situations of ongoing conflict. Kimberly notes that caregivers “could’ve had an issue with a staff member” or be uncomfortable because “their kids are following other kids and doing bad things.” Interestingly, most participants were actually quite hesitant to assume the motivations of others. For example, Candaces noted that “there’s only a few of us that always come to the school into the Parent Room for activities” and that Eaglecrest’s Community Schools Coordinator “would like to get other people to come, but they just wouldn’t.” She admits that she does not know why they are hesitant to come and states that she “can’t answer that for them.” Kimberly reiterated this when I ask her why she thinks caregivers do not participate in Family Room activities, stating:

I have no idea, to tell you the honest truth. I’ve no idea. I’ve told them multiple times, like, you know, “We’re doing this in the family room.” When I’m able to attend, I’m like, “Why don’t you come? You can sit with me.” Because we talk outside of school and they’re like, “No, I don’t want to go there” and blah, blah—And it’s like, “Okay.” And I don’t force the issue. I ask, but I let them—if they come, they come. If they don’t, they don’t. I don’t know why they won’t come. So, I just don’t ask—cause I don’t want to pry.

This hesitancy to comment could be attributed to a sense of isolation amongst caregivers (in that they literally are not aware of the motivations of others because of a lack of connection) or, perhaps, a commonly held presumption that it is important to protect the privacy of others (which, perhaps, could be a way of protecting others from various systemic threats such as child apprehensions). While identifying the motivation for this reluctance to speak on behalf of others requires additional research, I would argue that it has the (unintended) effect of obscuring the underlying causes of caregiver disengagement and speaks to the potential benefits of providing more opportunities for caregivers to connect and share their own experiences.

Caregiver participants were, however, far more open to discussing the various school-based factors that helped or hindered their engagement. This included some of the school's physical features, including its close physical proximity to a caregiver's home—which some suggested facilitated engagement because it made it much easier for them to access (e.g., going to the building did not require neither a lot of time nor access to transportation). Others highlighted the role of specific parent-focused spaces, such as Eaglecrest's Parents' Room, which was identified as an important site for accessing information and making connections. Similarly, Candace suggested that the schools garden box program provided an important space for caregivers, children, and teachers to connection while Lena noted that the school's caregiver-run lunch program can act "like a network hub" that fosters connections between families and allows for "sharing information or learning information." Such spaces, participants suggested, facilitate the building of relationships and, some suggested, combats the isolation that caregivers often feel in the community.

At the same time, there were also numerous physical and procedural *micro-barriers* that limited caregiver engagement. These included the numerous gatekeeping practices and physical micro-barriers (such as large countertops in the main office which create physical distances between visitors and staff, the need for all visitors to "sign in" and wear an identification tag, and the school divisions volunteer screening process). Deirdre—a CBO worker who primarily supports the caregivers of young children—spoke about the micro-barriers she has identified in other schools, describe in particular the physical design of one school's main office:

The worst thing I noticed is—when I got to the school—was just the way the school’s designed. The office is—on the one hand it’s good—the office is kind of open.

You don’t have to go into a doorway into a little room, so that’s kind of good. But on the other hand, it means everything’s public. There’s no privacy. So, if I do want to talk to the principal about “Daniel,” he’s going to come out of his office and I have to say it in front of a lot of people. Well, that’s not good either. [The principal] should say, “Oh come on in. Come sit down. Do you need some water? Do you want a coffee?” Now the mother can say it at her own pace and in her own time.

Thus, Deirdre identifies as the physical set up of a room in combination with the *active welcoming* practices of staff can determine the extent to which a caregiver may feel sufficiently comfortable to talk to an administrator about an issue of concern. Consideration of these micro-barriers suggest that school staff should not be too quick to presume that their school is perceived as accessible by caregivers.

Relatedly, one should not assume that caregivers will perceive one’s efforts to foster engagement as either relevant or accessible. Penny, for example, stated that she did not begin connecting with the school until she found a program that she found both relevant to her interests and needs:

My kids were probably here for a good two, three years before I started coming and hanging out in [in the Parents’ Room]. I guess I was just tired of being home all the time. And I did do a program with the kids here—that F.A.S.T. [Families and Schools Together] program¹⁹³—and I guess that helped me come out of my shell a little bit so I could actually want to come and do stuff. I did really enjoy the F.A.S.T. Program that I did with my kids. It let me get to know my daughter more and spend time with them—and get to know the staff—and just to [*pause*] grow, I guess, as a family. You would meet with a bunch of different families. You’d have quiet time with your kids. You eat a meal, cook a meal and then have individual play with one of your children. And, yeah, it was good, it benefited us a lot. I’d say [to other caregivers], “Come to programs, they’re good. They at least get you out of the house and doing something.”

For Penny, there was no legitimate reason for her to expend the time and energy connecting with Eaglecrest until she found a program that was of interest. This first engagement, she further

¹⁹³ Nearly all caregiver participants spoke very highlight of the F.A.S.T. program, with some identifying it as the first time they were able to connect with other caregivers and school staff. However, the program itself has come under criticism and, at time of this study, the school administration was considering ending it. It was presumed that these kinds of programs do not work well for caregivers because they are framed using a deficit-oriented lens and according to one staff member and one CBO worker participant, fail to meet caregivers “where they’re at.” Some school staff suggested that the program “smacked of residential schools” in that it required a very strict and regimented performance of an idealized White, middle-class form of family engagement that was not at all congruent with the reality of the families in the Eaglecrest community. I was quite surprised by this assessment of the program giving how favourably caregivers had spoken about it. This suggests, perhaps, that school staff and caregivers may interpret the value of programs in very different ways.

notes, made it easier for her to *cross the threshold* and participate in other ways. In addition, Bernice noted that some of the programming offered is not of interest to either her or her child while both Kimberly and Lena emphasized that the scheduling of in-school programs and events makes these opportunities inaccessible to caregivers who work during the day. This suggests that schools should neither overestimate the relevance and accessibility of school programming nor underestimate the amount of time and personal resources it takes for a caregiver to *cross the threshold* and initiate engagement. Notably, some staff members informed me that it had actually become much harder for the school to develop relevant programming due to changes in Community Schools Program’s application process. That is, while schools originally had near total control over the choice of programming, they were now required to ensure at least half of the grant funding provided is tied explicitly to literacy-oriented programming (which was justified as a means to directly improve student learning outcomes). Hence, while it is apparent that schools need to draw more effectively on caregivers to select relevant programming and implement these in accessible ways, many of these institutional failings are rooted in the bureaucratic practices of more powerful bodies (such as the provincial government), which demand that schools demonstrate the legitimacy of their programming by linking it to broader directives (or, one could say, by making local parental engagement practices *legible* enough to meet the *legibility demands* of the more powerful party).

However, the mere presence of *physically accessible spaces* and *relevant programming* was not considered sufficient. All participants suggested that these spaces must also be seen as *welcoming/safe* and *accessible* and offer *relevant reasons for engagement*. All participants emphasized that the school—as a whole—must be perceived of as *welcoming* by caregivers so as to ensure people feel wanted, accepted, and safe. Consider, for example, the following excerpts which offer differing assessments of Eaglecrest’s overall school climate:

KIMBERLY: I’ve actually been to two or three different schools and I didn’t like them. I didn’t like how some staff was unfriendly and some just stuck their nose up in the air. Here [at Eaglecrest] you don’t get that. Like my nieces and nephews are at a different school and I’ve gone there to pick them up or something. At this school here [Eaglecrest], they can greet you with a big smile. If they could, they’d probably hug you [*laughs*]. So, I just, I prefer this school over a lot around—in this district. Like, I’ve gone to another nearby school and the majority of the staff there is friendly but the odd one just totally ignores you. You come here and you say, “Hi” to one teacher and they’re like, “Oh, hi!” And they ask you how your day is.

And I pretty much know everybody—being here five years. Except for the newer staff, I haven't really met them. But I've met the majority of them. And we'll stop in the hall and we'll talk. [It's] like a big family. We might not all be blood-line—but we're a community family. I visit with everybody. I, we—sometimes it's, you know, formal greetings, like “Miss” or “Mr.” But the majority of the time it's on a first-name basis. We're friendly, we talk. Like, if I see them outside of school, we chat. Like, we'll stop and talk for like five, ten minutes.

PENNY [discussing her initial impressions of Eaglecrest]: [I thought] it was a good school very welcoming. It is so open and welcoming—welcoming for parents to come and check on their kids or even just hang out in [the Parents' Room]. The staff always say, “Hi!” They're always kinda nice like that, you know? Some schools they just give you looks or they don't even, like, talk to you. Here they say, “Hi.”

LENA [when discussing the distinctions between the current and previous school administration]: The other [previous] principal—during that that ten-minute morning time [before the morning announcements], she was, like, *always* right around the office. She was always in the hallway so you could always get a “hello” and she kind of was always talking to people as they were coming and going and you always got a “hello” from her. And she would always call people by name, “Hi Lena”—always. [But I can] go weeks without seeing [the current administration] because they're not—in that ten-minute window—they're not in that central area where people are coming and going. And so, you're not getting that same kind of connection of, “Hey, I *know* you. I *know* you. I *know* you.”

And if I think about it, that ten-minute window that [the former principal] stood out there and talked to everyone was awesome—cause it gave people a chance to connect with her. And she was making an effort to reach out so people would be like, “Oh! I can talk to her. She's not super-busy, she's not running into another meeting.”

I mean, I'm lucky again because you just—if you're walking down the halls and then you can say, “Hi” and they're like, “Oh, blah blah blah blah blah—” and they'll tell you something. And it's, “Oh that's good to know.” But if I wasn't there, you would never have any interaction. I mean everyone's super friendly and I—they're very welcoming. But you just don't run into them that much.

OLIVIA: When I first started my daughter here, I didn't know where the office was. I came in the wrong doors and a staff member gave me a hard time. I guess we bumped heads and after that she just respected me and I respected her. But she didn't want to tell me where the office was—cause she's like, “Is there somewhere you should be?” I guess she didn't know.

BERNICE: I wasn't, like, approached and spoken to a lot when my son first started here. Like, not so—It didn't feel so friendly and inviting. I just felt, like, ignored, kind of? I don't know. That's how *I* felt when I came. Like, nobody said, “Oh, there's a Parents' Room here. Come and—you can come here and [I'll] explain things” like that.

While these excerpts express two very different perceptions of Eaglecrest, they all discuss how vital it is for caregivers to be *actively welcomed* when they enter the school building. They further specify that these acts of *active welcoming* involve both verbal and nonverbal acknowledgement and validation of the caregivers presence (staff members say hello and smile), efforts to reduce hierarchies through the use of humanizing practices (such as the use of first names), regular informal conversations (that occur both within and outside of school), and efforts to provide assistance (helping caregivers find rooms and understand resources). When staff members *actively welcome* caregivers, they can help foster a sense of kinships and familiarity, provide caregivers with the sense that they can access the school building (and its staff and resources) at any time, and indicate that caregiver inclusion is a priority (that staff members will “make time” for caregivers).

Conversely, schools can also be perceived as *actively unwelcoming* through a lack of verbal communication, non-verbal behaviour that appears judgmental, and overt statements that challenge or invalidate the caregiver’s presence in the school. Such actions may create a reluctance amongst caregivers to engage out for (for example) fear that they will be judged, ignored, or seen as a “bother.” Expanding upon these ideas, Lena told a *story of experience* about a one of hers and a fellow caregiver who had been an active participant in school programming until there was conflict between him and staff members regarding his son’s behaviour. This conflict escalated to the point where this father was actually “banned from school property”—a result that Lena found baffling. She could not comprehend how the communication between this “committed parent” and “super nice guy” and the school administration had broken down so completely. She suggested, further, that caregivers would benefit from having their own advocate who could mediate these types of challenging circumstances. In other words, she argues that it would be helpful to have someone—not beholden to the school itself who was well versed in the *formal and informal rules of school*—who could help caregivers learn how to *navigate* this social institution. In addition, this *story of experience* further suggests that the *advocacy* and/or *resistant work* of caregivers can lead them to being *pushed out* of the schooling system. Lastly, the participants’ comments further indicate that interactions between caregivers and school staff are largely dependent upon face-to-face contact, which requires caregivers to be *physical present* in schools. Thus, it largely becomes the caregiver’s responsibility to *cross the threshold* into the building and into relationships.

During my on-site fieldwork I witnessed many incidents of *active welcoming*, *active unwelcoming*, and challenging conflict. I found that *active welcoming* required that teachers be very *present* and *observant* in the school space—to make a point of *noticing and responding* to the adults in the building, which was often challenging due to the extensive demands placed upon the time and energy of teachers. These constraints make it harder to maintain the focus necessary for *noticing and responding* to caregivers and reduces the amount of unstructured time available for staff to engage in more informal interactions (which, as several participants suggested, provides the vital foundation for establishing relationships and trust. In addition, at times I noticed that staff members had to deal with two paradoxical issues; on one hand, they wanted to create a welcoming atmosphere for parents. However, at the same time, they were attempting to maintain the safety of students and staff, which meant there were limitations placed upon the mobility of caregivers and volunteers within the school space. This was particularly evident during a partial school lockdown (referred to as a hold and secure) that was called after the school received several threatening phone calls. I ended up being stationed at the front door to help monitor incoming traffic—a task for which I was wholly unsuitable (but was asked to do because I was one of the only available extra bodies in the building). Hence, while not dismissing the need for deeper consideration of how schools can foster a welcoming climate, it did appear that there were a multitude of factors which impeded the capacity of educators to undertake this particular form of (largely informal) *care and contribution work*.

Caregivers playing the odds and crossing the threshold

While I think it is necessary to consider the multitude of factors which can contribute to an *unwelcoming* school climate, I also want to stress that caregivers and young people are subjected to negative treatment within the schooling system by those in positions of authority. Evidence of this is suggested by various *stories of experience* told by young people, Kimberly's statement that she often feels ignored and judged at other schools, Lena's story of a caregiver being *pushed out* of the schooling system, and Bernice's story of her interaction with a substitute teacher. CBO representatives also told *stories of* abuse by teachers while also sharing examples of how caregivers—due to their previous experiences in school and various other settings—may be wary of schools. One anonymous CBO survey respondent suggested that, for the Indigenous families that they work with, this wariness “comes from a long history of schools being seen as not being

allies, but something to be avoided and that comes from the residential school legacy.” Similarly, Nate suggested that newcomers may be reluctant to engage with those who are seen as outsiders because “there’s a bit of a fear of CFS. Like, there’s whispers in the community, ‘They’ll come and take your kids’ kind of a thing” (a fear that, other participants noted, is also common amongst Indigenous communities). He further notes that, more generally, that newcomer families often “have a healthy skepticism or suspicion about stuff based on their experiences from home.”

Deirdre—a CBO worker who primarily supports the parents of younger children—told numerous *stories of experience* which demonstrate why many caregivers are understandably and legitimately ware of various social institutions, including schools. This included a story about a single Indigenous mother being berated by a White doctor for missing an appointment to the point where she, as a White professional, had to intercede—which, she explained, had to be done carefully (in a placating manner) so as to ensure the woman received needed care. She stated,

I just *know* that he’s thinking, “Well that’s how *they* are.” Do you know what I mean? Like he’s interpreting her reaction as being somehow related to the fact that she’s Aboriginal. Not to the fact that he’s attacking a single mom. So, I think, that’s, like—what do you do about that? I wasn’t going to say, “Stop being a racist asshole.” I mean, the reality is, I need *him* to help *her*.

Well, that’s the whole thing about power and control, you know? People have a—of course—people have, even professionals like teachers and more educated daycare staff have this thing about how Aboriginal people—Indigenous people—*are*. It’s like “What?! [pauses, shakes head in disbelief] What?!” “How about we just talk about *this* family, this is how *this* family is. This is what’s helpful for *this* family.”

But, you know, I wanted to smack him but—I need *him* to help *her*. But that’s the whole thing is, people get away with that stuff because people like me don’t know how to stand up against it. That’s sort of part of it too, you know? So, I think I accept a lot of stuff because, I just said it, because *I need him to help her*.

Thus, she connects the underlying dynamics witnessed in this patient-doctor exchange to those that occur within schools, suggesting that authorities may abuse their power because their racist presumptions convince them they are correct and because those who are disempowered are dependent upon these authorities for the services or resources they provide. Later in our conversation she told a *story of experience* drawn from her work within schools. In this example she witnessed a teacher being verbally abusive to a student and then suggested that this type of behaviour goes unchallenged because caregivers, due to their socioeconomic positioning and how they are racially *marked*, are hesitant to risk “playing the odds” by raising the issue with the authorities. She states,

But you get away with that shit. Why? Because his mom isn't the mom that's gonna complain—and they [the teachers] *know* it. You don't get to be a racist accidentally. You know that if you shout at him and he goes home and goes, "Mrs. Walker shouted at me," Mom's not going to do anything—probably.

Like, [the teacher is] playing the odds, but you're probably pretty good at it. And if you're playing the odds at an inner city school, [you presume that] that even if Mom's upset, maybe she doesn't feel able or confident enough to phone up and complain, you know? Because she's not going to be listened to. Why? Because she's an Aboriginal woman. But, I mean, "I'm poor, I'm a woman, I'm Aboriginal—oh my God!" [*slaps hands*]. So, what are you supposed to do? So, if an Aboriginal mom goes to the principal and says, "You know, Daniel told me that Mrs. Walker yelled at him and it wasn't him." Well, she's playing—*she's* playing the odds. "What's he likely to say or do to me? Is it worth it?"

She suggests, further, that middle class, White families do not have to worry about *playing the odds* in this way because they are generally seen as "being an advocate for their child." She also notes that newcomer caregivers often face the same judgement and fears as Indigenous caregivers but notes that they may also lack the English language capacities that are demanded by these types of engagement. Further, in addition to these stories of overt abuse, she gave several examples of staff members (at schools and daycares) demonstrating judgement and dehumanization in more subtle ways—citing, for example, case where daycare staff complaining about a mother whom they felt should be picking her child up right after work (claiming, "she's probably at Superstore"). Deirdre, however, knew that the reason for the mother's absence was because she was regularly attending Narcotics Anonymous meetings so that she would not have her child apprehended by Child and Family Services (a fact which, in the interest of confidentiality) she could not actually share with the daycare staff. Hence, overall, she notes that caregivers who are marginalized—by class, race, and other factors—are commonly judged and harmed by those in various positions of institutional authority. However, because they are in a lower power position within institutional and relational hierarchies, they remain depended upon these abusive parties (e.g., for resources and services) and are unlikely to have their concerns heard, understood, and addressed. Indeed, engaging in *resistance, micropolitical, and advocacy work*—either on behalf of oneself or one's child—carries significant risk. These oppressive everyday dynamics are directly attributable to the operations of both the landscape and the storiescape (which places caregivers in these positions of dependence and draw upon racist, classist and other discourses to justify these relations of power). Hence, schools should not underestimate the various challenges that caregivers face when seeking to *cross the threshold*

into a social institution such as school; caregiver hesitancy and wariness is warranted given the real risks they regularly face when engaging with institutions and authorities. Further, maintaining such *necessary wariness*—as well as the additional challenges faced by those who are marginalized and morally excluded—requires caregivers divert significant time and resources to *navigational work* and other labours that maintain themselves and their families. Hence, *wariness can cause weariness* which leaves caregivers less willing and able to *cross the threshold* into schools (much in the same way that *wariness and weariness* impedes the ability of young people to *stay parent* in schools).

Some caregiver participants suggested that even those caregivers who are both willing and able to engage with school (both informally and more directly in terms of volunteering and participation on parental advisory bodies) often face school-based procedural, logistical, and informal barriers to participation. As I have stated previously, the school division and individual schools employ various gatekeeping practices that impede the involvement of caregivers and community members (e.g., the school divisions volunteer application process and the sign-in/name tag procedures used by individual schools). Several participants also noted that accessing information about school events and their own child's schooling was often challenging. Candace noted that students do not always bring home the school newsletter, which Lena suggested does not always come out right at the start of each month, which means that caregivers have "already been missing things." To address this, both Candace and Lena suggest the use of online tools (primarily social media) to provide more accessible and up-to-date information (although this strategy presumes caregivers have access to technology and internet, which is not always the case). Some participants also noted that inconsistencies in terms of schedule (e.g., in terms of Parents Meetings and the availability of the Parents' Room) can be frustrating—particularly if one makes the time to attend an event that is then cancelled (although, as engagements with staff members suggest, these scheduling inconsistencies and cancellations may be largely attributable to the need to accommodate the other work demands of school staff and need to rapidly respond to crises).

Lena further suggested that Eaglecrest did not offer sufficient opportunities for caregivers to gather—formally and informally—to discuss school issues. She noted that the school does not have a functioning formal Parents Council and that most caregiver events primarily involve "administration telling you what's up on the calendar and what's going on, or if there's anything

in the school that they need some input on” and that “it’s never the *parents* talking about, you know, things that are going on.” She suggests that this is largely due to the expectations of school staff, she states:

I don’t think the parents *naturally* engage a lot. And so, they—even for the parent meetings—the only reason they get people at the meetings is if they call them. And if they don’t call them, nobody comes. And I just—I’m sure there’s room to work on that. But, it’s—it’s just kind of assumed [that caregivers cannot or do not want to engage]. There’s no *different expectation*.

So it’s like, “Well, we will call our parents and, you know, we’ll get our three or four out and we’ll do it on a Tuesday cause that way I know I can get three or four parents to answer the phone and come to the meeting.” But, I don’t know, it’s not my ideal situation.

I always kind of bring it back to expectations. Cause if you’re not expecting anything from people, they’re not going to offer. [At another school] we were in the Parents’ Room and they had a sign up list for some pizza lunch or something and there were volunteer slots. And I’m like, “Well why don’t we have a list and ask parents to do specific things?” And it was just like, “Oh, they won’t do it.” Or, “That hasn’t worked for us”—or this or that. And I’m like, “How do we know if we don’t ask people? “We can’t plan for them to show up” or—I don’t know what the exact responses were. But I know it’s—I’ve never been asked to volunteer for anything. I *volunteer*. I come and say I’d like to—I want to be here for Field Day. If I know that they’re having a hotdog lunch or something and I have time I’ll come. But there’s never a call for, “Hey! Here’s an event, we’d like some help.” That doesn’t happen. Or, if it happens at the Parent Meeting [that I can’t attend] I don’t know about it so [*laughs*] But it’s—then it’s not public knowledge. It’s a select circle that may be asked.

Thus, Lena suggests that, while the level of formal caregiver engagement may inevitably be lower at Eaglecrest than at other schools, the low expectations of school staff make this even less likely by, effectively, putting the onus on the caregiver to take the initiative and become engaged (to *cross the threshold* themselves). Indeed, it did appear that staff members generally presumed Eaglecrest caregivers were either uninterested or unable to directly contribute, with one staff member noted that many schools benefit from the Parents Councils that provide vital volunteer services to the school, but argued, “that’s not something we can really put on our parents here.” These perspectives can be interpreted in different ways; perhaps Lena is underestimating the challenges Eaglecrest caregivers face on a day-to-day basis and overestimating their interest in formal opportunities for engagement (indeed, Parents’ Councils themselves are institutionalized, hierarchical structures which are neither culturally nor ideologically neutral). Or, perhaps, staff members misread the current lack of formal engagement as an indicator of either caregiver disinterest or deficit (that is, presuming that caregivers either do not want to or are unable to

engage). Based upon the findings of this study, I am inclined to suggest that the issue lies more with the school staff's misreading, although I do not want to underestimate the variety of challenges and different interest levels of caregivers in the community (indeed, in the end, the cause of limited caregiver engagement is the result of the complex interplay between multiple factors).

Regardless of the cause, the impact of low caregiver engagement (both formal and informal) is detrimental. For Lena, that lack of opportunity for connections is isolating and disempowering. Without opportunities to “compare notes” with other caregivers she finds it difficult to discuss issues with the school “in any kind of an informed way—because you don't want to come in and be the complainer.” That is, caregiver isolation makes it hard to determine if an issue is something that only bothers their child, or if it something that affects others. This makes it impossible to undertake any kind of collective action wherein concerns are brought to the administration in a coherent and impactful manner. As a result, caregivers may simply avoid raising issues with staff, or rely upon their own individualized advocacy, resistance, and micropolitical work (which, depending upon how it is received, may lead to escalating conflict and further risk). An exchange with Kimberly suggested that this sense of disconnection and disempowerment may also extent to how caregivers relate to other bodies in the schooling system. Specifically, she suggested that more supports should be made available for arts programming, stating that these are not adequately supported “because of budgeting.” She states, “I totally understand that it's about budgeting. Right now, the province itself, or the school district, they need to figure out ways to increase [funding].” However, she does not believe that, as a caregiver, she has an means for working towards this change, stating, “I can voice my opinion all that I want about it, but it's technically up to the school board and the government. So, I'm just a little ant in that whole situation.” Again, there is a sense that, as a caregiver, Kimberly feels isolated and disconnected from processes of institutional change.

Hence, overall, caregivers identified various school-related factors that help and hinder their engagement efforts. While there was a general sense that school staff were, overall, welcoming, supportive, and willing to take and listen—and while most participants believed that they would be contacted if their child had an issue at school—there was a general sense that if a caregiver wanted further formal and informal involvement with the school, the onus was on them to *cross the threshold* into the school space. This could involve, for example, offering to

volunteer at school events (and not expecting them to ask you), walking the halls to see what different classes are doing (although, if staff do not recognize you, you may be subjected to an interrogation) or initiating contact with your child’s teacher. Oliva, for example, stated that she will always “make a point to get to know my child’s teacher” and states that she does this by “going out to bug and bug and ask questions.” She further offers the following advice to other caregivers,

If you want to know something, just ask. Really, don’t be shy to ask a teacher anything. Your child’s success depends on the teacher *and* the parents. If you have concerns don’t be too scared to talk to the teacher and ask. Just go, go anytime you want really. I’ve gone during school or waited, whatever.

While affirming the *navigational work* that Oliva regularly undertakes, I suggest that this advice would not be applicable to all Eaglecrest caregivers. Indeed, *crossing the threshold* into school is experienced differently by different caregivers due to a host of intersecting factors that make the threshold more or less difficult to cross—this includes the extent to which schools recognize the interest and capacity of caregivers, make engagement relevant and accessible, and help build relationships both amongst caregivers and between them and staff through both formal and informal means of engagement. Hence, I suggest that relevance and accessibility are relational concepts that have physical, structural, relational, and perceptual dimensions; that is, schools cannot be presumed to be accessible because accessibility is determined by the relationship between the agent seeking to access the space (e.g., the caregiver), the characteristics of the space they are trying to access (the school), and the manner in which those already inside the space help or hinder the efforts of the accessing agent (e.g., do staff, school practices, and physical design make the threshold easier or harder to cross?). Hence, while caregiver participants offered a *story of school failure* that largely attributed it to a parental *failure to care* (a *failure of affect*) or a *failure of capacity*, their various *stories of experiences* (as well as those offered by CBO participants) suggest that the caregiver engagement should be understood as a wide array of practices (both formal and informal) and that the ability a willingness of a caregiver to engage is largely determined by the (*relational*) *accessibility and relevance* of school and how one experiences the process of *crossing the threshold*.

While the caregivers focused their comments on the issue of engagement, they also noted other school-related factors that they believed impacted a child’s capacity to succeed in school.

In the following excerpts, Penny and Kimberly both identify the benefits of the extra learning supports that their children have received at Eaglecrest:

PENNY: In my experience [my children's time at Eaglecrest has] been better than the school that I went to when I was young. I think it's really helped my kids become smarter kids. My son did language therapy. He's seen the speech person here and it helped him with his talking. You can understand him better now.

KIMBERLY: [My son] has extra support systems within the school, and the fact that they provide them for him—just to watch him grow from nursery to now, it's miraculous.

They're on top of things. They know what has to get done and they get it done. I, I can't ask for a better school. I actually have talked to other parents that are involved in different schools where their children are, and they've told me things where there's children who have needs and they're not being met. And I've actually told them, "Well my son goes here, and they meet *all* of his needs and it's a wonderful school." And I actually convinced, like, three of them to transfer their kids here [*laughs*].

In addition to noting the value of these services, Kimberly also suggests that the level of *responsiveness* at Eaglecrest may not be the norm. There was, overall, an expectation by caregivers that school staff would ensure the specific needs of individual students were met.

Olivia also noted the value of the school's breakfast program, stating that these types of programs—which support the basic needs of students—were not available to her as a child and noting that it is of benefit to "kids that don't get to eat properly."

Beyond consideration of specific learning and basic needs, caregivers also wanted to ensure their children had access to academic opportunities that were relevant and rigorous.

Consider, for example, the following excerpts:

OLIVIA: My son is in grade five, but he doesn't ever bring homework home. That was a concern because I remember, even in grade four, I had to do a science fair project. Like, starting in grade four, I think, was when I started getting homework. And not ever does this child have homework. And, like, I talk to the teacher, like, "There's no homework." It kind of baffles me a little bit because I think they should have at least a little bit of homework a week. I think that's a good idea. Even if it is just a specific subject that they're struggling with—whether it's a reading or retelling a story or something like that. Or, one thing that they have—that they're struggling with, just homework on that one piece.

PENNY: [It would be good if the school could offer] maybe more after school or during lunchtime class help. Like, my kids are struggling in certain aspects of the class and maybe if they had extra help—? Like, my daughter, she's really shy. So, she won't go out and ask for help. But maybe if there was like a club or whatever where she could go and get the help she needs. I think it's a pretty good school—just needs more, probably, academic after-school things.

KIMBERLY: The only bad thing that I heard over the past two years is that they don't teach handwriting. My perspective when I heard that I was, "Well, why not? These kids are going to have to sign a paycheck and their bank accounts." And whatever else they need – so they need to learn how to handwrite. So, when my daughter got, went into grade three this year, I didn't bother asking about it, I just, "It is what it is." I was teaching her at home and then all the sudden she comes home and she's like, "Mom! I'm learning how to handwrite." And it's like, "Oh!" So, it's parents' perspectives.

Each of these participants express that they want to ensure their children are receiving the academic experiences that will help them succeed in school and—as suggested by Kimberly's comments—in life more generally. According to Oliva and Penny this includes learning activities that extend beyond regular school hours (so that this additional time can be used to address their own child's specific learning needs). The focus on homework and handwriting is unsurprising; I found that both of these concepts were employed as common indicators of academic relevance and rigour with the local discourse employed by both caregivers and students (but, notably, Lena felt that the absence of homework was "great"). School staff, however, did not share this perspective, seeing both handwriting and homework as aspects of out-of-date schooling practices as well as an ineffective practice within the Eaglecrest community (they argued that students did not have adequate academic support at home and too many additional pressures—which meant that homework would be a waste of time for both the students who have to complete it and the teachers who are expected to provide it). They also cited research which indicates that homework is not an effective means of improving student learning outcomes. This tension between caregiver and teacher perspectives was clearly evident during P.A.T.H. planning processes as the intensity of the conversation intensified quickly when the issue of homework was raised. This suggests that while both caregivers and school staff share a common interest in providing quality academic opportunities, they often hold very different perspectives regarding what this looks like (which points to the need for more dialogue between these parties—as well as with young people, who held their own understandings of relevance and quality). In addition to the caregivers' interest in formal learning activities, caregivers also discussed the importance of extra-curricular activities—including academic activities (like homework clubs), sports, arts and music programming, and other recreational activities.

In addition to providing formal and extra-curricular learning experiences, caregivers also suggested that a *good school* addresses the behavioral and social needs of students while maintaining a safe environment. This is emphasized in the following excerpts:

KIMBERLY: [School staff] have helped with my children quite a bit with some social issues. My kids always come home happy—minus this year, this year was a little harder than in the past. But my kids seem happy here.

In all honesty, for my daughter, every day is a good day unless something happens. It's maybe once every two or three weeks there's an issue. Other than that, [my children] come home happy. I can hear them as they're coming up to the door, they're laughing and running and playing with their friends on their way home from school.

BERNICE: Every recess I always see my daughter playing by herself or playing with other kids and getting bullied. And I'm like, "Hey you guys can't do that to her! You're older than her! You're supposed to set an example here." I know that some of the bigger kids bully my daughter because she's told me. [Now] she starting to say she doesn't want to come to school. She's like, "And these kids swear lots around here," she said. She says, "I hear them daily." She says, "I don't like hearing that at school." I don't know.

Even when kids are playing outside there's supposed to be teachers out there taking care of them, right? I think the principal should be, like, contacting me and talking to me about these issues. But he doesn't. He's always too busy doing something. And, umm, yeah, I just want to get to the bottom of it. Like, I want to know why these kids are bullying my daughter.

OLIVIA [while discussing the efforts of her child's teacher to address the behaviour of her child and other students]: He's been addressing all of the boys altogether *and* their parents as well. And he's *trying*—and he's been trying for months. But it's not working if one child's listening and the other one's not. So, that's a struggle. But my son's teacher is trying. He's trying. I can't speak for any of the other parents, but I know that he is really trying to work with me and both of us talking to my son about behaviour. I don't know. I feel if [the teacher is] addressing, addressing the kids *and* the parents that they really want success for your children.

LENA [discussing her perspective on the use of suspensions as a disciplinary practice]: Is it really helping him to stay out of school for three days? Over a fight that some kid started? And, you know, it's understandable that someone might get agitated. But isn't there a way to make it better without pulling the other one out of school? And, it just seems counter-intuitive. You want them in the school. They should be in the—cleaning chalk brushes or doing all those chores that you used to have to get for punishment [*laughs*]*—but you were in the school.*

Across these perspectives is a sense that it is the responsibility of school staff to help maintain a safe and positive school climate while also addressing the social and behavioural needs of students. Kimberly and Bernice both want to ensure their child has a generally positive experience at school—that they seem “happy” overall. This underlying goal is shared amongst these participants, although Bernice is not satisfied with staff responses to her daughter's experience (which, she seems to suggest, is related to the “bullies”—the *bad kids*—within the

Eaglecrest student body). She further suggests that these social issues are impacting her child's chances of academic success, as she is now seeking to avoid school altogether. She draws attention to the expectations that school staff will provide adequate supervision (even during recess) and provide relevant information to caregivers—which was a general expectation shared by other caregivers (although the extent to which participants felt the school met these expectations differed). In a latter comment, Bernice also suggested that Eaglecrest should provide particularly robust supervision due to the presumed dangerousness of the surrounding community—stating,

I'm scared that someone's just going to walk by one day and take my daughter. I don't want that to happen. Like, they've got to be safer here, you know? Like there's too many open areas, do you know what I mean? Like everywhere. And it just—I don't know, I find it hard. If you turn your back once, you're not going to know that there's a kid missing unless they're paging them in the school or something, you know? They don't even do headcounts or anything when they go outside. I think that's what they should do.

Hence, it appears that Bernice expects that teacher supervision will take the *protectorate parenting* approach which, she believes, is necessitated by the presumed dangerousness of the area. Olivia and Lena's comments extend this expectation of staff responsiveness, highlighting the need for effective and appropriate disciplinary practices and the direct involvement of caregivers. Lena challenges the use of exclusionary methods such as suspensions while Oliva highlights the value of more dialogue-based approaches. There is also some indication of the challenges faced by school staff in addressing behavioral and social issues, with Bernice noting that the “busyness” of school administrators and Oliva describing how the efforts of her child's teacher are impacted by the relative responsiveness of caregivers.

In addition to providing supervision, social support, and discipline, participants also held the expectation that schools would address issues associated with students' health and hygiene. For example, Bernice criticized lack of regular lice checks by school staff members, emphasizing that checking her own children and dealing with outbreaks as a parent is “such hard work, especially if I'm the only parent doing it and no other parent is doing it” and asking, “But why do you have an EA [Educational Assistant] in the room then? That's what the EA is there for, you know?” She also noted that she has observed students outside in inclement weather without proper clothing, which leaves her presuming that “I have to make sure that [my daughter is] dressed properly for outside because the teacher doesn't.” Oliva shared this concern, stating,

That was an issue for me because I send my child [to school] dressed properly and I think as—especially if it’s cold or wet—it’s not heard for the teacher to say, “Where’s your jacket? Where’s your sweater? You can go get it and put it on? You need to wear it out.” Whereas then I got told that, “Well these kids come to school in winter in their sweaters, so it’s not our—we can’t check every child.” But I really don’t see what’s the big deal about a teacher standing at the door and asking them as they’re walking out the door. Because, yeah, sometimes they want to go outside in a T-shirt, you know, like they think they’re cool or whatever.

Underlying these statements is both a concern for their child’s health and wellbeing, as well as a particular perception of the teacher’s role within the school space. Both of these participants suggest that they, *do their job* as a parent and suggest that these responsibilities are transferred onto teachers during the course of the school day. Teachers, they suggest, should demonstrate the same level of attentiveness and control as a parent—which is a very high expectation given class sizes. They suggest that when a teacher fails to play this parental role, caregivers themselves are forced to step in to ensure their individual child is adequately care for; this, they suggest, indicates that this means a teacher is failing in their *professional* duty to care—or, as Bernice suggests, if she is forced to undertake these duties, she should be “paid” for this work. Regardless of whether the caregiver was content or not with their experiences of Eaglecrest, they also noted that they generally had little power to choose or change schools; or, as Kimberly states, “no one’s ever asked my opinion on what type of school we could go to. So, it was just, ‘You’re going to this school and that’s that.’ Pretty much.” Hence, while families may seek to make *informed choices about school* (as discussed by the young participants), many of them exist in *no choice* situations.

Throughout these discussions of school-related factors, caregivers often made reference to the specific characteristics of their own children—at times noting how Eaglecrest staff do or do not *notice and respond* to their child’s needs, characteristics, and interests. For example, Penny discussed some of the struggles faced by her children,

When [my daughter] gets frustrated, she just shuts down and she’ll just not do anything. She doesn’t want to ask for help. She doesn’t want to, [*pause*] I guess, show that she doesn’t know something or whatever. She just wants to shut herself out from everybody. I tried talking to her about it, but she just shuts down.

My son’s not allowed to read in class anymore because that’s all he does. He’s a really good reader. He learned how to read in Nursery and ever since then he’s always been a really good reader. And so that’s all he does is read [*laughs*] when he should be doing his work.

She also defined her two older children as “lazy,” stating “they don’t like going to school. They wish they could stay home.” While her youngest still enjoys school, she associates this with the fact that he still gets more recess and playtime—while her other children would prefer “not doing work. But that’s cause they’re growing into little people. They don’t want to do the harder work and they just want to play.” While she notes that additional afterschool academic help may be of benefit for her daughter, she suggests that the resistance to school expressed by her other children is natural, simply the result of their development “into little people.” In many respects, these statements reflect the limited discursive repertoires made available by the *dominating story about school* and overall *storyscape*. There is resonance with the notion of *failed affect*—including her daughter’s frustration, fear of demonstrating a lack of knowledge, and desire to “shut herself out”; her son’s *misdirected preference* for reading “when he should be doing his work”; and the “laziness,” desire to avoid “harder work” and *misdirected preferences* for play shown by her other children. Underlying this is the mythology of the *good student-worker* and *school-to-work-to-wellbeing theory of change*; school is defined as a *place of work* (a site of proto-employment) with mandated tasks that one must complete, regardless of whether it is seen as engaging or relevant. Hence, a resistant young person must be disciplined (forced to go to school or punished for engaging in inappropriate tasks—like reading). Arguably, this framing suggests a misreading of the *resistance and micropolitical work* undertaken by these young people—a misreading that is enforced by the actions of school staff (e.g., who no longer “allow” her son to read in class). In a similar vein, Candace notes that her older children “don’t do nothing” in terms of extra-curricular activities in school, although she cites the lack of engaging opportunities as the cause of this disconnection.

In a similar vein, Oliva suggests that her son needs to more completely embody the *good student-worker subjectivity*, stating,

I have a bright child. He’s doing well in school, so I don’t have any concerns or anything with the way that they’re being taught. He’s doing really well. It’s just behaviour outside, fooling around with friends. In the classroom, he’s got to understand that there’s a time and a place. Not while you’re learning. So, that’s it. His grades are good, he’s learning. There’s no issue there.

In this instance, she suggests that while her son is doing well overall (because, as she suggests, he is intellectually “bright”), he still needs to focus on being a *worker* in class and a *good kid* at recess. He needs to self-regulate his behaviour more effectively and prioritize school norms and

rules over interactions with peers (to learn that sociality is not congruent with school/work and should be reserved for “a time and a place”). At another point in our conversation, she also suggested that,

Things change over time. Twenty years ago—when I was in school—I don’t know [*pause*] if we were more mature and listened. The kids now have more behaviour problems. And living in the inner city, in a poorer area, kids aren’t getting what they need at home also—which affects their behaviour.

Hence, she attributes the behavioural issues she has observed at Eaglecrest, at least in part to the characteristics of the community (of living in a “poorer area”) as well as a presumed general historical trend wherein children no longer demonstrate the same level of “maturity” as in the past (which appears to be indicated by more self-regulation, “listening,” and deference to authority).

Bernice also highlighted the capacities of her daughter, often drawing upon various *markers* of success as indicators of academic ability:

She’s the smartest kid in her class. She’s in grade two doing grade five reading, grade six spelling so—. And she’s the highest-level kid in her class, so she must be doing something right. And she’s a good listener. And her report card was excellent, except for the absences because she was sick. But that’s understandable, right?

I can’t see her bringing homework home at all. She’s always ahead of everybody—always. I don’t know why, but she is.

While she makes reference to several of the *pedagogical fetish objects* valorized by schools, she also challenges the authority and relevance of school by attributing her daughter’s *legible success* to innate ability and the early learning experiences provided at home, stating,

My daughter’s learning, but not all because of the school. Because she was smart even before she came here. Like, I was teaching her at home—when she was three—how to do math and so she already knew. I don’t know, I guess it’s what you teach your kids. It’s not what the school teaches them.

In addition, she suggests that school has, in some respects, actually impeded her daughter’s ability to succeed. Specifically, she suggests that her daughter is becoming more disconnected from school due to regular experiences of bullying, the use of problematic disciplinary practices by the teacher (which, Bernice suggests, was an abuse of power by the teacher), and a general sense that her daughter feels “out of place” because, for most of the year, she has been one of only two girls in her class.

Lena also calls attention to some of the challenges her academically strong children have faced, but suggests that these are issues that they would face at any school in any community:

If anything has been challenging for the kids and for the school, it's just not—or just having to not be quite challenged. I think they've been challenged enough, but it's having to work with people that aren't at the same level all the time. And, so, it's hard for them to [*pause*] be motivated, right? Cause then they're working with people that don't show up or don't care about the work.

I think the problem's that, because my eldest—and I hope, kind of hope this becomes true, he just has this perception that if you're in a different school it's better. The kids will be better—different lifestyles. And I'm like, “You know what? You're going to have the same problems in other schools. The kids are going to have the same problems. They might have more money, but they're going to have the same issues and you're going to find unmotivated people, you're going to find jerky people.

And, you know, you don't even know what the school environment's going to be like. I'm hoping he looks back on Eaglecrest and says, “Oh, I was so lucky.” Because I think, I think they have been getting a really good environment, a good connection. Yeah, I think that the things that my eldest complains about aren't going to be as big a deal once he's gone. He'll be like, “Oh, Mom the kids in grade ten are horrible”—or whatever. We'll see.

He's been lucky because he's always been at the top of the class, so people look to him as a leader. And so, he kind of has this, kind of, float by lifestyle. Nobody really—he doesn't have a lot of challenges personally, so it'll be interesting to see how he blends into a much bigger environment with a lot more people, a lot of different interests. We'll see. It'll be an adventure.

Hence, while she suggests that her children's innate characteristics have helped them to succeed (e.g., she describes her son's leadership as “just something in his character”), she also gives credit to the “good environment” and “connection” offered by Eaglecrest, further noting that the socioeconomic characteristics of the community are not to blame for the low “motivation” of some students. Hence, while she challenges some of the essentializing aspects of the local discourse (disconnecting the notion of “motivation” from socioeconomic status), she still presents the student disengagement from school as the result of low motivation and a lack of “care about the work” while suggesting that some students “aren't at the same level.”

This critical examination of the caregivers' perspectives is not meant to discount their observations of their children (their capacities, their behaviours, their challenges, etc.) or the school (how staff members *notice and respond* to their child), but rather to highlight how their interpretations resonate with and/or contrast the discursive repertoires and narrative frames that dominate the *storyscape*. This is particularly evident in the discussions of affect, motivation/care, presumed personal traits (such as being lazy or smart); the use of *pedagogical fetish objects* as

markers of a young person's (legible) success, intelligence, or hard work (e.g., grades, report cards, and reading levels); notions that some students are at different "levels" (being ahead/behind or above/below others); the general valorization of the *good student-worker* subjectivity and conceptualization as school as a place of proto-employment; notions of community deficits and the presumed greater immaturity of young people; and the apparent tendency to read the *resistance and micropolitical work* of young people as an indicator of deficit (of affect, self-regulation, etc.). However, there was also some indication that the storyscape was not completely totalizing, with some participants challenging the notion of community deficit as well as the assumption that schools always act in the best interests of students (suggesting, rather, that they can sometimes be detrimental to learning and success).

Overall, while participants centralized the role of caregivers in fostering or hindering a young person's chances of succeeding in school (and subsequently, in life more generally), they also highlighted the impact of personal and community characteristics (discussed above) and school-related factors (some of which impact a caregiver's ability to *cross the threshold* into school and others which aid or impede student success more generally). This includes the various characteristics of a *good school*—which generally revolved around: the responsiveness of staff members to student academic, basic, and social needs and availability of supports and programs (both academic and extra-curricular as well as those that meet basic needs such as nutrition); the relevance, rigour, and variety of academic and extra-curricular programming (which often revolved around highly debated touchstone concepts such as homework); the effectiveness of school staff and disciplinary practices (e.g., if common practices address behavioural issues/inter-student conflict, provide information to and/or directly involve caregivers, and generally indicate that staff members are "trying" to address concerns despite evident challenges and time constraints); the creation of a safe, caring, and positive climate at school and the extent to which one's child has positive day-to-day experiences (which is linked the level of attentiveness demonstrated by teachers and the presumed dangerous nature of the community); and the extent to which school staff address the health and hygiene needs of students and demonstrate their *professional capacity* through the *taking on of the parental care role*. In addition, throughout the perspectives presented in this chapter and chapter six, caregivers also drew attention to the particular characteristics of the Eaglecrest community, citing the impact of socioeconomic instability and other family challenges on a child's success.

School staff: Engaging affect

As discussed in chapter six, most school staff members attributed student failure to student, caregiver, or community deficit, often casting young people as the victims of circumstance—although, as they get older, they may make *bad choices* due to their *failure of vision* and circumscribed mindset. Young people and caregivers were presumed to be trapped within a “downward spiral” of inequality, poverty, and racism that laid down “cookie-cutter paths” for Eaglecrest students to follow. Schooling is presumed to be the means for *breaking this cycle* while teachers see themselves as tasked with changing mindsets, teaching the value of education, and *engaging affect and visions* (e.g., teaching young people to aspire to “more”). They often frame this work as a heroic or sacred enterprise as well as a “heavy” burden. This work, however, is limited by the presumed *deficit of responsibility and vision, misdirected affect*, and resistance of caregivers as well as the sheer weight and complexity of the non-school factors which impact the lives of students (resulting in a “tragic loss” of potential). Hence, while school staff identify the presumed root causes of educational inequality, they primarily locate the immediate causes of failure within individual, caregivers, families, and the community. As a result, the main targets of intervention become students, caregivers, and the felt impact of community challenges. School staff see themselves as actors capable of mitigating the impact of those systemic factors and making up for the resulting individual and familial deficits while often casting young people as passive and in need of corrective (cognitive and affective) tutelage from enlightened professionals.

These deficits, participants suggested, manifest in various ways. Several participants noted the impact of familial and societal factors on the mindsets of individual students; for example, Margaret suggested that staff must try to “hook the kids into wanting to learn and wanting to aspire to something” through, for example, an expansion of career counselling supports that could help young people envision a pathway through school. Others suggested the need to provide students with experiences that would enrich their general knowledge base; for example, in the following excerpt, Tracy links her students’ socioeconomic status to their difficulty engaging with curriculum content, stating:

A lot of them, do come from homes that maybe aren’t so lucky, don’t have as many opportunities. So, a lot of students don’t get to see a lot of thing that maybe others would. They, a lot of them—which I found interesting—you know, they’ve never been out of this area.

So, I was doing something, we were talking about the beach and I just to realize how many kids have never even to the beach—things like that, let alone the other side of the city, you know? Whereas maybe other areas students travel around to different hockey or whatever else, events they do. These students, a lot of them, they're entertainment and afterschool happens right in the community, right in the surrounding areas.

I think it'd be helpful for a lot of students if they could get more opportunities to leave their neighbourhood. So, take them to the beach, or take them, you know, places—a forest maybe that they've never been too. Cause if you're in the city your whole life you don't know what the country's like. And I think there's so many learning opportunities that have maybe been missed if they're not able to experience that firsthand.

While field trips and other excursions could help to address this, these opportunities are rare due to a lack of funding, the limited availability of school busses, and liability issues. Thus, Tracy identifies a gap between curriculum content and the lived experiences of her students—an incongruity which she attributes to their socioeconomic status and presumed deficiency in cultural capital (rather than, say, the ideological nature of the curriculum itself)—as well as school-related factors that limit an educator's capacity to respond to these issues.

Others suggested that the struggles, deficits, and *failure of responsibility* demonstrated by caregivers often places undo strain on students—leaving them responsible for waking themselves up, feeding themselves, and getting themselves to school. Some participants noted that this had a direct impact of the school attendance (e.g., Bryce suggested that caregivers “put the ownership” for attendance on their children). Roberta notes that these attendance issues often intensify within the latter grades, suggesting that,

As a whole school [attendance] would be an issue—and especially junior high. I don't know—like, grade six. I would say grade six—grade five and up—their attendance really slows down and then junior high, you know, you get kids that have been moving in and out. Like, they're at this school, they have a hard time, they'll go to another school and then they come back.

And I think that's where, if somehow if we could support the parents, you know, and supporting—helping get their kids to school, “What do I do to get my kid to school?” And we do things for that. I mean we have a truancy officer, we do have an attendance train, but—

At a later point in the conversation, she suggests that the issues faced by caregivers are often intensified by family size, noting that

I would say most families that we see it's not like one or two children, right? There could be five kids in the family and there's such a range in ages and that it makes some of their lives really hard, you know?

Hence, while recognizing that students sometimes “have a hard time” at specific schools (which, she suggests, leads them to switch between institutions) she roots this in the limited capacity of caregivers (rather than school-related factors). Hence, in addition to the use of disciplinary measures such as truancy officers and supportive practices such as attendance trains,¹⁹⁴ there is a need for additional measures that more directly engage caregivers. She states,

I know our kids need support but if, somehow, we could open it up for the parents, right? Getting the parents—getting parents support, getting more parents involved in our school—feeling comfortable to be in our school.

You know there’s a lot of parents that have a lot of difficulty parenting and if we could somehow support them, but—they still need to know that they’re not doing anything wrong, like, it’s trying to help them without making them feel like they’re a bad parent. There are no bad parents. I think if we could support the parents—and I think that, in turn, helps to support the students and it would make some of them, their lives, a lot easier at home. Yeah, I don’t know, I think the support, from my eyes, I think the support’s gotta come to the parents, it’s gotta be for the parents.

Hence, for Roberta, the key to student success was supporting families—to help address the “difficulties” that they experience while parenting. However, this must be done in a manner that maintains the authority and dignity of caregivers overall, to avoid framing them as “bad parents” because, as she suggest, “there are no bad parents” (which is, in itself, a discursively framed presumption).

Addressing causes located within caregivers and families: Fostering engagement

This need to increase caregiver engagement was identified across the participants with some (like Roberta) noting that the school serves as a site for delivering supports and programming. Others suggested that caregivers and families can be an important resource for the school; for example, Vanessa stated that it is important for school staff to “listen to” and “learn from” these actors—stating, “that’s where our strength needs to come from...that’s where we need to look.” Speaking about the work being undertaken by the school’s Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Committee, she further notes that the school is currently pursuing efforts aimed at,

¹⁹⁴ Wherein staff members go house to house, knock on doors, and walk students to school.

bringing parents and community members into the school and inviting them to participate in the decision making and in the celebrations and—you know? Helping them feel like they can take ownership of the school.

During my time at the school site, it also appeared that the school’s administration was seeking to foster this sense of “ownership.” In one exchange they suggested that there was a distinction between “involvement” and “engagement”—with the former referring to simply improving the “numbers” of caregivers participating in school events. In contrast, engagement was defined as “parents, caregivers [being] regularly present in the school” and a relationship of “genuine partnership”—as demonstrated by, for example, caregiver involvement in school planning. At the same time, however, they also suggested that Eaglecrest caregivers often do not have the capacity to engage with the school in the same way as those located in more affluent parts of the city (e.g., by providing volunteer services or undertaking fundraising). Thus, caregivers were often discursively placed in an ambiguous position—on one hand they were centralized as the primary agent responsible for their child’s educational success and as a key resource for the school; however, at the same time, they were also presumed to be in need of support from the school and struggling to fulfill their parental responsibilities.

Alongside this was the notion of caregiver resistance to schooling and a presumed reluctance to engage.¹⁹⁵ Staff members generally located the cause of this within the caregivers’ own struggles and experiences, citing (for example) the intergenerational impact of residential schooling; time pressures associated with work schedules and/or caring for multiple children¹⁹⁶; general disinterest in school activities; and the inherent discomfort they presume many caregivers feel within schools. Others suggested that Eaglecrest caregivers seek to maintain distance between their home and school, partly because (it is presumed) they do not prioritize educational success to the same extent as caregivers in other communities. One staff member noted the higher level of engagement at another community school and stated,

They say they have lots of parents come. But I look at the area of that school and it’s mainly newcomers with little ones. So, they want that education, education, education—that’s very important to them. In this area it’s a little different. People figure that if their kids are in school, well, they don’t want to be here too.

¹⁹⁵ Roberta also suggested that students themselves can contribute to caregiver disengagement, suggesting that older students sometimes try to prevent family members from coming in, stating, “Like, when you’re in junior high, it’s like, you don’t want your parents—or your grandma or whoever, to come in anymore.”

¹⁹⁶ The size and age differences of families also makes it difficult to develop adequate programming for caregivers, particularly when a single caregiver has multiple young children.

They would rather be at home and let their little one's do whatever they do, and they can be at home and do what they need to do too.

These comments exemplify a perception—which I commonly observed at Eaglecrest—that this specific community (which is primarily Indigenous) does not prioritize education to the same extent as newcomer communities—a framing which resonates with broader racist and colonial discourses that locate the cause of school failure within the *affect* of Indigenous families and/or the (so-called) “culture of poverty” of local communities (as discussed in chapter two).

These factors, they suggested, result in inconsistent and limited involvement, as suggested by Roberta and Bryce

ROBERTA: I know we do a lot, like we offer a lot. Over the years it's been a variety of things. I think if we could do some kind of programming, something—We need to get them in the school somehow. We have a core that come in, but that core is not enough, you know? If you have six parents that come in all the time, you need to—somehow—get more parents in.

Sometimes we've had student-led and there hasn't been as many parents come in. And—is it the fear of parents? I don't know, I don't know what it is, you know, that stops them from coming in.

BRYCE: I think we have programs that we've tried to set in motion that had that community background, but maybe it's not that well-received. Like, we try to do things with parents and stuff and sometimes we have a ten-person turnout, sometimes it's none. Sometimes you try—you're trying to implement something—but it doesn't go any farther.

Hence, the issue is not a lack of effort on the part of staff, but rather (primarily) caregiver *reception* to school initiatives. Margaret reiterates this argument, but suggests that caregivers are specifically reluctant to undertake more formal or intensive forms of involvement, she states:

And I think for the most part the parents—you know, because when we have, at the winter concert the place is packed. Student-led conferences, we get a pretty good turnout.

And, umm, I know some staff get frustrated, trying to get volunteers and stuff in here. But you know what? I used to get frustrated when I chaired the Parents' Council at my child's school because the same people came over and over. And, finally, I realized that, you know what? There's nothing that you can do about it. You're not going to change people's minds. They don't want to go to a meeting—or they're afraid if they go to a meeting then all of the sudden they're going to be the Treasurer or something. And they're not interested. I was interested. But not everybody is.

Hence, for Margaret the socioeconomic and other challenges faced by Eaglecrest caregivers only intensify what is, overall, a common phenomenon—that is, caregivers will only be engaged in

activities that are of interest to them (such as parent-teacher conferences and school concerts). Few individuals want engagement beyond these forms of participation. In this instance, caregiver disengagement—or, at best, superficial/limited caregiver participation—is taken as the expected norm and the cause of this is, once again, presumed to be located within the *affect* of the individual (their disinterest).

To address these issues, staff members identified a variety of initiatives undertaken by the school as well as their own daily practices. More formal efforts included, amongst other outreach activities, initiatives funded through the Community Schools Program; the school’s garden box program; and efforts to invite caregivers in for special events and meals. In addition to these formal activities, staff members highlighted various everyday strategies that they employ to try and foster a positive and welcoming atmosphere for caregivers. For example, Tracy describes her efforts in a way that mirrors the notion of *active welcoming* discussed by caregiver participants earlier in this chapter. The key to developing relationships with caregivers, she suggests is,

Just asking them how their day was, you know, when you see them in the hallway, I’ve tried to make a point of really learning their names. So, I think that, you know, if you can call them by their name they say—they might think you actually care about them. I mean, I do care about them, but it—to make a connection that way. We try to, you know, I try to invite them in if they want. If they’re sitting out in the hallway, you know I’ll say, “Come on in and check this out!” Or things like that. Just so they feel really welcome to come in whenever they want. That sort of thing, I guess.

In addition to overtly welcoming and inviting caregivers into the school and her classroom, she also tries to engage with them “in a positive manner” wherein she “highlights” their child’s strengths and positive behaviours. She states,

I try to write little notes to them. So that not only helps the students but also the parents to see, “Oh! Well, my child’s actually doing good.” You know? Cause it must be frustrating to always here the bad, bad, bad stuff that goes on. And that seems to be—I mean don’t get me wrong, I have to make those calls too when there’s issues—but it’s nice when you can tell positive things. I think it shows the parents that you do care about their child, not just when they’re misbehaving. So that’s one way I’ve done it.

Similarly, when Vanessa engages with caregivers, she focuses on “being positive, listening” and “asking them for feedback.” She stated, “I really want them to speak. I want to listen to them. And I want to speak as little as possible just so that I can learn from them.” These everyday practices, participants suggest, help to make caregivers feel invited and comfortable within the

school. Roberta further notes that these efforts have led to a general shift in the school's climate; reflecting back on her early years at Eaglecrest, she suggests that,

There was one time when you used to walk down the halls and parents wouldn't look at you and it was just—you know. Anyone I'd pass in the hall you'd try to say hello to. And parents now are more comfortable. And I'll have parents that'll walk by and they'll say "Hi" to me first. I have a parent that'll wave to me all the time. She'll walk by my door and we wave to each other cause that's just something we started last year. So, yeah. It was just—the staff I think at that time was just—and I'm not meaning anything wrong—but maybe just a little bit colder, where, I don't know, things have just changed.

Yeah. Recognizing—acknowledging parents when you see them in the hallway, or visitors in the hallway—yeah, letting them know that, "Hey we're glad you're here." "Welcome." "Nice seeing you here." Or just a "Hello."

Thusly, she suggests that these largely informal efforts by staff—to notice, recognize, and acknowledge caregivers and other visitors through *active welcoming*—have led to an overall change at Eaglecrest, creating a welcoming and inviting space. Overall, staff suggested that Eaglecrest is dedicated to fostering caregiver engagement and regularly employs both formal and informal strategies for fostering both participation and deeper forms of engagement.

Consequently, caregiver disengagement is primarily located not in the school or efforts of staff, but rather in the caregivers' deficit of affect (e.g., their disinterest or resistance) and/or their deficit of capacity (e.g., they are unable to be involved due to pressures at home).

In addition, staff members identified various spatial and systemic factors which support or inhibit the school's efforts to foster caregiver engagement. Facilitative factors included the close proximity of Eaglecrest to students' homes and the availability of resources both within the school and at the local recreation centre. Vanessa and Tracy highlight the benefits of these factors:

VANESSA [discussing her initial impressions of Eaglecrest]: I was very interested in all of the community, the community involvement in the school. I found fascinating all of the resources that were kind of available. Even the location, right? The relationship with the [housing] development and that community and the community centre—and the fact that we are kind of cradled—I mean we're kind of the central square for, for the community.

TRACY: If a student forgets something they can almost run home and grab it, you know? So that's working well. I guess we have—it's really nice that we have the day care in the school, so that helps out a lot of families—helps the students get to school on time. Helps them come to school. The parents know that they can have that resource afterschool and before school.

I mean we—there’s always various community members in our school. We have our family room, which parents come in and out of. It feels very community-based, I think. Even just because we’re attached to the community. There’s no fence around the area—around our playground and stuff. It just goes straight into someone’s backyard. So that makes it feel like you’re part of the housing area I guess.

Both of these excerpts highlight the importance of the school’s physical accessibility (in terms of distance and the lack of barriers) and its spatial and symbolic positioning as the centre-point of the community. There is a sense that the borders between the school, the community, and student homes are somewhat permeable, with individuals constantly moving back and forth between these difference spaces. In addition, they suggest that the school offers relevant supports to families, such as childcare.

Despite these connections, participants also noted that direct communication with caregivers is often difficult. Tracy stated that many families do not have phones or computers, which means that, to establish contact, “you literally have to go to their house. Or send a note home, but that doesn’t always get home.” She further stated that,

So, having to go walk to their house, I mean, that takes *time*, right? So that’s another time out of the day to try to do that, as opposed to just a quick phone call. I don’t do it too often, but—I mean usually when you go you take someone else with you, like another staff member. Just for safety reasons and things.

But yeah, often teachers will go there cause [students] live so close, right? It’s across the field. I mean, I’ve walked kids home and whatever else, yeah. I mean I try not, like, I try not to go to people’s houses if I don’t have to. I don’t want to be an intruder, you know? I’d never want them to feel like, “Well, you’re coming to my house, you’re intruding.” I’d never want them to feel like that. So, I usually, I try to call if I can call. Or else, you know, I go to their door and leave a note. I try to do that more so than just knocking on the door.

Hence, the close physical proximity of homes to the school, while helpful, is not sufficient. Eaglecrest staff members must spend additional time and energy *crossing the threshold* into homes and the community—arguably more so than teachers working in comparably more affluent communities. They must also navigate relational dynamics and try to avoid coming across as “intruders” into the private lives of families. This is a challenging form of *relational work* that is made more difficult by safety concerns and the pressing limitations of time.

Staff efforts to engage caregivers are further limited by externally imposed bureaucratic barriers to accessing funding and supports for this work. One staff member suggested that accessing supports for Indigenous families requires that they complete the school division’s

Indigenous Self-Declaration Form—which many are reluctant to do (due to, it was suggested, an internalized sense of shame and/or the fear that this will lead to negative repercussions for their children). In addition, during the course of this research, the provincial government made changes to Community Schools Program’s grant application process which required that at least half of the programming developed by schools be explicitly linked to improving student literacy outcomes. One staff member suggested that this pressures them to “twist” their funding application “to make it fit” within these provincial requirements while, more generally, creating gaps in programming.¹⁹⁷ This also places additional burdens on already over-extended staff members, including the Community School Coordinator—who is largely responsible for securing funding, implementing programming, reporting on progress, and meeting the needs of individual students (e.g., taking them to see optometrists or dentists). Other staff members discussed feeling stretched by competing demands, which makes it harder to fulfill their primarily role as educators—or, as one administrative staff member stated, “we can be here to encourage and empower, but we can’t do everything. Our job here is to help students learn, so that’s what we need to focus on.”

Some staff members also drew attention to the limitations of provincial and board mandated reporting methods—including report cards and the structure of teacher-parent conferences. Tracy, for example, noted that jargon-heavy report cards are inaccessible to caregivers, stating, “I have trouble understanding them. So, how are you supposed to, you know, explain them to students, or explain them to families? The words they’re using, why can’t they just simplify it, you know?” Underlying these responses was a general sense that staff find their engagement efforts hindered by externally imposed barriers that serve the needs of powerful bureaucracies, rather than those of students and families. That is, more powerful bodies (such as the provincial government) demand that schools demonstrate their legitimacy and progress by presenting the outcomes of their work in a way that is *legible* and dictate *legibility demands* suited to their own needs. Hence, overall, the causes of caregiver disengagement were attributed to factors outside of the school—within either caregivers, the community, and/or the limitations manufactured by the demands of out-of-touch bureaucracies.

¹⁹⁷ For example, there are limited opportunities for caregivers with older children.

Addressing causes located within students: Fostering connection

While there was a general tendency to emphasize the deficits of students and caregivers, some participants also stressed the potential of young people and the strengths and knowledge of community members. Specifically, many staff members identified the independence of Eaglecrest students, with one suggesting that “these kids are very much in charge of their own lives—even though it might look like chaos to us or someone outside.” Several participants also employed the term “resilience” in reference to their ability to handle these responsibilities and survive various challenges. Consider, for example, the following excerpts:

TRACY: They’re very resilient, I guess that would be another strength that they have. They go—a lot—some of them go through a ton more than I’ve ever gone through and they somehow still make it to school and are able to do work and laugh and have fun—even though what they have been through might be harder than we even know.

STAFF MEMBER [comment from fieldnotes]: You can’t live this community “twenty-four seven”—but these kids do, which shows how resilient they are.

BRYCE: It’s amazing to see the resilience that the students have from the situations that they come from

VANESSA [*after being asked specifically if she would use the term “resilient” to characterize Eaglecrest students*]: I think, I think that because I’m—because I am again just new, like I’m newer to this community—I have yet to uncover all—some of those, some of the ways in which these students are resilient, I will never know. But I am, I think I’m—it’s progressively being revealed to me.

And, um, yeah—what they’re able to bounce back from. And so, I’m still, I’m still a bit ignorant. I’m learning but I—yeah. I don’t, I don’t know. I don’t know as much. I think I’m ignorant, yeah. I don’t know as much as they know in many ways too.

MARGARET: And with our kids, yeah, I mean—and again I am not privy to half of what goes on, but I mean, just from what I know, you just look at them or you meet their parents and you think, “Oh my God.” And yet, how do they do it? How do they do it? And *they’re* the resilient ones. You know, some of these kids just get beat down—and I don’t mean necessarily physically, but emotionally—and they just keep coming. They just keep coming.

These participants define resilience as the capacity to persist through and bounce back from challenging circumstances, abuse, and hardship—to cope and continue to “work and laugh and have fun.” There was also a tendency for staff to frame these difficulties as beyond the scope of their own experience and comprehension (“some of them go through a ton more than I’ve ever gone through” [Tracy]) and to express a sense of awe and/or incomprehension when asked to

identify the sources of this strength. Indeed, participants had a tendency to presume that resilience is either an inherent trait or something that arises out of difficult circumstances. Tracy explicitly presents this argument, while also suggesting that some of this capacity is learned from their families:

[What is the source] of the resilience? Um, I think maybe they just have to be, right? Like, if you're thrown in there then you really have no choice—it's either, "adapt or die," you know? Not actually, but—they just, they grow up with it, they, they see their—their families are quite resilient, I'm sure. So, they gain from that. They—most of the students love being at school so they come and they, I see maybe, a more positive side than I would otherwise—I'm not sure. So, yeah, I don't know how they get it, but, they have it.

Hence, while, staff members recognized the agency, coping skills, and personal strength of young people, they also framed these capacities in a manner that *mystifies* their sources. As discussed in chapter five, young people in the community draw from a variety of personal, familial, and community resources—a rich *relational web* and various forms of social and cultural capital—to maintain themselves and others. These various sources are, however, largely rendered invisible and illegible within the paradigm of deficit (the *dominating story about the community*) employed by the staff member participants. Given the invisibility of the agency and resources employed by young people, evidence of their strength is romanticized and/or rendered incomprehensible.

Given this *mystification of resilience* (which frames it as an inherent trait rather than as something rooted in relationships and resources), it is perhaps unsurprising that the personal resilience of students was not seen as translating into academic persistence and success. Consider, for example, Vanessa's description of how and why students sometimes *shut down* within school contexts:

One of the things I've noticed is that the students have, umm [*pause*—where students shut down. They shut—if students are shutting down it's, it's when they, when they hit the wall that everyone hits when you are doing something difficult. It's that—I find that is the source of a lot of emotional, a lot of emotional and behavioural reactions. The kids are not—they haven't learned how to push themselves through the part that's hard. They're, they—they have a hard time admitting that something is difficult and then keeping on going and—like, persistence, determination, driveness, even to complete things. Like, I probably find that, across the board, this is a huge source of behavioural and emotional—you know? And, um, frustration and that's where the meltdowns happen—because they don't like to fail. But they don't know how—or they're not, they haven't been taught or they're not used to pushing through, like, persisting and being okay with the fact that something's difficult.

So, success—they want success just as much as anyone else does. But they want easy success and they're not used to—they're not used to the success that comes from perseverance.

I think it is, it's a source of great frustration for the students. And, um, yeah—I think, learning how to commit to a project—to follow through to completion. I've also seen that there's a lot of pride in the students when they're able, you know, when they're able to complete something—as there would be for anyone.

When asked if this was something she thought was unique to Eaglecrest, she reflected back on her previous teaching experiences and clarified,

I mean for sure I think it's hard. It's hard to, it's hard not to be good at things. It's hard to fail. It's hard to do things that are hard, right? So, I would say in general this is part of the human condition. But I especially noticed it at this school. I did.

Thus, while staff members (including Vanessa) suggested that Eaglecrest students demonstrate considerable resilience in their personal lives, there was also a sense that they suffer from a deficit of *academic resilience and persistence*. In Vanessa's comments, this deficit is attributed to young people not being “taught” or having the chance to “[get] used to pushing through” and “being okay” with difficulty. She suggests that students want “easy success” rather than that which “comes from perseverance.” While noting that everyone, at times, struggles with “pushing through,” she implies that Eaglecrest students commonly demonstrate this *failure of academic persistence*. Hence, while her observation that students *shut down* in class may be accurate (e.g., by refusing to complete academic tasks and/or communicate with staff members), her framing and interpretation of this behaviour resonates with the deficit-oriented paradigm that dominates the *storyscape*.

In a similar vein, Bryce describes and interprets one student's overt opposition to class activities as a demonstrated lack of respect. He describes the incident as follows:

I had a student this morning who—we were doing a group activity and she just started being really rude right away and I said, “What's going on?” She said, “I just don't want to do this, this is stupid, it's boring, this is stupid.”

So, I said, “Okay, you know what? You're not ready to be here. Why don't you just go outside [into the hallway] and I'll come talk to you.” And, so, she thought that I was upset or whatever and I kind of had to be stern to her and said, “I'm not tolerating this, you can't just be rude to me like this. You can get out of the classroom.” So, I went out there and sat with her here, you know, sat beside her, put my arm around her and said, “What's going on? What's with the attitude today?” And she just, she started tearing up a bit and I could tell that she was upset. And I asked her if she wanted to talk about it and she said, “No.” So, I said, “Alright, you know what? I care about you and I'm here to talk if you

want to. If you don't want to talk that's okay, you know? But you have to respect that I'm taking you out of the classroom just because you weren't being respectful. And it's okay to have bad days, you know. We all have them. But we have to—I can respond to your bad day by still being respectful—so can you.”

So, I brought her a couple of books and said, “Why don't you just sit here for thirty minutes and just read.” And she read her stuff. She didn't go out for recess—she stayed in with me. We hung out a little bit and then the rest of the morning was good, it was fine.

In this instance, the Bryce frames the oppositional behaviour of the student as indicating a failure to express proper affect and adhere to classrooms norms (she is considered “not ready to be here”). This, he suggests, required a “stern” disciplinary response, including the student's temporary removal from the classroom. However, he notes, these actions were not rooted in anger, but rather in care and reflected an effort to demonstrate that care by setting expectations for student behaviour. His description of the follow-up conversation seems to suggest that he interpreted the oppositional behaviour as an expression of underlying issues. While the student did not respond to his invitation to share these presumed stressors, he does suggest that his actions helped settle the student so that “the rest of the morning was good” (free from further outbursts). While this narrative suggests that Bryce's response was effective and, perhaps, the most appropriate choice given the situation, his framing of the event suggests the same deficit-oriented paradigm employed by Vanessa. Essentially, issues are rooted completely in the young person's affective and behavioural responses to situations and/or their own emotional challenges. The nature of the pedagogical tasks, classroom norms, and teacher behaviours remain unexamined.

Instead, these types of behaviours—shutting down and overt opposition—could be interpreted as forms of *resistance work*¹⁹⁸—as an effort to destabilize relations of power, to refuse irrelevant or unengaging work, and/or to challenge the corporeal control required by the *good student-worker subjectivity*. These behaviours could also be a means of performing self-care work (e.g., as an effort to protect oneself from judgement, stress, or others forms of harm), or identity work (as a means of maintaining one's positive self-concept and sense of self-efficacy and/or refusing to engage in activities that may draw attention to one's limitations. While additional research on these phenomena is required to further clarify and expand upon these alternative interpretations, I argue that there is sufficient evidence to call the common, dominant

¹⁹⁸ With *shutting down* being a form of infrapolitical resistance.

explanations (e.g., that this indicates a student’s *failure to persist* or a failure to effectively manage one’s affect)—as well as the overall *dominating story of deficit*—into question.¹⁹⁹

At the root of these various descriptions of student behaviour is the presumption that the causes of school failure lie within the deficits of students and in the conditions which give rise to these failings (be they familial, community-based, or structural). Meanwhile, school-based responses are presumed to be the cure, rather than one of the potential causes, of educational inequality. Further, by extension, school completion is held as the primary means for addressing the underlying conditions that give rise to individual deficits. Consequently, staff members focus their attention to providing this “cure” while also working to ensure students remain engaged with school as an institution—to *stay present* and adequately perform as *good student-workers* so they may receive the immediate benefits of schooling (e.g., opportunities and supports) and garner the skills and credentials necessary for moving forward through the system and, subsequently, *rising above* their circumstances. However, staff participants suggest that many students disengage from school—a phenomenon which begins as early as grade five and that progresses rapidly in junior high. Staff find that their capacity to address the familial and socioeconomic factors which contribute to this disengagement very limited (due to, for example, low caregiver engagement, bureaucratic barriers, and the limitations of time and resources). Consequently, staff target their efforts upon individual students, seeking to engage their affect and perceptions (to *shift student mindsets*) so that they come to see “the value of education” (Bryce) and aspire “more” for themselves (Margaret). This is combined with a focus on building the capacities of students to *stay present* in school through the adequate performance of the *good student-worker subjectivity*. This suggests an implicit theory of change wherein it is presumed that addressing these subjective, affective, and corporeal factors will help keep young people present and engaged within schooling—thereby ensuring their continued access to the formal and informal benefits of this institution.

The primary means for addressing these subjective, affective, and corporeal factors and maintain a student’s connection to school is through the creation of interpersonal relationships. In fact, participants—regardless of their gender, years of experience, or specific position within

¹⁹⁹ To be clear, I am not suggesting that the participants’ interpretations are necessarily wrong—further exploration could confirm their complete or partial accuracy. Rather, I am calling into question the automatic foreclosing of other possibilities.

the school—all emphasized that *acts of care* and the intentional formation of interpersonal relationships are central to their work. Teaching practice was described as “relationally-based” (Vanessa) and rooted in both the formation of one-on-one connections between adults and young people as well as the creation of communities within classes and the school as a whole. Bryce identified relationship-building as his “highest priority,” stating that,

if you don’t have a relationship with the students you can’t get them to do work. You can’t get them to increase their reading level by two grades by just telling them to do stuff. You have to have a relationship where they can trust that what you’re saying is, is for their good. And if they don’t trust you, if they don’t have that relationship with you, good luck ever getting them to do anything, you know?

In a similar vein, Roberta suggests that students new to Eaglecrest are often initially defensive, but that they gradually “soften” as they get used to school routines and practices:

You can always tell the new students that come in. It’s just they, I don’t know, to me they just seem to stand out a little more. They just don’t know our routines that we have, you know. They just don’t seem as settled in yet, they’re just a little more defensive. And then once they’ve been around for a month or so you can see them soften up and—yeah. But it’s interesting, especially Junior High you can really see when there’s new kids that come into Junior High.

Hence, relationship building is necessary so that students will, in time, learn to trust school authorities and drop their defenses. This emphasis on bonding and establishing trust is reiterated by Vanessa, who suggested that relationships-building is the means through which one can re-engage a student who has disconnected from the learning process, the school, or teachers. She states,

Once I have a relationship that’s my “go to,” you know? If there’s a student who is frustrated or who doesn’t like me or for some reason is acting out or doesn’t come to school, whatever it is—whatever the situation is that keeps the student from being in the classroom and learning—the first thing I do is I start building a relationship. Start hanging out with them. You know, bonding with them. Because I think, I think that a relationship builds trust and once there’s trust then knowledge can be transmitted, or learning can happen.

Both Vanessa and Bryce emphasize that the establishment of trust is central to their practice and frame “relationship” as a kind of foundational channel through which pedagogical activity occurs. Roberta extends this notion of interpersonal trustworthiness to the fostering of a sense of community within her classroom, something which she suggests must be done intentionally and early in the school year:

You've got to make a community in your classroom. You've got to create relationships with your kids. I would say the first couple weeks of the school year you've got to build a community in your classroom, you know? [pause] You just figure out the best way that you can make everybody feel that they're welcome in your classroom.

Do we always like every student we work with? No. Right? I mean it's the same with adults [pause] but you have to leave all that behind and make them feel like they belong and everything works out.

Here, the notion of interpersonal bonding is extended to larger collectives and the establishment of "community" is presumed to provide a sense of belonging and safety—a kind of affective security—amongst students. She also specified that the foundation of a "community school" is "being a community in your classroom." Across these excerpts is the sense that one must create an affective and relational context—amongst students and between each student and the teacher—characterized by trust and a sense of belonging before effective teaching can take place.

On one hand, this highlights the potential autonomy of young people, suggesting that they have the capacity to resist schooling practices and that a teacher's effectiveness is dependent upon a student's engagement and consent (or, at least, their acquiescence). Given that these participants generally conceptualize coercive measures (yelling, removal from the classroom, etc.) as a kind of "last resort" that is ultimately ineffective as a long-term strategy, their effects centre upon encouraging students to *buy into* learning activities and classroom/school norms. Interpersonal connections, subsequently, provide the mechanism for *compelling this consent*. Hence, relationships are understood as both a means and an ends—they provide the channel for knowledge transmission, secure the young person's trust and consent (so that they will then do their work), and serve as a resource for students themselves (enriching their *relational web* and providing a sense of belonging). The primary means for developing these relationships, participants further suggest, is through *acts of care* that "bond" students and educators.

This suggests an implicit theory of change which presumes that consistent demonstrations of care serve to connect young people to the adult, who then serves as a trusted spokesperson for the institution. That is, the young person is less likely to actively resist what is being asked of them if they trust (and feel positive affect toward) the source of the request. Relationships and positive affect, therefore, provide the glue which binds a young person to the schooling institution more generally; interpersonal trust leads to institutional trust as a young person comes to see specific schooling practices (perceived of as irrelevant, boring, or otherwise undesirable) as inherently "for their own good." Underlying this is both the recognition and delegitimization

of student agency and resistance (which is framed as resulting from the student's inaccurate assessments of teachers, learning activities, and school as a whole). I term this overall process of *bonding students to teachers* through the use of *care work* (so as to gander their consent and forge a sense of connection to school as an institutions) *affective linking*.

While participants noted that *affective linking*—this relationship building and *care work*²⁰⁰ is central to all forms of teaching practice regardless of context, it is considered particularly important at Eaglecrest because of the presumed disconnect between young people/their families and the schooling system. As Bryce explains,

At some schools, your job is curriculum “here” and then the other portion [relationship-building] “here,” only this percentage [*using hand gestures indicating a higher percentage focused on curriculum at other schools*]. Whereas, I think our school it is probably forty percent curriculum, sixty percent relationship-building, you know?

But I think that's why I fit better with this anyways because I didn't go into this to just have an easy job. I knew what I was getting into and I was willing to go for it, so. I think I fit this better anyways, to do more of the relationships and stuff.

If I was in another school I'm sure I'd have parents breathing down my back and saying, “Why aren't you teaching three-digit division already? This is grade five, they should be doing this, they should be doing this, they should be doing this. Why can't my kid write this? Why can't—” Whereas, I'd probably get torn apart, not by the kids but by the parents. My job, day-to-day, would be a breeze but, but here it's—it's a different story. It's the complete opposite.

In this excerpt Bryce suggests that, at Eaglecrest, more staff attention, time, and energy is devoted to relationship-building. He contrasts this with other schools, wherein (he suggest) far more emphasis is placed upon the achievement of curriculum outcomes (partly because this is demanded by caregivers who are, comparably, more engaged and who hold higher academic expectations). This suggests not only that academic expectations at Eaglecrest are, presumably by necessity, inherently lower than at other institutions, but it also situates caring and academic rigour as separate concerns. This reflects an inherently class-based framing of educational needs, with a strong academic focus being largely reserved for schools situated in more affluent communities (because, it is suggested, teachers working in these institutions do not need to address the *deficits of care and capacity* that impact Eaglecrest students).

²⁰⁰ I recognize that there is a significant body of literature that explores the role of care in teaching (as well as the notion of care ethics more generally). Deeper exploration of this work will be focus of future publications.

This serves to frame marginalized students as inherently vulnerable and in need of the care and protection of (largely White and middle class) educators. Indeed, it was generally suggested that by participants that the primary purpose of their work is to *care for* students, a framing which makes academic capacities a secondary concern—or, as Margaret suggested, “If kids come here and they know they’re safe and their loved, and they’re fed and clothed, you know, for those six hours or whatever, then we’re doing something right.” Further, staff members often conceptualized themselves as fulfilling the care responsibilities of parents. Vanessa, for example, suggested that Eaglecrest teachers are “busy, you know, acting as counsellors and surrogate parents” while Bryce notes that they “quickly fall into almost a role of half-time parent, half-time educator.” In addition, Roberta suggested that she treats her students, “like they’re my own kids,” Margaret stated that there are some students that “you just want to take home,” and Tracy claimed that, as a teacher, she has come to “love these kids.” Hence, participants see their work primarily as filling *deficits of care*—which, they suggest, bonds students and educators and helps them to see the value of (and consent to) day-to-day schooling practices. Hence, they aim to *engage the affect* of students, to make them feel both *cared for by* and *connected to* school. This is merged with efforts to help students see school as the pathway toward a (particular kind of) good life and to invest their hope and faith in this journey and the power of the institution to help them rise above their circumstances.

In practice, this *care work* encompasses a wide array of everyday strategies and requires staff members to draw upon a diverse set of (largely intrinsic) forms of knowledge. Some of these strategies involved highly structured team- or community-building activities. Roberta, for example, describes methods that she employed early in her teaching career:

All my students came into the room and I had teacups set out. They had to sit at a table that had a teacup. And there’s that book *Three Cups of Tea*? I followed that format. So, we had our friend, our acquaintance, our first time, then we had our friend, and then we had our family. So we had the three cups of tea together and then we drew the teacups and then they took their teacups home. Another year I had all the kids come in and nobody had a desk. They all sat in a chair. And they all—it took about a week and then I finally gave them a desk.

As Roberta’s efforts exemplify, these strategies temporarily disrupted standard classroom arrangements to create a more equitable context wherein students could feel comfortable opening up to the teacher and each other.

These more intentional relationship-building activities, however, were only used occasionally. Far more common was the infusion of relationship-building and *care work* within the informal, unstructured interactions that occurs between teachers and students on a daily basis. This includes regularly *speaking care*—welcoming students, saying hello, and explicitly stating, “I care about you.” While important, such speech acts are also limited, as suggested by Bryce:

I tell my kids that I care on a regular basis and some of them are like, “No you don’t.” And they say that just because that’s their response mechanism, you know?

Thus, he suggests that Eaglecrest students have ample reason to be skeptical of speech acts of care—which means that one must back up these words with actions—with embodied *performances of care*. Participant descriptions of these informal practices centered around the notions of *spending time with* and *showing interest in* individuals. Tracy describes her process as trying to “give the light” to each student. Building relationships, she suggests, involves

Working one-on-one with them as much as you can. It’s hard in a huge class, but, you know, just making time for that. During reading time, for example, going around and sitting with a kid and really giving them the, the light, you know? Looking at them and they’re the boss.

The importance of spending time was reiterated by Roberta, who suggested that this allows for natural processes of building connections:

I don’t know, you know sometimes how you don’t know how to say it, like it just kind of comes naturally. You know, you have conversations with them. So, we spend lunch with them, you know? At lunchtime the EAs [Educational Assistants] will sit with them. Sometimes I’m in here, sometimes I’m not. But you just—different connections. You just, you get to spend more time with them. It just kind of happens, right? It’s just, you know sometimes it’s hard to explain how that stuff works, but it just kind of happens. You know, you become a good listener.

At another point in our conversation Roberta also stressed importance of celebrating student successes, stating,

A little success is something to celebrate. It doesn’t have to be anything really big. It can be, you know, I have a student and his reading has come a long way. And then, one day, he was reading a lot higher than I, than he ever has for me. Like, I congratulated him and [told him] how proud I was of him and he goes, like, “Wow that was really good.” So, when they recognize—themselves—that they’ve done well—yeah.

In both Tracy and Roberta’s excerpts the participants highlight the importance of *giving time* to young people in order to demonstrate one’s care and build connections. They also suggests that

this time must involve humanizing, validating, and dignifying engagements that, to some extent, disrupt the hierarchical relationships between teachers and students. Bryce reiterates the importance of spending time and just *being with* students, suggesting that he often has to find ways to *make time* outside of regular school hours in order to (from his perspective) effectively do his job as a teacher. He states,

For me, it's just one job that all falls into one thing. In order to teach the curriculum, I have to have the relationships and put in this time. I have to stay afterschool, I have to, you know. For me I go to the community center with the kids and I'll just play in the gym with them for half an hour after school. Why do I do it? Cause it's, in my mindset, it's part of the job. Some people will say, "No my lunch hour is my lunch hour I need to take it for this. My recess time is my recess time. I take my prep." That's where I'd say I differ from some teachers in that regard.

Hence, for Bryce, to work effectively within an inner-city school one must *make the time* and *spend the time* to foster relationships—which often means doing *relational* and *care work* outside of regular work hours. Relatedly, a school board staff member suggested that spending time was also an important way for educators to gather information about individual students that can help them better respond to their needs. Specifically, she suggested that staff members should volunteer with school breakfast programs because this can give them a chance to “see how kids were doing” and to identify if a child was “starting the day” stressed or tired. These informal, unstructured interactions also provide the opportunity to learn more about on-going issues, to ask questions and, at times, to speak with caregivers. Hence, for her, these types of programs were “about more than just food.” Hence, overall, *being present* and *spending time* also helps develop an educator’s capacity to notice, understand, and respond to student issues and needs.

While emphasizing the importance of *spending time*, Vanessa also suggested that relationship building sometimes involves “holding back,” and waiting for the young person to initiate contact, something which she notes is particularly important at Eaglecrest:

A lot of people don't build relationships by being as forceful as maybe I was in my subbing, like coming across really strong. Like, I think a lot of people also build relationships by holding back—by holding back and waiting and waiting for people to come to them. I think that I'm learning, I'm learning that here [at Eaglecrest] it might have more to do with holding back at the right times. Yeah—I think that's, that's one thing that working at this school is teaching me.

This suggests that educators need to develop an intrinsic sense of when to engage (when to *reach out*) and when to *hold back* and give the young person a chance to feel comfortable enough to initiate contact. Knowledge of when and how to do this is largely intuitive and developed through experience. Regardless of the approach taken, however, it is presumed that the onus is largely upon the adult to prove the authenticity of their care and to allow sufficient time and space for the young person to *cross the threshold* into relationship.

Participants were overwhelming positive when discussing the extent to which Eaglecrest staff undertake this *relational and care work*. There was a general sense that staff commonly put in significant time engaging with and caring for students—offering both regular interpersonal support as well as structured extra-curricular activities. Margaret suggested that staff often go “above and beyond” the requirements of their job for students, at times going “overboard” and becoming over-committed. She notes that while this level of dedication is common at many schools, it is particularly strong at Eaglecrest. Reflecting this assessment, Bryce illustrated some of the ways he went “above and beyond in order to prove himself to a student who often disrupted his own classroom, narrating the following story:

I had a student in my first year. We butt heads for [more than] four months—and then still had hard days in between from time to time. But he *hated* me. He would say a lot of mean things to me. I’d go and see his hockey games on the weekend and take him and his dad out to McDonalds after the game and pick them up and drive them home or to the games if I was going. And, um, you know, by the—at the last day of school he was on his way out and I said, “Hey, come over here. You can’t leave. You gotta give me a hug before you go.” He gave me a hug and he started crying and, like, I started tearing up and it was like [*pauses, sighs*].

But that, that whole, that whole battle—that four or five month battle that we’d had—to have that experience [at the end of the year] was—it made it all worth it to feel that some form of that relationship *got through*.

This *story of experience* describes the *relational and care work* that Bryce undertook in order to *prove the authenticity of his care* and form that sense of connection necessary to reduce this student’s resistance to his authority and garner his consent. Notably, he describes this as a “battle,” a turn of phrase which calls attention to the power dynamics which impacted this bonding process. Bryce suggested that the various informal strategies he employed to connect with this student and his father—strategies which involved spending both time and money—eventually resulted in a relational victory; he had managed to push through the student’s defenses so that “some form of that relationship *got through*.” In addition, this excerpt highlights both the

instrumental and intrinsic benefits of *relational and care work*; his efforts improved classroom dynamics while also affectively *moving* Bryce himself. Several staff members emphasized that emotional rewards of making connections is one of their primary motivators for undertaking this work. Further, some framed their willingness to *go above and beyond* as indicative of their professionalism and personal dedication to their job—and, hence, the time and energy they invest in this process of relationship-building not only helped reduce disruptive in-class behaviours, but also directly rewarded staff members by helping them maintain a desirable professional identity and sense of self. Drawing upon this internal motivation, they suggest, is necessary because this work (and the additional time and energy required to undertake it) is not otherwise recognized or compensated for within the educational system.

Other participants emphasized the importance of (partially) challenging the power relationship between teachers and students. For Tracy and Bryce, this means being open, transparent, and vulnerable:

TRACY: I think just talking to the students and telling them that you care about them and generally, like, just being genuine. Being interested in their lives, what do they do afterschool? What do they like? Not only that, but kind of telling them how you feel to and things you like so that they can get to know you better. So, I think opening up to them allows them to open up to you. So even, like, telling them things that you're scared of personally or, things maybe, mistakes you've made. That allows them to open up to you and do that to you as well. Yeah, just caring about them. You know?

BRYCE: I try to be as open with them as possible and explain to them, "I'm only human and, um, we make mistakes but we learn from them, you know?" I talk to my students about how in an ultimate frisbee game I—someone fouled me really hard on purpose and I pushed him and I got angry and I said, like, "I talk to you guys about the correct way to handle things, did I handle that situation correctly? No." But I'm willing to share that with the students so that they see I'm not trying to come in there saying I'm a perfect person and you have to do exactly "this" and it's not acceptable to ever make mistakes. We're all human, we make them, but we have to grow from it—so, "What would I change in the future? I would do this. Same thing that when you guys make mistakes or when we make mistakes or when we have problems, what can we do to change this from happening again?" You know?

Thus, care work also involves demonstrating genuine interest in students and taking the time to learn about their lives beyond the classroom—to see them as people, rather than just students. While this is, itself, a dignifying practice, it also serves to create a context wherein students feel

comfortable sharing. Further, as Bryce suggests, these engagements can also have pedagogical value, opening up space for discussing interpersonal challenges and behaviours.

While challenging these relations of power can help with *affective linking*, educators also (and seemingly paradoxically) stressed the importance of maintaining their authority and enforcing classroom/school norms and expectations. Such efforts, they suggest, are necessary for maintaining the integrity of the classroom space (e.g., helping to ensure that all students feel safe and secure) while also serving as another means for demonstrating their care. As suggested by Vanessa, “being strict” meets the students’ (presumed) need for boundaries while also communicating that you believe in their potential. Reiterating this, Bryce suggests that, at times, this means denying students privileges, noting how this is applicable to students with poor attendance:

I get upset with those students who don’t show up to school on a regular basis. So the relationship between not showing up to work, to school and being five years below grade level, you know, it’s like well, *obviously*. But—so I get upset with him, you know? I say, “No, no you don’t get to join for this. You don’t get to come for the afternoon and join some fun thing. You haven’t been here for three days this week in the morning. You can’t just wake up at 11:30am and just come in whenever you’d like,” you know?

And they get upset a little bit, but I say, like, “If I didn’t care about you, I wouldn’t mind—it’d be one less student I’d have to teach. But I want you here.” And, reminding them, “I want you in this class, I don’t— this is not me trying to get rid of you.” I don’t try to send kids to the office or send them home. It’s not about getting rid of them, it’s about working through the battles that you know some kids are just going to want to have with you on a regular basis.

In this instance, Bryce suggests that ensuring his student regularly attends school necessitates actions which prevents the making of *bad choices*. Specifically, he interprets the student’s lack of attendance as a conscious effort to avoid academic tasks and only participate in activities which he enjoys (which is seen as a manifestation of *misdirected affect*). Bryce’s response is to not permit the student to participate in some activities—framing these as privileges which one must earn through schoolwork. Enforcing this behavioural norm, as well as others associated with the *good student-worker subjectivity*, is framed as an act of care and personal sacrifice; it would be much easier, Bryce suggests, to simply ignore these issues—to avoid initiating and “working through the battles” that come with maintaining high expectations. Not disciplining students, therefore, is seen to be indicative of a lack of care because, in doing so, you are leaving students vulnerable to their own *misdirected affect* and *bad choices* while also failing to provide

the structure they need to develop the affective control and corporeal habits required for staying within and moving through the schooling system.

Roberta reiterates this overall argument, suggesting that she seeks to hold her students up to the same standards of behaviour that she maintains for her own children. She states,

I treat them like they're my own kids, right? If they've done something wrong, well, I let them know they've done wrong. But I tell them, you know, "You're just like my own kids, like I treat you like you're my own." You know? So, but—I get mad at them. They get mad at me. And every day is a new day, right? So, from morning to afternoon for some of these students, I mean—from five minutes away—it has to be a whole fresh start again.

And I find that with some of them it's very—you've got to really relate that message of, "I'm not mad at you. I don't like, you know, what you did or the behaviour was inappropriate, but I'm not mad at you." And, you know, sometimes it's like, "Well why did you yell?" "Because you weren't listening to me. I repeated it and repeated it. And when I yelled that's when you seemed to listen." But we don't yell very often in here unless we really, really have to.

And, sometimes, it takes a while to get that message across and some of them understand it and, you know, when they're having really hard days and you say, "We've got to call home" and they'll get mad at us and it's kind of like—but it's all about safety. If we didn't care we wouldn't talk about it. We wouldn't make those phone calls. Certain things, family members need to know.

Later on in our conversation, Roberta also noted that these expectations extend beyond individual classes to encompass the entire school, stating,

Everyone treats the kids like they're *our* kids. It's not like, "These are only *my* students"—they're everybody's kids. So, if you see somebody doing something wrong in the hallway, you know, it's very rare you'll see somebody [an adult] walk by and not say something, you know?

In this excerpt Roberta employs the (commonly articulated) discursive link between teachers and parents—making reference to this socially legitimated relation to power in order to rhetorically justify her own disciplinary approach. She further suggests that holding students to the same standards as one's own children conveys the message that, as a teacher, she sees these students as valuable—as worthy of the same time and energy afforded to comparably more privileged young people (including her own children). She suggests, further, that all Eaglecrest staff members relate to students in a similar way.

However, at the same time, her description of student responses to these disciplinary practices suggests that they do not necessarily perceive her actions as acts of care. Indeed, both

she and Bryce suggest that the *caring intention* of their actions must often be explicitly articulated to students—otherwise these actions may be (from these participants’ perspective) “misinterpreted” as unfair or harsh. Indeed, all participants suggested the importance of combining coercive disciplinary measures with additional *relational and care work*. Consider, for example, the following excerpts:

BRYCE: I’m a really firm believer on positive reinforcement with discipline. As a child I was, I was spanked and stuff or whatever, but there was always positive enforcement that came from it. It wasn’t just an emotional thing. And, so, with these students, having boundaries—saying, “No, this is not acceptable and you’re going to have to miss out on this” or saying, “That is not okay.” Or, you know, sometimes where you have to raise your voice to a student or something like that to set firm boundaries.

But having that conversation after with them, where you can say, “Listen, I care about you.” I just try to make sure that we end it on a calm, calm level that—where he [the student] knows that I am doing this because I care, you know? So, I think positive reinforcement is definitely a key component there. It’s not always easy though, for sure.

ROBERTA: We have, you know, classroom lectures. We have classroom discussions. It’s never pointing out and saying, “Well so-and-so did this.” You talk about the behaviour that occurred and, you know, that it’s not appropriate for school. I never sit up there and say, “Well this is what so-and-so did, they’re not supposed to do that.” We try to learn from the experiences.

VANESSA: I always conversations with them afterwards. Once they’ve had a chance to cool down and we talk about how we feel and stuff. But what’s even more interesting is that they’ll start off, I think, by being really angry but then, right, like not wanting to talk to me or whatever and then—and then as they day progresses you can tell that there’s a new level of respect.

Across these perspectives is an emphasis on employing conversation to both explain one’s motivations (seeking to convince the student that they are rooted in care) and to re-establish destabilized interpersonal relationships (which, Vanessa suggests, are often strengthened as a result). Further, in order to avoid having one’s actions “misinterpreted,” one must be very cognizant of the specific disciplinary strategies employed. Efforts should be made to maintain the student’s dignity and to focus upon learning from mistakes. Being able to do this, they suggest, requires significant emotional regulation—on must, as Bryce suggests, learn “how to use patience to deal with situations instead of emotions.” In fact, even more aggressive forms of discipline (e.g., yelling) are framed as *logical* (rather than emotional) responses that indicate the educator’s professional competence and experience. This form of emotional regulation can, I

argue, be conceptualized as a kind of *corporeal work* that staff members suggest they undertake on a day-to-day basis.

Participants also suggest that balancing the need to maintain expectations while also preventing misinterpretations, maintaining relations, and minimizing the risk that you will unintentionally push a student out of school is a challenging task made even more difficult by the specific personal, familial, and socioeconomic characteristics of Eaglecrest students. Staff members identified various factors which may impact: a student's capacity to self-regulate; the extent to which they trust school authorities; and their perception of/response to teacher disciplinary techniques. In the following excerpt, Roberta describes how she seeks to respond to these factors while also maintaining classroom norms and expectations, stating,

You accept if they're going to come in a grumpy mood that, you know, you're going to maybe kind of walk on eggshells around them for a little bit, but you're not going to let them get away with it. If it's something you wouldn't allow your own child to do well, then, it's like, "I'm not going to allow you to do it. I guess, I understand that you may have more difficulties at home than my children did, but somehow we've got to learn to get over some of that. We're safe people. We're, you know, safe. You can talk to us. We're here for you."

Thus, Roberta implies that by engaging in *affective linking* and forging trusting relationships it is possible to create an interpersonal context wherein the teacher—regardless of the extent to which he or she shares the same experiences or social positioning as the student—can be identified as “safe” and counted on as a trusted source of support. When this is established, she suggests, it is possible for students to “get over” (at least to some extent) the impact of personal and external challenges—that is, a student can learn how to *leave these at the door*. Margaret reiterates this need to help students “get over” their challenges, suggesting that Eaglecrest staff, at times, “let what's happening at home dictate the way we react too much.” She states,

Day after day, some of the kids—the same ones—are always acting out and acting up. They have reasons for it, but you can't let it go, you know? I think sometimes we let, we let what's happening at home dictate the way we react too much. Because, I think, sooner or later you're going to be held accountable and sooner is better to learn it. And I'm not talking nursery school, okay, but a kid—by grade two, three and up—like, they know right from wrong. They know right from wrong. Doesn't matter what they come from, they know right from wrong. I think it just gets bought into too much sometimes.

But, again, there could be things going on in their lives, that I don't know about. But I also think you have to draw a line, you have to—sooner or later they have to be responsible for themselves and learn there is a better way.

In both of these excerpts, participants centralize the need to balance the *recognition of challenges* with the *maintaining of expectations*. One can acknowledge the impact of factors which make it more challenging for a student to perform as either a *good kid* or a *good student-worker* and, in some instance, may grant them some disciplinary leeway if they are having a difficult time. However, a staff member cannot be too flexible; standards must be maintained (“you have to draw a line”) for the benefit of the student, the teacher, and the class as a whole. Failure to do so, they suggest, not only insults the young person’s presumed inherent capacity to “know right from wrong,” but also prevents them from developing the sense of personal responsibility (the proper affect) and behavioural capacities (affective and corporeal management strategies) needed to move forward through school and life. Underlying this logic, however, is the presumption that students—if accurately perceiving the actions of staff—will feel “safe” at school. By extension, a perceived lack of safety or sense of insecurity is attributed the misperceptions of students. Margaret exemplifies this logic, stating, “I think that most of our kids know they’re cared for here. Some of them are too angry to realize it. But I think most of them know that they’re cared for.” Hence, once again, neither the school nor the staff are framed as potentially contributing to educational challenges while the resistance of students is presumed to result from their own misperceptions and unjustified affective states.

Overall, participants describe their relational and care work as complex forms of labour that involve the use of multiple strategies as well as a largely intuitive and tacit knowledge base (developed through personal and on-the-job experiences). Educators must understand what strategies to employ in different situations and they make these calls by drawing upon both their general knowledge and their assessment of individual students. They need to know when and how to *speak care* (perform the speech act), *show care* (engage in caring acts), *reach out* (initiate connection), *give space* (wait for the student to establish contact), *open up* (share and demonstrate vulnerability), *push students out* (discipline students), *pull students in* (reestablish relationships), *adapt to the needs of individuals* (give them space and disciplinary leeway), and *maintain standard expectations* (treat them like any other student or child). Both this knowledge and these practices are generally developed through experience rather than explicit instruction and training. Indeed, when discussing this care and relational work, participants commonly made reference to their own upbringing and previous personal and professional experiences. Hence, while *affective linking* is presumed to be foundational for student success, it is not something that

is commonly acknowledged, taught, or compensated for within the broader educational system. Indeed, both the participant interviews and my own field observations indicated the various ways in which educational bureaucracies and infrastructure actually inhibit this critical work, thereby suggesting the extent to which it is externalized and rendered illegible and invisible.

Building relationships within an educational technocracy

School staff participants readily identified various facilitative and inhibitive factors that impact their ability to effectively undertake the *care and relational work* that they deem foundational to pedagogical practice and student success. Facilitative factors include local-level structural changes that help maintain teacher-student connections, such as the use of split grade classes so that educators could teach many students two or more years in a row. Class size was also identified as a factor, with low-enrollment programs helping some educators build the strong relationships required for meeting the needs of (often) very vulnerable students. Roberta indicated her preference for these smaller classes, stating, “It’s nice because you get to know them, right? When you have a classroom of twenty-five you don’t get to know them quite the same.” Vanessa also highlighted how smaller classes can also grant educators the freedom to “transform the way education is done” and create “a new sort of innovative structure” that goes beyond just “sitting at a desk.” While Eaglecrest does offer these types of specialized, low-enrollment programs, they are reserved for students with very specific neurological diagnoses. The majority of classes remain relatively large (around twenty students each).

In addition to reducing the number of students in each class, participants also suggested that increasing the number of adults in the room can be beneficial. Some participants noted the benefits of working with one or more Educational Assistants while Tracy highlighted the value of volunteers, stating,

Having more adults is always a great support. There’s never enough time to help every student all the time. So that would be more beneficial, you know, the more adults or the more, yeah—I guess adults or older students helping out would be really helpful just in the everyday, with everything really. Whether it’s spelling or doing some math—that sort of thing, more supports. Just having more adults would be great. Like I love when people come volunteer. When other people are here just to help out, playing, working one-on-one with kids.

Hence, having more adults present in the room—which reduces the ratio of students per adult—increases the number of connections that can be made with students and potentially grants each

adult more time to engage one-on-one with individuals. That is, forming interpersonal relationships often involves *giving time to* and *being with* students. Reducing the number of students and/or increasing the number of adults helps to spread these various work and time demands across more people, reducing the pressure placed on each individual and (potentially) improving the overall quality of relationships.

Participants also noted that they generally have sufficient access to funds for material resources such as books, technology, and other tools. However, Tracy has found that at times Eaglecrest staff members limit what is provided to students due to concerns that materials will not be returned, stating:

I have tried to do like a home-reading things and I'll get, maybe, two kids that bring it back to the class. So, I—I always try, like—I feel like some teachers here, they say, "Well I never get [my materials back]. All my books go missing, so I'm not even going to bother."

I feel that's unfortunate cause for those kids that do want to do it, or will do it—even if I give out twenty books and one comes back at least that one kid's reading. I would always give them, like, two chances and then after that it was, "Sorry, no." Or [I just give them] those paper books they can take. That's what I've been doing this year, just the paper, photocopied ones.

Hence, while staff members were generally satisfied with their access to in-class materials, they were limited in terms of the resources they could provide to students for home use. Tracy has managed to work around these restrictions through the use of cheaper photocopied materials—although, as she later noted, this requires she spend additional time producing these documents. Given these limitations, it is perhaps unsurprising that Tracy has found that many teachers do not “bother” to offer these additional supports at all.

Other participants highlighted the importance of supportive intra-staff relationships. This included feeling “empowered and valued” by the school’s administrators (Vanessa) and being given the freedom to “do what we need to do to make our program a success” (Roberta). In addition to this sense of autonomy, staff members noted the value of administrative support in developing and implementing student discipline strategies; managing staff workloads; and accessing professional development and other learning opportunities. However, at the same time, they also suggested that administrative personnel are dealing with multiple competing priorities, many of which require them to attend meetings and events at other locations. As a result, administrators are not (as one staff member suggested) always very “present and available.” This

leaves staff responsible for developing their own support systems. For example, Vanessa described the workaround developed by teachers on her floor:

We kind of came up with our own system because we couldn't send kids to the office because the administrators were never there. And so, we'd send the kids to each other's rooms. We created our own disciplinary method. And it still happens this year on the second floor.

Thus, Vanessa suggests that the externally imposed demands placed upon administrators detracts from their ability to be present and available on a day-to-day basis. This subsequently offloads the responsibility to address behavioural issues completely onto the teachers themselves. While Eaglecrest staff have found suitable and effective means for managing this situation, it still results in an intensification of their daily workload.

In many respects, Eaglecrest staff members depend upon each other for various kinds of formal and informal support—often performing additional *care and contribution work* to assist each other. In the following excerpt, Margaret explicitly identifies these relations of care:

I mean, there's just something about this place that no matter how [*pause*] sad things can be, how awful things can be—cause some of our kids are dealing with awful situations— that as a staff we can come together and we can help and we can laugh and make ourselves feel better.

And I think we take care of each other too. I think we take care of each other. We try to be aware if somebody's going through a rough time and stuff like that. It's just— like I said, I feel very, very, very fortunate to have had this job and love it all the time. It is a gift. It is a gift

She further described relations between staff members in kinship terms—making reference to the “Eaglecrest family” and stressing that she “can count on them” for anything. This notion of mutual support was reiterated by all participants, as exemplified in the following excerpts:

TRACY: It's really nice having other teachers around that are very “welcoming,” I guess you could say. So, if I have a question or, you know, I need to rant about something, I just go across the hall and they can help me out. Or if you need a lesson. So that's one thing that works really well is staff being accommodating to others. If you have a student who's having a hard time you can send them to another classroom to do their learning. So that's really nice.

ROBERTA: You hear things down the hall so—and if it, not this year, but in the past it's been really noisy down the hall. So, you kind of will check in on the teacher and it's kind of like, “How are things going? Do you need any help with anything? Do you need any resources? Do you need anything?”

VANESSA: Staff members will come into my room, either giving me positive feedback or constructive criticism—to the point where I got annoyed. It’s like, “Let me have my kingdom.”

But, but it’s, it’s all coming out of care and love. That’s where it’s coming from and, on a regular basis, teachers will ask, well say like, “Vanessa, you look like you’re having a bad day. Do you need to come and cry in my room?” There’s a lot of that, a lot of people checking up on each other, before school, afterschool, coming in to chat. Like a lot of, a lot of that. Yeah. And so, it really feels like people have got your back.

Across these perspectives is a shared sense that staff members can count on each other for both emotional and pragmatic support (e.g., help with student discipline, lesson plans, resources, information, and feedback). Further, Tracy suggested that she has benefited from the *active welcoming* practices of other teachers—which creates a sense that they are approachable and always willing to help. Both Roberta and Vanessa highlight how staff members will often reach out and “check in” on each other; while Vanessa sometimes finds this intrusive, she nonetheless considers it an expression of care and an indicator that “people have got your back.” Hence, overall, Eaglecrest staff members regularly engage in *care and contribution work* to support each other, while also drawing upon their own school-based *relational web* to access their local stores of social capital.

The development of this *relational web* is, to some extent, facilitated by formal opportunities for connection, including “structured meeting times” (Vanessa) and “vertical groups” wherein teachers from different grades will collaboratively undertake professional learning activities. However, the majority of the *relational work* undertaken by staff members (to build and maintain their own *relational webs*) is done informally. As Roberta suggests,

You need an ally on staff. And I was told that when I first started here—that, “The most important thing you need is one ally and then that’s the person you go to when you’re having bad days, good days, or you need extra support.”

There’s always, there’s always one or two people—one or two teachers on staff—that you connect up with and you just start getting that relationship with them, you can talk with them. There’s just some people on staff that you just have the same interests as. You have, you know, you start spending time together. You connect up in the mornings before school starts and you chat and you chat at lunch times. If you need that time, then you make that time. Yeah. Everyone has preps, cause everyone will have preps and stuff like that.

Hence, staff members commonly undertake this *relational work* informally—both individually and on their own time (which, as Roberta suggests, means that one has to “make that time” either within or outside of regarding work hours).

Participants also noted that these *relational webs* are also supported by collectively held expectations (e.g., of student behaviour) and a shared sense of deep commitment to students, staff, and the school as a whole. As Vanessa suggests,

Another thing that is working I think is the staff. The staff—all of the people that are here seem to want to be here. And if they don't, there's not a lot of apathy. There's a lot of passionate, passionate and involved—to the point of being over-involved—people. I mean, I think we all have a lot of work to do and we're all aware of how much work we have to do—but people are committed. And people are committed to helping each other as well because the job isn't easy.

This sense of deep commitment, while often understood as an overall indicator of a *good teacher*, was often conceptualized as being particularly important within the Eaglecrest community because of the demands placed upon staff and the overall weight of the challenges that they encounter. As Bryce suggests,

I think the staff that are here wanna be here. I think that—I don't think there's too much ignorance going on. I think that people know what they're getting into when they get to the school. Like, the school, it's got a reputation.

Margaret reiterates the notion that staff members must both “know what they're getting into” and “want” to work in this community, stating that Eaglecrest personnel,

Want to be here, they want to make a difference in these kids' lives, you know? But there's very few teachers—staff—over the years that I took a dislike to. Some come and I'm like, “Hmmm. I don't know if you're going to fit in well here.” Sometimes they don't and then sometimes they do. As long as they're smart enough to know, if they don't fit, to take the opportunity [to transfer] if it comes.

My personal feeling has always been: if you choose to teach or work in the inner city, you're special-right from the get-go. And I've seen it over the years where teachers have been placed here because, you know, they've been declared surplus. And it never works. You have to want to be here.

Across these perspectives is a shared sense that—to be effective in their work—Eaglecrest staff members must be intrinsically motivated to take on the additional challenges and demands necessitated by the characteristics of the student body and community (which mean spending time and energy that will not be formally recognized or compensated for). One must go *above and beyond* to provide the necessary *care and contribution work* and *relational work* to bond

with students, foster the process of *affective linking*, support other colleagues, and maintain one's own *relational web*. Participants noted various sources of motivation that they draw upon, including: the affective connections they feel for students and each other (often defined as care and love); their affective connection to Eaglecrest itself (which is framed as a special place characterized by care and belonging)²⁰¹; their sense that their work at Eaglecrest contributes to their own personal missions (e.g., providing a means through which they can “give back” to others, the community, and Canada as a whole)²⁰²; the emotional rewards and “payback of the relationships” (Bryce) they receive when they are able to successfully bond with students; and daily victors and joys—such as “seeing some of those light bulbs go off in heads” (Tracy); “calm” days (Margaret) without any “major meltdowns” (Bryce); and days when “kids are really excited and happy” (Roberta). In addition, many participants linked their professional and personal identities, suggesting that their work at Eaglecrest is an indication of not only their professional competence, but also their personal work ethic, dedication to others, and personal resilience.²⁰³ Hence, their position and experiences at Eaglecrest become resources that they draw upon when undertaking their own *narrative and identity work* (using it to develop a positive self-concept).

Perhaps, then, it is unsurprising that there was so little critique of either the school or educator practices—to challenge these elements of education is to challenge one's own sense of self and undermine the institutional structures and relations of power which grant them access to these narrative resources. Actually, while participants identified numerous school-related factors which impeded the effectiveness of their own work, they consistently framed these as impositions from external parties (the provincial government, the school board, etc.). These factors included: insufficient funding for students with additional learning needs (which Margaret stated was due to the school division's emphasis on “the bottom line” rather than the needs of students); policy barriers (which impact an educator's capacity to respond to students and caregivers); insufficient staffing numbers and large class sizes (which leads to burnout and

²⁰¹ For example, Vanessa suggested that “this school as something has something, it has something special that kind of pulls people in.” Margaret also defined Eaglecrest as a special place, stating, “it's not something you can put your finger on, it's just a whole bunch of things coming together, you know, people, the kids, the environment.” She further noted that when she first walked into the school, she “know I belonged here.”

²⁰² For example, Vanessa stated, “I feel like I'm kind of living out what I'm supposed to be doing and giving back.”

²⁰³ Which Margaret defined as the ability to, “go home and pick themselves up” following a “day from hell” then coming back “for another day and hop[ing] for something better.”

high rates of turnover²⁰⁴ that, subsequently, destabilize relationships between teachers and students impair the overall *relational web* upon which staff members depend); the common practice of suddenly shifting school administrators to other schools and/or board positions without their input or consent (which disrupts school planning, impairs continuity, and creates general instability); the use of enrolment-based funding formulae which effectively pit schools in competition with each other for resources; complex funding application processes which require significant time and skill to complete and that limit the types of programming and supports a school can provide; the physical design of schools and overall space limitations (which result in physical set-ups which restrict student movement and limit the types of pedagogical methods a teacher can employ)²⁰⁵ and a lack of alternative learning spaces (e.g., quiet spaces where smaller groups of students can work); school board and provincially mandated assessment and student tracking practices which are seen as both ineffective and burdensome; professional development requirements that do not actually meet the interests or learning needs to teachers; and the complexity of the processes teachers must work through in order to access support from (also under-resourced and over-burdened) consultants, social workers, and other specialists (which some staff members suggested requires more time and energy than dealing with issues by themselves).

In addition, some participants argued that teacher training is too heavily focused on theoretical concepts and offers too little practical experience—which leaves them inadequately prepared for the complexities of the job. Other staff members identified the complex *navigational work* that they undertake in order to learn about and work within this complex bureaucratic system. On top of this is the additional on-the-job (often unsupported) learning that they must undertake in order to figure out the (often changing) curriculum as well as the various temporary (“flavour of the month”) initiatives implemented by external parties, to deepen their understanding of relevant issues (such as student mental health), to develop their own effective teaching and classroom management practices, and to improve their capacity to develop relationships with students and families.

²⁰⁴ Some of this turnover is not preventable (e.g., due to maternity leaves and retirement). However, these additional factors make turnover more common within schools that already struggle to maintain connections with students and families.

²⁰⁵ For example, one of the junior high classrooms at Eaglecrest has fixed counter-top style seating which impedes groupwork and other forms of participatory learning.

These various policies and practices, participants suggested, reflected an underlying dynamic wherein comparably powerful parties—who determine the amount and availability of resources and dictate bureaucratic demands—are completely disconnected from the on-the-ground realities of school life (both generally, and within Eaglecrest specifically). These higher-power parties are, consequently completely out-of-touch with the needs of those working within schools and, as a result, not only fail to provide accessible and relevant supports, but actually create additional barriers which impede the work of staff members. Consider, for example, how Tracy frames board-mandated student assessment practices:

I could go on a huge rant. The division is always—again I’m a newer teacher so I don’t know how it was previously—but I feel that they’re always giving you more paperwork to do. And, as a teacher, there’s already no time. So, to fill out these bubble sheets and these assessment sheets for every subject—it’s just a little bit ridiculous. And you fill out this bubble sheet thing and then you have to add it on the computer, input it on the computer. This bubble sheet goes to the next teacher which—you know what? I don’t think anyone looks at them, personally I don’t. So, I don’t know what teacher looks at them or, to be honest, cares that much—because it doesn’t affect them. For myself, I do my own assessments on top of that.

Oh, I hate them with a passion. So much. And I don’t know if it’s like that in all divisions or if it’s just ours. But I just—these assessments, they just take way too much time. And it’s funny cause all the consultants they say, “Oh they shouldn’t take that much time, you just, you know, do it during the class time when they’re doing other activities.” And it’s like, “Well, no. You have to have your brain, your mindset on that—you have to pull the student out of class.”

And then they make you go to these PDs [professional development days] about how to DO these assessments and, to me, if that money could have just been—take all those assessments, take all those PD days that you’re giving teachers, let teachers maybe pick what they want to do, what they’d be more passionate about teaching.

Instead of doing these assessments that probably a lot of teachers make up, I’ll be honest. They [teachers] don’t have time to sit down with every student to see if they can count to a hundred.

Tracy’s comments—which largely revolve around the specific assessment practices used to track a student’s progression through the Winnipeg School Division’s Mathematics Pathway (which is described and visually depicted on page 239)—exemplify the frustration expressed by many staff members regarding these externally-mandated assessments. These are seen as the product of external actors (school division personnel and consultants) who have absolutely no sense of how teachers monitor student progress or managing their classes. These assessments are seen as unnecessary burdens that “just take way too much time,” actively diverting the teacher’s energy and focus away from activities that actually contribute to student learning (e.g., the design of

engaging pedagogical activities and relationship building). Further, these assessments are seen as poorly designed and inherently inefficient (to the point of being “ridiculous”) as well as inaccurate and inherently worthless (given that staff may simply “make up” results and discard the records provided by previous teachers). These and other standardized methods of assessment are generally framed as a massive waste of time, energy, money, and other resources.

Furthermore, staff felt that the outcomes of these assessment practices often failed to reflect the complex reality and challenges faced by communities like Eaglecrest and, in fact, actually further marginalize and stereotype local populations. Reflecting upon past engagements with teachers at other schools, Bryce suggests the results of assessments are often used to cast certain communities, divisions, schools, and teachers as inherently “worse” than others, stating,

They say, “Oh, the division here, the inner city, the Winnipeg School Division has the lowest academics.” It’s like, no shit! Look at the area! They also have the highest amount of poverty. Put those two things together. Other teachers don’t have to come to school and check if a kid has had enough sleep or, like, if they were even sleeping at home, you know? These things, it’s—I get frustrated sometimes when I hear, you know, these teachers in other schools. And it’s not that it’s a bad thing that they’re in a school that’s more—that doesn’t deal with that.

Underlying Bryce’s comments is the sense that these presumably objective methods of measuring student progress fail to account for differences in socioeconomic status and other factors which influence the efforts of both students and teachers—making them inherently inaccurate representations of either student capacity or teacher dedication. However, these are used to *mark* schools and communities in ways that correspond with preexisting social perceptions—which reflect both classist and racist assumptions.²⁰⁶ Later on in our conversation, Bryce further suggested that much of the work he does within the classroom is not readily recognized as legitimate pedagogical practice. He explains,

This afternoon we did these games for forty-five minutes—team-building activities where they’re just, I just put them in different groups to work with different people in the classroom and played games for forty-five minutes. We call it team building. We talk about how they can—what skills they’re learning from this. It’s not just games. But some teachers could see it as, “Oh they’re just fooling around,” you know? “There’s no real teaching going on there.” The division could see it as, tell me that I’m failing. I should be teaching social studies during that period, you know? I should be teaching science or math. But I’m not, so, I’m not meeting that expectation.

²⁰⁶ Which further feeds into pre-existing assumptions about the school and community. For example, Margaret stated that people often ask her if she is “scared” working at Eaglecrest—a question which she quickly counters with, “Seriously? Do you hear yourself? Like, why don’t you come and visit. You’ll see it’s a fabulous place to be.”

This highlights the extent to which *relational work* and *care work* are externalized and rendered invisible and/or illegitimate within—what is perhaps most accurately described as—the broader *educational technocracy*. Indeed, even Bryce himself appears compelled to justify his pedagogical methods, emphasizing that “it’s not just games.”

Hence, while the on-the-ground demands placed upon staff members are significant and very diverse, the only work that is systemically valued is that which converts readily into measurable student outcomes—that is easy to translate into a communicable, trackable, and comparable form. Work that is not so easily *translatable* consequently becomes illegible and is, therefore, neither recognized, supported, nor compensated for. Hence, the work that staff members widely believe is foundational to student success (that is, *relational* and *care work*) as well as the costs incurred by those who undertake this labour (e.g., in terms of time, energy, and money²⁰⁷) is *externalized*. These costs are offloaded onto individual educators/staff members who are chided as unprofessional or uncaring when they can no longer (or are no longer willing to) provide this work or incur these costs—which, arguably, can be understood as a form of *identity hurt*. Arguably, the entire operation of the school system (this *educational technocracy*) is reliant upon this unpaid, unrecognized, unsupported, and often overtly delegitimized work.

These various externally imposed impediments to educator work—which are manufactured by the operations of an out-of-touch educational technocracy—intersect with the additional challenges that educators face on a day-to-day basis. This includes various micro-barriers and minor inconveniences (e.g., outdated and unreliable technology, school maintenance issues, locked doors, informal school rules, and rainy days) as well as both minor and major disruptions and crises (re-scheduled meetings, late pizza lunches, scraped knees, bloody noses, broken windows, missing shoes, inter-student conflict, miscommunication, teacher absences, missed prep periods, school lockdowns, etc.). School staff generally live their professional lives moment-by-moment, with limited opportunities to rest or reflect. While, arguably, this characterizes the lives of most educators, at Eaglecrest these challenges appear to be particularly frequent and intense. Further, on top of this daily complexity are the heavy demands placed upon these teachers to go *above and beyond* for their students—primarily because they are structurally

²⁰⁷ Staff members often bought school supplies, food, and other resources with their own money. Further, the afterschool time they dedicate to their work is unpaid.

positioned as the representative of the broader education system and discursively framed as all that stands between these young people and school failure.

Hence, while this positioning of educators as both authorities and saviours does (as mentioned in chapter six) serve to justify and maintain oppressive (adultist, racist, classist, and colonial) relations of power—and while it is often a framing commonly employed by staff members themselves to conceptualize their own identities—it is *also* a means through which the educational technocracy maintains biopolitical control over its exploited employees. That is, there is a mythical notion and norm of *teacherhood* wherein a *good worker-teacher* is defined as both a competent technocrat (a “professional”) and a self-sacrificing martyr (a “caregiver”) who is *happy* to be paid back with little more than children’s love (which, obviously, also dehumanizes and exploits young people as well). Evidence of an educator’s supposed “failure” is often attributed to either their lack of capacity, unprofessionalism, or a failure to care which, within the neoliberal paradigm of education reform, is commonly addressed by an intensification of surveillance and biopolitical control through the use of various *technologies of regulation* (mandated teacher training program, intensified student assessment regimes, etc.). This mythical norm of *teacherhood* and the discursively constructed *good worker-teacher* subjectivity can, consequently, be read as an element of biopolitical control and governmentality. It is a form of cultural and epistemic violence—which is internalized by individuals because of its affective currency and usefulness in developing a positive self-concept—which mystifies experiences and phenomenon that could call the underlying landscape (the operations of structural violence and the educational technocracy) into question.

The cumulative impact of these barriers, stressors, and biopolitical control mechanisms manifests at the level of the everyday, limiting the time and energy which staff members can direct toward engaging with students. Indeed, across the board staff consistently identified that the primary challenge they face in their work is a lack of *time*—time to spend getting to know students on-on-one, time to develop and implement classroom strategies which foster a sense of community, time to develop and prepare engaging learning activities, time to communicate with caregivers, time to connect with colleagues, time to reflect and recover, time to deal effectively and appropriately with disciplinary issues, and time to simply laugh and enjoy being with young people and peers. Hence, as with students, Eaglecrest staff members are under a constant *pressure to perform*—to meet not only the personal and academic needs of students, but also the

distracting demands of an educational technocracy guided by a neoliberal paradigm which externalizes all forms of work—and all kinds of costs—that are not easily quantified or that, if acknowledged, might reveal the exploitative nature of the system. Indeed, I argue, the continuance of the educational technocracy is largely dependent upon the invisible labour of those who work within it—as well as its capacity to offload costs onto these disempowered actors (which, I suggest, include school staff, caregivers, and students).

In this respect, the educational technocracy can be understood as a “greedy institution” which employs various mechanisms to demand ever-increasing contributions (Sullivan, 2013; Coser, 1974). These demands are ever-increasing because processes of neoliberal education reform inherently and inevitable seek to erode the capacity of public institutions by reducing governmental investment and centralizing control (which creates greater distance and larger power differentials between bureaucratic authorities and on-the-ground practitioners). Further, even though the capacity of the system is continually eroded, it is still expected to function (and, indeed, those working “on the ground” are compelled to keep the system in operation because it is conceptualized as the only legitimate pathway for both helping young people and addressing social inequality). Consequently, individuals—in order to keep this eroding system in operation—are both expected and compelled to do the work and put in the time, resources, and energies which have been intentionally drained from the system through neoliberal reform. As the system is further eroded, these demands increase. Further, at the same time, the educational technocracy places intensified legibility and accountability demands upon those individuals (which, again, including school staff, caregivers, and students) who are increasingly tasked with keeping the system afloat. Failure, therefore, is framed as being caused by the deficits of individuals, rather than as the product of the intentional erosion of the education system by powerful actors who prioritize economic growth and the freedom of the market over the welfare of people and communities.

However, time and personal energy are both limited resources and, at some point, individuals must make choices and set boundaries in order to prevent their own erosion. For school staff, this often means triaging their concerns and being forced to make *bad choices* which often result in (to use the terminology of participants) both short- and long-term “failure.” Consider, for example, the following excerpts:

TRACY [*when describing what advice she would give to substitute teachers*]: I would say just survive the day. Like, cause, you know, “Do what you have to do. Don’t pick every single battle that you have because you’ll never get any teaching done.” If you know, “Johnny” is in the corner and you’ve tried for ten minutes to convince him or to engage him and he’s still not, you know—if it was my opinion—I would say just leave him, let him be. Teach the other kids and then hopefully find a time later to catch him up or get him engaged in the activity.

BRYCE: I’ll have a kid that’s just unable to do anything and they need to just fall asleep or—. I had a student yesterday who got really angry and started kind of pushing things around and I just had him sit down—“It’s okay, just, just relax.” And he sat there and wouldn’t do anything. I was trying to get him to do some stuff but he just refused. Eventually he just fell asleep for the last twenty minutes of the day. Is he meeting any curriculum standpoints? No. Did he need a nap, probably, yeah?

There’s days where I’ve kids that do absolutely no work and it can be hard to measure up to the standards of the school division—of what we’re expected to do, you know? We have kids coming in that are in grade five but are at a kindergarten/grade one level. They show up to school half the time and you have lessons where you’re talking and you look at them and you *know* they’re not registering a single thing that you’re saying. And it’s, it’s tough, it’s tough to continue on watching. You experience that and you feel that and then you just have to try to keep pushing through, you know?

And on a regular basis you feel like you’re failing. It’s a, it’s a constant uphill battle if you want to look at it in that regard. There’s days, you know, where I think I have had a great week and then all of the sudden I look back and it’s like, “Wow, they didn’t do enough of this” or, “Actually we really only learned one math skill or [*pause*] we should have been more efficient with this.” And all the should’ve, could’ve, would’ve things start to pop up in your head.

ROBERTA: Our kids are pretty good attenders. We’ve got a couple that, um, sometimes their attendance is not as good so, um, you know, that could be a challenge in itself. When you have eight students and you’re missing two, it’s like, do you want to go ahead or do you not? I do a reading program and there’s days I’m supposed to have seventeen students and I’ve got only ten. So that’s a real challenge. Not all the kids are here. Do you just say to heck with it and go on? Or do you wait one more day, you know?

There’s been students in the past where, you know, we’ve [*pause*] things haven’t quite gone the way that we had hoped they would have gone. They never stuck with us through grade eight cause there were so many outside factors. And you kind of feel like you failed. You know, it’s kind of hard—you know they don’t [*pause, holding back tears*—touchy, it’s a touchy subject.

Each of these excerpts tells a story of an educator *noticing* the struggles of a student, *recognizing* what kinds of actions that (from their perspective²⁰⁸) need to be taken, and being *affectively*

²⁰⁸ They are, overwhelming, forced to make these choices alone and often in-the-moment. There is simply no time or opportunities for deeper information gathering, collaboration, analysis, and reflection.

compelled to act while—at the same time—being placed in a position wherein their *capacity to act* is circumscribed. They find themselves “picking battles,” “pushing through” and “going on” when they *know* this will have negative repercussions for some students—that as an educator you will, in some respect, *fail*. Further, even if one does make (what they perceive to be) the best possible choice in a given situation you may still be seen as “failing” because you may not be meeting the expectations set by the curriculum or education system. Hence, for these staff members, failure is largely inevitable, partly because of the “outside factors” which impact a student’s life, but also because those who are tasked with helping students deal with, “rise above,” and “overcome” these challenges are, themselves, denied the time, support, and resources required to do so. Hence, school staff are not just dealing with a lack of time; rather, their time (and their energy) is being aggressively and intentionally manipulated, exploited, and externalized—the creation of these *time deficits* not only impact educators, but—by limiting their capacity to support students—actually intensifies the vulnerability and harm experienced by young people directly. The manipulation of time and creation of time deficits, is, therefore an outcome of neoliberalism, a mechanism of biopolitical control, and a means through which structural violence manifests at the everyday level. Hence, while these staff members are comparably powerful actors within the context of student-teacher and caregiver-teacher relationships, within the overall educational technocracy they are themselves a marginalized, disempowered, and exploited actor—bearing all of the responsibility, but holding none of the systemic power and control.

These excerpts also suggest that failure is not only inevitable, but also painful. For some, this took the form of *identity hurt* wherein staff members questioned their own professional competencies and/or struggled to maintain a positive self-concept while being discursively positioned as a failure due to their inability to meet contradictory (externally and self-imposed) expectations. For example, Bryce explained that he initially conceptualized teachers who did not go *above and beyond* as “lazy,” stating,

I saw a couple of people, a couple of teachers that I thought—when I first started teaching—that I thought were just lazy teachers. But I realized that, well, they’re just not—they’re not fighting that, this huge battle to get—because it’s not, it’s not worth the amount of energy and stress that they’ll put into something over one little thing, you know? So, like, it’s hard. I don’t really want to give examples or anything, but knowing how to be efficient and take care of yourself [is important] as well, you know?

This suggests that staff members who are seen as not adequately embodying the mythical norm of the *good worker-teacher* may be subjected to judgement—not only by external parties and students, but also their own colleagues. They are, consequently, wary of the judgement of others, who may frame their actions as indicative of a *failure to care*, unprofessionalism, and/or *misdirected affect* (e.g., as laziness)—when, in fact, they are simply seeking to set limits on the amount of energy they donate to and stress they absorb from the educational technocracy. Regardless, staff members often have to establish these boundaries so as to maintain themselves and to make space for other life priorities (e.g., staff members may reduce their level of commitment when they begin having their own children).

Given this constant pressure to perform and wariness of judgement, it is perhaps unsurprising that many participants also described experiences of corporeal hurt, which manifested as the stress, anxiety, illness, and burnout that comes from responding to the *pressure to perform* and carrying the weight of affective commitments. Margaret, for example, described her own experience thusly,

You have to think about yourself too. You have to think of your own wellness and your own mental health and that's something that I really had to—[pause] I think I had been here about two and half years and I got really sick—like, emotionally sick—and I was off work for about three months. And so, that was a learning thing for me—that I had to step back and I had to, umm, not let it consume me the way it did. But it is hard not to. It's hard not to—to care. Like we're human beings, you know?

We had a staff member here once who thought I was heartless and I said, “I’m not heartless.” I said, “I’ve just be here so long that I’ve learned that you have to step back.” I said, “Because it will eat you alive.” And I’m not privy to the worst stuff—I’m not and I don’t want to be.

In this instance, Margaret describes the costs she incurred to her own physical and mental wellbeing. She has since learned to “step back”—to decrease the amount of time and energy she devotes to her work while also distancing herself emotionally from students. While she considers this boundary setting necessary, she also indicates that it requires a certain amount of affective disciplining; stepping back emotionally, she suggests, takes effort because it necessitates the suppression of the natural human drive to connect—that is, “it’s hard not to care.” In addition, this emotional distancing has also left her vulnerable to judgement, with one staff member calling her “heartless.” In a similar vein, Vanessa noted the importance of taking the time to “recover and process” while Bryce stated that, sometimes, you need to force yourself to stop

working even though it means you will not be prepared for the next school day; specifically, he stated,

Sometimes you have to be able to let it go and say, “Okay, I’m done for the day, it’s five o’clock, I’m going to go home.” I don’t have the rest of the week planned though. I don’t have even tomorrow all planned out. I got to be able to go home for myself and to have some time on my own.

Hence, in order to sustain themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally, educators must learn how to step back and separate themselves from both their work and the students they work with. Undertaking this necessary *self-care work*, however, comes at a cost—you may be judged by others, fail to meet your own expectations, and leave yourself unprepared. In addition, this stepping back also requires a certain amount of affective disciplining, wherein you must force yourself to “let it go,” to constrain one’s own inner drive to care for others, and intentionally avoid learning about some of the challenges students’ face (“I’m not privy to the worst stuff—I’m not and I don’t want to be”).

Participants also discussed the *relational hurt, care and contribution hurt*, and “dehumanized loss” (Hardy and Laszloffy, 2005) that they regularly experience. This includes, for example, Roberta’s sense of loss over a student who “never stuck with us through grade eight” and for whom “things haven’t quite gone the way that we had hoped”—indeed, simply discussing this issue led to an emotional reaction which required a pause in our interview. To deal with these situations Roberta stresses the need for, “separation” and reminding oneself that “you can’t save them all.” Margaret also shared a story of experience that continues to carry significant emotional weight:

I think for me, learning to compartmentalize when I came here was hard. I hadn’t been here very long before I had encountered this little girl in kindergarten who use to come in and say, “Hello.” And she sat on my knee—and it was wintertime—and, um, she said something like, “Do you want to see my mosquito bites?” I’m like, “Your mosquito bites?” And I’m like, “Okay.” And she pulled up her shirt and, of course, dumb WASP [White Anglo-Saxon protestant] woman that I was, I didn’t really understand what I was looking at.

Well, they were cigarette burns. So, CFS [Child and Family Services] was called and they came and got her. And I never, ever knew what happened to her. And that really [pause] it’s [long pause] stuff like that stays with you.

The manner in which Margaret frames this *story of experience* suggests that part of what made it so impactful—and, I argue, part of what makes this an example of dehumanized loss—is the fact

that the outcome of this exchange is unknown—she “never, ever knew what happened” to the child she spoke with as she was quickly apprehended by child welfare services—thereby being placed in a system that (as Cassandra’s story indicates) often leaves young people isolated and vulnerable. During my time at Eaglecrest there were numerous examples of students suddenly being removed from the school—sometimes because their family moved to another part of the city, but often due to CFS apprehensions. Staff members were rarely provided with information about these former students and, overall, were expected to move on with their work and focus upon those who were still present. These can, therefore, be classified examples of “dehumanized loss” because they generally go “unacknowledged, unmourned, and therefore unhealed” (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2005, p. 91).

Care and relational hurt was also caused by the persistent experience of being placed in a position wherein one *notices* and *cares about* a student’s needs, but is not capable of effectively *acting upon this care* (because the challenges are too great and/or beyond the scope of one’s work/control or because one is being pulled in too many directions or otherwise lacks the capacity to engage). For example, consider Bryce and Tracy’s comments in the excerpts below:

BRYCE: I think sometimes it’s just separating, you’ve got to separate yourself from it, from their lives. So, as long as they’re coming in happy it’s easy. But when you get them where you know there’s stuff going on at home and there’s nothing you can do about it—?

I think the biggest, one of the biggest challenges would be to stay, stay grounded and stay, um, to keep reminding myself of why I’m doing this job—of what I need to do in order to be there for these kids, you know? And keeping my own sanity is really important. I felt that every year I’ve been mentally better and better. I actually feel it’s been getting better. I’m not getting more and more burned out, I’m actually being more efficient. I’m staying, you know, I’m able to go to the gym and stuff and play sports.

I’ve said to myself that if I go home every day stressed and stuff like that this isn’t a job that I want to do. That doesn’t mean that there’s not stressful days and stressful time periods but, um, ultimately this just has to be something I enjoy.

And to learn all the tools, or to learn tools along the way—cause you’re never going to know everything, you’re never going to be able to fix every kid. You’ll never be able to win every battle that you have. It’s just kind of the nature of it. You’re going to lose sometimes. But learning how to just, to keep going, maintain a passion and, you know, do the best job you can.

TRACY: I don’t know how to describe it, it’s like a loving relationship. You do learn, you love these kids. You would do a lot for them.

However, I do—I need to almost distance myself because of a lot of the trauma and things that these students go through, it’s hard as a teacher because you feel for them. So, it’s—I don’t know, I have to kind of, I guess I have a line. Like when I first started working with kids I, you know, if a kid didn’t show up with shoes I would buy him some shoes. Or, I would really be worried about them. But then, after you buy, you know, ten pairs of shoes [*pause*—like you can’t [*pause*] you *can’t*, right?

So you kind of have to realize, you have to draw the line I guess. Or, kind of distance a little bit and just do what you can. So when I go home after work, trying not to think about the things that happened in the class or, you know, “What’s little Billy or Joey doing tonight?” You know? Trying not to think about that. So really, I mean, “turning it off,” I guess you could say? So, that would be my hardest thing.

And I try to remind myself, “Well it is just a job at the end of the day.” As much as I care about the people and care about the kids I—it’s not my total life. To try not to let it take over my life. That would be the biggest challenge I suppose.

Common across these statements are efforts to create *emotional/affective distance* between oneself and students—a strategy referred to as “stepping back,” “separating,” “compartmentalizing,” “distancing oneself,” “turning it off,” and “drawing a line.”²⁰⁹ This occurs during times when an individual is directly confronted by the inherent contradiction embedded in the demands of the *good worker-teacher* subjectivity—while one is compelled to care, one is limited by one’s capacity to act upon that care. Consequently, to maintain one’s own personal integrity, one must learn to regulate and control the extent of one’s affective investments. In essence, one is expected to care enough to keep the system in operation, but is actively prevented from caring enough—and acting enough upon that care—to undertake more robust actions that may undermine existing systems of inequality. The end result is failure and a sense of loss—which are externalized costs that individual educators are expected to bear. Of course, while it is important to highlight this, one must not also forget that the costs carried by (often comparably privileged) educators generally pale in comparison to those incurred by young people themselves.

Community-based organization representatives (CBOs):

As discussed in chapter six, there was a fair amount of variation amongst the perspectives shared by CBO representatives. This was also indicative of how they attributed the causes of

²⁰⁹ The use of humour was also identified as a common coping strategy. Roberta suggested that, “some days you just gotta laugh, because otherwise you’re gonna cry” while Margaret stated, we always laugh—you have to. You can’t take yourself too seriously and, I mean, God knows I’m inappropriate more than once a day.”

school stuff and failure, although there was a general tendency for this set of participants to centralize the role of systemic factors, including the education system itself. George, for example, emphasized the impact of individual choice and the extent to which “bad choices” accumulate over time. However, he also notes that these choices generally stem from the “cards they’ve been dealt” in life. Overall, these participants identified a host of factors which may impact the capacity of a young person to complete school, including: self-esteem issues; trauma experiences and mental health issues; an unmet need for belonging; struggles with addiction; negative foster care experiences; homelessness; gang-involvement; and a lack of access to food, clothing, and other basic necessities. However, there was a general consensus that—while it is important to keep this “list” of factors in mind, each student’s situation is unique. The complexity of each individual’s situation is highlighted by Sam, who also draws attention to the challenges that this poses for educators:

So there, there’s a bigger story to every kid. Instead of just your grades. And that’s really difficult when you have thirty kids in one class.

And there’s, half of them have significant issues at home or, you know—or a tenth of them are struggling with their sexuality. And there’s—and it’s easier now, today, but it’s still a struggle for lots of people to be able to address the issues of sexuality and gender, the gender issues.

When asked how this complexity should be addressed by those working in the education system, he suggests the need to think holistically, that is,

To look at a classroom, because it’s a huge classroom really, you don’t just have, you know, thirty kids or twenty kids in that classroom—you have *hundreds* of people that are connected to each individual youth in your classroom with you. Because that’s on their minds, right? That’s, that’s what weighing on their shoulders. That’s the stuff—Sure, marks are important—[*pause*] *maybe*. But there’s lots of kids that need—like if there’s something wrong at home or there’s a divorce or family conflict, there’s just *so many issues* that youth today have to deal with.

This perspective contrasts with Roberta’s insistence that, given a context of sufficient relational safety, young people can effectively leave those things which are “weighing on their shoulders” at the door. Instead, it is this host of factors—which includes the complex relational webs within which young people are embedded—that must be centralized in one’s analysis and one’s work. Responding to this, CBOs see their work as “filling gaps” in services, spaces, and opportunities that result in increased vulnerability for the young people and families that they work and, subsequently, lead to individuals “falling between the cracks” (Sam).

Following this, CBOs had a tendency to direct their attributions of failure not at young people, families, or communities but rather at the way professionals (including teachers) and various social systems respond to the needs of young people and their families. This includes the manner in which the overall structure and paradigm of formal schooling serves to mystify educational success, which Andrew suggests makes various institutions and pathways appear inaccessible—for example, emphasizing that, “the University of Manitoba, despite being just a bus ride away, is still a world away from our students here.” Other participants stressed the limitations of the existing school system, drawing attention to the lack of career-related program and life-skills training and overemphasis on (comparably irrelevant) “academic” subject matter or, conversely, a failure to help students develop the academic capacities they will need for post-secondary education.

Many also focused on micro-level interactions, suggesting that the concept of “dropping out” is an inaccurate way of conceptualizing the process by which a young person disconnects from the school system. It is more accurate, rather, to understand this as a process of being “pushed out” by factors within the system and “pulled out” by factors from without. Consider, for example, how Andrew perceives the experiences of the young people (primarily Indigenous youth) that his program supports:

You know we’re trying to keep them in school but a lot of times the school environment is very difficult for a lot of students. You’ve heard this term, I forget who the person who said, it’s the “push out” versus “drop out.” So a lot of students feel pushed out, feel disenfranchised, marginalized—“There’s no reason to be back in school, they don’t want me there.”

Nate identified a similar phenomenon in his work with newcomer youth:

From the youth that I speak with, like, they always say that school is their biggest, the biggest challenge when they first come here and are trying to adapt. Some of the guys that I spoke to said they were fifteen years old when they came here with a grade four education and they’re placed in grade nine. Right? And so, they didn’t know very much English at all and they’re sitting in a grade nine classroom and they got frustrated, right? They feel stupid. They get frustrated. They feel isolated. They become the target for bullying or mockery and so that creates, like, a frustration, like “Well why should I—why do I want to subject myself to this everyday when I can just skip school and go and hang out?”

Aly suggests that many of the youth she works with chose to drop out of school because of a lack of social and practical support:

Lots of times people have been leaving school because they're not feeling supported in the needs or the way that things are being taught to them.

Lots of, like I said, lots—like we deal with a lot of FASD or mental health or kids that have come from abusive situations—and they dropped out of school because they weren't feeling supported or they weren't being able, they weren't learning in the way that they needed to learn.

Across these perspectives is a sense that “dropping out” is better understood as a gradual process of disconnection that is, in essence, a logical response to a setting that is alienating, isolating, disempowering, and unresponsive (and wherein one is subjected to judgement and labelling). Some suggest that this process of disengagement may be slowed or prevented through the establishment of positive interpersonal relationships with between teachers and students, but that this is not a guarantee, particularly as this relationship building is hampered by a lack of time and resources.

These structural impediments are largely the result of policies and practices which prevent young people, caregivers, and teaching staff from accessing help. Deirdre, for example, emphasized the damage caused by waiting lists and other bureaucratic barriers to accessing services (e.g., complex paperwork and obtaining diagnoses from physicians). In fact, these participants generally suggest that the challenges faced by young people (as well as caregivers and school staff) are, effectively, *manufactured* by inconsistent policies, institutional silos, and other systemic forces. At the root of these structural issues is the devaluation of specific populations, including Indigenous peoples, newcomers, persons who are impacted by economic inequality, and youth more generally. Sam, for example, suggested that the challenges faced by Indigenous youth—and which hinder his own organization's capacity to support young people—were directly attributed to systematic racism and a related reluctance to devote social resources toward meeting needs and ensuring equity, he states:

Racism is the big one here because we're an Aboriginal organization. On a bigger scale racism is a huge issue and it's systemic, like it's just soooo engrained in our society about how *little value* there is by the people in power for Aboriginal issues and Aboriginal people.

'Cause it's, it's like, “Hmm—yeah sort it out. It's your issue. It's your problem. You figure it out.” And it's not. Again, it's not that holistic thing, where it's not looking at it as, “This is our problem too.” It's, “That's just your problem and you people, this is just—you fix it. You figure it out.” So I think that's a big issue.

He later connected this systemic, racialized devaluation to the sudden cancellation of support for a group home facility that left over forty youth with “nowhere to go”:

Politics is part of it, right? And the political silos, right? Like that’s—and that’s what it is. Funding is an issue always. It’s always an issue, nobody wants to put money into it because it’s not their problem. So that’s always—that always trickles down to us.

This example of these forty-four kids who were, their program ended or their whatever their residential care ended, for whatever reason. There’s forty-four kids without some place to live, just overnight—nowhere for them to go. And nobody wants to take on the homeless kids, like nobody wants to take on and put very much money into it. Cause if we put too much money into it then there’s going to be public backlash, right? If we don’t put enough money into it, we just wasted money with something that didn’t end up with any results.

So there’s this bureaucratic politicking that always goes on. So that’s a problem. How it trickles down of course is with service. That’s the basic, simple thing is that it trickles down—Yep. [*pause*] *Frustrating*—And there’s *so* many kids out there that need some help.

Other participants reiterated this critique of institutional silos and politically motivated funding practices, often citing the challenges that they face funding their own organizations alongside the more general impact that this manifestation of structural violence has on the lived experiences of young people. While Sam centralizes how racism underlies these systemic failings, other focused upon the social and discursive marginalization of newcomers, street-affected populations, inner city populations, and children/youth as a whole.

Thus, in addition to seeking to address these systematic failings by working to meet the various needs of young people, these organizations also have to contend with similar systemic issues that hamper their own work (often leading to the closure of programs, the loss of staff, an inordinate amount of time and energy being spend acquiring funding sources, etc.). These are challenges that, George suggests, have intensified considerably over the past decade, he argues that:

Now we’re in an era where there’s logic models and incomes and outcomes and— [*laughs*] exports—and it’s just a whole different game.

We get [our funding] through the United Way. And then a little through Winnipeg Foundation and then we’ve got a Community Services grant this year. But that requires that you go and sell your soul for a couple of hours at a Bingo. [*sighs*] Oh, it’s just so painful.

And then, you know, you can get small grants and picking up things, the “flavours of the month” grants.

And more and more now with corporate ones they're wanting to get—well, in non-profits it begins to further this “click on kids” where now it's not the merit of your grant proposal, it's how many “likes” you can get on the MTS website, right? And we got \$5000 from MTS and we put their logos on our t-shirts and then our staff was expected to keep track of how many people saw the MTS logo on the kid's t-shirts

This provides indication that, in addition to racism, classism, and other forms of social marginalization, the capacity of these organizations to provide services is being increasingly impacted by the adherence of funders (including governmental bodies) to a technocratic, neoliberal paradigm. Consequently, to deal with these challenges while still fulfilling their organizational mission, these community actors also have to undertake various forms of work and be subjected to different forms of hurt that are often rendered illegible and externalized. This includes navigational work (e.g., navigating bureaucracies and the expectations of funders); navigational hurt (the extent to which meeting the demands of external authorities actively detracts from the time, energy, and resources they are able to devote to working with young people); relational work (vital efforts to build relational webs between young people, families, schools, and other parties); and relational hurt (the costs incurred by the fact that relational work is generally not recognized by funders or other external parties and, therefore, neither supported nor compensated for). Further, as with school staff participants, CBOs stress that the success of their work also depends upon the formation of interpersonal relationships with young people, families, school personnel, and communities. This vital work, however, is not recognized by nor supported by funders.

7.4 Summary: Sketching out the landscape

A comparison of the adult participant clusters suggest that the perspectives and *stories about success and failure* shared by adult participants largely resonated with those offered by the young people, with considerable emphasis being placed upon the characteristics of individuals (students, caregivers, and teachers) as well as the community. Generally, these participants attributed a young person's inability to complete school as either a *failure of affect* (a failure to feel connected to and to value schooling) or a *failure of access* (not having the necessary material, informational, social, and other resources required to move through the schooling system or to develop the required capacities for doing so). Further a young person's *failure of affect and access* was often linked to the deficits of their family and the overall community

context. In response, caregivers sought to ensure their own child had both *proper affect* and *sufficient access* to resources; school staff sought to *engage the affect* of learners through the establishment of interpersonal relationships (through what I have termed *affective linking*); and CBOs sought to *provide access* to the resources which young people and families need while also working to establish interpersonal relationships (which, as was discussed by Andrew in chapter six, provides the means through which a CBO may foster the leadership and self-determination of young people through—to use his words—“relational influence”).

There were, however, notable distinctions between these clusters, with caregivers giving more consideration to the factors related to schools, school staff centralizing the role of teacher-student relationships, and community-based representatives emphasizing systemic factors and social discourses. Further, a double-reading of these perspectives, consideration of the *stories of experience* presented by these different participants, and comparison between the standpoints of adult and young participants highlighted additional structural and discursive features of the landscape and storyscape. This included the identification of various forms of work undertaken by participants as well as the hurt they often experience which doing so—including: navigational work and hurt; relational work and hurt; care and contribution work and hurt; resistance and micropolitical work and hurt; corporeal work and hurt; and narrative and identity work and hurt. Further, this helped to illuminate the operations of a broader *educational technocracy* and the impact of neoliberal education reform, which has increasingly demanded that those working in the education system (students, caregivers, and staff) devote greater time, energy, and resources to the maintenance of this system—even though both this work and the costs which these individuals incur will be rendered illegible and externalized, thereby denying these actors compensation, support, and recognition for their efforts.

Indeed, this work is often explicitly discursively delegitimized—particularly if it takes the form of *care work* or *resistance and micropolitical work*. This system of structural violence (this underlying landscape) is further justified through the production of various *mythical norms* of studenthood, parenthood, and teacherhood. These individuals are placed under a constant pressure to perform and manifest specific subjectivities (of a good worker-student, a good worker-parent, or a good worker-teacher). These subjectivities are often contradictory and serve to locate the responsibility for success and failure onto individuals, framing this failure as due to a lack of care or capacity which justifies the intensification of surveillance and biopolitical

control through the use of various *technologies of regulation*. Hence, these mythical norms can, consequently, be read as an element of biopolitical control and governmentality. These are forms of cultural and epistemic violence—which are internalized by individuals because they carry affective currency and are useful resources for developing one’s positive self-concept—which mystifies experiences and phenomenon that could call the underlying landscape (the operations of structural violence and the educational technocracy) into question.

CHAPTER EIGHT
CONCLUSIONS:
DE-STABILIZING AND DE-NATURALIZING THE MAP,
THE LANDSCAPE, AND THE STORYSCAPE

8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to reinscribe the perspectives of various local actors—young people, caregivers, school staff members, and CBO representatives—upon the hegemonic map used to explain differentiated educational attainment rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada. This contrapuntal approach (Said, 1994) was intended to destabilize this existing explanatory frame so as to provide insight into a broader “research puzzle” (Gustafsson & Hagström, 2018)—specifically, why statistical educational and social welfare gaps between these demographics continue to widen, despite overall improvements in schooling completion rates and the implementation of policy and programs that, at least rhetorically, are intended to decrease the relative disparity between groups. In an effort to manage the scope of this endeavor, I focused on middle-years students and key adult actors working within Winnipeg’s inner city. I sought to explore what these participants perceived and experienced from their situated vantage points on the educational landscape. In this concluding chapter, I outline how the findings detailed in this report—the various *stories about* and *stories of* identified—contribute toward this research objective. After discussing these overarching themes, I present some general thoughts regarding the implications of this study for further research and practice—both on the specific issue of educational inequality as well as the discipline of Peace and Conflicts Studies as a whole. This is followed by a short discussion of limitations, future research directions, and my closing thoughts.

8.2 Conceptualizing the vantage points

Essentially, this project explored five different vantage points: a *view from above* (that which is exemplified by the hegemonic map and the counter-stories presented by its key challengers) and four different *views from below* (one each from those positioned as children/youth/students, caregivers/parents, educators/school staff members, and community workers). Across these different vantage points is an evident tension between definitional *stories*

about education, success, and a good life and the comparatively messier *stories of* lived experience. Generally, the dominating *stories about* maintain their coherence by eliminating nuance and complexity, offering—in a manner which resonates with Scott’s (1999) description of “high modernism”—a means for discursively producing legible and (presumably) controllable subjects and processes. Effectively, these both provide and limit the available narrative resources—the frames and discursive repertoires—that can be employed to think about, articulate, and talk publicly about lived experience. In contrast, *stories of* commonly de-stabilize the presumed legitimacy and normalcy of *dominating stories about*, offering *counter-stories* that call axiomatic assumptions into question, often highlighting how they serve to maintain existing relations of power.

The view from above

The first vantage point—the *view from above*—is presented in chapter two. To conceptualize this vantage point, I drew from a wide assortment of scholarly literature, research reports, and policy documents. Exploration of this perspective indicates the existence of various *stories about education*—including those which narrate its general purpose and those which locate the causes of success and failure. Many of these stories are framed using one or more of the underlying logics identified in the reviewed resources²¹⁰ Underlying these logics are implied theories of change, including the presumption that the key to addressing “Indigenous issues” is to improve the situation of Indigenous individuals, rather than directly challenging structural relationships (the *school-to-work-to-wellbeing theory of change*). Further, schools are generally presumed to be safe, trusted, and apolitical sites that are primarily directed toward the serving the best interests of all students. Indicators that this is not a universally shared perspective are often framed as the result of low trust and disconnection between schools and Indigenous students/families—factors which, it is suggested, may be addressed through the “infusion” of

²¹⁰ These logics include: “closing gaps” and “unlocking potential”; indirectly addressing social welfare gaps; providing a channel and space for interventions meant to directly address challenges; growing economies and building human capital; exploiting the opportunity and preventing the threat of Indigenous population growth; fostering intercultural understanding; demonstrating institutional legitimacy through (largely rhetorical) adherence to normative standards and rights frameworks; and (to a comparatively limited degree) fostering Indigenous survival and self-determination.

Indigenous perspectives into school life and efforts to foster engagement through relationship building. These perspectives and forms of engagement, however, are largely circumscribed.²¹¹

Given the legitimacy granted schooling and the presumed “sacredness” of formal education, it is unsurprising that these *dominating stories about school* often relate to *theories of failure* which locate the causes of educational disparity not in the structural realm, but rather within individual Indigenous students, their families, their communities, and (to a lesser extent) teachers and school environments. As a consequence, these actors become the central targets of intervention strategies—which generally revolve around addressing structural issues by providing access to resources or seeking to change perceptions and values through engaging (and “re-orienting”) affect. All of these components form an overarching *paternalistic metanarrative of deficit* that largely obscures historical, political, and structural dynamics while positioning classrooms, schools, and professionals as the “cure” for (rather than the potential “cause” of) disengagement and dropout.

This metanarrative of deficit, while dominant, is still subject to challenge on several fronts. On one hand, statistical trends indicate that the policies and practices currently being employed have largely failed to address the relative disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. That is, while it appears that highschool completion rates have improved, this has not “closed gaps” in standardized testing results, “on-time” highschool graduation rates, post-secondary enrolment/completion rates, or social welfare indicators. In addition, an alternative *metanarrative of on-going colonization*—which is evident in a variety of counter-stories about school (commonly presented by Indigenous political organizations and scholars employing critical theory)—offers an alternative explanatory framework (often by drawing upon *stories of lived experience* told by local actors and communities). These counter-stories draw attention to: to the continuing process of Indigenous dispossession; the root causes of socioeconomic disparity; daily experiences of racism; the limitations of (and potential harm caused by) additive, culturalist approaches to inclusion; the impact of broader international educational norms and systems; and the overall manner in which schools—through both actions and omissions—may operate as sites of violence (and, consequently, why student disengagement and disruptive behaviours may, in fact, be manifestations of resistance). In some instances, this involves

²¹¹ For example, discussions of history frame colonialism as a dynamic of the distant past while parental engagement is limited to particular legitimated forms of participation.

drawing upon normative documents to levy a critique of Indigenous/(re-)settler state relationships and/or offering alternative conceptualizations of education itself.

Overall, it is these two *views from above* which have constituted the two general “maps” of the educational landscape. The first, dominant (hegemonic) map emphasizes and naturalizes the pathways linking schooling completion, employment, and personal wellbeing. The second, “counter-map” suggests that the provided pathways are neither natural nor equitable. Rather, the political, social, and economic mechanisms of the Canadian (re-)settler state position Indigenous students in ways that make them more vulnerable to a host of intersecting risk factors that impact schooling experiences—thereby compelling individuals to construct their own complex pathways to navigate a terrain that has been “landscaped” in ways which violate their rights and continues the colonial project of Indigenous assimilation, exploitation, and genocide.

Views from below: Young people

The various vantage points *from below* are presented across chapters five to eight, with the majority of attention being paid to the perspectives of the young participants. Chapter five introduced the central concepts of *stories about* and *stories of* as well as key terms derived from the field of narrative therapy (including dominating stories, subordinated stories, storyscapes, sensemaking frames, and relational home). I suggest that there exists a historically-rooted, dominating deficit-oriented *story about* the Eaglecrest community that significantly impact both the sensemaking frames of individuals and the overall storyscape from which they derive their narrative resources. These *stories about place* also appear to be linked to the various *stories about self* told by research participants—most of which also centralized notions of community deficit and personal isolation. However, alongside these indicators of surplus powerlessness, participants also demonstrated their narrative agency (Ungar, 2001) and their desire and capacity to act as self-determining subjects (as demonstrated through, for example, the active shutting down of conversations, the pushing aside of questioning, and the descriptions of coping behaviours and daily rituals). This suggests that surplus powerlessness (Lerner, 1986) and narrative agency are not mutually exclusive states, although the limited resources offered by the existing storyscape do constrain one’s ability to manifest the latter, often by subordinating *counter-stories of experience*. The operation of these *dominating stories about* and the overall *storyscape* may be understood as inherently political as these both reflect and maintain existing

relations of power—oppression directs the course of lived experience while certain realities are framed as incomprehensible, unspeakable, and/or illegible (which manufactures both internal and external barriers that prevent challenges to the status quo). Actors who are in more privileged positions have disproportionately more capacity to engage in *storyscaping* and to both place and enforce their *legibility demands*.

These *storyscapes*, *stories about*, and forms of surplus powerlessness can, however, be challenged. I propose that many of the elements employed within narrative therapy can be used for this purpose and to foster the “discursive empowerment” (Ungar, 2001) of individuals and collectives, thereby strengthening their existent capacity to “[resist] the problem-saturated identities imposed on them” and their communities (Ungar, 2001, p. 144). Central to this is the identification, articulation, and enrichment of *subordinated stories* (including both *definitional stories about* and *stories of experience*) that challenge the hegemonic narrative world. This can be done through collaborative processes of storytelling and “double listening” that draw attention to the “absent but implicit” (Carey et al., 2009) and foster a “relational home” wherein emotions and experiences are “enfranchised,” affirmed, “held,” and processed (Mitchell, 2016, p. 8; Stolorow, 2014; 2013). Using these strategies when engaging with the young participants allowed for the identification of the personal, relational, social, material, and cultural resources that Eaglecrest students draw upon; provided a counter-story about the Eaglecrest community as a place possessing a wealth of accessible opportunities, places, and supportive people; and highlighted the participants’ own knowledge and navigational capacity.

Chapters six and seven provide a deeper dive into some of the *dominating stories about* that characterize the young participant’s narrative world. Analysis of the various *stories of the future* told by participants suggested underlying *stories about a good life* and *stories of school* that dominate the *storyscape*. These *stories about* resonated strongly with the *view from above* presented in chapter two, reflecting, for example: faith in *the school-to-work-to-wellbeing theory of change*; the notion of *pathway (in)efficiency*; the presumption that education systems/schools prioritize the best interests of young people; the binary categorization of *school completers* and *school leavers*; the individualization and monetization of success and failure (and subsequent moral exclusion of school leavers, those working “low-skilled” jobs, and those living in poverty); the framing of access to resources, post-secondary education, and employment as an earned privilege rather than a right; the valourization of middle-class lifestyles; and the overall

paternalistic metanarrative of deficit. In addition to these specific elements, the *dominating stories about* reflect the operations of broader neoliberal, colonial, racist, adultist, and classist social discourses. However, while these aspirational stories all adhere to this broad narrative frame, they are also very complex (encompassing concern for others, a desire for connection, and the pursuit of personal interests and new experiences) and nuanced—indicating the influence of: the immediate storytelling context (e.g., the characteristics of their audience and the setting); previous personal and familial experiences; their/their family’s current circumstances; narratives and explicit/implicit messages provided by others (family members, peers, school staff, etc.); and narrative construction with others (e.g., through discussions with peers or caregivers). Hence, a young person’s *story of the future* is inevitably a contextually embedded construction.

Given this embeddedness, these stories reflect both the storyscape and the landscape—or, to employ concepts from Peace and Conflict Studies, they reflect the influence of structural, cultural, epistemic, and (depending upon individual experience) direct violence on the lives of young people. Inequality (structural violence) limits the extent to which a young person is able to access lived experiences and narrative resources which are legible, legitimated, and/or exalted while also increasing their exposure to harm (including direct violence). Meanwhile, cultural and epistemic violence mystify the operations of oppression and delegitimize the capacities, knowledges, and experiences of the oppressed. The (historically and politically constituted) storyscape, thusly, mystifies experiences and phenomena that could call the underlying landscape into question—fostering surplus powerlessness and maintaining regimes of biopolitical control. The impact of these forces was evident in the young people’s *stories of the future*—manifesting as thin narratives, foreclosed options, and a strong adherence to (and enforcement of) the public transcript which posits school challenges as primarily the result of individual choice or deficit (which often meant that young people, in an effort to maintain their own sense of self-efficacy, would have to morally exclude “unsuccessful” peers, family members, and populations). While there was evidence that certain forms of intervention (e.g., career programming) can help to “thicken” these stories, their emphasis on personal success over collective change reduces (and perhaps nullifies) their emancipatory potential. And, of course, the fulfillment of even these individualized visions will continue to be challenged by inequality.

In summary, participants, when explicitly asked to identify the causes of school failure, largely attributed it to *going the wrong way*—taking the incorrect path laid down by an

individual's own accumulated *bad choices* and *failure to adequately perform* the role of either a *good kid* (wherein one stays within the bounds of socially legitimized childhood behaviours) or a *good student-worker without rights* (who is present, passive, attentive, productive, and able to control their body and affect). It was important to perform this *self-disciplining role/to embody this habitus* (to *self-regulate* and *self-manage*) regardless of the value of assigned tasks—partly because it was taken on faith that these were part of “getting an education” and partly because not acquiescing could lead to punishment or the loss of future opportunities. In fact, for some, there was a sense that they were on a *compressed timeline* and that they needed to quickly identify and follow the correct pathway toward success and *obtain what they need to go places* (although, some have a sense that they have *started off behind others* and may never catch up).

Participants employed this local discourse to classify and evaluate both their own behaviours and those of others. It provided an explanatory lens for understanding the actions of young people who *go the wrong way*—those who (the participants suggested) do not think of their long-term future, engage in “adult” behaviours, experience “adult pressures,” or who challenge classroom norms. These behaviours were taken to indicate a *failure to care* about school and *misdirected affect* (e.g., finding disruption humorous, displaying anger, or seeking social connection) rather than, say, forms of resistance, attempts to exercise agency, or efforts to maintain social connections. These behaviours—and the students (real and hypothetical) who demonstrated them—were presumed to be deviant or deficient in ways that resonated with hegemonic understandings of race, gender, age/childhood, and mental health (sometimes understood in terms of self-confidence). Participants often used these discourses to help them distinguish between themselves (*the good kid/the good student-worker*) and others (*the bad kids/the bad students*) and to make sense of their own experiences and observations. Young people drew further evidentiary support for their assessments through reference to the various indicators of ability (math drills, grade levels, etc.) that hold significant symbolic currency within their social world.

While students actively *labelled* others, many also found themselves the targets of these discourses; some suggested that their gender, race, Indigeneity, and/or past behaviours *marked* them as troublemakers, *reduced* to their traumatic experiences, or otherwise situated them in a vulnerable, *hyper-visible* place within the (racially, class-based, etc.) stratified institution of school—leaving them *always wary and never fully safe* (a state of constant apprehensive that

draws upon their time and energy, often leaving them drained and *weary*). Numerous forces worked within the Eaglecrest school and community to maintain and reinforce these micro-level dynamics, including an ideology of colour-blind liberal multiculturalism; the invisibility of Whiteness and colonial dynamics; other problematic discourses (e.g., around sexuality, pregnancy, bullying, and substance abuse); state-based and provincial policies which position communities in conflict with each other; continuing practices of Indigenous dispossession; complex interpersonal interactions and differing levels of social capital/social vulnerability; dynamics which create high rates of turnover and absenteeism at Eaglecrest; and the use of explicit disciplinary techniques (suspensions, etc.) and *pedagogical fetish objects* (tests, etc.) that are used to reify notions of innate ability while marking and stratifying students. The efforts of students to craft a positive *story about self* despite these various challenges draw attention to the complex identity work that many young people undertake. As a response, many experienced *identity hurt* and undertook various forms of *identity work* to challenge these dehumanizing prescriptions and craft their sense of self. The demands of this work, arguably, are not equitably distributed, with those who find themselves socially and morally excluded being constantly subjected to these discursive forces and denied access to the validating and empowering narrative resources.

While the most dominant *location of cause* identified by participants centered upon the individual student, they also highlighted numerous other potential sites. This included the influence of peers and the complexities of social dynamics within the school and community. Peer groups were often understood as either fostering or impeding one's progress through school, depending upon the extent to which these friends embody the *good student-worker habitus* and are *good kids* in the general community. Underlying these discussions were criticisms of those who sought "coolness" and "popularity"—notions which reflect a kind of discursive dismissal of the agency and sociality of young people. However, at the same time, the *stories of experience* shared highlighted the complexities of peer interactions, as well as the complex *relational work* that young people undertake. Young people in the community regularly deal with intergroup conflict (which is often intensified by structural and discursive factors), pressures and social stigma associated sex and intimate relationships, interpersonal conflict, and physical violence. That being said, these social connections are a vital source of support, information, and social capital as well as a key element of a young person's *relational web*. Hence, they employ various

strategies to *build and navigate* these relationships, including *withdrawal* and *conflict avoidance*; the use of physical and verbal aggression (*standing up for oneself*); using social media and other technologies to maintain connections across distances; and *stepping back from* or *limiting* relationships that one sees as potentially detrimental. While indicating the social agency of young people, these strategies are limited by various factors, including: one's relative access to social capital (that is, the extent to which people will *back you up* in difficult circumstances) and financial recourse (which can be employed to maintain *relational webs*); the common (but not totalizing) use of short-term coercive disciplinary techniques by educators; constraints on mobility due to lack of transportation and physical safety concerns; the *social cost* of stepping back from some relationships; *social dislocation* due to mobility (that is, *movement by force* rather than *movement by choice*); and the *devaluation* caused by the *dehumanization* of their *tangible losses* (Hardy and Laszloffy, 2005). Hence, while young people possess and deploy social agency, both their options and actions are limited—not by their own deficits, but by the contextual factors which impact their lives. They are often placed in no-win situations, suffering various damages to their *relational web* which are placed under further strain as they are presented with a debilitating dilemma—maintain one's relationships (and social capital) and remain “stuck” in the community, or *follow the pathway* and subsequently lose access to the resources.

It was also very common for participants to locate the causes of success and failure within a young person's family and home life. Many of their arguments pivoted around the notion of the *caring versus uncaring parent*—which further linked to the extent to which a caregiver *cared about school*, engaged in *protectorate parenting*, *set boundaries*, provided a good *role model*, made up for the presumed deficits of young people (e.g., in terms of impulse control), and *forced* their child to attend school. There was a general sense that *good student-workers* and *good kids* come from *good (caring) parents* who *steer young people in the right direction*. By extension, caregivers that do not fulfill this role—who *don't care*—are analyzed using the same discursive repertoires used in reference to *bad kids and bad students*—that is, they demonstrate *misdirected affect*, *make bad choices*, and otherwise fail to embody a particular conceptualization of *idealized parenthood*. It was also common to presume that many caregivers within the Eaglecrest community fit the criteria of an *uncaring parent*. Across these *stories about parents*, however, were also many nuances, with participants also drawing attention to how

instability and conflict, intergenerational factors, involvement with child and family services, time constraints, and socioeconomic pressures/structural factors impact families.

The *stories of experience* told, meanwhile, highlighted many of the ways in which caregivers, siblings, and other families members have impacted the participant's educational journeys, drawing attention to: some of the micro-level challenges faced by caregivers; the parental strategies of *gentle persistence* and *careful strategizing*; how family experiences and stories can provide various models of potential pathways and inspiration to young people; the manner in which pregnancy, while sometimes necessitating an *indirect pathways* through school, does not necessarily result in permanent school leaving; the various forms of tangible, emotional, narrative, cultural, religious, and linguistic resources that families provide; the role of family stories in shaping young people's identities; and the *narrative vulnerability* of young people on their family members in their lives, particularly when it comes to the recollection of early memories (and the *manufactured amnesia* of those who are denied access to these key adults); and the impact of contextual conditions on family dynamics. These stories also suggested that young people activity navigate and contribute to their families by: seeking to "make them proud"; assessing and adapting to difficult circumstances (within the limits of their power and resources); and providing both pragmatic and emotional support to others (especially younger siblings and cousins).

This draws attention to the *relational* and *care work* that young people undertake as well as their need for a sense of *generativity* (to contribute and "make a difference"). This work, however, was often framed by adults (including school staff members) using a pathologizing lens (e.g., as "parentification") which delegitimized the young person's independence and draws upon westernized/middle-class notions of idealized (passive and dependent) childhood and reflecting the valorization of *delayed adulthood*. While it is the case that many young people found these home responsibilities detrimental, others framed them in a positive light. This suggests that this *care work* is seen to be oppressive only if the demands are too heavy, unfairly allocated, or unrecognized by the adults in their lives—that is, it depends upon if the *care work* is given *consensually* or if it is *forced*. Further, I suggest that *forced care work* is more common in families that are struggling to meet their day-to-day needs due to the impact of socioeconomic inequality. In sum, structural dynamics lead to greater *care work demands* being placed on some young—demands which they respond to (whether consensually or not). At the same time,

prevailing discourses cast this work as either invisible or pathological—regardless of how the young person perceives it—a places blame for heavier demands upon the presupposed irresponsibility of caregivers.

These conceptualizations of families and caregivers were often linked to the *dominating story about* the Eaglecrest community which centralized deficit, poverty, criminal activity, and a lack of community pride. Overall, there was a general sense that the area in which the Eaglecrest students live (“The D”) was a bounded (indeed, segregated) space characterized by significant socioeconomic challenges. These challenges are often conceptualized—both by the research participants and the general public—as endemic to the socioeconomic status of residents. Further, it appeared that participants often employed their narrative agency in an effort to make sense of their own positioning with the community. On one hand, they positioned themselves as a part of the community and, consequently, as marginalized and socially/morally excluded from the rest of the city that *doesn't care* about them or the place where they live (which, some suggested, had a direct impact on response from police and news media). On the other hand, they attempted to separate themselves from the community, constructing a metanarrative of place that often relied upon dichotomies between *good kids* and the *dangerous others* (which included outsiders and, at times, their own peers). This suggests that young people seek to construct and perform a coherent and validating sense of self but find their efforts restricted by the limitations of the storyscape—which vilifies and devalues the community. This further suggests a complex interrelationship between subjective understandings and lived experiences, with participants telling multiple stories that highlighted a persistent sense of insecurity amongst community residents. However, at the same time, some *stories of experience* highlighted positive aspects of the community, including a sense of familiarity, the presence of community resources, and valued community spaces. This included community-based organizations, which provide physical and emotional supports; cultural, religious, and skills learning; a safe place to be; access to opportunities; and opportunities for developing social capital.

Underlying this was a general sense that young people employ a variety of *self-protection strategies* to avoid/deal with threats as well as *navigational work* to identify safe and helpful spaces and avoid those that are dangerous. Indeed, several participants demonstrated very sophisticated specialized knowledge—developed through personal experience, discussions with peers and adults, engagement with media, and other methods—that they use to conceptually *map*

out and navigate local spaces. Their efforts, however, are impeded by their limited mobility and access to resources (e.g., transportation and social capital) as well as the relevance, helpfulness, attractiveness, and accessibility of community organizations. Indeed, it should be emphasized that young people display significant *navigational agency* as they both seek out, attend, and evaluate the resources available. Overall, this suggests a far more complex *story about* the Eaglecrest community that recognizes the felt impact of socioeconomic inequality and insecurity, while also acknowledging the impact of discursive devaluation and the failure to adequately include young people's perspectives in community development processes.

Descriptions of community were often linked by participants to perspectives about specific schools (which, consequently, located the causes of educational failure and success within the characteristics of specific institutions). Participants expressed a desire to attend *good schools* that were safe (and located in safe communities), that offered diverse, quality learning opportunity and events, that were well-resourced, that had *nice* teachers, and that students were proud to attend. These characteristics were further linked to the presumed economic status of specific schools as well as the safety and wealth of the surrounding community. These were contrasted with *bad school* that were considered comparably *poor* and *unsafe*. These assessments were often based upon the reputations of the surrounding area and the student population—with older family members (e.g., siblings and cousins) often being the sources of this knowledge. These distinctions would also intersect with discourses of class and race. This indicates that these students, and their families, actively seek out and interpret information about different schools so as to make, what they see as, *informed choices* about where to enroll (indeed, the *rhetoric of school choice* resonated throughout these discussions). Overall, it was the expressed hope of many of these participants (and their families) that they would be able to access *good (comparably well-resourced) schools* that would provide the clearest and smoothest pathway through schooling. However, these *good schools* are not always accessible to students in the Eaglecrest community as they are often further away (and thus requires the student have access to transportation) or out of catchment (which requires students complete application forms, get permission to attend, and maintain a good student record). Overall, there was a general sense that some schools have “more,” and some schools have “less”—an inequity that results in differential opportunities being afforded to different students. Some participants suggested that Eaglecrest

was a *have not school* and that teachers often leave the institution for “easier” or better resourced settings.

In addition to locating causes in specific school sites, participants also identified factors associated with schooling practices more generally. This included the perceived pointlessness and uninteresting nature of many teacher-mandated tasks, a lack of breaks and limited opportunities for physical activity and time outdoors, and unfair and/or ineffective disciplinary practices. Both on-site observations and the participants *stories of experience* brought additional attention to the extent to which young people are expected to self-manage their affect and bodies (to engage in continual *corporeal work*) and to prioritize adherence to school rules over social interaction. Students suggest that they must *push through* their boredom and maintain corporeal control in order to be a *good student-worker* and to avoid disciplinary actions by the teacher (which are often focused upon the body of the student). Failure to do so is often attributed to the student’s perceived lack of self-regulation, which is subsequently addressed through an intensification of biopolitical disciplinary control that target the young person’s mind, body, or affect (e.g., “time outs” and “mindfulness practices”). In addition, other school practices served to regulate the students’ time, attention, and energy levels, including the fragmentation of time through scheduling and the use of various *technologies of regulation* (such as bells and clocks).

There was an on-going *pressure to perform*, despite mental and physical exhaustion, a lack of recreational time, personal challenges, not having one’s basic needs met, the constant wariness and insecurity caused by racialized (and other forms of) microaggression and hyper-visibility, multiple competing demands upon a student’s time and energy, and other challenges of which they were at intensified risk due to their socioeconomic positioning. This pressure was particularly felt by junior high students, who was expected to produce higher equality work at a higher output (both at school and through homework). I suggest that these young people often must *spread themselves thinner* and *work harder with less respite* than those who are more privileged in order to *stay present in school* (attending and being constantly attentive) while also meeting the continual *pressure perform* which is justifying through a neoliberal conceptualization of *high standards*. These various regimes of control also appeared particularly tight at Eaglecrest (although these was much diversity in terms of educator practice)—a tendency justified by largely class-based presumptions about the students’ need for “firm” boundaries (a perception reinforced by staff member’s interpretation of student reactions).

Young people responded to these dynamics in various ways. Some would engage in *relational work* with teachers if a relationship was destabilized (e.g., by performing difference). Others would engage in subtle forms of *infrapolitical resistance* that sought a *micropolitical renegotiation of power* which would “limit the demands of the powerful” (Dikar, 2008, p. 143), reduce “the amount of time students [are] required to give themselves over to...authority” (p. 142) increase the amount of energy and time expelled by authority figures seeking to force or compel student acquiescence and “call attention to the contradictions and inconsistencies in school authority” (p. 143)—resistances which included such practices as *shutting down*. Overt oppositional forms of resistance also occurred—often leading to the young person being *pushed out* of the classroom space.

Participants also noted that these school-based factors could be mitigated or intensified by the characteristics and actions of specific teachers—which students classified using the categories of nice versus mean, caring versus uncaring, fun versus serious, and active versus boring. The first three dichotomies revolve around perceptions of a teachers’ respectfulness, fairness, approachableness, helpfulness, and willingness to act in humorous ways. Participants suggested that students constantly evaluate teachers in terms of their communication behaviours, approach to discipline, means for awarding opportunities and privileges, willingness/capacity to connect with students and provide relevant assistance. Underlying this is the sense that teachers can improve a young person’s educational experience by respecting their dignity and humanity, treating them fairly, fulfilling their adult responsibilities, and working to reduce the hierarchical student-teacher power relation by being open and relatable. The active versus boring dichotomy, meanwhile, refers to pedagogical practices. Students suggested that they found more active and pedagogical methods more relevant and engaging. Boring teachers, meanwhile, used more passive methods, took too long to explain activities, over-directed learning activities, and over-controlled student behaviour—which, paradoxically, would result in more disruptions from students. In addition to these explicit categorizations, students also told *stories of teachers* (nice, mean, boring, fun, etc.). Some of these suggested that the participants had been subjected to microaggressions meant to maintain hierarchical relations of power. Others suggested that teachers may engage in behaviours that, from the participants’ perspective, are contrary to school rules which young people are expected to follow. Underneath this is a strong awareness of the unequal power relationship between teachers and students, a relationship which consistently

positions the young person as the one who must wait, the one who must apologize, the one who must stay silent, the one who must remain respectful and controlled, and the one who must conform. However, despite the attention paid to these more general institutional factors, most of these stories focus upon the behaviours of individuals (rather than these relations of power) and continued to pivot on the *good school/bad school dichotomy*.

A similar dynamic was identified in the (comparably limited) discussions of how structural factors impact schooling experiences. There was a general sense that school completion (and post-secondary completion in particular) was only accessible to those with financial means. Further, poverty and the child welfare system were often mentioned as contributing factors, but it appeared that students found it difficult to articulate the links between these systemic issues and daily experience (and, hence, they often focused upon having or not having access to material resources). This is unsurprising if one factors in the limited discursive and narrative resources available through the *storyscape* for undertaking this kind of analysis.

However, the stories of experience told by participants—presented throughout this report—helped with the further identification of these systemic factors. These include: socioeconomic inequality and precarity (and the resulting insecurity and lack of employment rights); housing insecurity; international conflict and crisis; gaps in settlement services for newcomers; historical and contemporary practices of colonization meant to—directly or indirectly—eradicate/assimilate Indigenous Peoples and nations and disrupt Indigenous families for the purposes of land acquisition; differences in the perceptions of and supports provided to Indigenous students and newcomer students (who are at times seen as more worthy of support); the omnipresent threat of child apprehensions by Child and Family Services; and the multiple operations of colonialism, racism, adultism, and neoliberal capitalism. These stories also highlighted the various strategies employed and capacities mobilized by young people and their families to respond to these different challenges—such as learning about and navigating various social institutions, finding ways to maintain and build one's *relational web*, employing various *self-protection strategies*, and undertaking micro-level acts of resistance that help one maintain a sense of self-efficacy and/or limit the impact of forces beyond one's immediate control. Across each of these stories is further indication of young people's capacity to observe, make sense of, and respond to their complex lived realities—even though many of them are impacted by institutions and systems that place them in vulnerable positions, isolate them from others, and

insult their rights and dignity. These capacities were further demonstrated by the participants demonstrated interest in global issues—which indicates young people’s status as political subjects. Hence, while these participants’ responses largely corresponded with the “individual deficit model of failure” (Clandinin, Steeves, & Caine, 2003) and attributed the causes of school failure to the deficits of students, families, their community, and their school, listening to their stories for the “absent but implicit” (Carey et al., 2009) allows for the identification of discursive and structural factors.

Woven throughout these stories were descriptions of the various strategies employed by young people (and their families) to meet their needs and respond to the various challenges that they face. In this report these strategies are classified as different forms of *work* that young people undertake on a day-to-day basis. These specific classes include: navigational work; relational work; care and contribution work; resistance and micropolitical work; corporeal work; and narrative and identity work. By expressing their agency and undertaking these forms of work, young people both engage with and contribute to their social worlds. Indeed, these various forms of labour can be seen to vital to the maintenance of families, communities, and social institutions. However, the options for and means of doing this work are severely limited by how they are positioned on the landscape and the operations of the storyscape. These limitations often place young people in a double bind wherein their actions are also a source of *hurt*. Hence, we can also identify the causes and impacts of: navigational hurt; relational hurt; care and contribution hurt; resistance and micropolitical hurt; corporeal hurt; and narrative and identity hurt. These harms are largely attributable to the operations of the storyscape and structure of the landscape. The landscape places greater work demands upon young people while also denying them access to various resources. Meanwhile, the storyscape not only limits the manner in which they can articulate and make meaning from their experience, but also leads others (including those in positions of authority and their own peers) to *misread* both their work and their manifestations of hurt—to see these as an indicator of pathology or deficit. Further, as a whole, the work of young people—which, I argue, is vital to the maintenance of families, schools, communities, and other social institutions—is generally rendered invisible in a manner that reflects the general externalization of certain forms of labour within neoliberal capitalism. Young people are seen as dependents upon the work of others, rather than as agents who undertake their own labour to maintain themselves, others, places, and institutions. Their work, consequently, is

rendered illegible within the public transcript. Indeed, the only work which is recognized and legitimized is that which oriented toward the production of legible (and consumable) academic goods such as assignments and test scores.

View from below: Caregivers

The vantage point of the caregivers resonated with that of the young people and the *view from above*. They largely affirmed the *story about school* and underlying *school-to-work-to-wellbeing theory of change*. They suggested, overall, that the purpose of school (which is seen primarily as a *means to an end*) was to complete it (*on-time*) so as to gain access to other opportunities and, in doing so, avoid negative life outcomes—in other words, one needs school to *get somewhere*. These understandings merged with their own sense of duty as a caregiver; they stressed the importance of teaching one's child to value school through both modelling and the use of explicit messaging. This *affective engagement* must then be matched by practical support (*providing the infrastructure for schooling success*) and a willingness to enforce the presumably deserved consequences of school leaving. Hence, these participants also adhered to the public transcript when describing their own relationship to school, even though there was some indication that their own personal experiences challenged its validity. Throughout this was an emphasis on their own personal aspirations for their children and the hopes that, through school completion, they could become independent and financially stable “good people” who are proud of what they have become (although some described these aspirations in greater complexity than others). Overall, they stressed that it is primarily the caregiver's responsibility to help their child *go through* school and onto better things (which, for some, included post-secondary studies)—to try to prevent the *misdirected affect* which results in school leaving.

Hence, caregivers generally attributed the causes of success and failure to the actions and characteristics of caregivers. Their *stories about school failure* generally attributed this to either a parental *failure to care* (*a failure of affect and responsibility*), their *failure of capacity* (their lack of knowledge about the *formal and informal rules of school*), or a lack of *access* to that which they need to build their capacity and support their child by building the “infrastructure” (Lena) for schooling success. In this respect, the caregivers' perspectives often revolved around the *good parent versus bad parent dichotomy* expressed by young people and were linked to the *stories about self* that participants shared (which emphasized how they *do their part* and seek

fulfill their duties as a caring parent). In addition, they often attributed the failings of *bad/uncaring parents* to essentialized notions of the Eaglecrest community (e.g., as related to socioeconomic status)—thereby drawing upon the *dominating story about community* described in chapter five.

Underlying these *stories about caregivers* is a mythical notion and norm of *parenthood* wherein a *good worker-parent* is defined as both an at-home (unpaid and largely unsupported) educational worker (that is, someone who orients much of their day-to-day labour around ensuring their child is physically, behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally “school-ready”) as well as a self-sacrificing martyr (a “caregiver”) who is affectively driven to undertake this work out of love for their child—a love which is only legible if it can be indirectly measured through an assessment of student learning outcomes. Evidence of a caregivers supposed “failure” is often attributed to either their lack of capacity or a failure to care which, within the neoliberal paradigm of education reform, is commonly addressed by an intensification of surveillance and biopolitical control through the use of various technologies of regulation (involvement with child welfare services, circumscribed models of caregiver engagement, intensification of school outreach into private homes, etc.). This mythical norm of parenthood and the discursively constructed good worker-parent subjectivity can, consequently, be read as an element of biopolitical control and governmentality. It is a form of cultural and epistemic violence—which is internalized by individuals because of its affective currency and usefulness in developing a positive self-concept—which mystifies experiences and phenomenon that could call the underlying landscape (the operations of structural violence) into question.

The impact of the *storyscape* was also evident in how caregivers discussed the characteristics of (and challenges faced by) their own children. This is particularly evident in the discussions of affect, motivation/care, presumed personal traits (such as being lazy or smart); the use of *pedagogical fetish objects* as markers of a young person’s (legible) success, intelligence, or hard work (e.g., grades, report cards, and reading levels); notions that some students are at different “levels” (being ahead/behind or above/below others); the general valorization of the *good student-worker* subjectivity and conceptualization as school as a place of proto-employment; notions of community deficits and the presumed greater immaturity of young people; and the apparent tendency to read the *resistance and micropolitical work* of young people as an indicator of deficit (of affect, self-regulation, etc.). However, there was also some

indication that the storyscape was not completely totalizing, with some participants challenging the notion of community deficit as well as the assumption that schools always act in the best interests of students (suggesting, rather, that they can sometimes be detrimental to learning and success).

These statements and the *stories of experience* told by caregivers also indicated the various formal and informal/everyday strategies that they employ to *do their part*. These include, ensuring their child attends school; setting and enforcing boundaries and setting expectations; being an example for their children; meeting their child's basic needs; and creating learning opportunities at home. In addition to these everyday practices, caregivers also sought more direct engagement with Eaglecrest, seeking out information about their child's schooling; speaking with their child about school; working in partnership with teachers; participating in caregiver engagement events and programming; being physically present in the school; contributing to school life (volunteering, etc.); advocating for their child; and communicating with other caregivers. It was suggested that these types of activities are means through which a caregiver can *model* engagement with education—thereby helping the children *see the value of school*; *learn the rules* of and *navigate* the schooling system; and understand *how to be present and perform* in school. These teachings resonated with the *school-to-work-to-wellbeing theory of change* and the notion of the *good student-worker* and reinforced the hierarchical relationships between students/teachers and young people/adults. While some conceptualized teachers as taking on the parental role within schools, others challenged this—stressing the need to challenge the authority of teachers when necessary. Further, while notions of *school choice* was discussed by the young participants, these caregivers suggested that they actually have very little choice in terms of where their children attend.

These perspectives, as well as the *stories of experience* told by caregivers also suggested that notions of engagement generally placed onus upon individual caregivers to *cross the threshold* into the school space and establish relationships with staff. Several personal, community, and school-based factors makes this a challenging endeavor, including a reluctance to connect (to avoid “bothering” people [Penny]) unless there was an identified need to do so; family and time pressures (which can often be linked to socioeconomic stressors); interpersonal conflict and strained relationships; the isolation of caregivers within the community and paucity of formal/informal opportunities for relationship building and collective action (which appear to

be, at least in part, due to deficit-oriented assumptions by school staff members); physical and bureaucratic micro-barriers and gatekeeping practices at the school site and throughout broader education system; the availability and accessibility of information, inviting spaces, and relevant activities (and the *legibility demands* which constrain school programming); the extent to which the school/specific spaces are seen welcoming and safe (which is impacted by the *active welcoming* practices of staff); the presence of absence of a sense of kinship within the school-community; conflict between caregivers and staff (which may occur if the *rules of parental engagement*—which legitimize certain forms of behaviour and delegitimize others—are not followed); the general *mystification* of the education system and internalization of power hierarchies; the intensity of pressures on school staff that make *noticing and responding* to caregivers challenging; experiences of subtle and overt dehumanization and abuse; and the *wariness* and *weariness* felt by caregivers due to experiences of being *marked* by schools, various professionals, and systems and the risk involved in *playing the odds* when undertaking *resistance, micropolitical, and advocacy work* (which may be linked to colonialism, racism, classism, etc.). Hence, relevance and accessibility are most accurately conceived of as *relational concepts* (as *relational relevance* and *relational accessibility*) that have physical, structural, relational, and perceptual dimensions. Hence, schools cannot be presumed to be accessible because this quality is determined by the relationship between the agent seeking to access the space (e.g., the caregiver), the characteristics of the space they are trying to access (the school), and the manner in which those already inside the space help or hinder the efforts of the accessing agent (e.g., do staff, school practices, and physical design make the threshold easier or harder to cross?).

While the majority of our discussions focused upon the roles played by caregivers, participants also drew attention to school-based factors which they believe impact a young person's ability to *go through school* and achieve a *good life*. These factors include, the responsiveness of staff members, supports, and programs to student academic, extra-curricular, basic, and social needs and availability of supports and programs; the relevance, rigour, and variety of academic and extra-curricular programming (which often revolved around hotly debated concepts such as homework); the effectiveness of school staff and disciplinary practices; the creation of a safe, caring, and positive climate; and the extent to which school staff address the health and hygiene needs of students and demonstrate their *professional capacity* through the

taking on of the parental care role (although this must be done without overstepping the bounds of one's authority). Indeed, there appeared to be a local discourse outlining the qualities of a *good school* and a *good, caring teacher* that presumed an unrestricted and unending capacity (in terms of personnel, resources, etc.) to *notice and respond* to all of the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of every individual student—while maintaining a welcoming atmosphere for all students/caregivers and responding to the intensified challenges faced by those living in the Eaglecrest community. *Good teachers* were those who: went *above and beyond* (e.g., by spending additional time providing extra-curricular activities and additional learning supports); maintained strict discipline and expectations (e.g., controlling the *bad kids*) while also ensuring students “come home happy” (Kimberly); consistently made an effort (and took the time) to establish one-on-one connections with caregivers; provided diverse learning opportunities that (largely) corresponded with the caregiver's own conceptualization of relevance and rigour; and who constantly monitored the activities of all students. Those who did not meet these (at times contradictory) expectations were considered not only unprofessional, but also uncaring (or, perhaps, failing in their *professional duty to care*).

Looking across the *view from below* presented by caregivers, it is possible to identify some of the *work* that they undertake as well as the *hurt* that they are subjected to while doing so. This includes navigational work and hurt (e.g., draining one's own resources [including time] while *learning the rules* [of school and parental engagement] and navigating social institutions with limited support); relational work and hurt (e.g., establishing interpersonal relationship with staff members and other caregivers while dealing with isolation, *wariness*, and the risks associated with *playing the odds*); care and contribution work and hurt (e.g., caring for one's child, providing service to the community, and volunteering in the school without adequate material or immaterial support); resistance, micropolitical, and advocacy work and hurt (e.g., challenging the authority of teachers and other professionals and risk being *pushed out* of the schooling system); corporeal work and hurt (e.g., managing one's body and affect within the school space by containing anger and performing deference]; and narrative and identity work and hurt (maintaining one's identity as a *caring parent* despite the limitations of the *storyscape*). As with young people, the options for and means of doing this work are severely limited by how they are positioned on the landscape and the operations of the storyscape. Generally, the *labour demands* placed upon caregivers in the Eaglecrest community are high while access to supports and

resources are low—making the act of *crossing the threshold* far more challenging. Further, much of the work undertaken/hurt experienced by caregivers is either rendered invisible (e.g., navigational work/hurt) or delegitimized (e.g., resistance work/hurt) within the public transcript. Indeed, the only work rendered legible and legitimate is that which supports and aligns with the *dominating stories about school and a good life*. To some extent, home was treated as an extension of school while legitimized family life was defined as that which revolved around practices that helped foster narrowly defined conceptions of engagement and success.

View from below: School staff

The perspectives of staff members suggested two different circulating *stories about* the Eaglecrest students and families. The first emphasizes their deficits and vulnerabilities, positioning them largely as the passive victims of circumstances—including their family’s *misdirected affect* (their failure to *want* more) and deficit of responsibility, vision, persistence, and aspiration (which young people are presumed to inherit) as well as broader societal messaging which presents “cookie-cutter paths” for them to follow. The second story emphasizes the innate potential, strength, and resilience of both the young people and their families, positioning these as key resources from which the school can draw. Both of these stories, however, demonstrate a ubiquitous faith in the potential of school to foster long-term (individual) wellbeing—as the pathway toward wellbeing and away from violence and harm. Educators, consequently, are granted the role of changing students’ mindsets, helping them foster appropriate visions for the future (wherein one “achieves more”), redirecting their affective commitments, and unlocking their potential—to achieve personal success. This is justified both in the interests of *breaking cycles* and responding to the students’ presumed innate drive for this type of engagement. Underlying this is the axiomatic assumption that young people (and, to some extent, their caregivers) can be *taught to value* education (meaning: school completion) and *taught to aspire to* (or *taught to want*) a particular kind of life. While this teaching is, ideally, meant to be done primarily by caregivers, educators can take up this task when necessary. Underlying this is a general tendency to locate the causes of success and failure within external factors, including the characteristics of student and families, the socioeconomic status of the community, and the failures of external educational actors and systems.

At Eaglecrest, staff commonly frame themselves as being assigned the heroic task (and burden) of *saving* young people from their circumstances. Their means for doing so is to develop the young person's faith in the *school-to-work-to-wellbeing theory of change*—a faith which educators share, despite recognition that it is rare for young people to actually follow this pathway (with most either *falling off* or *squeaking by*). Despite this reality, neither the theory nor the pathway are called into question (these are presumed to be “true”); rather, failure is attributed to non-school related factors—including the resistance and/or failings of caregivers (which is largely attributed to “false” perceptions). While, in some respects, this does offer a slightly more nuanced analysis of educational inequality (in that it locates the root causes of individual deficits within historical, structural, and societal factors), it also casts young people as inherently passive and in need of corrective (cognitive and affective) tutelage from “enlightened” professionals.

This belief in the dependency and deficit of young people was also evident in the staff member's interpretations of why students were reluctant to depict their “roots” on the Tree of Life Map. As discussed in chapter five, they attributed this to the presumed age-based developmental capacities of young people and the instability, crisis, trauma, and dislocation believed to dominate the lives Eaglecrest students—all factors which they presumed made it difficult for students to reflect and “think in abstractions.” Further, in chapter six, the tendency of staff members to *mystify* the resilience of students was also identified (which romanticized resilience and located it within individuals, rather than framing it as resulting from a young person's broader relational web and the accessibility of community and familial resources). Lastly, this overall framing—this *story about young people*—which dominated staff perspectives appeared to lead to numerous misreadings of student actions—particularly behaviours which may have been forms of resistances and micropolitical work.

This relocation of causal factors and responsibility away from educators and onto students was mirrored in the participants description of caregiver engagement efforts, which valorized the work done by the school and staff and located caregiver disengagement primarily within caregivers themselves (e.g., they resistance and reluctance to engage) and the pressures of raising families within a socioeconomically marginalized community. At times this was also framed in ways that drew upon racist and colonial deficit-oriented perspectives of Indigenous families which presumed they place less value on education than other populations (e.g.,

newcomers). This being said, the perspectives of staff also resonated with that of the caregiver participants, particularly regarding the identified importance of the practice of *active welcoming*.

Overall, school-based responses are presumed to be the cure, rather than one of the potential causes, of educational inequality. Consequently, staff members focus their attention on providing this “cure” while also working to ensure students remain engaged with school as an institution—to *stay present* and adequately perform as *good student-workers* so they may receive the immediate benefits of schooling (e.g., opportunities and supports) and garner the skills and credentials necessary for moving forward through the system and, subsequently, *rising above* their circumstances. They further suggested that the primary means achieving this was through the creation of interpersonal relationships *acts of care*.

This suggests an implicit theory of change which presumes that consistent demonstrations of care serve to connect young people to the adult, who then serves as a trusted spokesperson for the institution. The young person is less likely to actively resist what is being asked of them if they trust (and feel positive affect toward) the source of the request. Relationships and positive affect, therefore, provide the glue which binds a young person to the schooling institution more generally; interpersonal trust leads to institutional trust as a young person comes to see specific schooling practices (perceived of as irrelevant, boring, or otherwise undesirable) as inherently “for their own good.” Underlying this is both the recognition and delegitimization of student agency and resistance (which is framed as resulting from the student’s inaccurate assessments of teachers, learning activities, and school as a whole). I term this overall process of *bonding students to teachers* through the use of *care work* (so as to garner their consent and forge a sense of connection to school as an institutions) *affective linking*. It was consistently implied that this *affective linking* was particularly important at Eaglecrest because of the presumed disconnect between young people/their families and the schooling system. This reflects an inherently class-based framing of educational needs, with a strong academic focus being largely reserved for schools situated in more affluent communities (because, it is suggested, teachers working in these institutions do not need to address the *deficits of care and capacity* that impact Eaglecrest students).

In practice, this *care work* encompasses a wide array of formal and informal strategies, requires staff members to draw upon a diverse set of (largely intrinsic) forms of knowledge, and to negotiate the contradiction between recognizing and responding to the challenges of students

while also seeking to maintain high expectations. Further, much of this work was done on the educator's own time and was neither supported or recognized by the broader education system—which means that the motivation for undertaking this work is partly driven by necessity (one needs to build relationships in order to fulfill their professional roles) and intrinsic motivations (which often rely upon romanticized notions of an educator's role as a saviour of the vulnerable). Further, there was a general assumption that care work, relationship-building, and affective linking can create learning context wherein young people are able to “get over”—to externalize—their personal and social challenges, effectively “leaving these at the classroom door.”

Staff members also identified various factors which they believe facilitate or inhibit their work. Facilitative factors included the close proximity of Eaglecrest to students' homes; the availability of resources within the school community organizations; the use of split classes to maintain continuity, reducing class sizes and increasing the number of adults present in classrooms; sufficient access to material resources; having a present and supportive school administration, and building a relational web of positive intra-staff relationships. Inhibitive factors included: difficulty communicating with caregivers (e.g., due technological barriers); fear that one may be perceived of as an “intruders” into the private lives of families; externally imposed bureaucratic barriers to accessing funding and supports; insufficient staffing numbers and large class sizes; staff turnover; the limits to practice caused by the physical design of schools; ineffective and burdensome school board and provincially mandated assessment and student tracking practices; insufficient pre-employment training and professional development (which leads to heavy on-the-job learning demands); and the bureaucratic structures that must be navigated in order access support from (also under-resourced and over-burdened) consultants, social workers, and other specialists.

These various policies and practices, participants suggested, reflected an underlying dynamic wherein comparably powerful parties—who determine the amount and availability of resources and dictate bureaucratic demands—are completely disconnected from the on-the-ground realities of school life (both generally, and within Eaglecrest specifically). These higher-power parties are, consequently completely out-of-touch with the needs of those working within schools and, as a result, not only fail to provide accessible and relevant supports, but actually create additional barriers which impede the work of staff members. The operations of this

educational technocracy inhibit the efforts of school staff while also rendering much of their work illegible and invisible. In fact, the only work that is systemically valued is that which converts readily into measurable student outcomes—that is easy to translate into a communicable, trackable, and comparable form. Work that is not so easily *translatable* consequently becomes illegible and is, therefore, neither recognized, supported, nor compensated for. Hence, the work that staff members widely believe is foundational to student success (that is, *relational* and *care work*)—as well as the costs incurred by those who undertake this labour (e.g., in terms of time, energy, and money)—are *externalized*. Arguably, the entire operation of the school system (this *educational technocracy*) is reliant upon this unpaid, unrecognized, unsupported, and often overtly delegitimized work. These various externally imposed impediments to educator work—which are manufactured by the operations of an out-of-touch educational technocracy—intersect with the various micro-barriers and minor inconveniences that staff members deal with on a day-to-day basis. Further, on top of this daily complexity are the heavy demands placed upon these teachers to go *above and beyond* for their students—primarily because they are structurally positioned as the representative of the broader education system and discursively framed as all that stands between these young people and school failure—reflecting a mythical notion of *teacherhood* and the discursive conceptualization of a *good worker-teacher* as one who is both a competent technocrat (a “professional”) and a self-sacrificing martyr (a “caregiver”)—who is, further, *happy* to be paid back with little more than children’s love. Evidence of an educator’s supposed “failure” is often attributed to either their lack of capacity, unprofessionalism, or a failure to care which, within the neoliberal paradigm of education reform, is commonly addressed by an intensification of surveillance and biopolitical control. This mythical norm of *teacherhood* can, consequently, be read as an element of biopolitical control and governmentality. It is a form of cultural and epistemic violence—which is internalized by individuals because of its affective currency and usefulness in developing a positive self-concept—which mystifies experiences and phenomenon that could call the underlying landscape (the operations of structural violence and the educational technocracy) into question.

The cumulative impact of these barriers, stressors, and biopolitical control mechanisms manifests at the level of the everyday, limiting the time and energy which staff members can direct toward engaging with students. As with students, Eaglecrest staff members are under a

constant *pressure to perform*—to meet not only the personal and academic needs of students, but also the *distracting* demands of an educational technocracy guided by a neoliberal paradigm which externalizes all forms of work—and all kinds of costs—that are not easily quantified or that, if acknowledged, might reveal the exploitative nature of the system. Indeed, I argue, the continuance of the educational technocracy is largely dependent upon the invisible labour of those who work within it—as well as its capacity to offload costs onto these disempowered actors (which, I suggest, include school staff, caregivers, and students). In this respect, the educational technocracy can be understood as a “greedy institution” which employs various mechanisms to demand ever-increasing contributions (Sullivan, 2013; Coser, 1974). Further, at the same time, the educational technocracy places intensified legibility and accountability demands upon those individuals (which, again, including school staff, caregivers, and students). Failure, therefore, is framed as being caused by the deficits of individuals, rather than as the product of the intentional erosion of the education system by powerful actors who prioritize economic growth and the freedom of the market over the welfare of people and communities.

However, time and personal energy are both limited resources and, at some point, individuals must make choices and set boundaries in order to prevent their own erosion. This results in educators being placed in a position where they notice student challenges and are affectively compelled to act, but are also placed in a position wherein their *capacity to act* is circumscribed. They find themselves “picking battles,” “pushing through” and “going on” when they *know* this will have negative repercussions for some students—that as an educator you will, in some respect, *fail*. This failure is both inevitable and painful—resulting in identity hurt, corporeal hurt, relational hurt, care and contribution hurt, and dehumanized loss. To manage this, staff members must create *emotional/affective distance* between themselves and student. That is, to maintain one’s own personal integrity, one must learn to regulate and control the extent of one’s affective investments. In essence, one is expected to care enough to keep the system in operation, but is actively prevented from caring enough—and acting enough upon that care—to undertake more robust actions that may undermine existing systems of inequality. The end result is failure and a sense of loss—which are externalized costs that individual educators are expected to bear. Hence, overall, while these staff members are comparably powerful actors within the context of student-teacher and caregiver-teacher relationships, within the overall educational

technocracy they are themselves a marginalized, disempowered, and exploited actor—bearing all of the responsibility, but holding none of the systemic power and control.

View from below: Community-based organization representatives

The perspectives offered by CBO representatives were relatively diverse. Some resonated strongly with the *view from above*, emphasizing the role of school completing in helping young people *rise above their circumstances* and *break cycles* of poverty while also noting that various factors (namely structural forces, familial deficit, a lack of vision, and poor personal choices) means that the “potential” of young people²¹² is both limited and rarely fulfilled. For some, the solution to this is more intensive school-based interventions that address social welfare gaps and family deficits (to “cure” them of this unhealthy state). Other participants challenged these assumptions, suggesting that school itself is a primary cause of educational inequality and destabilizing the *school-to-work-to-wellbeing theory of change*. For some, this was due to the misplaced priorities of educational institutions, staff, and curriculum developers who fail to provide young people with either the academic capacities, life skills, career development, or on-going support required for success in either the post-secondary system or workforce. These participants suggested that (due to structural inequality) not all students or families have access to the resources needed for meeting these needs and, consequently, it is the responsibility of those with greater access (that is, CBOs and schools) to fill these gaps.

Other participants called into question some of the more fundamental aspects of educational discourse, suggesting that it is reflective of both the cultural and ideological paradigms of dominant actors. In particular, they challenged how the *linear route* through school enforces a kind of *manufactured delayed adulthood* that delegitimizes the agency of young people and limits their opportunities for capacity development. Addressing this requires a concentrated effort to help young people *come into their own* regardless of their circumstances or stated aspirations. For many this required recognizing and affirming the existing capacities of young people (and, often, their families and broader community). This suggests a different relationship between institutions/communities and adults/young people—one predicated upon the notions of *mutual dependency* and *relational autonomy*. Some also called into question many

²¹² The “lost” potential of young women was highlighted as a particularly “tragic” outcome of these factors—a sentiment shared by some school staff members as well.

of the *markers of success* employed by the education system as well as the bureaucratic nature of school progression. They suggest that the cause of school failure lies not with young person's or their family's *failure to value* education, but in the way that the "lifeless" elements of schooling are fetishized, how education and wellbeing are framed as privileges rather than rights, and how the pathways through school completion and post-secondary education are both mystified and made inaccessible.

This suggests an alternative implicit theory of change that does not adhere to the hegemonic *story about school*. The goal their work is to help a young person *come into their own* (to develop their sense of self-efficacy and self-determination), which is achieved by: *recognizing* their capacity and agency; helping them to *develop* these further by *providing support and opportunities* (which are conceived of as rights rather than privileges); fostering the development of their *relational home*; and *demystifying* the schooling system itself (recognizing it as a construction and helping young people *navigate* their way through it). The goal is not to remove or alienate a young person from his or her existing capacities, experiences, relationships, or home, but to "enfranchise" these aspects of self (to draw upon Michelle, 2016) while also making school completion accessible by addressing the societal and institutional factors which deny young people their inherent right to education and a good life. While an important challenge to hegemonic understandings, this theory of change still centralizes individual empowerment over social change. Indeed, while all CBO representatives recognized that the root causes of educational inequality were structural, they also stressed that their day-to-day work centres upon supporting individuals. While this approach and its related practices can (and to a limited extent do) serve to de-stabilize and de-naturalize the oppressive storyscape and landscape, these remains uncommon. They are peripheral approaches and practices—a hidden transcript (Scott, 1990)—that find expression primarily within local community organizations and in the context of on-one-on interactions.

Overall, these participants identified a host of factors which may impact the capacity of a young person to complete school, including: self-esteem issues; trauma experiences and mental health issues; an unmet need for belonging; struggles with addiction; negative foster care experiences; homelessness; gang-involvement; and a lack of access to food, clothing, and other basic necessities. However, there was a general consensus that—while it is important to keep this "list" of factors in mind, each student's situation is unique, which means that professionals must

employ a holistic lens when considering individual circumstances. It is not effective, they suggest, to expect students to “get over” the impact of their own situation (which includes the impact of class, racial, and colonial inequalities). Instead, it is this host of factors—which includes the complex relational webs within which young people are embedded—that must be centralized in one’s analysis and one’s work. Responding to this, CBOs see their work as “filling gaps” in services, spaces, and opportunities that result in increased vulnerability for the young people and families with which they work.

Hence, CBOs had a tendency to direct their attributions of failure not at young people, families, or communities but rather at the way professionals (including teachers) and various social systems respond to the needs of young people and their families. This includes the manner in which the overall structure and paradigm of formal schooling serves to mystify educational success and the limitations of the existing school system. Overall, the concept of “dropping out” was understood as an inaccurate way of conceptualizing the process by which a young person disconnects from the school system. It is more accurate, rather, to understand this as a process of being “pushed out” by factors within the system and “pulled out” by factors from without. “Dropping out” is better understood as a gradual process of disconnection that is, in essence, a logical response to a setting that is alienating, isolating, disempowering, and unresponsive (and wherein one is subjected to judgement and labelling). Some suggest that this process of disengagement may be slowed or prevented through the establishment of positive interpersonal relationships with between teachers and students, but that this is not a guarantee, particularly as this relationship building is hampered by a lack of time and resources that are directly attributable to structural factors.

These structural impediments are largely the result of policies and practices which prevent young people, caregivers, and teaching staff from accessing resources and help. In fact, these participants generally suggest that the challenges faced by young people (as well as caregivers and school staff) are, effectively, *manufactured* by inconsistent policies, institutional silos, and other systemic forces. At the root of these structural issues is the devaluation of specific populations, including Indigenous peoples, newcomers, persons who are impacted by economic inequality, and youth more generally. This systematic racism and racialized devaluation is used to justify a reluctance to devote social resources toward meeting needs and ensuring equity.

Participants also reiterated this critique of institutional silos and politically motivated funding practices when discussing the challenges that they face funding their own organizations as well as the various forms of externalized work that they have to undertake to fulfill their organization's mission in the face of these challenges (including navigational work, care and contribution work, and relational work). While some centralized how racism underlies these systemic failings, other focused upon the social and discursive marginalization of newcomers, street-affected populations, inner city populations, and children/youth as a whole. Hence, these organizations also have to contend with systemic issues that hamper their own work (often leading to the closure of programs, the loss of staff, an inordinate amount of time and energy being spend acquiring funding sources, etc.). These challenges, they suggest, have intensified over the past decades, providing indication that in addition to racism, classism, and other forms of social marginalization, the capacity of these organizations to provide services is being increasingly impacted by the adherence of funders (including governmental bodies) to a technocratic, neoliberal paradigm.

8.3 De-stabilizing the map, the landscape, and the storyscape: Key exclusions

Reading across the various *views from below* presented by young people, caregivers, school staff, and CBO workers, draws attention to several aspects of the educational landscape which are excluded from the hegemonic map that is used to explain the identified differential schooling attainment rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations as well as the phenomenon of educational inequality more generally. These aspects include:

- the extent to which all of these actors perform various kinds of work that are commonly rendered illegible, invisible, pathological, or illegible. This includes navigational work; relational work; care and contribution work; resistance and micropolitical work; corporeal work; and narrative and identity work;
- the harm caused to and costs incurred by these everyday actors as they undertake this work within a broader context characterized by (largely manufactured) impediments to their efforts and discourses which cause others to misread this work (e.g., consider the misreading of resistance as a failure of affect). These forms of hurt include: navigational hurt; relational hurt; care and contribution hurt; resistance and micropolitical hurt; corporeal hurt; and narrative and identity hurt;

- inequitable labour demands wherein the structure of the landscape—as well the operation of the educational technocracy and the storyscape—requires those in positions of lower power to acquiesce to the demands of the comparably more powerful; to translate their work so as to make it legible to the parties who make and enforce these legibility demands; and to remain wary and weary of those in positions of power who may *mark* them and render them *hypervisible* and vulnerable to increased harm;
- the extent to which one’s positioning on the landscape intensifies labour demands by increasing one’s vulnerability to risk and reducing one’s access to support;
- the dependency of the educational technocracy on the (inequitably distributed and ever-increasing) work of on-the-ground actors (including students, caregivers, and school staff) as well as the offloading of costs/harms onto the less powerful;
- the extension of the educational technocracy into home life and the mobilization of caregivers and students to serve as (unpaid and largely unsupported) educational workers;
- how neoliberal education reform has eroded the education system and led to an intensification of the work and costs offloaded onto everyday actors;
- the power of *pedagogical fetish objects* and the extent to which these are used by various actors (including students) to mark and stratify themselves and others;
- temporal elements such as: the compressed timelines which intensify pressure on marginalized young people to find and following the “proper” paths along the landscape; the manufacturing of time deficits by the landscape and the educational technocracy; and the harm (the violence) caused by manufactured delays (e.g., in terms of wait times for support services); and
- the role played by *relational webs* and social and cultural capital in helping young people and other everyday actors move through the educational technocracy and their communities as well as the various forces which erode these vital resources.

In addition, this study highlighted some of the factors which specifically impact each participant cluster. For young people, this included experiences of social dislocation and dehumanized loss; the social costs which may be incurred as one moves through the education system and seeks to embody the good student-worker/good kid subjectivities; their narrative vulnerability and dependence upon adults to provide narrative resources; and their (often

unrecognized and unmet) need for generativity and contribution. This work also highlighted the agency and capacities of young people—indicating that they are reflective, observant, and active political actors who are capable of contributing to discussions of educational change and community development. This study also drew attention to the specific factors which impacted the adult participants. For caregivers, this includes the impediments they experiences while trying to *cross the threshold* into schools (which draws attention to the need to conceptualize accessibility and relevance in relational terms). For school staff, this includes their efforts to engage in *affective linking* within an educational technocracy that actually manufactures impediments to this work—which forces them to emotionally distance from the students they are support and leads to inevitable failure and dehumanized loss. Lastly, consideration of CBO representatives draws attention the challenges they face while seeking to address the gaps which are manufactured by the structure of the landscape—while, subsequently, dealing with the bureaucratic elements, institutional silos, and political challenges which impact the landscape of community development and non-profit work.

Further, the existing hegemonic map fails to account for the operation of the storyscape. Indeed, it presents the landscape as a natural construction, rather than the product of historical and contemporary landscaping. Considering the storyscape draws attention the *dominating stories about* and various discourses which work to maintain and justify—through cultural and epistemic violence—the structural violence of the landscape. Further, this brings to light several factors which impact the educational success of young people, including:

- the mythical norms of *studenthood, parenthood, and teacherhood* to which individuals are expected to aspire by embodying specific subjectivities (including, the *good kid, the good student-worker without rights; the good parent-worker; and the good teacher-worker*)’
- how these mythical norms and subjectivities function to maintain disciplinary regimes and biopolitical control;
- deficit-oriented dominating stories about young people, caregivers, teachers, communities, and schools which may be internalized and, subsequently, foster surplus powerlessness;
- the cultural and ideological nature of both dominant conceptions of education and child/youth (which is predicated upon the discursive and structural manufacturing of *delayed adulthood*);

- the resonance between the dominant *stories about school, a good life, and success/failure* with the broader *paternalistic metanarrative of deficit* (which suggests that local actors draw upon the same discursive constructions as those found within policy, research, and scholarship);
- the existence of *counter-stories about school, a good life, and success/failure* and *subordinated stories of experience* which circulate (primarily) within the hidden transcript (as well as how this narrative subordination prevents the telling of stories which call both the landscape and the storyscape into question);
- how the operations of both the landscape and the storyscape limit the availability of narrative resources which individuals could use to make meaning from their experiences and/or develop their own self-concepts (and, overall, the contextual embeddedness of each individual's narrative world);
- the influence of adultist, colonial, racist, classist, neoliberal, and high modernist discourses and how these shape the public transcripts which dictates what is speakable and unspeakable within public spaces;
- how these operations of the storyscape serve to mystify education, resilience, parental disengagement, and other phenomena; and
- how the storyscape, by limiting the extent to which experiences of harm, social inequality, and oppression can be interpreted and discussed, actually prevents collective action by enforcing a narrative frame that leads to moral exclusion and the individualization of deficit, responsibility, and blame.

A contrapuntal reading of this hegemonic map that draws upon and *reads back in* these numerous excluded factors (that is, what is left off the map of the landscape, which includes the entire concept of the storyscape) fundamentally destabilizes several of its key presumptions, including: the notion that addressing social inequality is best achieved by improving the situation of individuals (indeed, this study's findings point to the need to challenge structural relationships); the overwhelming faith put into the school-to-work-to-wellbeing theory of change; the presumption that schools are safe, trusted, and apolitical sites which are accessible to students and caregivers; the notion that low levels of trust are due to the misinterpretations of individuals (rather than logical conclusions drawn from lived experience); and the notion that

interpersonal relationship building is both an apolitical and sufficient mechanisms for engaging young people. Indeed, given the operation of both the landscape and the storyscape, educational inequality is more accurately conceptualized as something which is, largely, *manufactured* by the very system (the educational technocracy) which claims to hold the cure for socioeconomic issues.

In addition, it calls into question the notion that simply “infusing Indigenous perspectives” into educational curriculum will result in improved outcomes for Indigenous students; specifically, this study helps to reveal the fact curriculum—which is itself a discursive construct reflecting relations of power—is implemented in an inherently politicized space that largely manufactures the various harms it claims to cure. This, in addition to the culture of silence around race and ideological adherence to colour-blind liberal multiculturalism identified within schools inherently circumscribes any such “infusion” efforts—generally reducing the complexity of Indigenous experiences into a homogenized “Indigenous experience” and then reducing this monolithic Indigenous experience into a discussion of (narrowly defined) “culture” and (problematically framed) “history” (which, serves to reaffirm the colonizing [re-]settler state, rather than challenge it). There was direct evidence of these tendency at Eaglecrest, as evidenced by engagement with students who expressed that discussion of Indigenous experiences was very minimal or who, when asked to describe what they learned, could only recite which animals corresponded to which of the Seven Teachings or present a very rudimentary overview of the residential school system. This tendency, as well as its potential causes, was directly discussed identified by Dawn:

A lot of teachers, like, when they try to teach about Aboriginal things, they miss stuff that happens. Or they don't really say it correctly. Or sometimes teachers, they try once and then they give up. Some teachers, you might get confused by what happened or they might feel uncomfortable talking about that stuff. Like, if a teacher was talking about residential schools, they might start getting uncomfortable with, like, the stuff that happened in the school, in residential schools. And maybe wouldn't keep teaching about that stuff. I think they're just not comfortable with it. Like, sometimes, some of the stuff that happened during residential schools and stuff is sad. Because a lot of the people that were in residential schools, like they didn't survive. Like, a lot of them got killed or they starved to death or something like that. Like, teachers might be uncomfortable talking about that kind of stuff.

Further, when I ask her is she talks about Indigenous issues and residential schools within her social studies classes, she stated,

Not really. It's mostly about stuff that, like, other cultures. Like the Egyptians or the Irish or something like that. We mostly talk about what happened in other countries, not what happened in Canada. But, I feel like, teachers, even if they feel uncomfortable about Aboriginal stuff, I think they should still speak about it because students need to know about what happened in their country—what happened to the people that used to live here.

Hence, Dawn draws attention to how limited efforts engage with Indigenous perspectives are at Eaglecrest—which, again, is a school which is rhetorically and often practically committed to these efforts. Further, underneath her comments is a reduction of teacher resistance to a “lack of comfort,” a reduction of historical experiences to residential schools, and framing of colonial violence as a phenomenon of the past (“students need to know...what happened to the people that *used to* live here”).

Further, Vanessa noted that Indigenous Education was subsumed within the work of the Education for Sustainable Development Committee and that, in order to access funding, her and other teachers had to demonstrate their efforts by linking these to pre-existing curriculum outcomes and actually providing visual proof their work, stating,

This year we're collecting, we're collecting artefacts and evidence of integration [of Indigenous perspectives] in order to share it with the rest of the division. So, throughout our school we're kind of taking pictures and doing write-ups and stuff.

This suggests that the notion of “integrating Indigenous perspectives” is subjected to the same types of formulaic legibility demands that used to assess student academic outcomes. Hence, the notion of Indigenous perspectives are not only reduced to those which are “safe” (that is, which do not post a challenge to the nationalist narrative of Canada), but also to those which are “legible” to the educational technocracy. Notably, since the time of this research, the focus on Indigenous was relocated—and is now under the auspices of the school's Education for Reconciliation Committee.

In addition, there was also indication of broader colonial discourses at work. For example, when I asked one staff member about her efforts to integrate Indigenous perspectives, she stated:

Well, I mean, as much as I—they have some great perspectives that I think—and I do teach a lot of them. A lot of them can just be embedded in everyday, you know, teaching, right? So, like the Seven Teachings—like using courage, that's something you talk about all the time, or being respectful, everyone. You're always talking about that. So, in that sense a lot of it is already integrated.

But, I mean, I also, on the other note—I do, I agree with putting in Aboriginal perspectives—but I also don't think it should be only that. I feel like the curriculum leaves out a lot of other cultures in there that, maybe, they could add in. Or, instead of saying specifically “Aboriginal,” they could say “various perspectives,” that kind of thing. Cause, I mean, you don't really hear about Chinese perspectives, or anything like that in the curriculum. And as we get more and more people from other countries I think it's important to include those perspectives as well.

This comment not only reflects an ideological commitment to both colour-blind liberal multiculturalism and maintaining the nationalist imaginary of Canada (by reducing Indigenous experience, removing elements that call attention to colonial violence and question the operations of the [re-]settler state, and subsuming Indigenous peoples into the broader imagined community of Canada) but it also indicates that some Eaglecrest staff members are interpreting the (slowly) changing demographics at the school (due to the influx of newcomers) as reason to undermine even the comparably limited centering of Indigenous perspectives that was presenting occurring. An exchange with Bachir also indicated this trend. In one focus group he told me,

Last year, umm—like, the past years we used to talk so much about Aboriginal stuff and then, my teacher, Miss R didn't think it was fair so she wanted to give us a chance to learn about African culture and that stuff. I thought that was fun.

While being granted a chance to learn about experiences that resonated more with his own my have been helpful for Bachir, the notion that (as he claims) his teacher suggested that the centring of Indigenous perspectives at Eaglecrest was “unfair.” Overall, this indicates that while the school presents itself as being very attune to Indigenous experiences, within the context of individual classrooms daily practice may contradict these rhetorical commitments. However, I should note that in more recent years Eaglecrest has sought to re-frame it's overall approach to integrating Indigenous perspectives and have implemented a series of initiatives meant to—as the school administration suggested—significantly deepen this work. Indeed, it would be valuable to explore the current situation at Eaglecrest to see if the impact of these initiatives.

8.4 De-stabilizing the map, the landscape, and the storyscape: Implications

Overall, this study calls into both the hegemonic map of educational inequality and the *paternalistic metanarrative of deficit* that it both reflects and maintains. These findings give support to alternative *meta-narrative of on-going colonization* and its corresponding counter-map—which centralizes the impact of historical, political, and structural dynamics and challenges idealistic conceptualization of schooling as the pathway toward a good life. It supports the notion

that the landscape is a historical and political construction which serves to maintain colonial processes. However, it also adds to this understanding, drawing attention to the impact of neoliberal education reform, the educational technocracy, processes of landscaping and storyscaping (which hint at the existence of powerful landscapers and storyscapers). and mechanisms biopolitical control—thereby helping to illuminate how the macro-level structural factors identified by the *meta-narrative of on-going colonization* actually manifest at the level of the everyday (which also drawing attention to the various ways in which local actors work within and challenge these dynamics).

By linking the analysis of the macro to the operations of the everyday, this study provides a foundation for developing deeper analysis as well as local-level strategies for challenging the landscape and storyscape. While this foundation for further analysis and strategizing still requires considerably additional research and theorizing, I do it does—at the very least—suggests the potential of narrative work and critical pedagogical practice (e.g., as discussed by Freire, 2011) to draw out *stories of experience* that could help to counteract moral exclusion, foster discursive empowerment, challenge surplus powerlessness, build local level coalitions, and call the public transcript into question. Further, this study offers several conceptual tools for enriching the meta-narrative of on-going colonization and providing greater details to the “counter-map” (e.g., the mythical norms of studenthood, parenthood, and teacherhood, the classification scheme used to identify the various form of work undertaken and hurt experienced by everyday actors, the notion of pedagogical fetish objects, and the identification of temporal factors). These ideas can be developed further and used to create new theoretical frames for analyzing daily practices in a manner that maintains a focus on the capacity and agency of those working on the ground and prevents the deployment of deficit-oriented paradigms. Hence, this study serves to de-stabilize the hegemonic map while also providing a foundation for expanding alternative theoretical explanations (to develop a counter-map and counter-narrative). Arguably, many of the individual elements generated through this analysis (e.g., the classification of work and hurt) could also be employed in the analysis of other social phenomenon.

Implications for the Peace and Conflict Studies

The overall purpose of this study was, essentially, two-fold; on one hand, I wanted to add to and challenge (to “trouble”) the existing “map” of the educational landscape. Secondly, I

wanted to explore the process of conducting peace research in a manner that responds to current trends in scholarship (particularly explorations of “everyday” and “local” peace) in relation to schools and young people. Overall, this study makes several theoretical contributions to the PACS discipline; this includes various conceptual ideas which can be adapted and employed to study manifestations of violence, conflict, and peace in other contexts (the classifications of work and hurt and the distinction between the landscape and the storyscape could be particularly useful in this regard). This work also draws attention to the complexities and nuances of everyday contexts and highlights the need to draw out both *stories about* and *stories of* peace and violence—to double-listen for that which is explicitly said and that which is implicit. This work also challenges the tendency of specific traditions of PACS scholarship (most notably the liberal peace paradigm) to employ deficit-oriented paradigms when working with local populations (in general) and young people (in particular). Indeed, it suggests that PACS scholars should conceptualize young people as agents and political actors capable to contributing robust analyses of their social worlds. Further, the specific research methods described in this report (including the Educational Journey Map and Tree of Life) could be adapted and employed by PACS scholars, thereby offering a means for engaging young participants. Lastly, this study challenges the assumption—common within PACS—that schools and educational systems are apolitical institutions. Rather, they are highly complex spaces and any peacebuilding work undertaken in these settings (e.g., peace education programming) must be rooted in a robust analysis of the educational landscape and storyscape.

8.5 Limitations and Future Research

As stated in chapter one, this study was meant to offer a starting point for additional scholarship, including my own future research program. Hence, it was necessarily limited in size and scope and, while I believe many of the core concepts introduced through this work are potentially generalizable to other settings, I do recognize that more work is required to further strengthen this assertion. In the future I intend to undertake additional research that employs the main concepts and themes identified in this particular report. I am particularly interested in engaging with a broader age demographic and to develop participant recruitment strategies that will facilitate the involvement of young people who—due to various logistical and gatekeeping

issues—were excluded from the focus groups. I also intend on refining and employing the Tree of Life and Educational Journey Map strategies in future research.

Further, I anticipate that some may wish to question the validity of this work because they question the extent to which young people are capable of serving as reliable informants. One on hand, I am compelled to dismiss this criticism as another manifestation of adultist discourse—not to suggest that the stories of young people offer “objectively accurate” depictions of reality, but rather to infer that, perhaps, researcher should consider adult participants as also imperfect sources. This being said, I did employ numerous methods to strength the rigor of this study, including triangulation and constant comparison as well as an assortment of member checking strategies (often incorporated in my focus group processes).

8.6 Closing thoughts

During the final stage of writing this report, two significant events occurred which—in my mind—provided further evidence of the need to challenge the hegemonic map, the landscape, the storyscape, and the educational technocracy. The first of these events was the spread of and the various mechanisms used to manage and contain this health crisis. Being the spouse of a teacher, I have a sense of how this reality has impacted young people, caregivers, and educators. I cannot help but read this crisis through the concept of the landscape and the demands of the educational technocracy; COVID-19 has raised public awareness of many of the gaps which are manufactured by the landscape. However, the impact of these gaps is generally read as being “caused by” the pandemic itself. I suggest an alternative explanation; that is, the stability and functionality of the education system—prior to the pandemic—was dependent upon the externalization of labour and harm onto students, caregivers, and educators. These actors maintain the stability of the system largely by: drawing upon unrecognized resources; doing work that is not recognized; developing unique workarounds and strategies to accomplish their goals despite systemic impediments; and “finding” and “making time” by over-extending themselves to the point of burnout. COVID-19 has not only intensified these work demands (e.g., social distancing has significantly increased the corporeal work demands placed upon students and teachers), but also severely impacted the unrecognized resources that people draw upon (e.g., destabilizing relational webs), eliminated many of the strategies and workarounds that people employ to get through the day, and significantly impacted time pressures and stress

levels. Hence, COVID-19 has not created a “crisis” in the education system—it has simply suppressed or removed the elements which the educational technocracy has relied upon to maintain its false image as an equitable and functional system. Further, and expectedly, the discourse which has come to surround the impact of the pandemic on schools has readily employed deficit-oriented paradigms and oppressive discourse as discussions of young people as a “lost generation” who are—and will remain—“behind others” dominate public discourse.

The second major event was a more local one. Manitoba’s provincial government recently released the long-awaited final report of the Commission on K to 12 Education as well as *Bill 64: The Education Modernization Act*. This legislation—which is justified not only by the findings of the Commission’s report, but also by the impact of COVID-19 on student outcomes in Manitoba—proposes a radical restructuring of the entire education system. This will include the elimination of school boards and the centralization of power within a provincial school authority (making an already out-of-touch bureaucracy even more disconnected and authoritarian); increased surveillance of both students and teachers through the expansion of accountability measures such as standardized testing; the transferring of power from elected and paid school trustees onto local (institutionalized/formalized) Parents Councils (which not only increases the work demands placed upon caregivers, but completely ignores the challenges they face when seeking to *cross the threshold* into school); potential curriculum changes which will further promote the marketization of education and erode existing work in Indigenous education (which is already limited and problematic); and, generally, manufacture further limitations that will directly impede the work of students, teachers, and caregivers (which, no double, will also intensify the work demands of CBOs who must address these limitations and gaps).

Both of these events have not only intensified the externalization of work and hurt onto everyday actors (including young people) but have also shown *just how quickly things can get so much worse*. As a result, this first-gen kid from Rexdale is now even more convinced of the need for more robust analyses of educational inequality as well as the need for collective resistance and change.

APPENDIX ONE
SUMMARY OF FACTORS IMPACTING THE
EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF INDIGENOUS STUDENTS
(AS SUGGESTED BY EXISTING LITERATURE)

Appendix 1.1 Location: Individual Indigenous students

Table 1 Summary of factors and interventions (individual Indigenous students)

Factors	Interventions
<p><i>Student characteristics and access to resources:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socioeconomic status • Gender • Indigenous identity and Status • Mobility and churn rates • Physical and mental health • Personal and cultural learning styles • Special learning and behavioural needs • Geographic location and distance from schooling institutions • Access to transportation • Access to digital technologies/internet <p><i>Student experiences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lived traumatic experiences (e.g., abuse, homelessness, violence, bullying) • Intergenerational residential school trauma • Child welfare involvement • Disrupted schooling • Social exclusion, discrimination, and micro-aggressions • Cultural and epistemic discontinuity <p><i>Student capacities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life skills • English language proficiency • Indigenous language proficiency • Cultural knowledge • Academic preparedness and study skills • Literacy and numeracy levels 	<p><i>General purpose</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level the playing field by ensuring access and/or mitigating the impact of inequality on school readiness <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head Start initiatives and other early childhood education programs • Nutrition programs • Targeted learning support (e.g., in literacy and numeracy) • English as an Additional Language (EAL) support • Homework clubs • Community Schools Program • Partnership with Indigenous community and other organizations • Improve Indigenous Identity Declaration forms and practices • Psychosocial assessments and supports • Facilitating access to out-of-school supports and services (e.g., optometrists, dentists) • Individual Education Plans (IEPs)
<i>Student perceptions/subjectivity and affect</i>	<i>General purpose</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-concept and self-esteem • Cultural identity and Indigenous language proficiency • Personal aspirations and hope for the future • Conceptualization of education and success • Perceptions of educational and career accessibility • Perceived relevance of in-school activities (learning and extra-curricular) • Sense of personal and cultural safety (in school and generally) • Fear of success and losing family and/or community connection • Level of trust in school, teachers, and other adults • Feelings of social exclusion/isolation and loneliness (in school and generally) • Sense of “connection” to school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage affect, create attachment, and shape value judgements <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language immersion and cultural programming • Curriculum reform (for cultural relevance and accessibility) • Leadership development and extra-curricular activities • Career education, mentorship, and apprenticeship programming • Positive teacher-student relationships and one-on-one support (e.g., success coaches) • Focus on unique “gifts” of each student • Inclusion of Elders and traditional teachings • Holistic approach to support (addressing physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs) • Expand music, art, and physical education programming • Hold community events • Create individual “spaces” in schools (e.g., specific room with access to resources and supports)
<p><i>Student behaviours: in-school</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance/skipping class • Overall “engagement” with school • “Resistant,” “oppositional,” or otherwise disruptive behaviours • Extra-curricular involvement • Persistence/academic resilience • Engaging in violence or “bullying” • Choice of peers • Academic performance • Time management <p><i>Student behaviours: out-of-school</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk behaviours (e.g., sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, smoking, criminal activity, getting into “trouble”) • Pregnancy 	<p><i>General purpose</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target behaviours (address and prevent) • Use behaviour as an indicator of “at-risk” status and target underlying causes (by ensuring access, mitigating the impact of inequality, engaging affect, creating attachments, and shaping value judgements) <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various disciplinary practices (zero tolerance policies, restorative justice practices, suspensions, etc.) • Conflict resolution and peer mediation practices • Use of school resource officers (police)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caring for children and relatives • Holding part-time employment • Reading regularly at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance and achievement tracking (e.g., standardized testing) • Use of truancy officers • Child welfare interventions • Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Behaviour Intervention Plans (BIPs) • Provision of transportation and/or walking school buses • To address root causes: interventions meant to level the playing field and/or engage affect
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Appendix 1.2 Location: Caregiver, home, and local community

Table 2 Summary of factors and interventions (caregiver, home, and local community)

Factors	Interventions
<p><i>Caregiver characteristics and access to resources:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socioeconomic status • Gender • Indigenous identity and Status • Physical and mental health • Geographic location and distance from schooling institutions • Access to transportation • Access to digital technologies/internet • Educational attainment • Employment status <p><i>Caregiver experiences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lived traumatic experiences (e.g., abuse, homelessness, interpersonal violence) • Intergenerational residential school trauma • Social exclusion and discrimination (in school and generally) • Racial micro-aggressions (in school and generally) • Past experiences with child's school(s) • Own schooling experiences 	<p><i>General purpose</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level the playing field by increasing parental capacity to ensure access and provide support so as to ensure student's school readiness <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head Start initiatives and other early childhood education programs • Family food and nutrition programs • Parenting programs • Partnership with Indigenous community and other organizations to provide support (e.g., assisting with referrals) • English as an Additional Language (EAL) support • Community Schools Program • Improve Indigenous Identity Declaration forms and practices • Holistic approach to family engagement (seeing child as part of family system) • Provide information to parents on post-secondary opportunities and funding

<p><i>Caregiver capacities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life and parenting skills • English language proficiency • Indigenous language proficiency • Cultural knowledge • Academic preparedness and study skills • Literacy and numeracy levels • Understanding of education system • Capacity to provide at-home learning support 	
<p><i>Caregiver perceptions/subjectivity and affect</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-concept and self-esteem • Cultural identity and Indigenous language proficiency • Aspirations and hope for child’s future • Conceptualization of education and success • Perceptions of educational and career accessibility • Perception of school (e.g., level of trust, value of education) • Culture of poverty • Sense of “connection” to school 	<p>General purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage affect, create attachment, and shape value judgements so that parents transmit specific behaviours, values, affective states, and expectations • Intervention possibilities are limited and primarily revolve around building relationships with parents and encouraging engagement with school <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting programs • Increase caregiver engagement and inclusion opportunities and proactively build relationships with caregivers
<p><i>Caregiver behaviours: in-school</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School involvement and/or engagement • “Resistant,” “oppositional,” or otherwise disruptive behaviours <p><i>Caregiver behaviours: out-of-school</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk behaviours (e.g., substance abuse) • Employment 	<p>General purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target behaviours (address and prevent) • Use behaviour as an indicator of mistrust, disengagement, or “at-risk” status and target underlying causes • Intervention possibilities are limited and primarily revolve around building relationships with parents and encouraging engagement with school <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caregiver engagement efforts • Child welfare interventions • Conflict resolution practices • Include parents in school and school board advisory committees

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer relevant programming for parents • Actively recruit parent and community volunteers • Set aside space for parents and community members (e.g., “Parent Rooms”) • Employ community liaison workers and cultural advisors • Conflict resolution practices
<p><i>Home environment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size and structure of household (e.g., single parent) • Mobility and churn • Quality of housing • Role models who have completed school (parents, siblings, cousins, etc.) 	<p><i>General purpose</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rarely addressed directly • Efforts are commonly directed at mitigating the impact of challenging circumstances on individuals and/or families <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various approaches to ensuring access and/or mitigating the impact of inequality on school readiness • Child welfare involvement • Facilitating access to other supports (e.g., making referrals to other community organizations) • Mentorship programming
<p><i>Local community/neighbourhood</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socioeconomic status • Employment rates • Educational attainment rates • Culture of poverty • Crime rates • Housing quality • Brain drain (community members who achieve a certain level of education will leave) • Geographic location and distance from educational institutions (e.g., rural and on-reserve communities) 	<p><i>General purpose</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rarely addressed directly • Efforts are commonly directed at mitigating the impact of challenging circumstances on individuals and/or families <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various approaches to ensuring access and/or mitigating the impact of inequality on school readiness • Building school-community partnerships • Allowing the community use of school resources/building • Community Schools Program

Appendix 1.3 Location: Individual educational institutions (school and classroom)

Underlying these intervention efforts is an attempt to fulfill a complex (and contested) institutional mandate: to meet all student needs: to provide a sense of safety and belonging; and to ensure academic “excellence” so as to ensure “readiness” for future employment and educational pursuits.

Table 3 Summary of factors and interventions (individual educational institutions)

Factors	Interventions
<p><i>Teacher characteristics and access to resources</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race, culture, class, gender, and other social locations • Specific position (e.g., elementary or secondary teacher, educational assistant) • Underrepresentation of Indigenous teaching staff <p><i>Teacher experiences, capacities, and behaviours</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training received • Years of teaching experience • Capacity to act as role model for Indigenous students • Communication tendencies and self-presentation (e.g., formality of dress) • General teaching style • Use of personal stories and humour to connect with students <p><i>Teacher perceptions/subjectivity and affect</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biases and prejudices • Perceptions of success and expectations • Educational philosophy • Teacher perception of and response to Indigenous-focused programs and supports • Affective connection to students <p><i>Teacher-student/teacher-parent relationship</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of trust and general nature of relationship 	<p><i>General purpose</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase individual and collective teacher capacity to more effectively engage with and support Indigenous students <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve teacher training and professional development to foster knowledge of Indigenous issues and cultures • Reform teacher training and hiring practices to increase proportion of Indigenous teaching staff • Incorporate mandatory courses on Indigenous issues into teacher training • Work with community liaison workers, cultural advisors, and Elders to improve teaching practice • Maintain high expectations for student success and behaviour

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Culture/class/experiential divide” between teachers and students/parents (Silver & Mallet, 2002, p. 28) 	
<p><i>Administrator characteristics and access to resources</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race, culture, class, gender, and other social locations • Underrepresentation of Indigenous personnel in school leadership positions <p><i>Administrator experiences, capacities, and behaviours</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training received • Years of experience • Capacity to act as role model for Indigenous students • Communication tendencies and self-presentation (e.g., formality of dress) • General leadership style and practices • Use of personal stories and humour to connect with students • Disciplinary practices • School planning practices (e.g., extent to which these are inclusive of Indigenous students and parents) <p><i>Administrator perceptions/subjectivity and affect</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biases and prejudices • Perceptions of success and expectations • Educational and leadership philosophies • Administrator perception of and response to Indigenous-focused programs and supports • Affective connection to students <p><i>Administrator-student/administrator-parent relationship</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of administrator-student trust and general nature of relationship • “Culture/class/experiential divide” between administrators and students/parents (Silver & Mallet, 2002, p. 28) 	<p><i>General purpose:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase individual and collective administrator capacity to develop a school structure and climate that effectively engages with and supports Indigenous students • Note: Interventions generally focus on what administrators can do to improve outcomes for Indigenous students, rather than what can be done for administrators to increase their capacity <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop tracking and accountability mechanisms to judge effectiveness of administrator plans and practices • Develop standardized school planning processes to ensure consideration of Indigenous students and parents • Improve training and professional development to foster knowledge of Indigenous issues and cultures

<p><i>Administrator-teacher relationship</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations of staff • Behaviour towards staff 	
<p><i>Classroom characteristics and physical structure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class size, grade level, and demographic composition • Physical set-up of classroom • Availability of resources (e.g., technology, texts, culturally appropriate resources) <p><i>Classroom/teaching practices</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal curriculum (e.g., cultural relevance of content and teaching practices) • Exclusion of Indigenous perspectives from curriculum content and pedagogy • Hidden curriculum (e.g., power relationships and disciplinary practices) • Micro-level interactions (student-teacher and student-student) • Teacher-caregiver relationship 	<p>General purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure classroom spaces and practices are “inclusive” and “safe” for Indigenous students so that they can engage with learning activities and meet expectations (“succeed”) • To foster a sense of “connection” to class, school, and education more generally <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts to increase individual and collective teacher capacity to more effectively engage with and support Indigenous students • Creating a welcoming environment and classroom community • Culturally relevant classroom practices (e.g., talking circles, arts and crafts) • Incorporation of specific cultural practices (e.g., smudging ceremonies) • Use of field trips • Inclusion of Elders and traditional teachings • Regular recognition of learner successes • Use of reflective, storytelling, and experiential pedagogy • Integrating Indigenous perspectives into education for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students • Use of outdoor and land-based education • Maintaining “high expectations” for student success and behaviour
<p><i>School characteristics and physical structure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School size, grade level, and demographic composition • Physical set-up of school • Availability of resources (e.g., technology, texts, culturally appropriate resources) 	<p>General purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure overall school spaces and practices are “inclusive” and “safe” for Indigenous students so that they can engage with learning activities and meet expectations (“succeed”)

<p><i>School practices, climate, and culture</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal curriculum (e.g., cultural relevance of content and teaching practices) • Hidden curriculum (e.g., power relationships and disciplinary practices) • Misdiagnosis, underdiagnosis, and overdiagnosis of learning and behavioural needs • Conceptualizations of parental engagement/capacity • Exclusion of Indigenous perspectives from school practices and representation • Power relationships • Extracurricular activities and other opportunities • School violence and “bullying” • Extend and quality of caregiver engagement practices (e.g., exclusion of parents from school planning) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To foster a sense of “connection” to school (on part of students and caregivers) <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally relevant school events • Inclusive representation in school design and décor • Increase Indigenous representation in decision-making • Foster welcoming, safe, and inclusive school climate (fostering community) • Restorative justice practices • Increase parental engagement and inclusion opportunities and proactively build relationships with parents • Indigenous spaces (e.g., support rooms) • Engage in school planning processes that incorporate the needs and priorities of Indigenous students and parents • Facilitate the sharing of best practices between educators • Ensure supply of culturally appropriate teaching resources • Maintaining “high expectations” for student success and behaviour • Connecting with local community leaders and organizations
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Appendix 1.4 Location: Broader systems

Table 4 Summary of factors and interventions (broader systems)

<p><i>Education system: Structure and policy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitions between elementary, secondary, and post-secondary systems • Grade promotion and streaming practices • Complexity and inaccessibility of system bureaucracy • Lack of inter-school collaboration • Use of labels (at risk, special needs, etc.) • De-professionalization of teachers 	<p><i>General purpose</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depends upon perspective of analyst • Remove barriers to school completion and ease transitions to post-secondary education and job market • Increase Indigenous control of education system
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographic location and accessibility of institutions <p><i>Education system: Governance and Decision Making</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships between educational authorities (e.g., provincial ministries of education, school boards, band-operated schools) • Indigenous/community control over education • Data availability and dissemination issues • Jurisdictional conflicts (e.g., federal versus provincial responsibilities) • Exclusion of young people from decision-making and planning processes • Competing definitions of key terms. (e.g., consultation, engagement, success, control) • Public perceptions of Indigenous education initiatives 	<p><i>Common interventions: Transitions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition programs (e.g., Access programs) • Supports to ease transitions between schools (including transition from on-r • Indigenous institutions of higher learning • Academic upgrading programs (for adults) • Provide access to education through distance learning and/or remote sites (community delivery) • Flexible programming models <p><i>Common interventions: Other</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pan-Canadian reform efforts • Increase Indigenous representation in/control of decision-making • Engagement with Indigenous philosophies of learning and education (e.g., holistic education, notions of the “Learning Spirit”) • Facilitate the sharing of best practices between schools and school systems
<p><i>Education system: Funding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall underfunding of K-12 system • Overall underfunding of student supports • Chronic underfunding of on-reserve schools • Limited targeted funding for Indigenous students (overall) • Inadequate physical and human infrastructure (overall) • Data availability and dissemination issues • Funding accountability issues • Post-secondary tuition costs and challenges of accessing funding supports (e.g., band funding) • Other unsupported “day-to-day” education costs (e.g., housing, transportation, childcare) • Accessibility of funding and complexity of application processes 	<p><i>General purpose</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove barriers to school completion and ease transitions to post-secondary education and job market by ensuring adequate support for individual students, schools, and programs <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase overall funding for K-12 education system (both provincial and on-reserve) • Ensure parity between provincial and on-reserve schools • Increase funding support for Indigenous post-secondary students (e.g., student loan system reform) • Ensure stable funding for various programs (e.g., student support, parental engagement, cultural)

<p><i>Education system: Curriculum</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underlying philosophy of learning and education (eurocentrism, secularism, neoliberal ethos) • Definitions of success and assessment mechanisms • Accountability mechanisms • Exclusion of Indigenous perspectives from curriculum • Culturally appropriate resources • Course availability 	<p><i>General purpose</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure curriculum is “inclusive” so that Indigenous students can engage with/connect to learning activities and meet expectations (“succeed”) • Definition of “success” depends upon perspective of analyst, referring to either 1) school completion and meeting grade-level learning expectations (common); or 2) more “holistic” notions of personal development (rare) <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum reform (for cultural relevance and accessibility) • Develop learning and curriculum resources • Increase Indigenous participation in (and control of) curriculum development
<p><i>Influence of other systemic factors</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour market accessibility • Child welfare system • Childcare system • Unemployment assistance programs • Transportation infrastructure • Community economic development and “brain drain” • Underfunding of community-based organizations and alternative education • Broader issues of Indigenous sovereignty and Treaty rights • Jurisdictional conflicts (e.g., federal versus provincial responsibilities) • Identity categorization (e.g., supports available to Status First Nations students not available to non-Status students) 	<p><i>General purpose</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rarely addressed directly • Efforts are commonly directed at mitigating the impact of challenging circumstances on individuals and/or families <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various approaches to ensuring access and/or mitigating the impact of inequality on school readiness (wherein it is assumed that increasing education attainment rates will indirectly impact other systemic factors) • Efforts to increase Indigenous engagement with/control of education system • Increase funding for non-profit and community organizations that address the impact of these other systemic factors
<p><i>Continuing impact of historical events or dynamics</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical and on-going colonialism • Impact of residential schools 	<p><i>General purpose</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rarely addressed directly • Efforts are commonly directed at mitigating the impact of challenging

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of assimilationist education policies • Devolution of on-reserve education • Overt and systemic racism • Impact of neoliberalism and the resulting underfunding of public services 	<p>circumstances on individuals and/or families</p> <p><i>Common interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various approaches to ensuring access and/or mitigating the impact of inequality on school readiness (wherein it is assumed that increasing education attainment rates will indirectly address the impact of historical events and dynamics) • Curriculum reform (to address impact of colonial “legacy” and residential schools) • Treaty education initiatives • Efforts to increase Indigenous engagement with/control of education system • Education for Reconciliation initiatives
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APPENDIX TWO
STATISTICAL DATA

Appendix 2.1 Graduation rates for Manitoba

Table 5 Four-year graduation rates (% of student population who graduated “on time”)

Starting Cohort Year	Non-Indigenous			Indigenous			Gap
	Girls	Boys	Overall	Girls	Boys	Overall	Overall
2009	86.9	80.3	83.5	48.8	45	46.9	36.6
2010	88.2	81.4	84.7	47.9	46.6	47.2	37.5
2011	88.6	82.2	85.3	48.8	42.5	45.7	39.6
2012	89.2	82.8	86.0	49.9	45.1	47.4	38.6
2013	89.6	84.1	86.8	52.7	46.1	49.4	37.4
2014 (Graduated in 2018)	90.6	85.4	87.9	51.2	45.9	48.5	39.4
Change (2009 to 2014)	+3.7	+5.1	+4.4	+2.4	+0.9	+1.6	+2.8%

Table 6 Five-year graduation rates (% of student population who graduated within five years)

Starting Cohort Year	Non-Indigenous			Indigenous			Gap
	Girls	Boys	Overall	Girls	Boys	Overall	Overall
2009	90.2	84.7	87.4	54.4	51.0	52.7	34.7%
2010	91	85.6	88.2	55.2	54.3	54.8	33.4%
2011	91.4	85.9	88.5	56.5	49.4	52.9	35.6%
2012	92	86.8	89.4	57.7	52.5	55.1	34.3%
2013 (Graduated in 2018)	92.1	87.8	89.9	60.0	54.3	57.1	32.8%
Change (2009 to 2013)	+1.9	+3.1	+2.5	+5.6	+3.3	+4.4	-1.9%

Table 7 Six-year graduation rates (% of student population who had graduated within six years)

Starting Cohort Year	Non-Indigenous			Indigenous			Gap
	Girls	Boys	Overall	Girls	Boys	Overall	Overall
2009	91.1	86.1	88.6	57.2	53.8	55.5	33.1%
2010	91.9	86.6	89.1	58.8	57.8	58.3	30.8%
2011	92.6	87.4	83.3	60.8	53.4	57.1	26.2%
2012 (Graduated in 2018)	93.0	88.0	90.4	61.3	56.4	56.4	34%
Change (2009 to 2012)	+1.9	+1.9	+1.8	+4.1	+2.6	+0.9	+0.9%

Table 8 Gap between non-Indigenous and Indigenous per cohort year and completion time

Starting Cohort Year	4-Year			5-Year			6-Year		
	Girls	Boys	Overall	Girls	Boys	Overall	Girls	Boys	Overall
2009	38.1	35.3	36.6	35.8	33.7	34.7	33.9	32.3	33.1
2010	40.3	34.8	37.5	35.8	31.3	33.4	33.1	28.8	30.8
2011	39.8	39.7	39.6	34.9	36.5	35.6	31.8	34.0	26.2
2012	39.3	37.7	38.6	34.3	34.3	34.3	31.7	31.6	34.0
2013	36.9	38.0	37.4	32.1	33.5	32.8	NA	NA	NA
2014	39.4	39.5	39.4	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Change (first to last available date)	+1.3	+4.2	+2.8	-3.7	-0.2	-1.9	-2.2	-0.7	+0.9

Data Source:

Government of Manitoba. (2019). High school graduation rates and student achievement statistics. *Manitoba Education*, https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/grad_rates/student-tracked.html

Appendix 2.2 Standardized assessment statistics for Manitoba

Table 9 Grade three and four assessment: Percentage of students meeting expectations

Assessment	Non-Indigenous			Indigenous		
	2009	2017	Change	2009	2017	Change
Numeracy	29.0	38.5	+9.5	15.1	20.4	+5.3
Reading	47.2	51.5	+4.3	26.7	28.2	+1.3

- Numeracy gap in 2009: 13.9%
- Numeracy gap in 2017: 18.1% (+4.2%)
- Reading gap in 2009: 20.5%
- Reading gap in 2017: 23.3% (+2.8%)

Table 10 Middle years assessment (mid-grade seven): Percentage of students meeting mid-grade performance expectations

Assessment	Non-Indigenous			Indigenous		
	2008	2018	Change	2008	2018	Change
Number Sense and Number Skills (English Program)	28.6	39.6	+11	13.3	15.8	+2.5
Reading Comprehension in English (English Program)	48.0	57.2	+9.2	24.6	27.6	+3.0
Expository Writing in English (English Program)	41.7	50.0	+8.3	20.2	21.7	+1.5

- Number sense and number skills gap in 2008: 15.3%
- Number sense and number skills gap in 2018: 23.8% (+8.5%)
- Reading comprehension gap in 2008: 23.4%
- Reading comprehension gap in 2018: 29.6% (+6.2%)
- Expository writing gap in 2008: 21.5%
- Expository writing gap in 2018: 28.3% (+6.8%)

Table 11 Successful grade nine credit attainment (percentage of students obtaining credits on their first try)

Subject Area	Non-Indigenous			Indigenous		
	2009-2010	2016-2017	Change	2009-2010	2016-2017	Change
Grade 9 Mathematics	89.7%	93%	+3.3%	65.9%	67.6%	+1.7%
Grade 9 English Language Arts	92.2%	94.2%	+2%	71.1%	71.4%	+0.3%

- Grade nine mathematics gap in 2009-2010: 23.8%
- Grade nine mathematics gap in 2016-2017: 25.4% (+1.6%)
- Grade nine English language arts gap in 2009-2010: 21.1%
- Grade nine English language arts gap in 2016-2017: 22.8% (+1.7%)

Table 12 Grade twelve provincial tests (average marks)

Assessment	Non-Indigenous			Indigenous		
	2009	2019	Change	2009	2019	Change
Applied Mathematics	60.9	63.3	+2.4	56.7	57.9	+1.2
Essential Mathematics	59.4*	56.7	-2.7*	53.3*	49.3	-4.0*
Pre-Calculus Mathematics	67.4	68.9	+1.5	57.8	60.3	+ 2.5
English Language Arts	66.3	69.4	+3.1	59.5	60.6	+ 1.1

*2009 data was unavailable for Essential Mathematics. Figures from 2014 were used for the 2009 column.

- Applied mathematics gap in 2009: 4.2%
- Applied mathematics gap in 2019: 5.4% (+**1.2%**)

- Essential mathematics gap in 2014: 6.1%
- Essential mathematics gap in 2019: 7.4% (+**1.3%**)

- Pre-calculus mathematics gap in 2009: 9.6%
- Pre-calculus mathematics gap in 2019: 8.6% (-**1.0%**)

- English language arts gap in 2009: 6.8%
- English language arts gap in 2019: 8.8% (+**2.0%**)

Data Source:

Government of Manitoba. (2019). High school graduation rates and student achievement statistics. *Manitoba Education*, https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/grad_rates/student-tracked.html

APPENDIX THREE
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Appendix 3.1 Student participant demographics (focus group participants)

Table 13 Student participant demographics by pseudonym

Pseudonym	Grade	Age	Gender	Race, Citizenship Status, and/or Nationality
Asim	6	12*	Male	Newcomer (refugee—Sudanese)
Avery	7	12	Female	Newcomer (immigrant)
Bachir	5	10	Male	Newcomer (refugee—Sudanese)
Cassandra	6	11	Female	Indigenous (Métis)
Davy	5	10	Male	Newcomer (refugee—Congolese)
Dawn	8	13	Female	Indigenous (First Nations—Cree)
Emily	5	9	Female	Mixed Race (one Métis parent)
Ethan	6	11	Male	Indigenous (Métis)
Ghani	5	11	Male	Newcomer (refugee—Afghan)
Halima	6	12*	Female	Newcomer (refugee—Eritrean)
Jemal	6	11	Male	Newcomer (immigrant—Eritrean)
Jordan	6	13*	Male	Indigenous (First Nations—Cree)
Kennedy	6	11	Female	White
Leo	5	10	Male	Indigenous (First Nations—Cree)
Liam	8	13	Male	White
Mason	6	11	Male	Indigenous (First Nations—Cree/Ojibwe)
Mia	6	11	Female	Newcomer (immigrant)
Noah	5	10	Male	Indigenous (First Nations—Cree)
Peter	5	10	Male	Mixed Race (one Métis parent)
Robbie	7	13	Male	Indigenous (First Nations—Cree)
Rose	5	10	Female	Indigenous (First Nations—Cree)
Subira	6	11	Female	Newcomer (refugee—Ethiopian)
Tanya	5	12*	Female	Indigenous (First Nations)

*Early schooling disruptions led to student being older than other peers in their grade

Table 14 Overall student participant demographics

Category		Total	% of Total Participants
Gender	Male	13	56.5%
	Female	10	43.5%
Grade	5	9	39%
	6	10	43.6%
	7	2	8.7%
	8	2	8.7%
Age	9	1	4.3%
	10	6	26%
	11	8	35%
	12	4	17.4%
	13	4	17.4%
Race, Citizenship Status, and/or Nationality	Indigenous—First Nation	8	35%
	Indigenous—Métis	2	8.7%
	Mixed Race—Métis parent	2	8.7%
	Newcomer—refugee	6	26%
	Newcomer—immigrant	3	12.9%
	White	2	8.7%

Appendix 3.2 Adult participant demographics (interview participants)

Table 15 Caregiver participant demographics

Pseudonym	Number of children at Eaglecrest	Number of years at Eaglecrest	Gender	Race, Citizenship Status, and/or Nationality
Bernice	4	4	Female	Indigenous
Candace	4	4	Female	Not Stated
Kimberly	2	5	Female	Unknown
Lena	3	7	Female	White (European)
Olivia	1	1	Female	Not Stated
Penny	3	6	Female	Indigenous

Table 16 School staff participant demographics

Pseudonym	Grade(s) Currently Taught	Years of Experience	Gender	Race, Citizenship Status, and/or Nationality
Bryce	3	3-5	Male	White
Margaret	Not applicable	10+	Female	White
Roberta	5/6	10+	Female	White
Tracy	1	3-5	Female	White
Vanessa	Multiple	3-5	Female	White

Table 17 Community-based organization representative participant demographics

Pseudonym	Focus of Organization		Position	Years of Experience	Gender	Race, etc.
	Demographic	Services or Programs				
Aly	Youth to young adult Mixed Street-affected	Various	Program manager	3-5	Female	Unstated
Andrew	Middle years to highschool Students in school Indigenous Inner city	Educational	Administrative	10+	Male	Indigenous
Christine	Children to young adult Newcomer	Various (educational)	Program manager	3-5	Female	White
Corey	Children to adult Mixed	Arts-based	Administrative	3-5	Male	White
Deirdre	Children to adult Mixed Inner city	Various	Support worker	10+	Female	White
Erin	Children to adult Indigenous Inner city Violence-affected	Various	Program manager	1-2	Female	White
George	Early to middle years Mixed Students in school	Recreational	Administrative	10+	Male	Unstated
Nate	Children to young adult Newcomer	Various (educational)	Program manager	3-5	Male	White
Sam	Children to adult Indigenous Inner city	Various (educational)	Program manager	10+	Male	Indigenous

Table 18 Overall adult participant demographics

Category		Total	% of Total Participants
Gender	Male	6	30%
	Female	14	70%
Race, Citizenship Status, and/or Nationality	Indigenous	4	20%
	White	11	55%
	Unknown to Participant	1	5%
	Unstated by Participant	4	20%

APPENDIX FOUR CONSENT AND ASSENT FORMS

Appendix 4.1: Text from student consent form (signed by parents/guardians)

Project Title: Educational experience narratives of young learners attending an inner-city community school in Winnipeg, Manitoba

Researcher: Julie Hyde, PhD Candidate (University of Manitoba)

Email: -----

Phone: -----

Please keep one copy of this form and return the other to your child's school.

This form should give you a general idea of what this project is about and what your child's participation will involve. If you would like more information, please contact me. I can also meet you in person.

About this project:

I am doing this project because I am interested in learning more about the experiences of young people going to school in Winnipeg as well as how education can be improved. Throughout this project your child will be asked to discuss their experiences in school.

Location and Time Requirement:

Participation will require that your child attend two afternoon meetings and two to four lunch meetings. These meetings will involve small group discussion and art activities.

All of these meetings will happen at your child's school during regular school hours.

I would like to audio record these meetings (but if you do not agree to this I will make notes by hand).

Participation in this project is voluntary and your child may refuse to answer any question or participate in any activity that he/she chooses. Your child may also leave this project at any time.

You may remove your child from this project at any time. If you remove your child, any information regarding your child's participation will be erased. Removal will not result in any negative consequences to you or your child.

Participation is of no cost to you. I agree to provide all of the necessary supplies for this project. Lunch will also be provided for your child at no cost to you. You will receive copies of all reports produced based upon this project. Your child will be permitted to keep their art.

Confidentiality:

Your child's teacher has approved his/her participation. I will not name or otherwise identify your child in any reports or presentations produced from this project. Information containing personal identifiers (like this form) will be destroyed as soon as they are no longer necessary (by

October 2016). All recordings and other notes will be destroyed when no longer needed (by September 2017).

I will keep everything that your child says confidential. The only exception to this is if your child discloses information that indicates they may be harmed by something that is going on in their life (bullying, etc.). Then I am obligated to report what I have heard to you, school staff, and/or other appropriate authorities.

Information from this project will be shared in my final thesis, reports, and at professional meetings (e.g. conferences). Other methods of sharing the data may be employed (e.g., a handout for teachers working in Winnipeg). Your child will not be named in any of these reports or presentations. Also, your child's school will not be named.

Risks and Benefits:

I do not believe that there is any risk to your child from participating in this project. I will regularly check in with your child to ensure they are feeling supported and comfortable. There may be short-term benefit to your child in that they will have an opportunity to share their experiences.

Consent:

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood the information regarding participation in the project and agree to your child's participation.

In no way does this waive your legal rights or release the researcher or involved institutions from their legal or professional responsibilities.

Your child's continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so feel free to ask for more information throughout the project. If you would like more information at any point please speak to me in person or through email (-----) or phone (-----).

Ethics approval has been granted by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (University of Manitoba) and the Winnipeg School Division. If you have any concerns about this project please contact the Human Ethics Coordinator at -----, or by email (-----).

I, _____, consent to my child's participation in this project/study
(print name)

- Yes, I also agree to allow the audio recording of meetings.
 No, I do not agree to allow the audio recording of meetings.

(Your signature)

(Date)

(Researcher's signature)

(Date)

Appendix 4.2: Text from student assent form (signed by young participants)

Researcher: Julie Hyde (University of Manitoba) (-----)

What is this project about?

I want to know what you think about school and how school can be made better for students like you.

What will we be doing?

We will be meeting at lunch (two, three, or four times) and in the afternoon (at least two times).

We will be doing art activities and talking about your thoughts and experiences.

Your rights:

1. You do not have to answer any questions or do any activities that make you feel uncomfortable.
2. I will not tell other people what you have said unless I think you may be hurt by something going on in your life.
3. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be.
4. If you decide to stop after we begin, that's okay too.

It is important that all students in the study feel safe enough to be honest. This means that you cannot repeat what other students say in our meetings. Students who do not follow this rule may be asked to leave the project.

When we are finished I will write a report (called a thesis) about what was learned. I may also write a book or give presentations about what was learned.

Put a check next to each statement you agree to:

- Yes, I understand what we will be doing.
- Yes, I agree to participate in this project.
- Yes, I agree to keep the names of the other students and everything they share private.

Do you agree to audio recording? (Only Julie will listen to these recordings).

- Yes, I agree to have our meetings recorded.
- No, I don't agree to have our meetings recorded.

I, _____, agree to be in this research study.
(print name)

(Sign your name here)

(Date)

(Researcher's signature)

(Date)

Appendix 4.3: Text from caregiver consent form for interviews

Project Title: Educational experience narratives of young learners attending an inner-city community school in Winnipeg, Manitoba

Researcher: Julie Hyde, PhD Candidate (University of Manitoba)

Email: -----

Phone: -----

This consent form should give you an idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more information, feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully.

Project Description:

I am conducting this study because I am interested in learning more about the educational experiences of children and youth (age ten to fourteen) who are attending public school in an inner-city community in Winnipeg. I am interested in exploring this issue so as to develop a better understanding of how education for these students can be improved. The inclusion of other persons in this study (parents/caregivers, school teachers and staff, and community workers) is meant to help develop an in-depth understanding of the contexts within which young people live their lives. In the course of the interview, I will ask you questions about your experiences and perceptions as a parent/caregiver of a student at this school. Although this research is mainly directed toward the production of academic reports and my PhD thesis, I hope it will also provide practical suggestions for those working in the school and community.

Location and Time Requirement:

Participation will require approximately 30 to 40 minutes and will occur at a time and location of your choosing. I will request that you permit me to audio record our conversation, but if you object I will transcribe it by hand. Participation is voluntary and you may decline to answer any question you prefer to omit. You may also withdraw from the study at any time.

Confidentiality:

I will keep all information gathered in this research strictly confidential. All digital data will be kept on a password-protected computer. Only the researcher will have access to the data. You will not be named or made identifiable in any reports of this study. Information containing personal identifiers (e.g. the consent form) will be destroyed as soon as it is no longer necessary for scientific purposes, approximately October 2016. Interview transcripts will be deleted and/or destroyed by shredding once the project reaches its conclusion, approximately March 2017.

Risks and Benefits:

I do not anticipate that there is any risk to you from participating in this research. There may be a short-term benefit to you in terms of having an opportunity to share your experiences.

Consent:

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 no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. If you like more clarification at any point please contact Julie Hyde at (-----).

Ethics approval has been granted by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (University of Manitoba). If you have any concerns about this project please contact the Human Ethics Coordinator -----, or by email (-----).

_____	_____	_____
(Participant Name – please print)	(Participant Signature)	(Date)

_____	_____	_____
(Researcher Name – please print)	(Researcher Signature)	(Date)

Appendix 4.4: Text from school staff member consent form for interviews

Project Title: Educational experience narratives of young learners attending an inner-city community school in Winnipeg, Manitoba

Researcher: Julie Hyde, PhD Candidate (University of Manitoba)

Email: -----

Phone: -----

This consent form, a copy of which I will leave with you for your records, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you a basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about anything mentioned here, or need information that is not included, feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Project Description:

“Educational experience narratives of young learners attending an inner-city community school in Winnipeg, Manitoba” examines the individual and collective “educational journeys” of young people by exploring the stories they tell about their experiences in their school and community. I am conducting this study because I am interested in learning more about the educational experiences of children and youth (age ten to fourteen) who are attending public school in an inner-city community in Winnipeg. I am interested in exploring this issue so that we can develop a better understanding of how education for these students can be improved and how they can be supported in their journeys through the schooling system. The inclusion of other persons in this study (parents/caregivers, school teachers and staff, and community workers) is meant to help enrich these student narratives and to help develop an in-depth understanding of the context within which young people live their lives. In the course of the interview, I will ask you questions about your experiences providing support to/working with young people as well as your perceptions regarding your specific schooling and community context. Although this research is mainly directed toward the production of academic reports and my PhD thesis, I hope it will also provide practical suggestions for those working in the school and community.

Location and Time Requirement:

Participation will require approximately one hour of your time (this time requirement can be reduced to accommodate your schedule). Interviews may take place during regular work hours or outside of these hours (depending on your preference). Interviews may take place at your place of work or at a nearby location (depending on your preference). I will request that you permit me to audio record our conversation, but if you object I will transcribe it by hand. Participation in this project is voluntary and you may decline to answer any question you prefer to omit. You may also withdraw from the study at any time. Please initial here if you would like to receive all reports produced based upon this research _____.

Confidentiality:

I will keep all information gathered in this research strictly confidential (this includes personal names and the name of institutions/ organizations). All data will be identified only by pseudonym and kept in a secure location. All digital data will be kept on a password-protected computer. Only the researcher will have access to the data. You will not be named or made

identifiable in any reports of this study. Information containing personal identifiers (e.g. the consent form) will be destroyed as soon as it is no longer necessary for scientific purposes, approximately October 2016. Interview transcripts will be deleted and/or destroyed by shredding once the project reaches its conclusion, approximately September 2017.

Dissemination:

Results from this research will be disseminated in the form of my final thesis, academic publications, and at professional meetings. Other methods of sharing the data may be employed if deemed appropriate (e.g. a brochure for teachers).

Risks and Benefits:

I do not anticipate that there is any risk to you from participating in this research. There may be a short-term benefit to you in terms of having an opportunity to share your experiences. In the long-term, you may benefit if the findings of this research help in the improvement of practices within the school/community organization.

Consent:

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 no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. If you like more clarification at any point please contact Julie Hyde at (-----).

Ethics approval has been granted by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (University of Manitoba). If you have any concerns about this project please contact the Human Ethics Coordinator at -----, or by email (-----).

_____	_____	_____
(Participant Name – please print)	(Participant Signature)	(Date)
_____	_____	_____
(Researcher Name – please print)	(Researcher Signature)	(Date)

Appendix 4.5: Text from community-based organization worker consent form for interviews

Project Title: Educational experience narratives of young learners attending an inner-city community school in Winnipeg, Manitoba

Researcher: Julie Hyde, PhD Candidate (University of Manitoba)

Email: -----

Phone: -----

This consent form, a copy of which I will leave with you for your records, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you a basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about anything mentioned here, or need information that is not included, feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Project Description:

“Educational experience narratives of young learners attending an inner-city community school in Winnipeg, Manitoba” examines the individual and collective “educational journeys” of young people by exploring the stories they tell about their experiences in their school and community. I am conducting this study because I am interested in learning more about the educational experiences of children and youth (age ten to fourteen) who are attending public school in an inner-city community in Winnipeg. I am interested in exploring this issue so that we can develop a better understanding of how education for these students can be improved and how they can be supported in their journeys through the schooling system. The inclusion of other persons in this study (parents/caregivers, school teachers and staff, and community workers) is meant to help enrich these student narratives and to help develop an in-depth understanding of the context within which young people live their lives. In the course of the interview, I will ask you questions about your experiences providing support to/working with young people as well as your perceptions regarding your specific schooling and community context. Although this research is mainly directed toward the production of academic reports and my PhD thesis, I hope it will also provide practical suggestions for those working in the school and community.

Location and Time Requirement:

Participation will require approximately one hour of your time (to a maximum of 90 minutes). Interviews may take place during regular office hours (8:30am to 3:30pm) or outside of these hours (depending on your preference). Interviews may take place at your place of work, or at a nearby location (depending on your preference). I will request that you permit me to audio record our conversation, but if you object I will transcribe it by hand. Participation in this project is voluntary and you may decline to answer any question you prefer to omit. You may also withdraw from the study at any time. Please initial here if you would like to receive all reports produced based upon this research _____.

Confidentiality:

I will keep all information gathered in this research strictly confidential (this includes personal names and the name of institutions/organizations). All data will be identified only by pseudonym and kept in a secure location. All digital data will be kept on a password-protected computer.

Only the researcher will have access to the data. You will not be named or made identifiable in any reports of this study. Information containing personal identifiers (e.g. the consent form) will be destroyed as soon as it is no longer necessary for scientific purposes, approximately October 2016. Interview transcripts will be deleted and/or destroyed by shredding once the project reaches its conclusion, approximately September 2017.

Dissemination:

Results from this research will be disseminated in the form of my final thesis, academic publications, and at professional meetings. Other methods of sharing the data may be employed if deemed appropriate (e.g. a brochure for teachers).

Risks and Benefits:

I do not anticipate that there is any risk to you from participating in this research. There may be a short-term benefit to you in terms of having an opportunity to share your experiences. In the long-term, you may benefit if the findings of this research help in the improvement of practices within the school/community organization.

Consent:

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 no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. If you like more clarification at any point please contact Julie Hyde at (-----).

Ethics approval has been granted by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (University of Manitoba). If you have any concerns about this project please contact the Human Ethics Coordinator at -----, or by email (-----).

(Participant Name – please print)

(Participant Signature)

(Date)

(Researcher Name – please print)

(Researcher Signature)

(Date)

APPENDIX FIVE**INTERVIEW GUIDES****Appendix 5.1: Student focus group/paired interview guide****Q 1. Let's talk more about your Educational Journey Map.**

Probes/follow-up questions:

Can you tell me more about...

Can you tell me a story about...

Q 2. Tell me a story about a day in school that you will never forget.**Q3. Walk me through a typical day here at [school name] (for you).****Q4. How do you think things are going here? What is working for you?****Q5. What makes for a “good school day” for you?****Q6. What if you're not having a good day. What kinds of things do you do to make things better?**

Probes/follow-up questions:

Is there anyone in particular that you talk to?

Why does [activity] make you feel better?

What else could help you have a good day? What could teachers do to make the day better?

Q7. Is there anything special or unique about [school name]?

Probes/follow-up questions:

Is there anything special or unique about the students here?

Is there anything special or unique about the teachers?

Is there anything special or unique about the community around the school?

Q8. If you were asked to give advice to teachers in your school, what would you tell them?**Q9. What do you find most challenging about being in school?**

Appendix 5.2: Sample adult interview guide

Interview Guide for Teachers/Staff

Overall: I am really interested in hearing stories about your experiences - so stories, anecdotes, and examples are most welcome.

Q 1. Tell me a bit about your position here at [school name].

Probes/follow-up questions:

How long have you been working here?

What brought you to [school name]?

When you started working at [school name] what were your first impressions?

Q 2. Describe/walk me through a “typical day” as a [position] at [school].

Probes/follow-up questions:

What types of activities do you do on a daily basis?

How do you feel at the end of the day?

Q 3. What makes for a “good day” at [school name]?

Probes/follow-up questions:

For you...

For students...

Q 4. How do you think things are going at [school name]? What’s working here?

Probes/follow-up questions:

What’s special or unique about [school name]?

The students at [school name]?

The staff at [school name]?

The surrounding community?

Does/how does the Community Schools Program shape daily life here?

Q 5. What kinds of relationships do you develop with students?

How do you go about developing those relationships?

Probes/follow-up questions:

How do you get a sense of a student’s personality?

How do you “get to know” them?

Do you get to learn much about a student’s life outside of school?

What kinds of relationships do you develop with the parents or caregivers of students?
 What about community members?

Q 6. What do you think are the most common or pressing challenges for students at [school name]? You can think in terms of students in general, or particular groups of students.

Probes/follow-up questions:

Do different groups of students face different challenges?
 Are there common challenges?
 How do you think students respond to these challenges?
 How do you think families respond to these challenges?
 How do you and other staff members respond?

Q 7. What kinds of opportunities or supports do you think students would benefit from?

Probes/follow-up questions:

Are any of these supports or aspects of these supports already in place?
 What role does the Community Schools Program play in providing these opportunities or supports?

Q 8. What are your most pressing challenges as a [position] in this school? How do you respond to these challenges?

Q 9. What kinds of opportunities or supports would you benefit from?

Probes/follow-up questions:

Are any of these supports or aspects of these supports already in place?

Q 10. Do you find that the challenges faced by students, communities, and teaching staff are considered or addressed at the level of board of provincial policy?

Probes/follow-up questions:

Have there been any recent policy developments that have impacted daily life/your work at [school name]?

Q 11. If you were to give advice to a new staff member starting here, what would you tell them?

Q 12. Do you have anything else you would like to add? Any closing words?

General probes:

Can you provide an example of...?
 Can you tell me a story about...?

Take me through the experience.

Tell me more about that...

What do you mean by...?

What were you thinking at the time?

Tell me about it.

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