

**Exploring the Role of Indigenous-Based Support in Post-Secondary Education:
The On-Campus Friendship Centre at Grande Prairie Regional College**

by

Brigitte Benning
BA, University of Victoria, 2015

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department of Sociology

© Brigitte Benning, 2018
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part,
by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

Exploring the Role of Indigenous-Based Support in Post-Secondary Education:
The On-Campus Friendship Centre at Grande Prairie Regional College

by

Brigitte Benning
BA, University of Victoria, 2015

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Garry C. Gray, Supervisor
Department of Sociology

Dr. Cecilia Benoit, Committee Member
Department of Sociology

Abstract

In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 2015, and the longstanding advocacy of Indigenous peoples, there is a national movement within Canada to better support Indigenous students in post-secondary institutions. Research that is strength-based, Indigenous-led, and community-focused recognizes the wealth of existing Indigenous knowledge, practices and programs across Canada. This includes the variety of interventions which are being employed to Indigenize and decolonize post-secondary institutions, such as the On-Campus Friendship Centre at Grande Prairie Regional College. The On-Campus Friendship Centre, which is an Indigenous-based support program for all students, has been running for nearly two decades. Nationally, there are 125 Friendship Centres, yet the On-Campus Friendship Centre is the *only* one that is directly situated within a post-secondary institution. Through the guidance of my Métis Sash Research Framework, which I created to reconcile Indigenous and qualitative methodologies, I have engaged in research that explores the role of the On-Campus Friendship Centre in the experiences of Indigenous students at Grande Prairie Regional College. From my findings, I discuss the role of the On-Campus Friendship Centre and address prominent challenges within the program. I also highlight wise-practices for improving Indigenous-based support within post-secondary institutions across Canada.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures	vi
List of Pictures	vii
List of Abbreviations	viii
Glossary of Terms	ix
Acknowledgements	x
Dedication	xi
Introduction	1
Overview	6
Chapter 1: The Canadian Landscape for Indigenous People and Education	13
Chapter 2: The Indigenous Experience within Post-Secondary Institutions	24
Chapter 3: Indigenous Interventions within Post-Secondary Education	33
Chapter 4: The On-Campus Friendship Centre	52
Chapter 5: Indigenous and Qualitative Research Methodologies	70
Chapter 6: The Métis Sash Research Framework	85
Chapter 7: Building, Gathering, and Making (Methods)	102
Chapter 8: What I Found (Findings)	119
Chapter 9: Completing the Sash (Discussion)	171
Chapter 10: The Give Away (Conclusion)	188
References	195
Appendices	205
Appendix A. Certificate of Ethical Approval	205
Appendix B. Certificate of Ethical Approval - Renewal	206
Appendix C. Script for Inviting Participation	207
Appendix D. Poster for Inviting Participation	208
Appendix E. Email Script	209
Appendix F. Email Response to Sign-up Sheet	210

Appendix G. Participant Consent Form	211
Appendix H. Interview Question Ideas (Group 1 A – Current Students).....	214
Appendix I. Interview Question Ideas (Group 1 B – Past Students)	215
Appendix J. Interview Question Ideas (Group B – Admin/Other)	216
Appendix K. ‘My Experience with Talking Circles’ Information Sheet	217
Appendix L. Talking Circle Question Ideas	218
Appendix M. Questionnaire for Participants	219
Appendix N. Visiting Scholar Agreement	220
Appendix O. Letter of Support – Nelson Mayer (Executive Director of ANFCA).....	222
Appendix P. Letter of Support - Joseph Redhead (GPFC President)	223
Appendix Q. Letter of Support - Loretta Parenteau-English (Elder-in-Residence).....	224

List of Figures

Figure 1: Combatting Forces between Colonization and Decolonization	25
Figure 2: Indigenous Interventions	34
Figure 3: Transforming Research Practices	36
Figure 4: Indigenizing Curriculum	40
Figure 5: Increasing Indigenous Presence	41
Figure 6: Implementing Support Programs.....	44
Figure 7: Location of GPRC and 3 Largest Universities in Alberta.....	56
Figure 8: Friendship Centre Structure.....	57
Figure 9: Creation of the Circle of Indigenous Students	59
Figure 10: Creation of the On-Campus Friendship Centre.....	60
Figure 11: Communicating between Indigenous and Qualitative Research.....	79
Figure 12: Translating between Qualitative and Indigenous Research	81
Figure 13: The Métis Sash Research Framework.....	87
Figure 14: Wearing the Métis Sash.....	88
Figure 15: The Colors of the Métis Sash	90
Figure 16: Arrowed Design of the Métis Sash.....	93
Figure 17: Weaving of the Métis Sash.....	94
Figure 18: The Métis Sash Research Framework Overall	101
Figure 19: Participant Representation.....	122
Figure 20: Topics of Discussion for Findings.....	123
Figure 21: Student Theme.....	124
Figure 22: Strengths of Students.....	125
Figure 23: Challenges of Students	129
Figure 24: Definitions of Success for Students.....	133
Figure 25: Needs of Students.....	135
Figure 26: Overview of Student Theme.....	139
Figure 27: The On-Campus Friendship Centre Theme.....	140
Figure 28: Level of Involvement at the OCFC	140
Figure 29: Frequency of Involvement.....	141
Figure 30: Reason for Going to the OCFC	148
Figure 31: Role of the Staff at the OCFC	160
Figure 32: Partnership with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre.....	164
Figure 33: The On-Campus Friendship Centre Theme Overall.....	168
Figure 34: Findings Overall	169
Figure 35: Future Areas of Research for OCFC	187

List of Pictures

Picture 1: The Forks, Winnipeg, Manitoba.....	xii
Picture 2: Onion Painting by Katrina Shirley	1
Picture 3: Grande Prairie Regional College.....	55
Picture 4: The On-Campus Friendship Centre Visiting Area	63
Picture 5: The On-Campus Friendship Centre Teepee	63
Picture 6: The Circle of Indigenous Students Logo.....	66

List of Abbreviations

ANFCA Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association
CIS Circle of Indigenous Students
GPFC Grande Prairie Friendship Centre
GPRC Grande Prairie Regional College
ILC Indigenous Liason Coordinator
NAFC Association of Friendship Centres
OCFC On-Campus Friendship Centre

Glossary of Terms¹

First Nations: I use this term to identify Status and non-Status ‘Indian’ peoples of Canada. First Nations can also be used instead of ‘band’ (Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres [OFIFC], 2014). There are over 630 First Nation communities in Canada, representing over 50 Nations and 50 languages (Canada, 2017).

FNMI: I use this acronym to refer to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people as a whole – all of whom have their own complicated history within Canada. I use each of these terms to describe a specific group or individual who identifies accordingly.

Indigenous: I use this term to refer to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit [FNMI] peoples of Canada. Though this term is gaining currency, not all people welcome ‘Indigenous’, and no term can truly encompass the vast cultural, social, and political diversity between FNMI peoples.

Inuit: I use this term to refer to Indigenous people “living in the arctic regions of Canada (Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and northern parts of Labrador and Quebec), Greenland and the United States” who are “united by a common cultural heritage and a common language” (OFIFC, 2014, p. 14; Centre de santé Inuulitisivik, 2018, par. 1).

Métis: This term was originally used to refer to ‘a person of mixed heritage’ and has since evolved to encompass a group of people who have their “own unique culture, traditions, language (Michif), way of life, collective consciousness and nationhood” (Métis Nation, n.d.).

Non-Indigenous: When using this term regarding people, I use non-Indigenous to refer to those who do not identify as Indigenous. Non-Indigenous is also used to refer to structures and ideologies that are not born from Indigenous people, culture or worldviews.

Urban Indigenous: I use this term refers to Indigenous people who live within urban settings such as cities or towns (in contrast to a reserve or settlement). The number of Indigenous people living in the urban setting is steadily growing (Benoit, Carroll & Chaudhry, 2003; OFIFC, 2014).

Western: I use this term, which is sometimes interchanged with ‘Eurocentric’, ‘mainstream’, and ‘colonial’, to describe “particular ontological, epistemological, sociological, and ideological way of thinking and being differentiated from Eastern thought, and Indigenous worldview” (Kovach, 2009, p. 21). I use Western when referring to the structure of education in Canada.

¹ Terms such as Indigenous, non-Indigenous, and Western generalize the drastic differences between individuals, groups and cultures. This is not my intention. I carefully use these words as a necessary means of communication.

Acknowledgments

To the **land** on which this research took place: Treaty 8 Cree Territory, traditional lands of the Beaver and homeland to the Métis and Dene people. The traditional lands of the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ people. To my **Ancestors**, who planted the seeds of which I reap today. I hear your prayers. To my **grandparents**, for their choices, dreams and stories.

To my **parents**, who have made this life possible through their endless and unconditional support. To my **Mum**, Kelly, for bravely picking up the history of our family, sharing the truth, and breathing life, pride and celebration into who we are as Métis people. For answering every phone call, reading every page, and always being ready with the necessities: Coffee, food, and sage. To my **Dad**, Rick, for ensuring that I always know my worth and importance by constantly encouraging me to take the next step, and for taking it with me when it's a big one. For all the kilometers travelled to see me, and all the kilometers walked to visit with me.

To my rock, **Geoff**, for always knowing how to make me laugh, for being an anchor during the storms, for making 1,300 km feel like a quick trip, and for sharing this life with me. To my sisters, **Jackie and Justine**, who have provided me with friendship, lessons and encouragement since day one. To my brothers, **Geoff and Joël**, for their never-ending laughter and support. To my niece, **Margot**, for her light. To my **friends** who are family, for being there during the highs and lows. For making me feel home during every adventure. For choosing to love me everyday.

To my supervisor, **Garry**, who made this entire experience possible by believing I could achieve things I never dreamed of, and for working to make sure every moment was meaningful. For sharing his voice, and for listening to mine. To my committee member, **Cecilia**, and external examiner, **Jean-Paul**, for sharing their expertise and taking the time to be a part of this journey.

To my Elder, **Loretta**, for her irreplaceable guidance and support. For grounding me while also pushing me forward. To my **cohort**, for their inspiration and solidarity. To my amazing co-workers, **Cyndy and Simonne**, for their selflessness, encouragement, and conversation.

To the **Sociology Department at the University of Victoria**, for their flexibility. To the **Research and Innovation Department at Grande Prairie Regional College**, for their generosity. To the **Friendship Centre Movement**, for providing me with the access and opportunity to engage in this research project.

To those who provided financial support which made this project possible: **Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Indspire, and Rupertsland Métis Institute**. Your support allowed for me to fulfill my dreams.

To my **community**, for raising me and welcoming me home. To the **participants**, for sharing their time, words of encouragement, and beautiful voices.

This *is* because of *you*.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to all the Métis people who are finding their place in the world,
and to Nelson Mayer, for helping us to find it.

Picture 1: The Forks, Winnipeg, Manitoba



- Introduction -

“This is how I peel the onion.”

- My Grandpa

(Personal Communication, May 28, 2016)

Picture 2: Onion Painting by Katrina Shirley



Introduction

Tansi! My name is Brigitte Benning, and this is how I peel the onion. My Grandpa taught me to introduce myself like this when sharing my views to a group of people. It is his way of saying ‘yes, there are other ways of doing this, but let me share with you how I see it’. It is simple, humorous and effective. I have also learned within the Indigenous community to introduce myself by first acknowledging the land I am on, then my ancestors, then my family. As I have already acknowledged the land, I would like to introduce those who have walked before me. A lifetime of conversation with my Oma has taught me to do this through story.

Like many Métis families, our history is mostly unspoken, full of twists and turns, and is continually being uncovered. Our Métis story starts with my great, great, grandparents on my mother’s side – whose lives speak to the mysterious Métis experience. During the Scrip Policy in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the federal government removed Métis people from their own land by exchanging with them a small amount of money, or a certificate for land elsewhere. In the words of my Mum, ‘they were given five bucks and told to get out of town’. Through this policy, the federal government dispersed Métis people across the country and revoked their constitutional rights – but that’s a story for another time.

In the 1870s my great, great grandfather was given land scrip along the Red River in Manitoba, and he was listed as a ‘Plains Cree Buffalo Hunter’. Just two years later, however, he was given land scrip in Willowbunch, Saskatchewan and listed as a ‘Catholic, French-speaking Farmer’. During this time, Indigenous children were being taken away from families and racist policies were stifling the livelihood of Métis people. We can assume that, like many other Métis people, my great, great grandfather chose to hide his Indigenous heritage to keep his family safe

and with opportunity for a successful life. Thus, a ‘Catholic, French-Speaking’ family was embraced, and a history was buried.

In addition to denying Indigenous heritage, it was also safer to keep on the move. My great grandmother, who was from a Métis Settlement in Willowbunch, raised her family throughout Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Yet while they always said they were French, my Grandpa was raised with the values of the unnamed Métis culture. If you saw that man jig, you would understand what I mean. Sometimes a word that belongs to the Métis language of Michif will still slip into his vocabulary, and he continues to laugh about his ‘nice tan’ that lasts all year. Although it was never given a name, my Grandpa has lived the life of a Métis man.

In 1956, my Grandpa married my Grandma in a Church right beside Louis Riel’s grave in Winnipeg, Manitoba. My Grandma’s family was English and Scottish, and she was raised with her two sisters. Along with my Grandpa’s family, they continued the ‘gypsy lifestyle’ by moving to Saskatchewan, back to Manitoba, over to Yellowknife, back to Manitoba, then finally over to Alberta. Together my grandparents raised five children, including my Mum, and the unnamed Métis experience continued.

Before I introduce my Mum, I need to introduce my ancestors on my Dad’s side. This side of the story has a long and full history. It’s one that deserves its own book, but we will start with my grandparents. My Oma, who is German with some French ancestry, was born and raised in Rhede, a little town in Germany along the Dutch border and not far from the Rhine. My Opa was from Brulo, a town just 10km from Rhede. After visiting Yellowknife for a year, my Opa moved there to work as a carpenter and furniture maker. My Oma planned to join him for two years, and in 1952 she took an absolutely wild journey from Rhede to Yellowknife (again, another story).

When my Oma returned to Rhede to visit her family, she noticed the unsettling air quality in Germany after the war. Even though she would miss her family, she decided that she wanted her children to grow up in the clean air of Canada. Leaving behind a life for the betterment of generations to come runs strong on both sides of my family. In this way, my grandparents have taught me about courage, sacrifice, and generosity. After having their first two children in Yellowknife, my Oma and Opa moved to Ponoka, Alberta – where they raised my Dad.

In 1987 my Mum and Dad met in Grande Prairie, Alberta. Together, they raised my two sisters and I in a beautiful home that continues to be our gathering spot. It was not until my great grandmother passed away that my Mum followed her families trail and gave us back our name of Métis. This has been a gift for me, as throughout my life we have celebrated and been proud of our Métis heritage. To this day, it helps me understand my own experiences, motivations, and perspective on life.

Now that I have acknowledged the land and those who have walked before me, it is time to introduce myself. I was born and raised in Grande Prairie, Alberta, which is Treaty 8 Cree territory, traditional lands of the Beaver and homeland to the Métis and Dene peoples. I have always been surrounded by my sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents on both sides. Through the encouragement and support of my parents, I have lived a life full of community through sports, education, and arts. My Oma shared German culture with us through everyday events and annual celebrations. My Mum shared the Métis culture with us through immersing us in the Indigenous community. Together we would go to feasts, pow wows, celebrations, and ceremonies.

Immersion in the Indigenous community continued into my adult life through my involvement with the On-Campus Friendship Centre (OCFC) at the Grande Prairie Regional

College. The support network that I had formed through the OCFC was not clear to me until I moved to Victoria, British Columbia for school. For the first time in my life I was without my community, and I felt like a single strand that had broken loose from an entire sash. Yet the travelling tricks of my ancestors pulsed through me, and I formed another community and home on the Island.

As I wove a new life in Victoria, I continued to feel connected to Grande Prairie and the OCFC. Paired with my passion to raise the voices of Indigenous people, this connection to home and my Indigenous community inspired the premise for my thesis research project. As the OCFC had made such an impact on my own experiences, I wanted to learn more about the role that an Indigenous-based support program can play in the experiences of other Indigenous students in post-secondary education. I also wanted to do work that gave *back* to the community that raised me. I wanted to go home. And so, this research project was born.

The journey is told throughout this thesis dissertation. Through the literature review, you will understand my passion for reconciliation, my focus on resilience, and my interest in Indigenous-based support programs in post-secondary education. Through the methodology section, you will learn about my interest in reconciling qualitative and Indigenous research methodologies, and how my Métis heritage and experiences have guided this research project. Through the findings and discussion, you will learn about the On-Campus Friendship Centre via the voices of my community. Through the wise-practices, you will see the recommendations I have made for future support of Indigenous students in Canada.

I thank you for taking the time to hear *my* voice, and reading about how I peel the onion.

Hiy Hiy

- Overview -

“I watched the sky turn from blue, to black, to red and yellow too,
before the purple dawn was filling up my room.
And for a brief moment, I heard the whole earth groaning,
like there was something that it needed me to do.”

- Wild Sweet Orange

(2008, Track 1)

Overview

There is a longstanding push within Canada for improved relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. While this movement has an extensive history and broad scope, catalysts such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) have provided specific focus on the relationship between Indigenous people and the Western education system. The TRC, a federally-supported and Indigenous-led investigation into the residential school system, exposed the colonial and violent history of education within Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Prior to the TRC, there was very little public knowledge about the residential school system's existence, the experiences of the Indigenous children while at the schools, and the federally-endorsed policies which allowed for them to take place.

By amplifying the long-oppressed voices of residential school Survivors and their families, the TRC has offered a new perspective for understanding the current experiences of Indigenous people. There has been increased recognition of the intergenerational trauma and resilience that Indigenous communities carry, as well as the systemic barriers Indigenous students face within the education system. These include a lack of cultural support, opportunities to express self-determination, and relevancy to personal worldviews (Anonson, Huard, Kristoff, Clarke-Arnault, Wilson, & Walker, 2014; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Kuokkanen, 2008; Little Bear, 2009; Mendelson, 2006; Restoule, Mashford-Pringle, Chacaby, Smillie, & Brunette, 2013; Waterman & Lindley, 2013).

When considered together, these challenges feed into a broader battle that Indigenous students face when trying to resist the 'hidden curriculum', which frames success in terms of a student's ability to assimilate into a colonial structure (Canadian Council on Learning [CCL], 2007; Pidgeon, 2008). This is often perpetrated through a *solely* statistical assessment of

Indigenous student experiences in post-secondary education based on retention and graduation rates. When statistics are presented without context, the focus is on the inability of Indigenous students to ‘keep up’, and systemic barriers are unrecognized (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001). However, when presented alongside a discussion of such issues, these statistics can be helpful in understanding the current landscape of post-secondary education for Indigenous peoples.

For instance, a gap continues to exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student completion rates in post-secondary education (Benoit et al., 2003; Restoule et al., 2013; Statistics Canada, 2011). In 2011, a 17% difference existed between Indigenous (48%) and Non-Indigenous people (65%) aged 25 to 64 who had a post-secondary qualification (Statistics Canada, 2011, par. 1). These percentages vary when broken down demographically, with the North and the prairies representing the areas with the largest post-secondary education gap (Gordon & White, 2014; Mendelson, 2006). These statistics highlight the need for improved support of Indigenous student success across Canada.

In addition to revealing the systemic issues within the Canadian education system, the TRC has also drawn national attention to the resilience, innovation and success of Indigenous students, staff, and programs. Across Canada, post-secondary campuses are actively being ‘Indigenized’ and ‘decolonized’. According to the University of Regina (2018), “academic Indigenization refers to the transformation of academic programs with an aim of both re-centering Indigenous content, epistemology and pedagogy and through academic decolonization” (par. 4). The term decolonization has evolved to refer to “a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power” (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., 2018, par. 1). It is important to recognize that these terms are often used

subjectively, and that there are people who believe that Western education cannot be decolonized or Indigenized.

Despite the contestation of these terms, there is a palpable movement across post-secondary institutions in Canada to better support Indigenous students and to increase awareness of Indigenous history and experiences. Students and staff are working together to address and dismantle barriers, Indigenous-based support programs are thriving, and the voices of Indigenous students are gaining attention. As such, the TRC has carved out space for Indigenous-led and strength-based research that explores the ways in which to best support Indigenous students across Canada (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012).

A strength-based approach within such research is integral, as it combats the deficit-based approach commonly used when non-Indigenous academics engage in research with Indigenous peoples. Whereas a deficit-based approach focuses on the weaknesses of a group and results in external solutions to fix a problem, a strength-based approach encourages researchers to prioritize the knowledge and experiences of Indigenous people, with the aim of harnessing their gifts towards a common goal (Benoit et al., 2003; CCL, 2007; Voyageur, Brearley & Cailliou, 2015). As such, there has been a paradigmatic shift within research from what Canada can do *to* and *for* Indigenous people, towards a dialogue that recognizes, supports and mobilizes the existing knowledge and practices of Indigenous people (Absolon, 2011; Cailliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015; Canada, 1996; Kovach, 2015; Smith, 2012; Truth & Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

This shift has resulted in an overall strengthening of ethical parameters and rules to ensure that research regarding Indigenous peoples is carried out respectfully and effectively (Castellano, 2004; Schnarch, 2004). Additionally, researchers and institutions are encouraged to

engage with Indigenous students, staff, stakeholders and communities to formulate wise-practices that can be shared with the rest of Canada. Wise-practices, which are a set of adaptable recommendations based off a learning experience in one area, are often preferred by Indigenous communities over best-practices, which are generally viewed as ‘tried and true’ rules (CCL, 2007). Wise-practices that are developed from other Indigenous communities or programs respect the diversity and autonomy of various Indigenous groups, while best-practices have an inherent theoretical, rigid and competitive element (Cailliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015).

In an effort to contribute to this national movement, I have engaged in research with an existing Indigenous-based program within my own community: The On-Campus Friendship Centre [OCFC] at Grande Prairie Regional College [GPRC]. As a Métis woman studying within the qualitative sphere of sociology and working with an Indigenous-based program, I felt it necessary for this research to be guided by a culturally and academically appropriate methodology. As such, I created a research framework which draws on both Indigenous and qualitative methodologies, which I call: The Métis Sash Research Framework.

Despite the great diversity amongst various Indigenous methodologies, the concept can generally be understood as a research methodology that is steeped in Indigenous culture, knowledge and beliefs (Kovach, 2009; Little Bear, 2009; Wilson, 2001). The presence of Indigenous methodologies within mainstream research is growing, yet there is still contestation regarding the relationship between Indigenous and qualitative methodologies (Kovach, 2015). I address my work in reconciling the two, specifically Métis epistemologies and anti-oppressive research practices, in Chapter 5.

The values within my Métis Sash Research Framework led me to move back home to Grande Prairie for this research project. By living in the city where the program exists, and

taking on the role of Visiting Scholar at GPRC, I could spend valuable time at the OCFC and with the people who are involved with the program. Through interviews and a Talking Circle, I explored the role that the OCFC plays in the experiences of Indigenous students at GPRC.

After transcribing the interviews, and gathering the notes from my research journal, I proceeded to analyze the findings with Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, and ‘computer assisted NCT analysis’, which stands for “noticing things, collecting things, and thinking about things” (Friese, 2014, p. 12). This analysis allowed me to organize the findings into general themes and sub-themes related to the role of the OCFC. The two prominent themes were 1) the experiences of Indigenous students in post-secondary education, and 2) their reason for attending the OCFC. These resulted in a better understanding of the role of the OCFC, the program’s strengths, and the areas needing improvement. From this, I created a list of wise-practices to share with other post-secondary institutions in Canada that wish to better support their Indigenous student population.

Chapter Overview

My thesis is comprised of 10 chapters. In Chapter 1, I introduce the Canadian landscape regarding education and Indigenous peoples through reviewing the legacy of the residential school system. In Chapter 2, I highlight the intergenerational effects that the residential school system continues to have on Indigenous students and post-secondary education today. In Chapter 3, I discuss the emergence and role of Indigenous-based interventions within post-secondary institutions, specifically focusing on support programs. In Chapter 4, I introduce the Indigenous-based support program which I researched: The On-Campus Friendship Centre at Grande Prairie Regional College. In Chapter 5, I discuss the emergence of Indigenous methodologies in research, along with their relationship to qualitative methodologies. In Chapter 6, I review the

Métis Sash Research Framework, which guided this research project. In Chapter 7, I explain the methods used to make meaning from and analyze the findings. In Chapter 8, I share what I found, with direct quotes from participants. In Chapter 9, I discuss the role of the On-Campus Friendship Centre, and connect the findings back to the national discussion regarding improved support for Indigenous students in post-secondary education. In Chapter 10, I discuss knowledge mobilization and dissemination for this project, present the wise-practices developed, and share a personal reflection on this research journey.

Chapter 1

- The Canadian Landscape for Indigenous People and Education–

“Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one”

- John Berger

(as cited in Ondaatje, 1987, p.2)

Introduction

In this chapter, I will highlight the ways in which Indigenous people are reinserting their voices into the national narrative regarding Canada's history and current landscape. First, I will address the power dynamics within knowledge production that have led to Indigenous people's perspectives and experiences being ignored on a national scale. Secondly, I review the ways in which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has reclaimed the narrative by uncovering the history and continued effects of the residential school system.² Thirdly, I highlight the resilience enacted by Indigenous people that led to the end of the residential school era. Reviewing this history sets the foundation for understanding the colonial repercussions that perpetrate Western education today.

Taking Back the Narrative

There is a growing awareness of the colonial history between the Canadian federal government and Indigenous peoples. However, this enlightenment is preceded by generations of systemic ignorance, which is the intentional outcome of Canadian history being narrated and continually reproduced through a colonial lens. As McMahon (1995) explains, "we forget the human authorship of the social world, and because some people seem to live according to our stories, we believe that these accounts must be externally and objectively true for all" (p. 165). Within Canada, the hegemonic nature of knowledge production has resulted in 'one version' of history, which is dominated by colonial perspective and excludes Indigenous voice and experiences.

² This section, particularly pages 17-21, reviews the history of residential schools and may be unsettling or triggering for some readers.

Recognizing this one-sided history requires acknowledgement that “knowledge can be oppressive in how it is constructed and utilized, or it can be a means of resistance and emancipation.” (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 19). As such, it is vital to recognise the power dynamics within the knowledge production that has shaped the colonial version of Canadian history. This can be understood through an adaptation of Vahabzadeh’s (2009) discussion of the ‘ultimate referentiality’, which is “a foundation or a ground that justifies an entire theoretical approach” (p. 458). Problems arise when one reference, such as the Western narrative, become the *ultimate* reference; and is therefore situated in a privileged and universal position (Vahabzadeh, 2009, p. 447).

The Western perspective has historically been deemed as ‘the’ narrative within Canada, with other perspectives being pushed to the margins (Strega & Brown, 2015). This has resulted in an epistemological tyranny, where Western theory reproduces its position of power through discrediting narratives that do not align with its central position (Collins, 1991, p. 204). Often, the privileged position is enforced through perceived objectivity and “a distant, authoritative voice” (Gray, 2017, p. 180; Strega & Brown, 2015). As positivistic values based on reason, science and universal truth are generally favoured within Western research, narratives laden with subjectivity are commonly oppressed (Kovach, 2015).

Like qualitative approaches, Indigenous forms of knowledge production are often embedded in subjectivity, with knowledge sharing commonly occurring via song, storytelling and ceremony (Kovach, 2015). Paired with forces of colonization, these power dynamics within knowledge production continually situate Indigenous knowledge as “primitive, heathen, barbaric and not worthy of preserving” (Plockey, 2015, p. 34; Little Bear, 2009). Thus, the validity of theory from Indigenous people has often been rejected on the basis that they are “unwilling or

unable to legitimate [their] claims using Eurocentric...criteria” (Collins, 1991, p. 204; Archuleta, 2006). Among other negative repercussions, this approach has resulted in an absence of Indigenous experiences from the version of Canadian history that is shared in school textbooks and curriculum. A prime example is our country’s residential school system.

As Canada was being created in 1867, “Canadian churches were already operating a small number of boarding schools for Aboriginal people” (TRC, 2015, p. 3). These schools, which were a tool to assimilate Indigenous people by severing cultural and familial ties, grew with the financial and political support of the federal government (TRC, 2015). At the height of the residential school system, there were over 139 institutions across the country, with over 150,000 FNMI children passing through the system (Bombay, Matheson & Anisman, 2014). However, despite the last residential school closing as recently as 1996, many Canadians never learned of their existence until the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015.

The absence of residential schools from the public’s general knowledge is a continued act of colonization. Leaving this part of Canada’s history out of the national narrative disregards the continued effects of colonization on Indigenous communities, and ignores the resilience Indigenous people have enacted to survive (TRC, 2015). In response, Indigenous people have been inserting their voices into history through deconstructing the dominant forms of hegemonic knowledge production. Indigenous scholars have been reclaiming this narrative by:

Raising important questions about knowledge production, such as – who is entitled to create meanings about the world; how some meanings and not others are accorded to the status of knowledge; and how race, gender and class factor into these entitlements (Strega & Brown, 2015, p. 1).

By deconstructing these structures, Indigenous people are making space for Indigenous narrative which “makes visible dimensions of the hidden history and colonial legacy” (Moretone-Robinson, 2003, p. 3). One of the most prominent examples of this is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which has uncovered the motives, acts, and present effects of the residential school system within Canada.

A primary aspect of the TRC’s mandate was to expose the truth of the residential school system “in a manner that fully documents the individual and collective harms perpetrated against Aboriginal peoples, and honours the resilience and courage of former students, their families, and communities” (TRC, 2015, p. 23). Led by three Indigenous commissioners, and supported by a culturally diverse Indigenous committee, the Commission travelled across the country to gather over 6,750 statements from residential school Survivors, their family members and others who wished to contribute (TRC, 2015, p. 25). These statements have drawn attention to the intergenerational effects that the residential school legacy continues to have on Indigenous people, while also uncovering the colonial roots of the Canadian education system.

While there is growing awareness that residential schools were a violent colonial tool used against Indigenous peoples, at the time their presence was justified “under the guise of policies such as protection, civilization and assimilation” (Cote-Meek, 2014, p. 49). This narrative allowed for the federal government and churches to co-opt ‘education’ and ‘care’ as tools to subjugate Indigenous people. As it is important to address the ways these justifications may perpetrate into Western education systems today, it is necessary to first review the motives behind the residential school system, the context which allowed them to operate, and the resilience which led to their closure.

The Residential School System

Colonizers described the resistance of Indigenous people to assimilate into Eurocentric ways as the ‘Indian Problem’, with the ‘solution’ of carrying out acts of ‘aggressive civilization’ (Bombay et al., 2014; Facing History and Ourselves, 2018). Acts of aggressive civilization primarily targeted the family unit by separating children from their parents, community, culture and identity (TRC, 2015). These acts are considered to be attempted cultural genocide carried out by the federal government against Indigenous people (TRC, 2015).

Cultural genocide is when the oppressive group strategically works to break apart the fundamental values of the oppressed group by banning spiritual practices and languages, confiscating spiritual objects, removing people from their land, and preventing “the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next” (TRC, 2015, p. 1). Among other acts, separating children from their parents was a prominent tool in the federal government’s genocidal agenda against Indigenous peoples.

Of the multiple tactics used to remove children, one of the most prominent and detrimental avenues was through boarding or ‘residential’ schools. As such, the education system was co-opted as “one of the primary tools of colonialism” (Cote-Meek, 2014, p. 49). While these schools operated under the pretense of educating Indigenous children, they were centrally focused on ‘killing the Indian in the child’ – a policy justified through federally-endorsed propaganda that Indigenous people were savages, less than human, and in need of settler intervention (TRC, 2015, par. 12).

This propaganda fostered a national narrative that Indigenous peoples were unfit to care for their children, and therefore normalized the regulations that an Indian Agent or Justice of the

Peace could forcibly remove any child from their home if they felt they were not being “properly cared for or educated” (TRC, 2015, p. 60). Despite attendance being ‘voluntary’, the TRC has revealed numerous stories of children as young as three who were physically stolen from their homes in traumatically abrupt ways (Bombay et al., 2014). The enforced regulations meant that if an Indian Agent had a warrant, they “could enter – by force if need be – any house, building or place named in the warrant and remove the child” (TRC, 2015, p. 61). Even when a child had been enrolled voluntarily by their parents, policies stated that they could *not* be released without approval from the school (TRC, 2015). From the 1870s to the 1990s, over 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit students passed through 130 government-funded, church-run residential schools across Canada (Bombay et al., 2014; TRC, 2015).

For many, “the arrival at the school was often even more traumatizing than the departure from home or the journey” (TRC, 2015, p. 38). As they entered the school, the children had their clothing stripped, hair cut short, their name replaced by a number, and were often separated from their siblings (TRC, 2015). In attempt to carry out linguicide, which is the disappearance of Indigenous languages, students were forced to speak English and were punished if they spoke their own language (Fontaine, 2017). In many cases, these rules were enforced by ‘caretakers’ through acts of extreme physical, mental and sexual violence that were systematically ignored by the churches and federal government (TRC, 2015). Additionally, students were often starved or severely malnourished, used for child labour, and in certain places, the involuntary subjects of cruel experiments to serve the country’s ‘scientific endeavours’ (Mosby, 2013).

For instance, federally supported and documented nutrition experiments conducted on non-consenting and malnourished Indigenous children have become more publicized through the work of researchers, activists, and residential school Survivors. Rather than work to reduce

starvation for the children in the schools, the students were split into control and test groups, where some received supplements often deemed unsafe for the public, and others were made to maintain their malnourished diet. In addition, many of these children received invasive testing by researchers and were denied dental and health care so as not to interfere with the study. These studies were said to contribute to scientific knowledge and improve health in residential schools and Indigenous communities; however, they did neither. Instead, they harmed and traumatized many Indigenous children. (Mosby, 2013).

Understandably, many children tried to return home. However, as exemplified through the highly publicized story of Chanie Wenjack, many of these children died along the long journey (Bombay et al., 2014; The Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund, 2018). Even when children did find their way home, the parents were at risk of being prosecuted as it was “policy that no child could be discharged without departmental approval – even if the parents had enrolled the child voluntarily” (TRC, 2015, p. 61). While some families found reunification, many never had the opportunity - over 6,000 students died while at the schools (TRC, 2015). Often the bodies were disposed of inhumanely, and requests to have them returned to the parents were denied by the school and government due to the cost of transfer. The truth behind these horrors continue to reveal themselves through press releases regarding evidence of hidden burial grounds and the use of electric chairs within the schools (Barrera, 2018; Quan, 2015).

Of those who did survive, a high portion left the schools with traumatic experiences rather than the skills and future that ‘education’ should have provided. Unqualified teachers who were prejudiced against Indigenous people carried out a curriculum that “demeaned their history, ignored their current situation, and did not even recognize them or their families as citizens” (TRC, 2015, p. 75). While some schools reported academic success, students often left the

residential schools without the ‘basic skills’ required to succeed within ‘settler’ society. The years of separation also made it difficult for Survivors to reintegrate into their own communities –some could not even communicate with their families as they no longer knew their Indigenous language (TRC, 2015).

Furthermore, Survivors were expected to live in a country that was not only ignorant of their experiences, but unapologetic. Despite the last residential school closing a little over two decades ago (in 1996), many Canadians have never learned of the existence of the schools or the abuse that occurred until years later (Elias, Mignone, Hall, Hong, Hart & Sareen, 2012; TRC, 2015). However, this is no longer true – there are over 80,000 Survivors of residential school still alive today who have used their voices to educate Canadians on the history of the residential school system, the resilience behind their closure, and the ways in which both truths perpetrate Canada today (TRC, 2015).

Meeting ‘Aggressive Civilization’ with Aggressive Resilience

Several innovative and resilient techniques carried out by Indigenous people led to the closure of the residential schools. Institutions were slowly forced to close as “parents and children developed a variety of strategies to resist residential schooling” (TRC, 2015, p. 115). Of the schools that remained open, Indigenous parents and communities worked to improve the education offered to their children by advocating for improved standards within the schools. This included ensuring that teachers were qualified, hosting medical exams prior to attendance, and changing the schedule from a half day of labour to a full day of learning (TRC, 2015). Parents also sought legal justice by filing lawsuits and investigations into schools where their children had died (TRC, 2015). Eventually, Indigenous peoples successfully called for the complete closure of the residential school system.

During the closure of the schools, Indigenous people continued to assert their rights through “establishing effective regional and national organizations” (TRC, 2015, p. 129). While these groups pushed for constitutional change, residential school Survivors sought justice through filing “lawsuits against the federal government and the churches over the treatment they received in the schools” (TRC, 2015, p. 130). With over 18,000 lawsuits filed, the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement was created and approved in 2007 by the Federal Government and Court (TRC, 2015). This was followed by an apology on behalf of Canada, and the launch of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008 (TRC, 2015).

In response to the current issues that exist, another vital part of TRC mandate is to “guide and inspire a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation with Aboriginal families, and between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal communities, churches, government, and Canadians generally” (TRC, 2015, p. 23). This process has resulted in a final report with 94 “Calls to Action” directed towards all aspects of Canadian society. These include child welfare, health, justice, education, language and culture. While education is woven throughout all 94 Calls to Action, the role of post-secondary institutions within reconciliation is directly referred to in Calls #10, #62 and #65.

Call to Action #10 requests that the federal government close the educational achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students through providing sufficient funding, implementing culturally appropriate curricula, supporting language revitalization, engaging with communities, and honouring Treaty relationships (TRC, 2015).

Call to Action #62 demands that in consultation with Indigenous people, Survivors and educators, all levels of government implement senior-level positions dedicated towards improving Indigenous content within education, and to “provide the necessary funding to post-

secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms” (TRC, 2015, p. 331).

Call to Action #65 mandates that there be research on the advancement of reconciliation through the collaboration of Indigenous peoples, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, the federal government, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and post-secondary institutions (TRC, 2015).

Chapter Summary

The TRC is an example of Indigenous people taking back the national narrative by exposing the truth of the residential school system. Through the Calls to Action, the TRC addresses areas for improvement within education, and the role of post-secondary institutions within reconciliation. In Chapter 2, I discuss the intergenerational effects the residential school system has had on both Indigenous people and the structure of post-secondary education in Canada.

Chapter 2

- The Indigenous Experience within Post-Secondary Institutions -

“Education is what got us into this mess...but education is the key to reconciliation.”

- Justice Murray Sinclair

(as cited in Waters, 2015, par. 17)

Introduction

The outcomes of the TRC have encouraged Indigenous people to “work on issues that have long been dormant and hidden, even from their own view, and allows them to confront issues that have run rampant in their social structures for far too long” (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004, p. 1). This has resulted in increased attention on three central consequences of the residential school system: 1) intergenerational trauma of Survivors and their families, 2) the systemic barriers within post-secondary education, and 3) the intergenerational resilience of Indigenous people to overcome both challenges. In the following section, I explore the landscape of post-secondary education through the first three aspects shown in Figure 1; intergenerational trauma, systemic barriers, and intergenerational resilience. In Chapter 3, I discuss the role of Indigenous-based interventions within post-secondary institutions.

Figure 1: Combatting Forces between Colonization and Decolonization



Intergenerational Trauma

Despite the closure of residential schools, “the traumatic history of colonization still hangs heavy in the air” (Nicolai & Saus, 2013, p. 56). One outcome of colonization is the intergenerational or historic trauma that some Indigenous people and groups experience (Elias et al., 2012). Lakota researcher, Yellow Horse Brave Heart (2003), describes this phenomenon as “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences” (p. 7). Amongst the growing literature, Evans-Campbell (as cited in Bombay et al., 2014) has developed three main characteristics of events that could trigger intergenerational trauma:

- 1) The event was widespread among a specific group or population, with many group members being affected; 2) the event was perpetrated by outgroup members with purposeful and often destructive intent; 3) the event generated high levels of collective distress in the victimized group (p. 322).

While the majority of research on intergenerational trauma has been associated with the Holocaust, there is an increasing amount of research that parallels the experience to that of colonization against Indigenous people in Canada, with a particular focus on the outcomes of the residential school system (Bombay et al., 2014; Brave Heart, 2003; Elias et al., 2012; Fast & Collin-Vézina, 2010).

Acknowledging intergenerational trauma is important as it recognizes the ways in which historic abuses can affect the lives of otherwise healthy Indigenous people today (Bombay et al., 2014; Nicolai, & Saus, 2013). Research has shown that intergenerational trauma is often manifested through “high rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal behaviour, substance abuse,

disrupted relationships, diagnosable disorders and various other symptoms” (Nicolai & Saus, 2013, p. 58). Paired with systemic issues in legal, health, welfare and educational systems, these symptoms have resulted in an overrepresentation of Indigenous people in terms of incarceration, violence, suicide rates, chronic disease, addictions, mental illness, poverty, child welfare, unemployment, and low levels of education (Canadian Medical Association, 2013).

Research has also shown that an additional outcome of intergenerational trauma is loss of trust or engagement within the systems wherein the trauma was experienced, including in the post-secondary education system (Nicolai & Saus, 2013). Indigenous peoples often identify current education systems within Canada as a “major factor in the loss of language, traditional teachings, and values” (Hansen & Antsanen, 2016, p. 12). This mistrust is made worse by staff and faculty who are unaware of the intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous people, which leads to a general misunderstanding of the barriers Indigenous students face, dismissal of their cultural values, and ignorance of their resilience (Nicolai & Saus, 2013). As a result, “Indigenous learners are schooled in an education system that is grounded in the interests and ideals of the colonizer” (Hansen & Antsanen, 2016, p. 5). Thus, it is also vital to discuss and deconstruct the systemic barriers that exists within post-secondary institutions as an outcome of colonization.

Systemic Barriers

While there has been an increase in Indigenous student success rates in post-secondary education, a significant gap still exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Restoule et al., 2013; Statistics Canada, 2011). Indigenous people have called for this gap to be mended, as achievement in postsecondary education is strongly related to a higher standard of living through improved employment opportunities, life satisfaction and overall health (Preston,

2008). In addition, success in post-secondary education can also result in an increased accessibility to better paying jobs, decreased likelihood of poverty, social exclusion, and increased susceptibility to mental health issues and substance misuse – statistics of which Indigenous people are negatively overrepresented (Benoit et al., 2001; Reading & Wien, 2013; Restoule et al., 2013).

While the statistical gap highlights the need for better support of Indigenous students, it must be addressed in a careful manner. Firstly, statistically tracking the graduation and retention rates of Indigenous students in comparison to non-Indigenous students only accounts for Western definitions of success (CCL, 2007; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001). For many Indigenous people, success in post-secondary education is not negated by taking time off or ‘dropping out’, as they often return to school after tending to other responsibilities, or they may have their needs met through partial fulfillment of a program (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001).

Secondly, situating the gap as a shortcoming of Indigenous people ignores the fact that some Indigenous people choose not to pursue post-secondary education because they feel the pressure to assimilate may impede their Indigenous-specific goals (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001). It also revokes the responsibility of the post-secondary institution to ensure that they are supporting the success of their Indigenous population, and instead places the onus solely on the students (Kirkness & Barnhart, 2001). As such, it is vital to recognize the colonial and systemic barriers that Indigenous students experience within post-secondary education.

Through policies and curriculum embedded in colonialism, post-secondary institutions often place Indigenous students at a disadvantage (Hansen & Antsanen, 2016; Restoule et al., 2013). When considering the transition of students into post-secondary education, typical models that institutions utilize do not always address the unique needs of Indigenous students as they do

not fit with Indigenous values or realities (Adelson, 2005). In many cases, the curriculum “promotes myths that serve to oppress Indigenous people” (Hansen & Antsanen, 2016, p. 5). Furthermore, when institutions do attempt to adapt their models to Indigenous people, they often continue to engage in colonial perspectives and practices that revoke the agency and expertise of Indigenous students. Kirkness & Barnhardt (2001) describe this as the post-secondary institution misunderstanding Indigenous peoples as ‘coming’ versus ‘going’ to school.

‘Coming’ to the university carries an expectation that students must adapt to the institutions while “checking their own cultural predispositions at the universities gate” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001, p. 3). This perspective privileges the educational system’s epistemology, and in turn encourages assimilation (Pidgion, 2008; Restoule et al., 2013; Sachs, Harris, Morris, Cajete & Gagnier, 2011). This ‘hidden curriculum’ perpetrates colonialism by devaluing Indigenous ways of knowing, and forcing Indigenous students to constantly be in a position of negotiation (Pidgion, 2008). Often, Indigenous students must trade their first language for English, exchange their oral forms of storytelling for Western formats of writing, and justify their knowledge and beliefs against Eurocentric practices. The expected adaptation of Indigenous peoples inspires critical questions such as:

What has been lost and what has been gained by participating in a system of education that does not stem from, or really honor, our unique Indigenous perspectives? How far can we go in adapting to such a system before that system literally educates us out of a cultural existence? (Sachs et al., 2011, p. 320).

Furthermore, a ‘coming’ perspective frames the education gap as due to the low achievement, poor retention and weak persistence of Indigenous students, resulting in solutions that place responsibility solely on the Indigenous student to better assimilate through special

counselling and tutoring efforts (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001). Without a balanced approach that also recognises the systemic barriers created by the institution, the “knowledge, values, skills, and interest that Native students possess are largely ignored in favor of strategies aimed at enticing them to conform to mainstream education” (Sachs et al., 2011, p. 322). These types of interventions inhibit students from being the leaders and beneficiaries of their post-secondary education experience (Sachs et al., 2011).

In contrast to ‘coming’, Kirkness & Barnhart (2001) encourage post-secondary institutions to adapt a ‘going’ to school perspective, which allows students to bring their knowledge and strengths forward as the post-secondary institution recognizes and supports their unique goals and self-determination. There is also a reciprocal relationship between the student and the school, as there is recognition of the skills that the student can offer the post-secondary institution (Kuokkanen, 2008). In Kuokkanen’s (2008) terms, this involves recognizing the Indigenous student and their knowledge as a ‘gift’ to academia. This requires value and respect for the resilience and life experiences of the student.

Intergenerational Resilience

It is important to recognize that while Indigenous people may have inherited trauma from colonization, they have also inherited resilience through generations of family members passing down stories and skills of resistance, adaptation and survival (Vaillant, 2002 in Johnston, Bailey & Wilson, 2014). In addition to discussing the trauma and barriers experienced by Indigenous students, it is imperative to recognize the intergenerational resilience that has fostered their survival. As stated by Erin Corston at the National Friendship Centre’s Indigenous Innovation Summit: “We talk about intergenerational trauma, but we don’t talk enough about intergenerational resilience” (Personal Communication, November 7, 2016).

Within an Indigenous context, intergenerational resilience “refers to the survival, endurance, and resistance of Indigenous people in the face of genocide, oppression and tragedy” (Francis IV & Munson, 2017, p. 53). Despite 500 years of colonial attack, many Indigenous people managed to survive, and many continue to thrive and maintain connections to their culture, languages and the land (Hansen & Antsanen, 2016). The emerging generations of Indigenous people increasingly contribute to this “revival of Aboriginal strength and determination across Canada” (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004, p. 1) Focusing on this resilience allows for recognition of the innovative coping strategies Indigenous people have inherited, and the ways in which they continue to overcome colonial practices still rooted within Canadian society (Bourassa, Blind, Dietrich & Oleson, 2015).

Post-secondary institutions have been a prominent site of revival, with Indigenous people using education as a tool reclaim their space, enact resilience, and ensure cultural transmission and survival (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004; Pidgeon, Archibald, & Hawkey, 2014). The balance between revitalizing Indigenous ways of knowing, and utilizing the resource of Western education is verbalized by the Canadian Council on Learning (2007):

First Nations, Inuit and Métis have long advocated learning that affirms their own ways of knowing, cultural traditions and values. However, they also desire Western education that can equip them with the knowledge and skills they need to participate in Canadian society. First Nations, Inuit and Métis recognize that “two ways of knowing” will foster the necessary conditions for nurturing healthy, sustainable communities (p. 2).

Increasingly, these two ways of knowing are being fused to foster resurgence and success, with education continually being referred to as the ‘new buffalo’ for many Indigenous people (Stonechild, 2006). Traditionally, the buffalo was a staple for the survival of Indigenous nations

as it was “a totalizing institution, providing food, raw materials, and marking the social and spiritual foundation for myriad indigenous civilizations over millennia” (Whittles, 2006, p. 126).

This metaphor situates education as the new staple of Indigenous livelihood and success.

Elder Kye^{7e} Cecilia Dick DeRose (as cited in Indspire, 2018) states: “to our Indigenous youth, remember that you have only one arrow left. It’s education. Use it wisely” (p. 51). In response, many Indigenous people have effectively used that arrow through increasing the presence of traditional knowledge within academia, and their communities’ presence within the political, socio-economic landscape (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001). As a result, Indigenous people have transformed education from a place of assimilation to a place of empowerment (Stonechild, 2006). One prominent way in which this occurs is through the implementation of Indigenous-based interventions within post-secondary institutions.

Chapter Summary

Increased attention regarding intergenerational trauma, as a result of the residential school system, creates an opportunity to better understand the current experiences of Indigenous student in post-secondary education. It also allows for a holistic understanding of the systemic barriers that exist within post-secondary institutions. Considering these barriers, Indigenous scholars call for a paradigmatic shift from assimilation, towards the post-secondary institution adjusting to support the unique strengths, needs and agendas of Indigenous students. This shift draws attention to the intergenerational resilience of Indigenous people, and the ways in which it is infiltrating Western education. In Chapter 3, I will explore the Indigenous-interventions currently being employed across Canada to better support Indigenous students.

Chapter 3

- Indigenous Interventions within Post-Secondary Education –

“The role of Aboriginal post-secondary education has evolved from a tool of assimilation to an instrument of empowerment.”

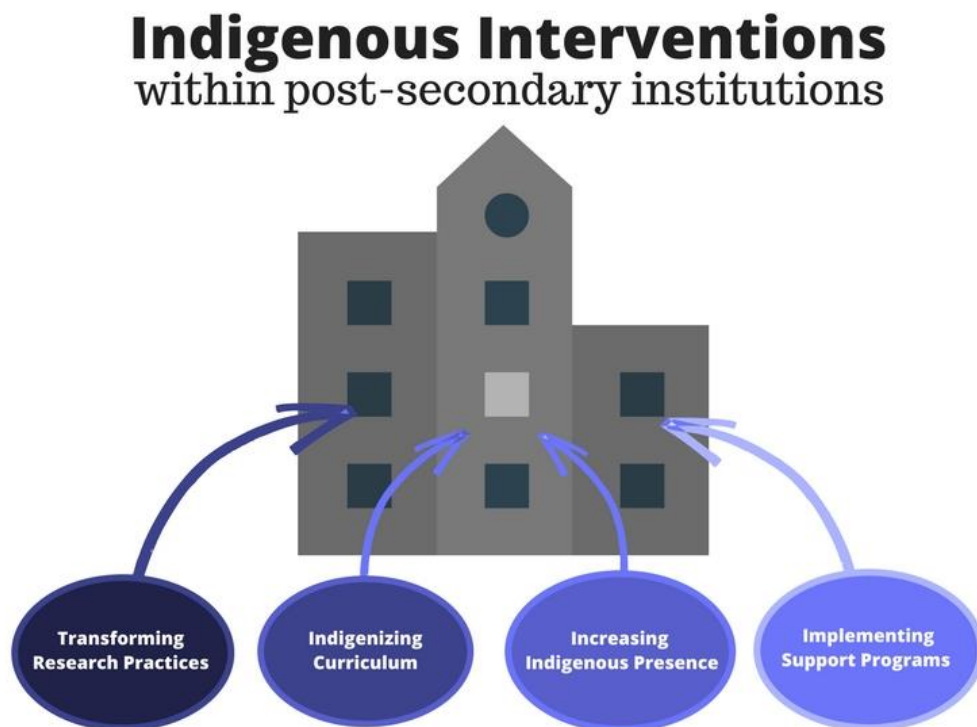
- *Blair Stonechild*

(2006, p. 2)

Introduction

Indigenous people are pushing for post-secondary institutions to subscribe to an innovative set of 4 R's: fostering an academic environment that is *respectful* of the identity of Indigenous students, is *relevant* to their world-views and goals, is *reciprocal* in relationships, and encourages appropriate distribution of *responsibility* (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001). These aspects are being encouraged by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, faculty, administration, students and community members, through four prominent Indigenous interventions within post-secondary institutions: 1) Transforming research practices, 2) developing appropriate curriculum, 3) increasing overall Indigenous presence, and 4) implementing Indigenous-based support programs. Each of these interventions are discussed in the following section.

Figure 2: Indigenous Interventions



Indigenous Interventions within Post-Secondary Institutions

Before discussing the role of Indigenous interventions within post-secondary institutions, it is important to note that there are also resilient practices that exist *outside* of institutions. A prominent example is the creation of Tribal Colleges, which are Indigenous-led post-secondary institutions geared towards offering Indigenous peoples higher education that is culturally reinforced (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001).

While these separate institutions have their own purposes and successes, my research focuses on work that is done in partnership with existing ‘Western’ post-secondary institutions. These interventions require a transformation of power balances through building relationships between the institutions and Indigenous peoples (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001). This transformation is an important step towards effective practices of reconciliation within Canada.

1) Transforming Research Practices

It is vital to recognize the role that research can play in the lives of Indigenous people, as it “can be used to suppress ideas, people and social justice – and it can be used to respect, empower and liberate” (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 19). Indigenous people are reclaiming research as a means to change the negative narrative regarding their lives, to address systemic barriers otherwise ignored by previous research, and to share stories regarding their resilience. This revival is carried out through a shift to strength-based paradigms, Indigenous-driven research, and implementing ethical protocols for research involving Indigenous people and knowledge.

Figure 3: Transforming Research Practices



Strength-based Research

In addition to education, research has been a prominent colonial tool used against Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2012). There is a strong history of non-Indigenous people entering Indigenous communities and performing research that is extractive, oppressive and harmful to Indigenous peoples. This occurs through an embedded ‘deficit-based paradigm’, which focuses solely on the weakness’ and shortcomings of a group of people (Voyageur et al., 2015). As stated by the Canadian Council on Learning (2007): “Research viewed through a deficit lens tends to encourage the development of policy and programs that respond to a deficit instead of supporting the positive successes that lead to improved learning outcomes” (p. 8). This approach centres the trauma experienced by Indigenous people while leaving out the resilience of their survival (Fasta & Collin-Vézin, 2010). This is important to recognize as much of our beliefs and understandings of people are influenced by the research that is produced.

Research that solely focuses on the ways in which Indigenous people are not ‘keeping up’ reproduces oppressive narratives that ignore highly successful Indigenous Nations, groups, communities, programs and individuals (Cornell, 2006 in Fasta & Collin-Vézin, 2010). Consequently, this deficit-based research contributes to stereotypes about Indigenous people as

unsuccessful and savage, thereby justifying colonial ‘solutions’ which situate Indigenous culture as an obstacle, revokes the agency of Indigenous people, and perpetrates negative stereotypes about Indigenous communities (CCL, 2007; Cornell & Kalt, 2007, in Fasta & Collin-Vézin, 2010). It also constantly positions non-Indigenous people as the ‘researchers’ and Indigenous people as the ‘researched’.

As a result, ‘research’ is “one of the dirtiest words in Indigenous world’s vocabulary” (Smith, 2012, p. 2). Just as the trauma within residential schools led to distrust with educational systems, harmful research practices have led to Indigenous people having a wariness when it comes to research regarding their communities, knowledge and culture. These sentiments are portrayed through an Indigenous participant quoted by Ball (2005):

We are tired of researchers coming in and documenting all the things wrong with our communities: Youth suicide, child neglect, alcohol abuse, family violence, poor nutrition, embezzlement. You would think people would want to figure out how we survived white people for so many hundreds of years. How we kept our children alive, kept our stories, kept our knowledge about how to live on the land, kept our ceremonies, kept our fires burning with hope for generations yet to come. How about some research on what’s right with us? About what makes us resilient (p. 86).

In response, Indigenous people have reclaimed research practices. As an Elder stated: “If we have been researched to death...maybe it’s time we research ourselves back to life” (as cited in Castellano, 2004, p. 98). This is being achieved through a shift from ‘deficit-based’ to ‘strength-based’ research: Rather than focusing on what’s not working, strength-based research explores successful practices within Indigenous programs and communities (CCL, 2007; Voyageur et al., 2015). This transformation of research “celebrates survival, resistance and

accentuates the degree to which Indigenous peoples and communities have retained cultural spiritual values and authenticity in resisting colonialism” (Smith, 2012, p. 146). A strength-based approach removes non-Indigenous researchers as the authority, and recognizes that “Indigenous peoples have never ceased to be the experts within their own communities about their own experiences” (Coburn, 2013, p. 57). Thus, strength-based research practices call for Indigenous people to lead the way.

Indigenous-Driven

A central aspect of transforming research practices is changing the narrative of *who* carries out research with Indigenous people. As Indigenous activist Carson-Fox (2017) explains: “For so long, our stories have been told *for* us, *about* us, you know? People have been telling *our* stories of resistance from a colonial perspective for hundreds of years now, and I think it’s important for us to take back the narrative” (1:01). The push for Indigenous-driven research encourages Indigenous people to become the researchers, and to prioritize Indigenous methodologies/ways of knowing & being.

Indigenous powerhouses such as Smith (2012), Kovach (2012), Absolon (2011), Little Bear (2009), and Wilson (2001), have carved space for upcoming students to utilize Indigenous methodologies within their own research endeavours. Often, these methodologies centralize the values of doing research with community and in partnership. Focus on community engagement ensures that research is not only *approved* by Indigenous peoples, but is *from, with and for* Indigenous peoples (Absolon, 2011). Research that is steeped in partnership works towards reconciliation through fostering dialogue and understanding built on respect, responsibility, relevance and reciprocity (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001).

However, complications still exist within Indigenous driven-research as the Indigenous population is vast, diverse, and subject to internal struggles of power dynamics. Due to multiple factors, certain Indigenous people, groups or organizations have more of a platform over others, which can dictate and influence research practices (Benoit et al., 2003). For example, Inuit people are often less represented in research at the national level as they are far more remote than other Indigenous populations (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2018). This can also be true for the urban Indigenous population, who may not have a governing body with connections to the federal government, such as the Assembly of First Nations, or a local band or council to negotiate approval and accountability within the community (Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, 2014).

One of the most prominent areas in which Indigenous-driven research faces challenges is regarding the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. For instance, the Missing Women Inquiry of British Columbia has been widely critiqued for not effectively including families of victims within the inquiry process, while the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls continues to face internal power struggles and challenges (Stanton 2013; Macdonald & Campbell, 2017).

Within an already oppressed group, such as Indigenous women, there is also insufficient recognition for Missing and Murdered lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and two-spirit people. These problems exemplify issues of power dynamics within Indigenous-driven research, and the ways in which they can affect research outcomes. For these reasons, there has been a growth of ethical protocols implemented to ensure that Indigenous-driven research addresses issues of equality, representation, accountability, and ownership.

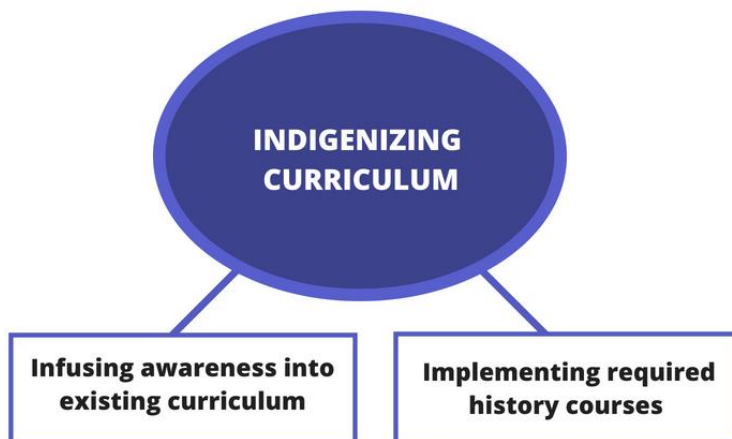
Ethical Protocols

Ethical protocols ensure that research involving Indigenous peoples is strength-based and Indigenous-driven. Following the trauma of invasive and extractive research practices, Indigenous people have implemented “human research ethics guidelines and protocols that attempt to safeguard the vulnerable from researcher malpractice” (Strega & Brown, 2015, p. 3). By creating ethical protocols guided by OCAP [Ownership, Control, Access and Possession], anti-oppressive parameters are being set for research that is conducted with Indigenous peoples (Castellano, 2004; Schnarch, 2004; Thomas & Green, 2007).

The incorporation of Indigenous ethics into these protocols protects Indigenous people from deficit-based, extractive and oppressive research practices. This is occurring on a national level via the Tri-Council funding agencies of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and on a community level through partnerships with band councils, Friendship Centres, and local Indigenous boards (Timmons & Stoicheff, 2016).

2) Indigenizing Curriculum

Figure 4: Indigenizing Curriculum



As reflected in the TRC Calls to Action, there is also a movement to ensure curriculums across the board are culturally appropriate and cognisant of Indigenous peoples' history (TRC, 2015). Through partnership with Indigenous people, and by universities appointing leaders to support staff in doing so, curriculums are slowly being infused with Indigenous knowledge (Timmons & Stoicheff, 2016). This means Indigenizing programs such as legal studies, educational administration, curriculum and instruction, educational psychology, special education, and forestry (R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2004). Often, this is achieved through partnering with Indigenous communities to create education and training that respects their cultural values and reality (RAMA, 2004).

In addition to infusing curriculum with Indigenous perspectives, a growing number of institutions have worked with Indigenous people to change degree requirements within certain faculties to include a course regarding Indigenous history and awareness (Timmons & Stoicheff, 2016). These processes are fostered by Indigenous people who work with institutions to “educate staff and faculty about Indigenous culture” (RAMA, 2004, p. 37). Indigenous staff and advisory councils are discussed in the following section.

3) Increasing Indigenous Presence

Figure 5: Increasing Indigenous Presence



Through fostering increased awareness, Indigenous people have encouraged post-secondary institutions to incorporate “practices that honour and show respect for Aboriginal peoples and their culture” (Timmons & Stoicheff, 2016, p. 2). This allows for an overall increase in Indigenous presence on-campus through various ways. For instance: Inviting Elders to open events with a prayer; allowing smudging on campus; “holding traditional ceremonies; acknowledging traditional territories and Treaty lands at meetings and events; opening long houses and Aboriginal centres; naming or re-naming buildings in Aboriginal languages; and providing greetings in Aboriginal languages” (Timmons & Stoicheff, 2016, p. 2). As these processes need to be guided and approved by Indigenous people, there is also a growth of Indigenous advisory circles and student councils within post-secondary institutions (Timmons & Stoicheff, 2016).

To assist in increasing Indigenous presence formally, there has been a push for universities to bring in more Indigenous faculty and staff (Restoule, 2011). While there is demand for more Indigenous professors, another central role is the Indigenous Liaison Coordinator. This person can respond to the needs of Indigenous students, while also bridging a connection to the rest of the institution and surrounding community (Harden, 2006, p. 252). There is also increased awareness of the role Elders can fulfil within post-secondary institutions.

While each culture has a different association with the term ‘Elder’, it can generally be understood as a respected community member of any gender who is a keeper and guardian of tradition and culture, and who shares sacred knowledge with those in need (Anonson et al., 2014). Due to the advocacy of Indigenous peoples, post-secondary institutions are increasingly recognizing the important role that Elders accomplish “as knowledge keepers, cultural advisors and supporters of students” (Timmons & Stoicheff, 2016, p. 3).

Research has found that Elders can assist in filling the cultural void that is often experienced by Indigenous students in post-secondary education (Anonson et al., 2014). Through traditional-teachings, cultural support, and creating bonds, Elders can help Indigenous students find resilience and success (Hansen & Antsanen, 2016, p. 14). In addition to supporting students, Elders can educate and support staff and faculty regarding Indigenous culture and the needs of students (Anonson et al., 2014). There is a growing presence of Elders within universities and colleges through Elder visits, Elders-in-Residence, Elders' councils, and even Elder faculty positions (Timmons & Stoicheff, 2016).

However, challenges exist when hiring Indigenous staff, faculty and Elders that may not be present during other hiring processes. For instance, what importance is placed on hiring people *from* the community versus people visiting from other areas? Do these people need to 'prove' their Indigenous status, and what should the application process look like? What constitutes as adequate compensation for Elders, and what are the standards for a 'good' contract? How should the institution address tensions and issues with a culturally-respected person such as an Elder? Some of these challenges were magnified in the dismissal of an Elder from the University of Alberta (Barrera, 2018). As such, further research on these topics would be helpful.

4) Indigenous-Based Support Programs

These aspects of Indigenous-intervention are often incorporated into and housed within an Indigenous-based support program within a post-secondary institution. Research has shown that an effective way to address systemic barriers within post-secondary institutions is through the implementation of programming that is inherently cultural, community-based, and centred on Indigenous knowledge and methodologies (Anonson et al., 2014; Little Bear, 2009; Pidgeon et

al., 2014; St. Denis, 2010). These programs tend to include a physical space for Indigenous students to gather, which can be run by Indigenous staff and/or Indigenous student councils. The level of non-Indigenous participation is generally determined by each program. These spaces can host events, workshops, and support through tutors, counselling, an Outreach Worker, an Indigenous Liaison Coordinator, and Elders. Such programs can aid Indigenous students through transitional support, building community, connecting to culture, and fostering self-determination. After discussing each of these aspects, I highlight the potential challenges that Indigenous-based support programs can face.

Figure 6: Implementing Support Programs



Transitional Support

There is an increasing regularity of Indigenous-based support programs focusing on transitional assistance for Indigenous students in post-secondary education (Wesley-Esquimaux & Bolduc, 2015). These programs can address the unique challenges that Indigenous peoples face when adjusting to Western institutions. Through offering learning and tutor support, these programs recognize that “reserve and remote schools typically do not offer the academic preparation required to succeed in post-secondary studies” (RAMA, 2004, p. 12). These spaces can also address the initial cultural shock many Indigenous students experience as they are often

required to leave their reserves, settlements or communities to attend the nearest college or university (RAMA, 2004).

Transitional support within Indigenous-based programs can be achieved through staff or students meeting students at their new residence, leading campus tours, hosting welcoming celebrations or feasts, and inviting students into the program space (Hossain, Gorman, Williams-Mozely, & Garvey, 2008). Additionally, many Indigenous students experience financial barriers as they are often required to move into areas with a higher cost of living, and are dependent on complicated, strict or backlogged funding (Timmons & Stoicheff, 2016; TRC, 2015).

Indigenous-based support can assist students by sharing information about external bursaries from organizations and businesses, and by helping them to prepare for their new financial reality.

Building Community

A fundamental aspect of Indigenous-based support programs is building a community for Indigenous students. As many Indigenous students have moved away from their communities to attend post-secondary education, they often experience homesickness, isolation and anxiety (Hossain et al., 2008). This can be combatted through establishing a new community within Indigenous-based support programs (Restoule, 2011). Research has shown that creating relationships with other Indigenous students can allow for Indigenous students to “feel safe at the university and to share their experiences in a supportive and respectful environment” (Pidgeon et al., 2014, p. 11). Building community within the post-secondary setting recognizes Indigenous values of family, relationships and interconnectedness.

Indigenous-based support programs can also increase opportunities for students to empathize with other Indigenous students who have similar worldviews, goals and definitions of success within post-secondary education. This is vital, as research has shown that Indigenous

students are encouraged when they see other Indigenous role models (Pidgeon et al., 2014; Restoule, 2011). Often, Indigenous-based support programs fortify these relationships through mentor-mentee relationships, which recognize “Indigenous cultural intergenerational approach to helping or teaching others” (Pidgeon et al., 2014, p. 10). From this, students can benefit from the knowledge and experiences of Indigenous peers.

Connection to Culture

Indigenous Elders, leaders and youth across the country emphasize the role of culture in the resilience, resurgence and revival of Indigenous peoples. Research has shown that cultural continuity is a known predictor of general well-being within Indigenous communities, and is a key component of Indigenous leadership development (Hallett, Chandler, & Lalonde, 2007; Voyageur et al., 2015). Research has also shown that this transfers into the academic realm, as connection to community, tradition and cultural integrity can anchor Indigenous students throughout their experiences in post-secondary education (Waterman & Lindley, 2013). Many Indigenous students who are leaving home for the first time find the cultural continuity within a support program helpful as they adjust to their new environments.

Indigenous-based support programs can offer Indigenous students a chance to engage in and strengthen their cultural connections through a variety of means: Embedded program values rooted in cultural teachings, workshops on medicines and cultural crafts, bringing in Indigenous artists, performers and academics, and having an Elder visit the space or live on-campus. In addition to meeting the students needs, an improved cultural understanding throughout post-secondary institutions can foster a more welcoming and respectful environment for Indigenous students. Elders within Indigenous-based support programs can work with staff and faculty to increase overall cultural awareness.

Fostering Self-Determination

Indigenous-based support programs can foster opportunities for Indigenous students to express self-determination through Indigenous student councils and Indigenous-led initiatives. Research has found that increased self-determination highly impacts the overall wellbeing of Indigenous communities (Reading & Wien, 2013). Specifically, communities that had greater self-government over land, cultural facilities, education, social programs and health practices, were found to have lower rates of suicide (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998). Such research displays the role that self-determination can play in individual and communal mental health.

The positive outcomes of self-determination are carried into the realm of post-secondary education, as many Indigenous students frame self-determination as an aspect of success within education. Due to a colonial history of non-Indigenous leadership invading Indigenous communities, many Indigenous students utilize leadership within post-secondary education as a means to reclaim power and control over their lives (Voyageur et al., 2015). The opportunity to lead peers and advise institutions through Indigenous student councils can allow for Indigenous people to bring their unique agendas into the post-secondary institution, and their skills back to their communities.

Learning from Indigenous-Based Support Programs

In recent years, there has been more than a 30% increase in programming for Indigenous students within post-secondary institutions in Canada (Timmons & Stoicheff, 2016, p. 2). Of Canadian universities, 69% offer transition programs, 84% offer financial aid, 79% have spaces for Indigenous students, 86% offer targeted support through academic aid and peer mentorship,

88% host social and cultural activities, and 54% offer language courses in over 30 Indigenous languages (Universities Canada, 2016, p. 5).

While there are positive examples of Indigenous-interventions within post-secondary institutions, there are undoubtedly challenges and cases where programs or initiatives have not been successful. In response, the TRC Calls to Action have highlighted the work that still needs to be done. This includes researching the most common challenges faced within these programs, gathering suggestions on how to overcome them, and formulating strategies to evaluate and ensure success. Potential challenges within these programs include: 1) Creating a space that is culturally meaningful for all students, 2) determining the degree of non-Indigenous involvement, 3) avoiding stereotype reproduction, and 4) fostering successful partnerships within universities and colleges.

Cultural Representation

An ongoing challenge within Indigenous programs and spaces is accounting for the cultural diversity that is found within urban post-secondary settings. While post-secondary institutions may be located on specific Indigenous territory, the Indigenous student demographic can include a variety of nations and cultures. It can be difficult for programs to afford the necessary respect to people of the land, while also accommodating the needs of cultures. If a balance is not found, there is potential for one nation's culture to be privileged over another, causing some Indigenous students to feel excluded. This issue is compounded for Métis students who are already vulnerable to feeling unwelcome in 'Indigenous' or 'First Nations' spaces (Gaudry & Hancock, 2012).

Non-Indigenous Participation

There is also potential for tension when determining what level of non-Indigenous participation is welcome within Indigenous-based support programs. While some work towards a safe place of solidarity for Indigenous people only, others work towards increasing awareness and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Both options have potential for individuals to feel unwelcome or disrespected. Furthermore, even if a program has a mandate, the people involved will each have their own autonomous view on the issue. As such, research is needed on how to appropriately choose and carry out such mandates.

Stereotype Reproduction

Another potential issue is the reproduction of labeling and stereotypes through Indigenous-based support programs. While there are many Indigenous students attending post-secondary institutions with the goal of preserving culture and connecting with their Indigenous identity, there are also Indigenous students who wish to integrate smoothly into the mainstream population without any stigma attached to their character. As such, being directed to ‘Indigenous-based’ programs or support has the potential to make Indigenous students feel stereotyped, and unwelcome within the overall student population. Research on how to make these interventions welcoming *options*, rather than agency-revoking aids, would be useful in mitigating this issue.

Healthy Partnerships

Finally, partnership between an Indigenous program and a post-secondary institution naturally creates opportunity for strife between either side. In efforts to decolonize, Indigenize and reconcile, there is potential for situations of misunderstanding. Also, matters of funding and financial distribution can catalyze tensions. Research is needed to determine which areas such problems commonly arise, and the solutions for avoiding or overcoming them smoothly.

Wise-practices

Finally, there needs to be wise-practices for other institutions looking to implement or improve Indigenous-based support. When considering program creation, numerous questions are raised: What sort of partnerships fostered these programs? What processes or changes had to occur within post-secondary institutions for these programs to be implemented? What challenges did these initiatives overcome, how did they do so, and what issues do they continue to face? What determines a program's success, and how can success be best achieved? And how can such programs be recreated in different autonomous communities with unique values and dynamics? Circulation of wise-practices from post-secondary intuitions that have attempted to implement Indigenous-based support programs, successfully or unsuccessfully, would contribute to increased knowledge on the topic.

Chapter Summary

Across Canada, post-secondary institutions are responding in various ways to the TRC Calls' to Action for better support of Indigenous students. Research practices are being transformed to encompass a strength-based and Indigenous-driven approach, while ethical parameters are being implemented to ensure reciprocity, accountability and ownership. Curriculum is being Indigenized through infusing awareness into existing courses, and the creation of new and required Indigenous history courses. Indigenous presence is increasing via acts of land recognition, cultural practices, and a growing amount of Indigenous faculty, staff and councils. The needs of students are being addressed through Indigenous-based support programs focused on transitional support, building community, providing a connection to culture, and fostering self-determination.

However, there is still room for growth. These interventions are not implemented without challenges. Common issues include addressing vast cultural differences within the urban setting, determining degree of non-Indigenous involvement, avoiding stereotype reproduction, and fostering successful partnerships between the program and post-secondary institution. These challenges highlight the need for research that explores the role and experiences of Indigenous-based support programs within post-secondary institutions. Only through analysing such issues and working together to find viable solutions, can we work towards these interventions reaching their full-potential.

For these reasons, I have chosen to explore the role of an Indigenous-based support program within my own community: The On-Campus Friendship Centre at Grande Prairie Regional College. In Chapter 4, I share the history of how the On-Campus Friendship Centre was created, explain the partnerships that enable its existence, and offer an overview of the program's current structure and mandate.

Chapter 4

- The On-Campus Friendship Centre –

“remember the body
of your community
breathe in the people
who sewed you whole
it is you who became yourself
but those before you
are a part of your fabric
- honor the roots”

- Rupi Kaur

(2017, p.126)

Introduction

To respond to the growing need for research on Indigenous-based programs within post-secondary institutions, I engaged in research with a program in my home community of Grande Prairie, Alberta: The On-Campus Friendship Centre [OCFC] at Grande Prairie Regional College [GPRC]. The On-Campus Friendship Centre is a partnership between the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre and the Grande Prairie Regional College. After a brief introduction of the city of Grande Prairie and each of these entities, I share the story of how the On-Campus Friendship Centre was born, describe its current structure, and review the services it provides.

The City of Grande Prairie

Grande Prairie, often referred to as the ‘Swan City’, is located within the Peace Country region of Alberta (City of Grande Prairie, n.d.). Prior to settler arrival, the geographical area was “occupied by people of the Beaver First Nation, who began trading with the North West Company at Dunvegan on the Peace River in the early 1800s” (The Canadian Encyclopedia [TCE], 2017, par. 1). A Hudson Bay trading post was established in 1881 northwest of the current city borders, and by the late 1880s Cree and Iroquois peoples had begun to settle along the southern part of the area (TCE, 2017). The early 1900s involved a land rush of settlers to the area via the Edson trail, leading to the formation of a town in 1919, and a city in 1958 (TCE, 2017). With an economy based in oil, gas, forestry and agriculture, Grande Prairie has continued to be one of the fastest growing cities in Canada (TCE, 2017). As of 2016, the city had a population of 63,166 people (City of Grande Prairie, n.d.).

Sitting about 450 kilometers north of the provincial capital (Edmonton), and nearly 720 kilometers north of the province’s largest city (Calgary), Grande Prairie is considered to be

‘Northern’ – despite the remaining distance to the border of the Northwest Territories. The location of the city draws in a number of people from surrounding First Nation Reserves, Métis Settlements, and small towns. While Grande Prairie is situated on Treaty 8 Cree Territory and traditional lands of the Beaver, it is also a homeland to Métis peoples who have travelled across the prairies, and Dene people who have travelled south. As an urban area, it is a homeland to many diverse Indigenous peoples from across the country, with Indigenous people making up just over 10% of the overall population (Statistics Canada, 2017). As of 2011, First Nations people made up 4% of the population of Grande Prairie, Métis peoples just over 5%, and Inuit peoples under 1% (Statistics Canada, 2017). Despite cultural diversity, Cree culture is rooted within the area: For instance, the heart of the city known as ‘Muskoseepi’ park is a Cree word for ‘Bear Creek’, and the essential ‘Wapiti’ river is a Cree word for ‘Elk’ (TCE, 2017).

Grande Prairie Regional College

In 1956, the need to provide those living in northwestern Alberta and the surrounding area with post-secondary learning opportunities was responded to by an “official request for a post-secondary institution (Grande Prairie Regional College, 2018a). By 1965, ‘Grande Prairie Junior College’ was incorporated into the Government of Alberta’s order-in-council No. 809, and by the following year complete staff were hired, 119 students showed up for their first day of classes, and the official inaugural ceremonies were held (GPRC, 2018a). In 1969, Indigenous architect Douglas Cardinal was hired to design the new building that would soon be known as ‘Grande Prairie Regional College’ (GPRC, 2018a). Through curved brick walls folding in amongst each other, Cardinal’s Indigenous and organic philosophy of architecture comes alive as one walks through GPRC.

Picture 3: Grande Prairie Regional College

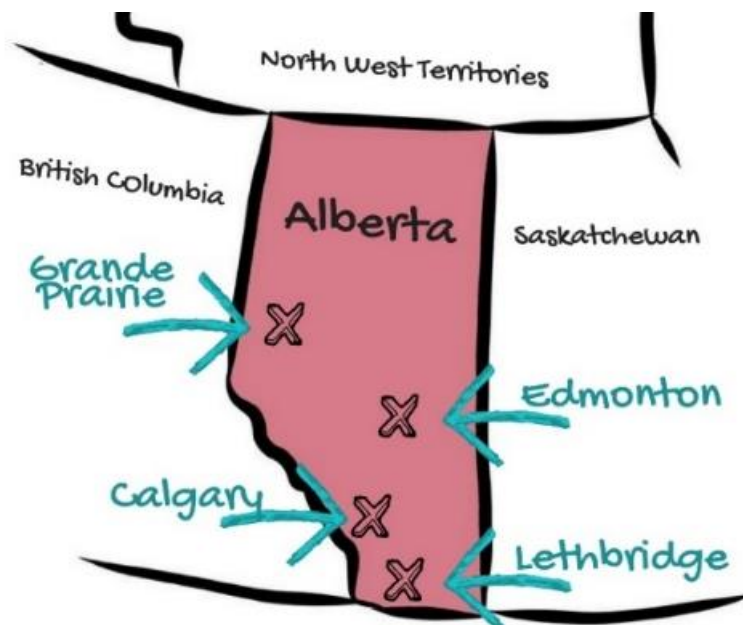


GPRC has seen growth over the years. In 2015, there were 4,269 students upon the first day of courses, with the projection of up to 9,000 students who would join throughout the year due to later start dates for certain programs (Grande Prairie Regional College, 2018b). Currently, GPRC (2017a) serves the community through offering “university transfer, diploma and certificate programs; apprenticeship and pre-employment trades training; and adult high school equivalency completion...credit programs...[and] baccalaureate degrees and master’s degrees in collaboration with universities” (2017a, p. 8). In February 2018, the Government of Alberta granted GPRC the approval to “pursue becoming a university with more degree offerings so students in northwestern Alberta can study closer to home” (Toogood, 2018). In addition to the Grande Prairie Campus, GPRC also has satellite campuses and learning centres throughout Alberta: Fairview, Hinton, Jasper, Edson, and Grande Cache.

Due to its location, GPRC draws a large population of Indigenous students. Within Alberta, it is the largest post-secondary institute north of Edmonton. This results in Indigenous people from surrounding reserves, settlements and communities choosing GPRC as a place to

study. There is also a high ratio of students coming from the Northwest Territories, as it is their closest option. Figure 7 exemplifies the location of GPRC in relation to the cities hosting the largest universities in Alberta: Calgary, Edmonton and Lethbridge. It also shows the proximity to northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories.

Figure 7: Location of GPRC and 3 Largest Universities in Alberta



Grande Prairie Friendship Centre

In 1965, the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre (GPFC) launched into existence with the mandate to “administer and implement programs to meet the needs of Indigenous people either migrating to cities or living in them, at the same time bridging a cultural gap between the Indigenous and non-indigenous community” (Grande Prairie Friendship Centre, n.d., par. 1). The GPFC is part of the broader National Association of Friendship Centres (2017), which is made of “a network of 125 Friendship Centres and Provincial and Territorial Associations (PTAs) from coast-to-coast-to-coast” (par. 1). As such, the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre is also a part of the Alberta Native Friendship Centre Association.

Figure 8: Friendship Centre Structure



The NAFC is a significant off-reserve infrastructure within Canada with the mission of aiding Indigenous people's transition to and success within the urban setting (NAFC, 2017). The NAFC has been considered within Indigenous research to successfully incorporate 'best practices' in bringing "culturally appropriate services and programs to urban Aboriginals and off-reserve Indians" (Voyageur et al., 2015, p. 38). While there is a strong Indigenous focus, the NAFC mandates that all centres are 'status-blind' and are open to non-Indigenous people. Status-blind means that there is not a hierarchy regarding First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Non-Status people.

Another core principle of the NAFC is that each Friendship Centre operates autonomously to meet the unique needs of the urban Indigenous population in their community. This has resulted in a cohesive movement made up of distinct centres across the country. The GPFC expresses this autonomy through a variety of programs that address the specific needs of Grande Prairie's Indigenous population. These include: Babies Best Start, Aboriginal Head Start,

Pitone Youth Group, Mamewpitaw-Family Preservation Program, One Window Resource, and the On-Campus Friendship Centre (GPFC, n.d.).

These programs span across three locations in Grande Prairie – two within the city and one physically within Grande Prairie Regional College. Of 125 Friendship Centres across Canada, the On-Campus Friendship Centre is the *only* one situated within a post-secondary institution. The birth of the OCFC is a story of community, innovation and partnership. As much of this history is not written down or accessible for citation, I learned of it through conversation with Kelly Benning who in addition to being my mother, has previously fulfilled the role of GPFC Board Member, GPFC Executive Director, and GPRC Indigenous Liaison Coordinator (personal communication, 2018).

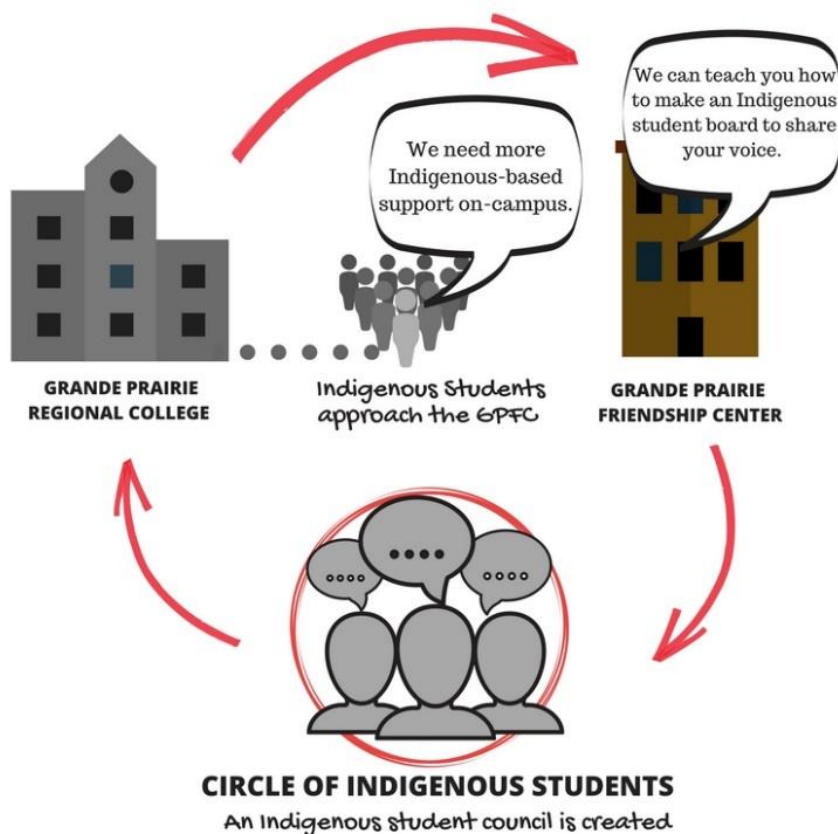
The Creation of the On-Campus Friendship Centre

In the late 1990s, Indigenous students who had been spending time at the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre approached the staff of Grande Prairie Regional College for assistance. They were looking for Indigenous-focused support within the institution. Knowing that the voice of many would be stronger, the staff at the Friendship Centre encouraged the students to form an Indigenous students' council. The staff guided the students on how to form and run a board, and advised them on how to access support from the college.

As a result, the Circle of Aboriginal Students was born and continues today – now known as the Circle of Indigenous Students (CIS). As an elected student executive, the CIS consists of a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Board Member and Educational Warrior. Their mandate is to bring forward the collective voice of the Indigenous student body, and to support

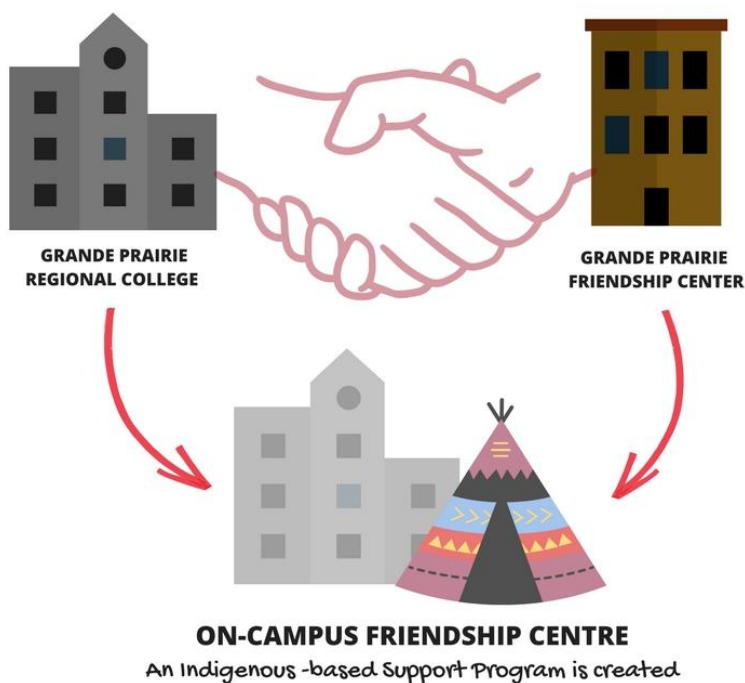
Indigenous students socially, culturally and academically. The creation of the CIS is depicted in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Creation of the Circle of Indigenous Students



During the creation of the Circle of Indigenous Students, a partnership started to form between the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre and the Grande Prairie Regional College. Together, these two institutions brainstormed ways to best support the Indigenous students within the college. As a result, a satellite Friendship Centre was created as a 50/50 partnership between the two entities. The On-Campus Friendship Centre, which is a sub-section of the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre and as such follows its mandates, opened its doors in 2000. Figure 10 shows this partnership.

Figure 10: Creation of the On-Campus Friendship Centre



It is important to recognize the web of connections that were in place to foster a partnership between GPRC and GPFC. During the creation of the Circle of Indigenous Students and the On-Campus Friendship Centre, there were key Indigenous and non-Indigenous people holding roles within the college and the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre.

For example, the late Melodie Wilton, who was non-Indigenous, held the role of Executive Director of Continuing Education at the college while also being a Board Member of the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre. Through holding both roles, Melodie bridged a road for communication between both entities. This was also true for Angie and Duff Crear. Angie, who is Indigenous, was a Board Member at the Friendship Centre. Duff, her non-Indigenous cousin, was the Native Studies Instructor at the college. This relationship provided faculty support for both the CIS and the OCFC.

Students played a role as well. Cora Voyageur, who is now a well-known Indigenous academic, simultaneously held the role of a student at the college and a Youth Board Member at the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre. Her husband, Brian Cailliou, another esteemed Indigenous academic, was a student at GPRC and one of the first members of the Circle of Indigenous Students. Together, these two were integral in forming an alliance between the college and GPFC.

As these partnerships exemplify, the implementation of the OCFC was the result of years of dreams and an entire community of work. These are just a few of the people that led to its creation. Recognizing this complicated web of connections is important as it highlights the need for community and partnerships of all kinds when building an Indigenous-based support program within a post-secondary institution.

The On-Campus Friendship Centre Today

As an Indigenous-based support program, the On-Campus Friendship Centre offers a variety of resources, activities and programs geared towards Indigenous students, but is also open to non-Indigenous students. Due to the inclusive mandate of the Friendship Centre Movement, non-Indigenous students are welcome and encouraged to participate at the OCFC. Events are hosted at the OCFC throughout the year. There are monthly potlucks, talking and sharing circles led by the Elder-in-Residence, smudging times, and cultural workshops. Through partnership with the CIS, there are monthly events that engage students with the broader community of Grande Prairie. A tutor also visits the OCFC weekly to assist any students requiring academic help. In addition to supporting college students, the tutor also works with high school students to get them prepared for and familiar with the college environment.

The OCFC is located in a room within the college. It is tucked into a corner at the end of a hallway on the ground floor. From the outside it blends in with the surrounding classrooms, sometimes making it difficult to find, yet when you walk in it is undeniably unique and surprisingly expansive. The space itself has three parts or ‘rooms’ that all flow into each other. When you enter the door, you are in a circular room. To the right of the entrance is a sign-in sheet, across the room is the On-Campus Outreach Worker at a desk. Behind them is a whiteboard with information on upcoming events, scholarships, bursaries, and sometimes the “Cree Word for the Day”.

As this is the visiting area, couches are set up circularly around a table, where about seven people can sit comfortably. Along the right-hand side there is a sink, counter, coffee and cupboards. The walls have posters from the Circle of Indigenous Students events and drums made between the Circle of Indigenous Students and children from the Aboriginal Head Start program at the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre. From the ceiling hangs a giant dreamcatcher in a horizontal fashion, so the web is parallel with the roof. This was also a project of the Circle of Indigenous students.

On the right-hand side, the wall opens up into another rectangular area. This space has a row of about five computers, a small library of books and resources, and a small kitchen. At the back of this room is a door that goes into a quiet study space. Within this room, there is a table that can seat about twelve people and a whiteboard. The walls are windows that look over the main concourse of the college. This room, which can be rented out by students and staff, is where the On-Campus Tutor is located when they are at the Centre, and where the food goes during monthly potlucks.

Picture 4: The On-Campus Friendship Centre Visiting Area



There is also a Teepee just outside of the Centre that is used for Ceremony³. The Teepee was painted by Indigenous artist Aaron Paquette and is situated in the heart of the campus. The Centre is open and staffed by the Outreach Worker and Elder-in-Residence from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm during the school year, and during the evenings that the tutor is booked.

Picture 5: The On-Campus Friendship Centre Teepee



³ This Teepee has since been destroyed by a wind storm. A new teepee was commissioned by artist Aaron Paquette and was installed in a new location near the On-Campus Friendship Centre.

Whereas many Indigenous-based support programs do not have permanent staff, the OCFC has two full-time staff within the space: The Outreach Worker and the Elder-in-Residence. The Indigenous Liaison Coordinator, which is a college staff member, also assists the space by mentoring the Circle of Indigenous Students. With this support, the Circle of Indigenous Students advises the operations of the On-Campus Friendship Centre and College.

Outreach Worker

The Outreach Worker is an employee of the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre, who works in their On-Campus Friendship Centre location. The college has a contract with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre to provide an Outreach Worker for the On-Campus Friendship Centre. Within this contract, 50% of the wage for the full-time Outreach Worker is paid by each entity. This arrangement allows the college to rely on the Grande Prairie Friendship Centres knowledge and community connections to choose an appropriate person for the role, while also ensuring that the Outreach Worker has the support and resources of the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre. In the past, the position was on a yearly basis, however this has recently been increased to a three-year contract.

The Outreach Worker is located at a desk within the main room of the OCFC. Their role is to greet students and work with them on a response basis. The Outreach Worker is the student's instant connection to the urban Indigenous community, which often requires directing students towards resources like the Indigenous Liaison Coordinator, the Elder-in-Residence, the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre, and community wide events. The Outreach Worker also supports the Circle of Indigenous Students.

Elder-in-Residence

Via an annual contract, the wage of the full-time Elder is 100% covered by the college, with the Elder living on-campus in family residence. However, rather than the college hiring an Elder themselves, they offer a contract to the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre to use their knowledge, connections and resources to find a suitable Elder for the students. The Grande Prairie Friendship Centre has the cultural expertise, community connections, and resources to provide an Elder, where an educational institution may not. By being an employee of the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre, the Elder is supported and held accountable via the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre.

The Elder-in-Residence, who is full-time, fulfills multiple roles within the OCFC and the college. They spend most of their time within the OCFC visiting with and supporting students. Through hosting ceremonies, Talking Circles, and smudging, the Elder offers teachings “on how to incorporate the traditional life with the life of being a student” (GPRC, 2018c, par. 3). In addition to student response, the Elder advises and supports the Circle of Indigenous Students in their decision making and events.

The Elder also works with the faculty and administration at GPRC to teach them about Indigenous culture and ways of life (GPRC, 2018c). This occurs through classroom visits and helping with events like a Blanket Exercise – which is an interactive history lesson to assist people in understanding the experiences of Indigenous people today (KAIROS, 2017). Finally, the Elder plays a key role in recruitment of new Indigenous students.

Indigenous Liaison Coordinator

The Indigenous Liaison Coordinator (ILC) is a permanent employee of the college within Student Services, who offers support to Indigenous students through various ways. For instance, the ILC “works with Bands, Councils and Elders to create educational opportunities for students, and will support students in finding and utilizing community resources to meet their needs” (GPRC, 2018, par. 2). They also play an integral role with the OCFC by assisting with events, and mentoring the Circle of Indigenous Students.

Circle of Indigenous Students

Picture 6: The Circle of Indigenous Students Logo



At the beginning of each academic year, there is an election for the Circle of Indigenous Students. Once formed, this board meets throughout the year to host events, and bring forth the voice of the Indigenous student body into discussions with the Students Association and the Board of Governors. With the support of the OCFC and the Indigenous Liaison Coordinator, the CIS also hosts monthly events that engage students with the broader community. These events include: The Student Welcoming Celebration, the Sisters in Spirit Vigil and Walk for MMIWG, Traditional Teaching Workshops, Indigenous Speakers Series, the Raising of the Métis Flag, Spirit Seekers Youth Conference, the Spring Feast and Bundle, and the Year End Celebration.

Continued Partnership with the College

Within their mandate, Grande Prairie Regional College (2017a) commits to responding to the needs of their diverse student makeup – directly addressing their Indigenous population (GPRC, 2017a, p. 8). Beyond factors such as the Aboriginal Administration Program, and Cree Language courses, this is also practiced through continuous and growing partnership with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre, the On-Campus Friendship Centre, and the Circle of Indigenous Students.

Through partnership with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre, pilot courses of blended online and land-based learning have been running for two years, which “encompass a unique combination of teachings from Indigenous scholars and wisdom keepers that are blended into an online learning based model with a two-day adventure land-based component” (GPRC, 2016, par. 5). This partnership also fostered a community-wide workshop series on ‘decolonizing Indigenous peoples’ experiences within education’ led by Indigenous Studies Instructor Kirsten Mikkelsen, which included teachings from various cultures and community members (GPRC, 2016).

One of the most recent and notable achievements has been the implementation of the Indigenous Education Partnership Protocol in 2017, which was created through the collaborative efforts of GPRC and the Circle of Indigenous Students. In addition to the ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ between GPRC and the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association, the Indigenous Education Protocol is:

One part of GPRC’s response to Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations that identified the needs for post-secondary education institutions to

play a leadership role to improve educational opportunities and success rates for Indigenous students (GPRC, 2017b, par. 2).

Through feedback and guidance from the CIS, the Indigenous Liaison Coordinator, and the Elder-in-Residence, an action plan was created that reflects the unique goals and intentions of the Indigenous community at GPRC.

There has also been the implementation of a new role within the college as of May 2018: The Indigenous Initiatives Coordinator. The Indigenous Initiatives Coordinator, which is a contracted position provided by the college, oversees GPRC's responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission throughout every level of the post-secondary institution. This involves recognizing how GPRC has responded to the needs of Indigenous students in the past and present, and formulating plans for improvement in the future. Through a broad view of the entire college, the Indigenous Initiatives Coordinator pulls together the Indigenous team, faculty, staff, administration, and students to work towards the goal of 'Indigenizing' GPRC.

Chapter Summary

Nearly two decades ago, the On-Campus Friendship Centre was created. The birth of this program can be attributed to the initiation of a group of Indigenous students, the advocacy of the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre, and willingness of the Grande Prairie Regional College to create a partnership. Since it opened in 2000, there have been major transformations within the Centre and the college, yet there is little to no research or formal reporting on this Indigenous-based support program. For the program to reach its full potential, and for other post-secondary institutions to learn from their experiences, certain questions should be answered.

These include: In what ways does this program face the challenges mentioned earlier, regarding Indigenous-based interventions? Is the program reaching its full potential? Are all Indigenous students within the college being supported? How can the OCFC expand its reach, and diversify its support to meet the needs of all students? What are some areas for growth and improvement? What are some consistent challenges faced by students, staff and the program? Are there components of success that can be shared? If another institution wished to implement an On-Campus Friendship Centre, what would they need to know?

To address these questions, I have engaged in research that explores the role of the On-Campus Friendship Centre in the experiences of Indigenous students at Grande Prairie Regional College. In Chapter 5, I introduce this research with a discussion on the role of Indigenous methodologies and their relationship to qualitative methodologies. This offers a foundation for the presentation of my research framework in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5

- Indigenous and Qualitative Research Methodologies –

“Many Indigenous peoples recognize that for their cultural knowledge to thrive it must live in many sites, including Western education and research.”

- Margaret Kovach

(2009, p. 12)

Introduction

In this chapter, I will clarify important research terminology, introduce Indigenous methodologies, and explain why they are often used by Indigenous researchers. I will also discuss the relationship between Indigenous and qualitative methodologies, and my experience in reconciling the two for this research project.

Clearing up the Terminology

Before discussing Indigenous methodologies, I feel a responsibility to clarify some common research terminology. I can relate to Absolon (2011) when she says: “Academics tend to use words like ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology. I find them confusing and would rather speak without the jargon” (p. 53). I also agree with Wilson (2001) when he explains that it is difficult to discuss each of these terms as separate from one another within Indigenous contexts, as the “elements of an Indigenous research paradigm are interrelated or independent” (Wilson, 2001, p. 69). Clearly, these ten-dollar words can be a challenge and often an obstacle for Indigenous researchers, who are often asked to justify their work in Western terms of research (Archuleta 2006; Coburn, 2013; Strega & Brown, 2015; Wilson 2001).

However, I also agree with Kovach (2009), who discusses the natural ally that Indigenous research can find within qualitative research – a partnership which is dependant upon the translation of ideas and concepts. As Kovach (2009) explains, “the layers of difficulty in bridging cultural paradigms within research most often begin at the level of individual word choice” (p. 21). For instance, the two sentences below have very similar meanings but use very different terminology, and will be either understood or misunderstood depending on the reader:

- 1) When embarking on a research journey, I need to reflect on the ways my beliefs about the world and my values influence the way I go about my work.
- 2) As a researcher, I need to assess the ways in which my ontology, epistemology and axiology influence my methodology and methods.

Translation between these statements is necessary for a conversation about Indigenous and qualitative research. As such, I would like to make clear the meaning of common research terms (ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology and methods) within this research context, according to my own interpretations. I believe that this is an important part of making research accessible, while also communicating my subjective perspectives and bias as the researcher.

How I view my reality is known as my **ontology**. It is how I theorize about or understand the ‘nature of existence’ (Wilson, 2001). For instance, is there one true reality that everyone shares, or we do we all have our own personal realities that depend on our perspectives and experiences? (Wilson, 2001). Someone’s ontological beliefs are their own opinions on ‘what is real’, and thus influences how they would research or learn about the world (Wilson, 2001).

In planning to research the world around me, I am seeking to attain knowledge about it. How I perceive knowledge and learning is referred to as my **epistemology** (Wilson, 2001). When I discuss my epistemology, I am saying ‘this is how I learn about our world’. My ontology influences my epistemology, as my perception of reality will determine how I learn about it. Together, my view of reality (ontology) and my view of learning about it (epistemology) set the foundation for a research journey and the choices that will be made.

These choices are also influenced by my **axiology**, which are “the ethics or morals that guide the search for knowledge” (Wilson, 2001, p. 34). When I discuss my axiology, I am saying

‘these are my values’. My axiology reflects my ontology and epistemology and guides the research focus. I have my perception of the world (ontology) and my beliefs about how I can learn about it (epistemology), now I need to decide what is *important* to focus on, and how can I *ethically* go about researching it (Wilson, 2001). These decisions are based on my axiology/values.

When taken together and directed towards research, our ontology, epistemology and axiology become our **methodology**. When I talk about my methodology, I am saying ‘this is how I go about research’ as inspired by my beliefs and values (Wilson, 2001). Methodology addresses “the how, who, where, what and when” of research (Absolon, 2011). My methodology guides the actual practices I used to carry out my research, which are referred to as the **methods**. When I talk about methods, I am referring to the steps I take to carry out my research and learn about the world. I will discuss each of these concepts throughout Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Next, I will introduce and discuss the role of Indigenous methodologies.

What is Indigenous Methodology?

While it is unacceptable to assume a pan-Indigenous approach to research, there are fundamental values shared across Indigenous methodologies. According to Wilson (2001), Indigenous methodology has an ontology and epistemology that is guided by Indigenous worldviews, beliefs, culture, and values. Ontologically, this means placing importance upon the relationship one shares with reality, rather than reality itself (Wilson, 2001). From an Indigenous perspective, reality is dependent on social relations, and these relationships can be with dreams, visions, teachings, people, animals, and the land (Little Bear, 2009). This connection to everything is often referred to as ‘all my relations’, which speaks to the holistic perspective of the world (Little Bear, 2009).

This ontology fosters an epistemology that posits the attainment of knowledge as a relational process (Wilson, 2001). Thus, the knowledge one seeks in research can be attained through engaging in relationships with self, the participants/stakeholders/community, and Indigenous knowledge and worldviews. It also inspires an epistemology that centres tribal knowledge, which “refers to a specific tribal way of knowing such as Cree or Dene” (Kovach, 2009, p. 20). This tribal knowledge, which depends on the researcher, shapes the conceptual framework of the research. The conceptual framework is used to illustrate the reasons, motives, and thoughts behind the action of the research (Kovach, 2009).

An essential aspect of Indigenous research is axiology, as cultural values and ethics are inseparable from the researcher and influence every component of the research journey (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Little Bear, 2012). For Indigenous researchers, the axiology or values and ethics cannot be a *component* of the research process – the research itself was *born* out of these values, it *breathes* these values, and it *cannot be separated* from these values (Wilson, 2001). While each researcher will have their own set of values, a foundational Indigenous axiology prioritizes relationality, reciprocity and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001, Wilson, 2011). This often manifests itself into research that is Indigenous-driven, community-focused, and strength-based.

Engaging in an Indigenous methodology means that the guiding conceptual framework should be explicit, to provide “insight into a researcher’s beliefs about knowledge production in general, and how those beliefs will impact the research project” (Kovach, 2009 p. 41). These conceptual frameworks are also an opportunity to share the cultural teachings and tribal knowledge brought into the research project. Kovach (2009) draws on her knowledge and experiences of being a Plains Cree woman to shape her Nêhiyaw methodology, which reflects

the “values, standards, ethics, and ways of Indigenous peoples generally and Cree specifically” (Kovach, p. 43, 2009). Absolon (2011) draws on her Anishinaabe teachings and experiences of ‘gathering’ to shape her conceptual framework, which uses the metaphor of a flower. In both these examples, the women also offer a visual representation of their conceptual frameworks to aid them in sharing the methodology that guides their research process.

Why Choose Indigenous Methodology?

Indigenous methodology allows for researchers to embrace cultural perspectives and worldviews as guidance for their research process. It allows for those who perceive the world through an Indigenous lens to honestly share how their research is informed by their beliefs, without translating them into ‘Western’ standards. By holding fast to their own forms of knowledge production and cultural values, these methodologies allow for Indigenous people to reclaim the narrative about their lives within research (Kovach, 2015).

As Kovach (2015) explains: “Indigenous methodologies have increasingly become an option alongside myriad qualitative approaches seeking to give voice to marginalized voices” (p. 43). This is important when considering the history of research being used as a colonial tool against Indigenous people in Canada. Embedding recognition of these power dynamics within Indigenous methodology allows academics to use research for resistance, revival and/or reconciliation (Strega & Brown, 2015).

For myself, engaging in Indigenous methodology is an opportunity for a meaningful research experience that aligns with my beliefs about learning, community engagement, and sharing knowledge. It keeps me grounded in my role as researcher, and allows for me to engage with my community in a respectful, non-extractive and appropriate way. The inherent recognition

of colonization within Indigenous methodology allows for me to address the political nature of research when involving Indigenous people, and to respond to the TRC Calls to Action for research that works towards reconciliation. The flexibility within Indigenous methodology also creates an environment in which I can draw from the multiple worlds I live in as a Métis person. As an Indigenous person within sociology, I embrace the opportunity to combine both cultural and qualitative practices within my research.

Indigenous and Qualitative Methodologies

Indigenous methodologies have begun to ‘emerge from the margins’, yet there is still confusion and tension, particularly regarding their relationship to qualitative methodologies and research practices (Coburn, 2013; Kovach, 2015). Diffusing this tension is important for Indigenous researchers *and* qualitative researchers, as collaboration across disciplines can “lead to mutually beneficial relationships where mainstream researchers can learn from decolonizing research and vice versa” (Burnette & Billiot, 2015, p. 10; Gray & Jones, 2016). Kovach (2009) expands on the need for collaboration:

The greatest ally of Indigenous research will be those non-Indigenous methodologies from the margins that do not hide from but rather embrace the political nature of research. The sustained autonomy but continued alliance between such approaches is critical. Mutually beneficial and open, spirited dialogue that is critically reflexive, and respectful, of each other’s practice will be necessary for growth. As positivism holds fast to its turf inside the academy, the methodologies from the margins will need each other (p. 60).

Indigenous and qualitative researchers share the experience of legitimating their methodologies according to Eurocentric and positivist ideals of research (Kovach, 2015). This

shared experience leads to similarities across paradigms, for instance Indigenous epistemologies can relate well to certain anti-oppressive research practices that employ reflexivity and address power dynamics (Strega & Brown, 2015). Further, the decolonizing aspect of Indigenous methodology can relate to the disruption of power dynamics within critical theory, and the community focus within Indigenous methodology fits with the values of participatory action research (Kovach, 2015; Edosdi, 2008; Burnette & Billiot, 2015; Little Bear, 2009). Methods can also be paralleled, such as between Talking Circles and focus groups, and between storytelling and unstructured interviews (Kovach, 2009; Lavallée, 2009; Michell, 2012).

However, it is important to recognize that Indigenous methodologies cannot and should not be subsumed under the ‘wing’ of qualitative research (Kovach, 2009). Qualitative research can never fully incorporate Indigenous methodologies as there is a “fundamental epistemological difference between Western and Indigenous thought, and this difference causes philosophical, ideological, and methodological conflicts” (Kovach, 2009, p. 29; Burnette & Billiot, 2015; Edosdi, 2008; Wilson, 2001). Secondly, there is a history of Indigenous knowledge being appropriated through colonizing research practices in Canada (Gaudry, 2011; Burnette & Billiot, 2015). Thus, one must ensure that they are not extracting when drawing connections between qualitative and Indigenous research, and are instead showing similarities between two separate methodologies that can stand on their own.

As such, Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers must learn to communicate in a way that is educational, supportive and respectful. This means recognizing the relationship between qualitative and Indigenous methodologies as discussed above. Additionally, people need to be clear about what they mean when they use words like ‘decolonize’ in relation to sociology. Like ‘reconciliation’ and ‘Indigenization’, the term decolonization has become a buzz word

within Canadian society. While these words are being used more frequently, their meanings have become subjective and unclear – leading to misunderstandings. For this reason, definitions need to be explicitly shared.

For myself, decolonizing sociology is action-orientated work that can be carried out everyday. It means addressing the “epistemic marginalization or suppression [that] is built into the history of disciplinary sociology” (Go, 2017, p. 195). This requires recognizing the ways in which the discipline’s positivist history continues to perpetrate our classrooms, subject matter and research approaches (Go, 2017). It means no longer carrying out colonial practices by making space for Indigenous academics, research and methodologies (Kovach, 2015). It also means recognizing the space created for Indigenous researchers within sociology, specifically through a relationship with qualitative research, and the opportunity to use research to communicate, learn and grow together. Simply put, it is a chance to use research as reconciliation.

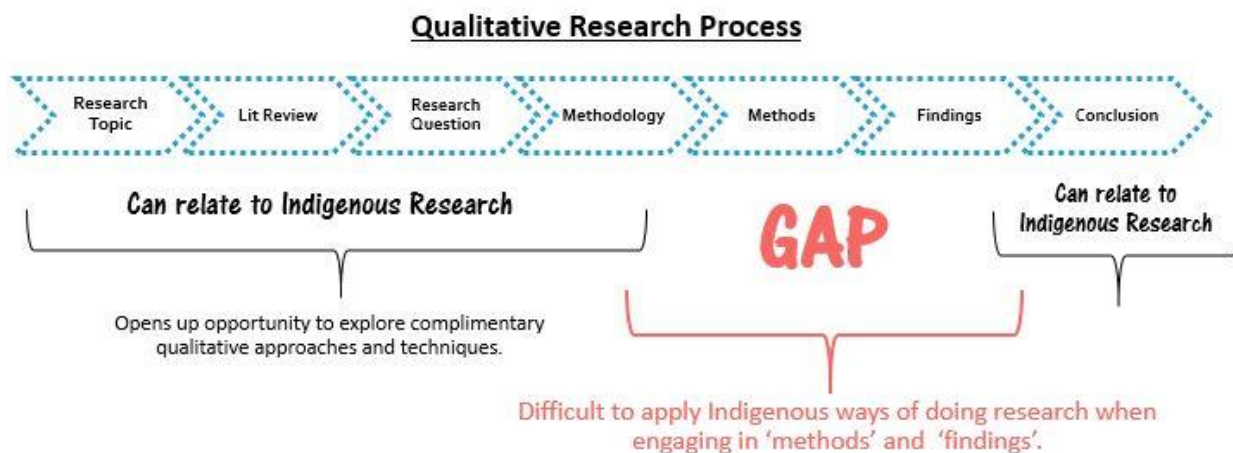
My Experience with Indigenous and Qualitative Methodologies

During this research project, I worked to reconcile the separate worlds I live in as a Métis person: the contrast of being ‘white’ and Indigenous, of living within Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, of learning within the discipline of sociology and through cultural values, and of resonating with both qualitative and Indigenous methodologies. To begin, I communicated these feelings to my non-Indigenous supervisor, who then worked with me to find culturally relevant educational opportunities outside of the Sociology Department at the University of Victoria.

This led to my participation in the LE,NONET program at the First Peoples House, where I could take an Indigenous-led and focused course on Indigenous research, which fostered the opportunity to create my own research framework: The Métis Sash Research Framework. I will elaborate on the framework itself in Chapter 6, but first I would like to share my experience of drawing from both Indigenous and qualitative methodologies, and communicating this process.

After creating the Métis Sash Research Framework, my supervisor and I drew parallels between the Indigenous aspects of the framework, which is embedded in Métis teachings, and a ‘standard’ qualitative research process. While we recognized that there are various qualitative research methodologies that are cyclical and fluid, we began with a simple, linear process as a starting point. This collaboration embedded reconciliation and learning opportunities throughout the research journey. The outcome of our initial conversations is depicted in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Communicating between Indigenous and Qualitative Research



Generally, we found it easy to find parallels between Indigenous and qualitative research when discussing the research topic, literature review, research question, methodology, and conclusion. This created opportunities to explore qualitative approaches and techniques that are complimentary to Indigenous methodology. However, drawing parallels with the methods and

findings section was extremely challenging. I found that qualitative forms of ‘data analysis’ and ‘findings’ were in contrast with Indigenous epistemological understandings of learning. When speaking with my supervisor, we initially referred to this area as a ‘gap’ between Indigenous and qualitative methodologies.

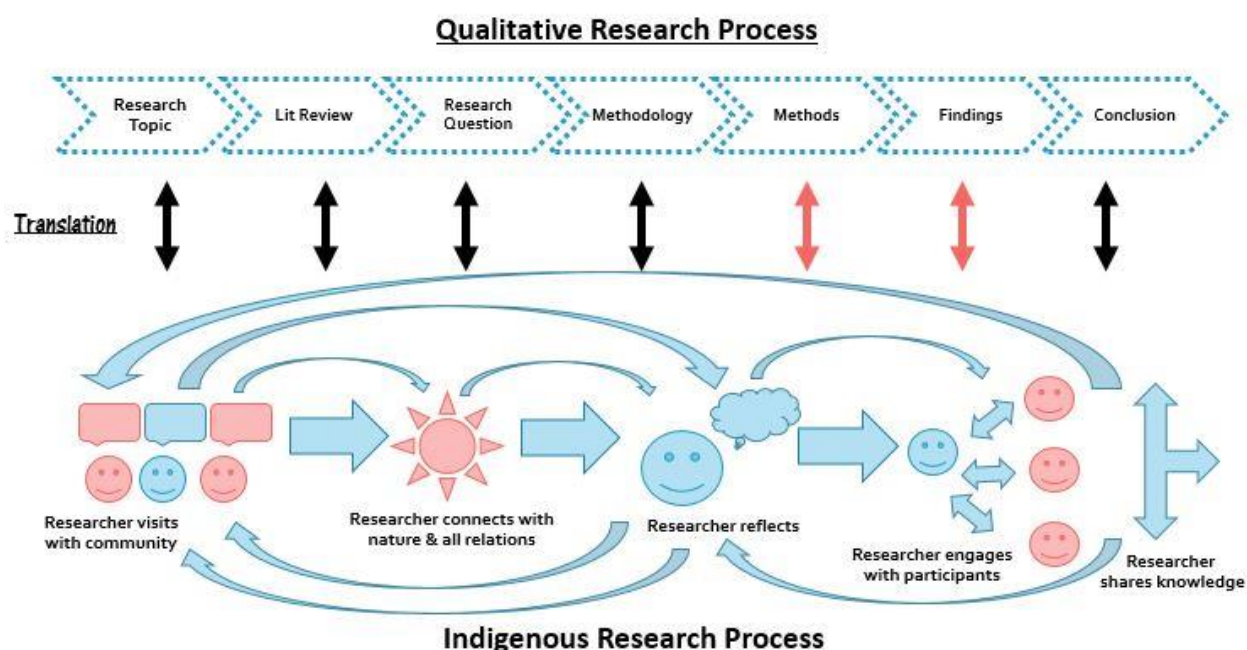
However, after further conversation, reading, and reflecting, we realized that ‘gap’ was the incorrect way to frame this issue. Despite our intentions to respect the autonomy of Indigenous methodology, we had been looking at the connection between the two with qualitative research situated as the dominant process, and Indigenous research as needing to assimilate. We recognized that this may lead into “the appropriation and incorporations of fractions of Indigenous knowledge into pre-existing Enlightenment models of science” (Coburn, 2013, p. 53). As this is something we were trying to avoid, we decided to reframe the issue.

In response, I created a diagram which I felt represented a typical non-linear, cyclical, and fluid Indigenous research process. By creating an Indigenous research process *alongside* the qualitative research process, we recognized that each type of research can stand on its own. We then reframed the ‘gap’ to an ‘area needing more translation’. This seemingly small change was a good lesson in constantly assessing power dynamics and the use of language within research. By referring to this process as ‘translating’ or communicating between the two, we carved space for dialogue about what *each* process had to offer, and how certain methodologies could be complimentary to each other.

Once we had adjusted our perspective, I could address the translation between the two research processes. While the Métis Sash Research Framework clearly had Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, I wanted to do a better job of communicating the complimentary qualitative methodologies that I had also involved. Feedback from my Supervisory Committee

helped me to reflect on this, and I found that the epistemologies and practices within anti-oppressive research resonated well with and enriched the Indigenous methodologies in my research framework.

Figure 12: Translating between Qualitative and Indigenous Research



Anti-Oppressive Research

While many qualitative paradigms could be paralleled with Indigenous research, I found that anti-oppressive research aligned best with my perspectives. As a Métis woman passionate about using research for reconciliation, centering Indigenous narrative, and decolonizing post-secondary institutions, I found anti-oppressive research to be a good fit for this research framework. Potts & Brown (2015) describe the fundamental values behind anti-oppressive research:

Anti-oppressive research means committing to social justice and taking an active role in that change. It means that there is political purpose and action to our research work...[it]

involves making explicit the political practices involved in creating knowledge. It requires a commitment to the people you are working with, personally and professionally (p. 17).

Thus, carrying out anti-oppressive research requires reflection on the power dynamics within knowledge production, critiquing the role of the dominant group in cases of oppression, addressing one's privileges and location as researcher, ensuring a deep level of community engagement, building meaningful relationships with participants, and producing research that contributes to social justice (Potts & Brown, 2015; Thomas & Green, 2007).

These values of anti-oppressive research often result in a non-linear and emergent research process, which involves research practices such as 1) engagement with community members and stakeholders prior to research, 2) purposeful and non-random sampling with the help of the community, 3) informed and ongoing consent with participants, 4) interviews or focus groups wherein power dynamics are mitigated, 5) treatment of data as a 'gift', with recognition of the researchers bias during interpretation, and 6) sharing the findings in a manner that is accessible and empowering to the participant group (Potts & Brown, 2015).

Despite the specific epistemological underpinnings of anti-oppressive research, methodologies can vary drastically depending on the researcher, their environment, and subject matter (Moosa-Mitha, 2015). This flexibility fosters opportunity for complimentary or 'ally' methodologies, such as Indigenous research (Potts & Brown, 2015). This makes sense, as the research epistemology and practices listed above align well with fundamental values of resistance, resurgence and respect within Indigenous methodology.

Anti-Oppressive Research and Indigenous Methodologies

For Indigenous researchers, Thomas & Green (2007), the attention to power dynamics and oppression within anti-oppressive research aligns with their decolonizing perspective, while also respecting “the sacred and traditional teachings of various Indigenous cultures” (p. 92). They continue to highlight the correlation between the two approaches by presenting their Indigenous perspectives on anti-oppressive practices through teachings of the Medicine Wheel (Thomas & Green, 2007).

As an Indigenous researcher, I find many of the fundamental values within anti-oppressive research to align with my Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. As shared in Chapter 1, a driving force of my research is to reclaim control of the narrative regarding the historical and current experiences of Indigenous people in Canada, particularly regarding colonization. This compliments the attention to power dynamics regarding knowledge production within anti-oppressive research. Further, the anti-oppressive focus on narrative encourages me to check my privilege as the narrator of this process (Potts & Brown, 2015). Additionally, anti-oppressive notions of critiquing the *dominant* group rather than just the oppressed group is paralleled with the growth of strength-based paradigms in Indigenous research, and present within my research (Potts & Brown, 2015; Voyageur et al., 2015).

Further, I have adopted anti-oppressive research practices in my attempt to combine complimentary Indigenous and qualitative methodologies within my Métis Sash Research Framework, as “choosing to be an anti-oppressive research means choosing to do research that challenges dominant ideas about research processes as well as research outcomes” (Potts &

Brown, 2015, p. 19). Similarly, to Thomas & Green (2007) who use the metaphor of the Medicine Wheel, I present anti-oppressive research practices within my Métis Sash Research Framework. I elaborate on the correlation between Indigenous and anti-oppressive research epistemologies and practices throughout Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter Summary

As Indigenous methodologies become more prominent within mainstream research, there needs to be more dialogue regarding their role, importance, and relationship with qualitative methodologies. While it must be continually recognized that Indigenous methodologies stand on their own and that qualitative research is not to extract or appropriate methods, drawing parallels between the two creates opportunities for collaboration, learning, and reconciliation.

For my research, I chose to create a research framework that reconciles my experiences as a Métis researcher within sociology. Partnership and communication with my Supervisory Committee fostered conversations about the parallels between Indigenous and qualitative research processes, which have enriched this research project. Specifically, I highlight the role that anti-oppressive research practices play within my mixed methodology approach.

I elaborate on these parallels in Chapter 6, where I present the Métis Sash Research Framework and share the ways in which it has guided my research with the On-Campus Friendship Centre. I also address the influence of Indigenous and anti-oppressive research approaches during my discussion of methods in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6

- The Métis Sash Research Framework –

“We must cherish our inheritance. We must preserve our nationality for the youth of our future.
The story should be written down to pass on.”

- Louis Riel

(as cited by Manitoba Métis Federation, n.d.)

Introduction

I created the Métis Sash Research Framework specifically for carrying out my research with the On-Campus Friendship Centre. As I am engaging in research as reconciliation, I draw on both Indigenous and qualitative methodologies, with specific focus on Métis and anti-oppressive epistemologies and research approaches. I have chosen to employ Indigenous methodologies for two reasons: 1) I feel this appropriately represents the people, community and program that are involved in the research, and 2) as an Indigenous person I feel that it is an honest representation of my perspectives, beliefs and values (ontology, epistemology and axiology) when doing research. It is for this reason that my research framework is specifically embedded in Métis teachings and values.

I have also drawn from qualitative methodologies in creating the Métis Sash Research Framework – specifically anti-oppressive research practices. As stated in Chapter 5, I have chosen to incorporate qualitative methodologies for a few reasons: 1) As a Métis person in a non-Indigenous field such as sociology, I would like to bridge the gap between my contrasting experiences, 2) I feel a responsibility to decolonize the discipline of sociology by bringing in Indigenous perspectives and ways of doing research, 2) I feel that reconciliation involves communication and partnership across paradigms, 3) I believe that certain qualitative methodologies can be a strong ally for Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2015). I also feel that qualitative methodologies are a good fit for the population involved in research, as they are mostly Indigenous people involved in post-secondary education and may appreciate the bridging between *their* worlds as well.

In this chapter, I will discuss the ways my values as a Métis researcher transform into an approach that fits well with an urban Indigenous population. I will do this by explaining how the

purpose and design of the Métis Sash metaphorically represent my beliefs and values that have guided my research with the On-Campus Friendship Centre. Discussion of Indigenous and anti-oppressive research approaches are woven throughout the chapter.

Figure 13: The Métis Sash Research Framework



The Métis Sash Research Framework

My framework uses the Métis sash as a metaphor for the realities, beliefs and values (ontology, epistemology, axiology) that guided my research process. Just as Kovach (2009) recognizes that her Nêhiyaw methodology privileges the knowledge of Plains Cree people, I acknowledge that my research framework privileges the knowledge, teachings, and experiences of Métis people. Recognizing the knowledge that I have privileged is a step towards a holistic research orientation, which is fundamental for Indigenous methodology (Kovach, 2009). Throughout this chapter, I share the Indigenous methodologies, paradigms and teachings that have inspired this framework.

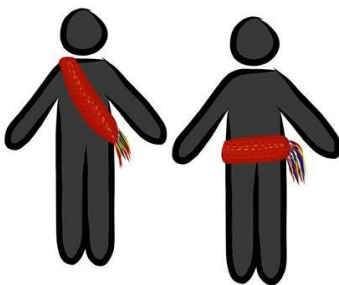
I also recognize the influence that qualitative epistemologies and methodologies have had on this research framework, specifically anti-oppressive research. By sharing this, I follow the

anti-oppressive notion of making my ‘conceptual baggage’ visible, which includes my epistemologies, ontologies, values and beliefs about the world (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 31). Later in this chapter, I explain the metaphors and values within the Métis Sash Research Framework, and the ways in which they have guided my research journey. Many of these teachings have been given to me by family and community members, and as such are subjective and may be different than other teachings about the Métis sash.

Purpose of the Métis Sash

The Métis sash continues to be used for identification in various ways. Historically, it was also used for transportation and healing. In the following section, I will discuss how these different purposes relate to my research process.

Figure 14: Wearing the Métis Sash



Identification

Historically, the Métis sash has many purposes, all of which can be connected to the goals of this research. Continuing to this day, a central reason for wearing the sash is to display Métis allegiance, identity, and culture. During fur trade times, it was also a way of identifying one’s work, as a sash could be placed on a hunted buffalo as a marker for who had hunted it. Through embedding Métis values and teachings into this framework, I have displayed allegiance to Métis people while also celebrating my family’s culture and values.

Transportation

In fur trade times, the sash was a versatile article of clothing. During travel, it was often used as a saddle blanket or a rope to portage canoes. The sash was also used as a bundle to carry belongings. In this way, the sash represents transportation from one place to another, as well as a bundle of livelihood and knowledge. In my research, it exemplifies the opportunity to move the culture and knowledge of Métis peoples forward. Through this framework, my research can contribute to bringing the Métis voice out of the margins and into mainstream academia. By offering wise-practices to the rest of Canada, the experiences and knowledge of those involved with the On-Campus Friendship Centre will be shared.

Healing

The sash could be used as a tourniquet for injuries acquired while hunting, with the fringe at the end functioning as an emergency sewing kit. Thus, the sash was used for healing, which is another key aspect of Indigenous research. Due to the violent history of colonization and its ongoing repercussions, Indigenous peoples need space to heal. The cultural aspect within Indigenous methodologies allows for research to be a healing process not only for the researcher, but the participants, community and culture (Absolon, 2011).

Within my family, the generations before me did not openly identify as Métis due to the racism they had witnessed and experienced. By sharing my family's history as Métis people within my research, I have healed some of the shame around our culture and heritage - within myself and hopefully others. Additionally, through recognizing the history of colonization, intergenerational trauma, *and* intergenerational resilience, I hope to foster healing for all Indigenous people engaging in this research. Finally, by recognizing the strengths of Indigenous

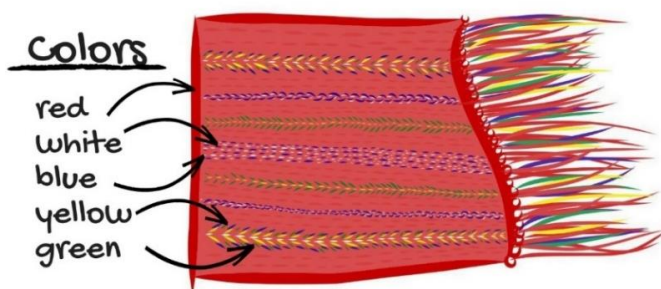
students and programs in a strength-based manner, I try to foster healing for the participants who shared their voices.

Design

The colors, arrowed-design, and weaving of the sash make up its design. In the following section, I will explain the meaning behind each of these aspects within my methodology and research process.

Colors

Figure 15: The Colors of the Métis Sash



The Métis sash is typically composed of five different colors: Red, white, blue, yellow, and green. Sometimes the sash has a predominantly blue background, but typically, and in this research framework, the background is red.

Red and White

The coming together of red and white represents the history of the Métis people, which is the mixing of two nations and the evolution of a nationhood and people. This recognizes the various worlds I straddle as a Métis person. It addresses the two worlds of Indigenous academics who are attempting to infuse their culture into a non-Indigenous discipline such as sociology. This aligns well with the mixed-methodology approach within this framework, which draws on

Indigenous and anti-oppressive research methodologies. As such, red and white were a reminder to always work in partnership and reconciliation.

I have been fortunate to have the support of a non-Indigenous supervisor who is excited about learning about my cultural perspective and experiences, and welcomes them into the research process. As he is the person who inspired me to continue into graduate school and take on this research, this partnership between red and white is an essential aspect of this research framework. Just as it weaves throughout the sash, we have continued to communicate throughout the research process.

The red and white also relates to the collided worlds within the urban setting of the research. Within the OCFC, there are Indigenous peoples from very different histories and lands, as well as non-Indigenous peoples. Thus, the coming together of the red and white was necessary for understanding the environment of the community of which I am engaging in research.

Blue

In the sash, blue represents water and the sky. I have been offered Cree teachings about these, which are meaningful to me as I have Cree heritage and live in Cree territory. Cree teachings about water say that it is the source of women's strength (Cave, 2016). This is important, as research can be draining, thus turning to Mother Earth for sustenance may be necessary. Throughout my research journey I have turned to the powerful ocean surrounding Victoria. She is a reminder of the energy constantly coming towards us, and crashing back out. I have opened my arms to her when I needed strength or cleansing. While I always feel in awe when I look to her, I also have a respectful fear of the ocean. This has been a healthy reminder to stay close to the shore and to the heart of my research. It has also been a reminder to keep those

around me safe by ensuring that participants who have shared their stories are secure and protected.

Teachings of the sky are fundamental to this research framework as well. The sky holds very important meaning within Cree teachings (Buck, 2009). The sky is where our ancestors dance through the northern lights, it is through the stars that our people came down to creation, it is where the sun sets and rises to signal the ending and beginning of each day, and its infinite space reminds us of our endless possibilities and opportunities. Thus, blue reminded me to keep connected to that energetic space above and the lessons it provides.

While there were many reasons to move home for this research project, the sky was a prominent one. The sun woke me up on the heaviest days, and the moon heard my cries on the hardest nights. There is nothing that moves me quite like the sky. I see the beauty in bodies of water, mountains, and forests, but I never truly feel at home until I am in a vast prairie with a wide view of the big blue. I was refreshed by the wind, inspired by the sunsets, comforted by the stars, and I danced with the northern lights. It has played an integral role in my health as a researcher, and has been something I could share with my community - because in the prairies we are always talking about the sky.

Yellow

Yellow represents the sun, and prosperity (Kikino Métis Children and Family Services Society, n.d.). Looking at the challenges Indigenous students face in post-secondary education meant discussing the ongoing repercussions of colonization, which could be heavy and heartbreaking work. The sun was a reminder that amidst the darkness there is light, and that by highlighting the resilience and innovation of Indigenous people, research can foster hope and

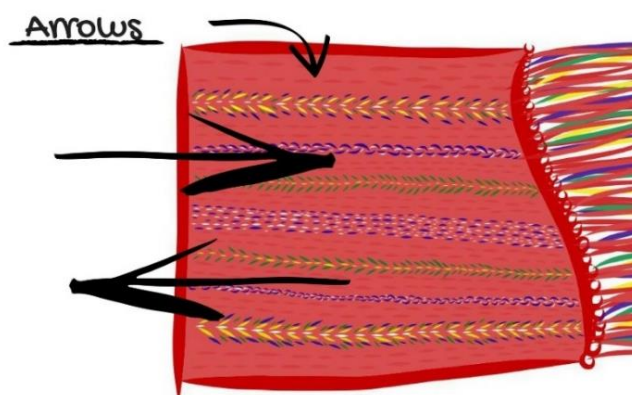
positivity. Yellow was a reminder to keep research strength-based, and to keep working towards a new day. It is my aspiration that through doing this research and sharing wise-practices moving forward, hope for improving the experiences of Indigenous students is increased.

Green

Generally, green represents the earth/grass, which symbolizes fertility and growth (Kikino Métis Children and Family Services Society, n.d.). This was a reminder to plant seeds at the beginning of the research process, nurture them, and watch them flourish. When I made tobacco offerings in this research journey, I drew seeds on the tobacco bags to signify the intention behind the offering and the potential for the relationships. I kept those offerings in my mind and heart throughout the research journey. Green was also a reminder to take care of each person and story that entered the research, and to humbly recognize that the researcher is always growing and learning. Green signifies the wildness of plants, and was a reminder to release control over the direction of the research process and to allow it to grow naturally. Putting my toes in the grass (or boots in the snow) reminded me stay close to the earth, keep grounded, and always tend to the roots of the research process.

Arrows

Figure 16: Arrowed Design of the Métis Sash

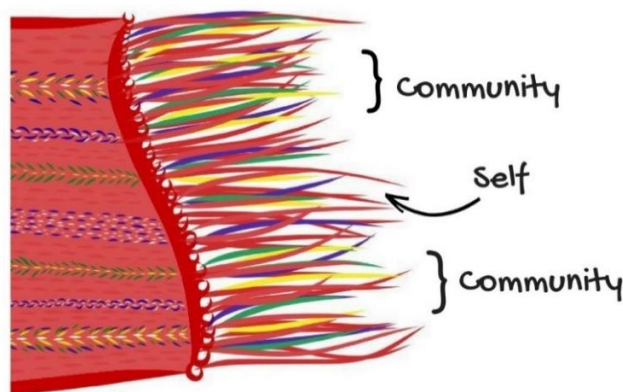


Due to the arrowed design on the sash, it is often referred to as ‘un ceinture fleche’, which can be translated into ‘an arrowed belt’. In relation to research, these arrows represented dialogue, reconciliation and intention. To engage in research that was meaningful and effective for the community, healthy dialogue between the researcher, key stakeholders and participants was fundamental.

These arrows also represent the direction of truth and reconciliation. If we are to move towards reconciliation, we must first look to the past and remember our collective history. We must also work towards a better future for all. These arrows reminded me to always ensure arrows flow both ways. Finally, a flying arrow is shot with intention. This encouraged me to ensure that all actions taken throughout the research process were intentional, purposeful, and well thought out.

Weaving

Figure 17: Weaving of the Métis Sash



The Métis sash is made of many strands woven together. For the Métis Sash Research Framework, I situated ‘self’ as the central strand and the ‘community’ as the surrounding strands. The self refers to the researcher, and the community refers to the people involved in the research

process. This includes the participants, stakeholders, and the people at the On-Campus Friendship Centre, Grande Prairie Regional College and within the city who have provided support or access in various ways. In short, community refers to the people affected by this research. By discussing my understanding of self and community engagement in relation to the *creation* of the sash, I ensured that these are fundamental aspects of the research framework.

The Self Strand

Often when you meet an Indigenous person, they introduce themselves by acknowledging the land they are on, connecting themselves to their ancestors and family, and through sharing *all* their names with you. This speaks to the great emphasis that is placed on relationships within Indigenous culture. Situating the self as central is integral to Indigenous research, as ‘the methodology is just as much about the person doing the searching as it is about the search’ (Absolon, 2011, p. 75). Self as the central strand in this metaphor reminded me to introduce myself properly, to always be reflective of my dreams, inspirations and motivations, and to continually communicate my role within the process.

Making these understandings of self transparent throughout the process is vital for combatting “false notions of neutrality and objectivity” (Absolon, 2011. p. 74). Kovach (2009) explains that introducing oneself from the beginning is important, because the voice, motives, and story of the researcher is woven throughout the rest of the work. Continuing to check in with ‘self’ throughout the research is also essential, as “self in Indigenous methodology has no time barriers and will always travel with us as we journey in and out of our search for knowledge” (Absolon, p. 69, 2011). For this reason, many Indigenous researchers keep research journals, which I did, to continually reflect on experiences and the knowledge gathered (Kovach, 2009).

Assessing ‘self’ within the research process is also fundamental in anti-oppressive research, as “knowing what our values and beliefs are, where they come from, and how they affect specific relations are important in developing a commitment to overcoming injustice in our practice” (Thomas & Green, 2007, p. 91). Anti-oppressive research calls for the researcher to “be vigilant about our own biases and motivations, and attend to the gaps between how we see ourselves...and how others may see us” (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 22). Being critical of other perceptions is an integral aspect of building relationships and mitigating power dynamics between the researcher and participant. Thus, the most impactful anti-oppressive researcher is one “that knows themselves best” (Thomas & Green, 2007, p. 97).

While each Indigenous methodology and anti-oppressive research approach has different ways of introducing self, the Métis Sash Research Framework follows Absolon’s (2011) three step process: 1) Remembering, 2) acknowledging motivations, and 3) self-locating within research.

Remembering is a vital part of situating oneself in Indigenous research, just as it is a vital purpose and outcome of wearing the Métis sash. Keeping the Métis sash present and on the bodies of Indigenous peoples is a way of revitalizing the history and continued strength of Métis people. This can also be done through remembering in research. Absolon (2011) explains that remembering reconnects the relationships that were severed through colonialism, as “when we remember, we actually become re-membered and are connected with our history, family members, identities, language, ancestors, and our open wounds begin to heal” (p. 77) For these reasons, I have taken the time to remember my family’s history and my own experiences, and to connect those memories with the research.

Remembering and situating self can help to understand **motivation**, which is important as it shapes one's research. Remembering helps to understand the motivations that inspired and influenced all my choices. Recognizing these motivations allowed for me to answer important questions such as: "Why am I doing this? Who am I doing this for?" (Absolon, 2011, p. 67). Consciously answering and sharing these motivations is fundamental within Indigenous research, as it allows for me to take responsibility for research, and to make it clear to others the ways in which my intentions may affect the process and outcomes. I have shared my remembering and my motivations explicitly in the introduction section, while also weaving them throughout my thesis.

Self-location means recognizing the researchers' unique position in relation to the research project. Both Kovach (2009) and Absolon (2011) do this explicitly in the prologues of their books, but it also weaves throughout their story. As Absolon (2011) explains, the research is impacted by the "researcher's gender, race, class, sex, age, [and] identity" as these shape interpretation, meaning-making and the presentation of knowledge gathered (p. 73). This is also a central aspect of anti-oppressive research, where it is encouraged for 'white' academics to "recognize that our ability to implement an anti-oppressive research approach rests (to some extent) on tapping into our privilege, and acknowledge that researchers from the margins face different challenges in attempting to enable anti-oppressive research" (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 18). As such, locating oneself is an integral aspect to the Métis Sash Research Framework.

For myself, this meant recognizing that I am a light-skinned Métis woman who grew up in a middle class, urban setting. It meant understanding the privilege that comes from being a young, heterosexual, cis-gendered, and able-bodied person attending graduate studies at a post-secondary institution. It also meant understanding the struggles that have come with living

between two worlds as a Métis person, and the general challenges I have overcome as a woman in spaces of patriarchy and misogyny.

Recognizing my self-location has helped me to understand the ways in which my appearance and experiences can affect the relationships and outcomes of this research. For example, I considered that some participants may not feel comfortable talking to someone lighter skinned than them, who has not grown up on a reserve or settlement, who has no children, is in graduate school, and who identifies as a heterosexual woman. On the contrary, I reflected on certain characteristics I carry that may make other participants feel comfortable or welcome within the research project. While I could not know exactly which way a participant would respond or feel, I worked to be cognisant of my self-location and the effects it could have on others.

The Community Strands

In the Métis Sash Research Framework, I have situated the community as the strands surrounding ‘self’. I appreciate this part of the metaphor, because we have to come together to make the research process: Without the community the researcher can be no more than a single strand. The sash cannot be weaved correctly without careful teachings and attention to process. If certain stakeholders are left out, then perhaps the sash is made without the key element of green, or without the arrows of dialogue. Thus, everyone must work together, at the same pace, towards the same goal. This has been a reminder for me to keep the community and their interests at the heart of the entire research process. It has encouraged me to ensure that engagement is happening at all levels, and all times.

Focus on community encouraged me to move back home to Grande Prairie for this research process. Just as Kovach (2009) had to move from Victoria, BC to her home in the prairies of Saskatchewan for her research process, I had to move from Victoria, BC to my home in the prairies of Alberta. I can relate to Kovach (2009), when she explains that “being based in the general vicinity of my traditional territory was critical to this research, I believe that where we are, and the daily influences of our lives, shape how we think and write” (p. 52). Being back in my hometown of Grande Prairie, surrounded by my community and the big prairie skies, was an integral aspect of this research. It makes sense that my Métis Sash Research Framework brought me home, as a central element of Indigenous methodology is connection to place, the land, and our roots (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Restoule, Gruner & Metatawabin, 2013).

This presence of community *throughout* the sash speaks to a vital aspect of Indigenous methodology, as the researcher is often part of the community and has relationships with participants *prior* to research (Kovach, 2009). These prior relationships can lead to participant recruitment that is purposeful according to “what they can bring to the study as opposed to random sampling” (Kovach, 2009, p. 51). This is an accepted characteristic of Indigenous methodology as “relationships are recognized as an important strength and resource for Indigenous re-search, and we make new relationships through our re-search” (Absolon, 2011, p. 124). While this may not be appropriate within more objective methodologies, it is often encouraged within Indigenous methodologies as it ensures that research is community-based and Indigenous-driven.

Pre-existing relationships are also a measure of protection for Indigenous communities against continued colonial research practices that are exploitative and extractive. Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) speak to the political nature of research within Indigenous communities in their

discussion of insider-outsider researchers. Often, insider researchers who already have relationships and credibility with a community are more accepted than outsider researchers. These levels of trust are very important when dealing with sensitive populations, Indigenous knowledge, culture and ceremony (Benoit, Jansson, Millar, Phillips, 2005; Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000).

This aspect of building community is also central to anti-oppressive research, as they often say that “we do not begin to collect data in a community until all the dogs know us...[or] no research without authentic relationships” (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 21). In order to do research that is *for* the community, the researcher needs to be embedded *within* the community (Benoit et al., 2005). For anti-oppressive research, this involves becoming deeply familiar with more than just the people involved, but also taking time to understand “the history and context of wherever the research will take place, and becoming savvy to the politics we will be immersed in” (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 22). Thus, the self strand must be irrevocably intertwined with the community strands.

Embedding myself in the strands of the community fostered a research experience built on accountability, safety and respect (Benoit et al., 2005). The fringe that remains at the end of the sash is also symbolic. By not cutting this off I preserve a reminder of where we started, and pay homage to every strand that has been involved.

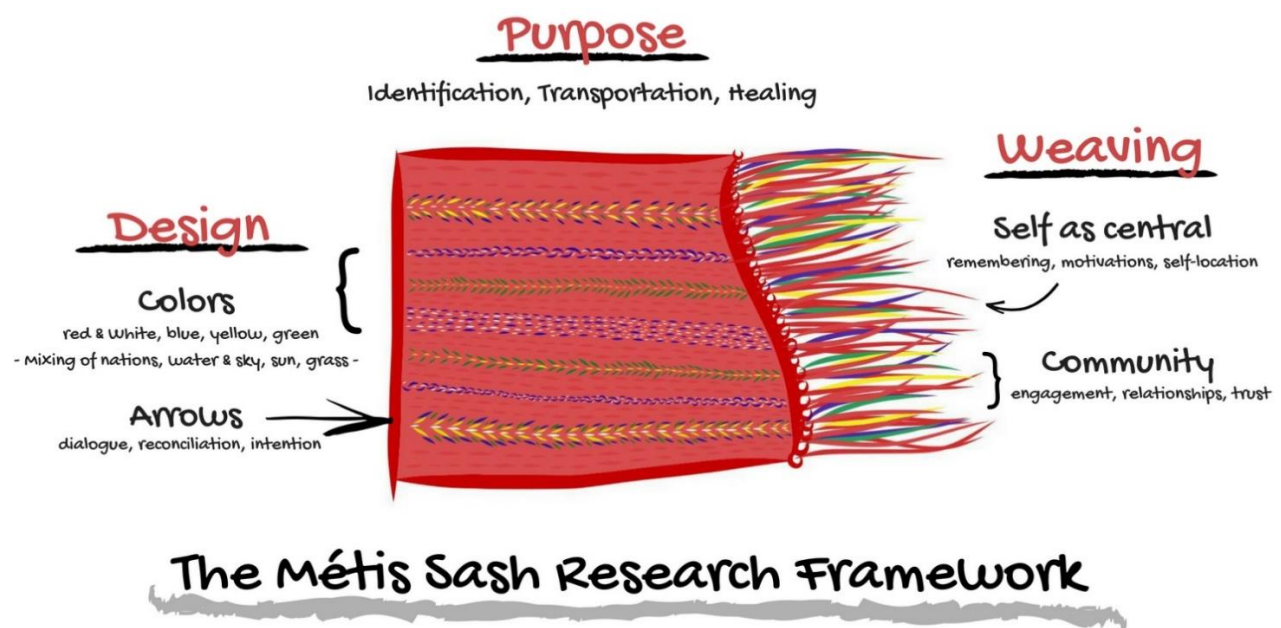
Chapter Summary

The various aspects of my Métis Sash Research Framework ensured that this research was embedded in Métis values, and worked towards reconciliation. The use of the sash allowed for me to identify my heritage and culture, and to acknowledge that my epistemology, ontology

and axiology privilege Métis values and teachings. The purpose of the sash for transportation and healing spoke to the goals of this research, which was to bring the voices of my community into the world of research, and to offer reconciliation and growth to everyone involved.

The arrowed design of the sash was a reminder of direction, dialogue, and intention within the research process. Each color within the sash represents my values as a researcher: Red and white brings two worlds together, blue brings Cree teachings of water and the sky, green brings fertility and growth, and yellow brings hope and prosperity. The creation of the sash by weaving multiple strands together signified the community involvement that is necessary for meaningful and ethical research. The central strand of self symbolized the role I play as a researcher, and the responsibility I have to remember my history, share my motivations, and to locate myself within this project. In Chapter 7, I will share the methods used to carry out the Métis Sash Research Framework, and to make meaning of my research with the On-Campus Friendship Centre.

Figure 18: The Métis Sash Research Framework Overall



Chapter 7

- Building, Gathering, and Making (Methods) –

“Trust me, this will take time but there is order here, very faint, very human.”

- Michael Ondaatje,

(1987, p. 146)

Introduction

To explore the role of the On-Campus Friendship Centre, I formulated a guiding research question: In what ways does the OCFC address and support the strengths and challenges of Indigenous students, and in what ways can this be improved? There were many methods utilized to explore this question, all of which were guided by the Métis Sash Research Framework. I present these methods in three separate but overlapping phases: Building community, gathering knowledge, and making meaning.

By describing the research ‘methods’ through terms like ‘building community’, ‘knowledge gathering’, and ‘meaning making’, I maintain an important aspect of accessibility when discussing the research process. Also, these terms are more meaningful to me, as they speak to how I view the process of carrying out my methodology and understanding the findings. In ‘building community’ I review the actions I took to foster relationships and connections of trust within the community. In ‘gathering knowledge’, I present the methods used to gather knowledge specifically regarding my research question. In ‘making meaning’, I discuss the ways in which I came to understand and interpret what I had learned – also known as data analysis.

During the entire process, I also kept a research journal where I wrote and drew about my experiences as I travelled along this research journey. To share the more emotional side of this research process, I have woven some snippets from the journal throughout this section.

(See textbox on the right).

Journal Entry – September 2016

I step towards the bright fog
and I am reminded of the valley
that I drove into all summer
I see the landscape of my future
in this research journey

Fog is not a vast sea
or a tall mountain
not a dark forest
or a sudden cliff

it can blanket all these things
but that is not what fog is

fog is a sleepy layer
teaching patience
telling you to keep landmarks
you don't rush into the fog
it will lift when it's ready
unveil the scenery for you

slowly you enter it
with searching eyes
and an active mind
something about staring
at a gray wall allows your
mind to think, to reflect

there's no separation
between land and sky
no distinction between
moon and cloud
no outline around the sun
just soft light
in a sort-of direction

follow it

Building Community

Before speaking with people *about* the research questions, there were some integral steps regarding community engagement that I needed to carry out (Benoit et al., 2005). Forming relationships is an integral aspect to both Indigenous and anti-oppressive research practices, as “involving people is done for purposes like community building, empowerment, and more nuanced understandings” (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 26). I began by offering tobacco to two key stakeholders. My teachings on offering tobacco come from my Elders, and may be different than others. Offering tobacco is a ceremonial act, so I will not go into detail about the exchange, but I will say that it was my way of asking these people for their approval and support throughout this research journey. Each bag of tobacco had a seed drawn on it to represent the growing journey we would be taking together - both people happily accepted.

The first person that I offered tobacco to was Nelson Mayer, who at the time held the position of President of the National Association of Friendship Centres and Executive Director of the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association. Nelson, a powerful and kind Métis man, was a friend and mentor. It was through our discussions that the ideas were planted for this research project, as he had always dreamed of opening more On-Campus Friendship Centres. When Nelson passed away in December 2017, I mourned the immense loss with the rest of the country. His larger than life presence is irreplaceable, yet his legacy continues. It is through this research project that I aspire to continue his efforts in making the world a better place for all urban Indigenous people.

Journal Entry – October 2016

The fog begins to dissipate
I can see that my role
in this journey now
is just as important
if not more important
than the end goal

here I am
now

The second person I offered tobacco to was Loretta Parenteau-English, who is the Elder-in-Residence at the OCFC. Loretta is a proud Blackfoot woman from Piikani Nation, and has

always been someone that I admire. While I sowed deep intention into the tobacco offering, I never could have predicted the journey it would take us down. As I describe in the rest of this section, I have had the amazing opportunity to travel with, learn from, and be supported by Loretta. Beyond assisting me in building community at the OCFC, she has been a rock and source of reason and ceremony whenever needed. I am immensely grateful for and proud of the relationship that we have formed.

Once those key offerings were made, I had more community engagements to fulfill. To truly explore the role of the OCFC, I felt that it was necessary to move back into the community rather than live in Victoria (where I am a graduate student) and travel to Grande Prairie occasionally (where the OCFC exists). By immersing myself into the community I could ensure that my research methods were not extractive, the process was community-driven, and that I could acquire a holistic understanding of the OCFC. Moving home also helped me to feel grounded and supported throughout my research journey.

This arrangement was made possible through the partnership of the University of Victoria and Grande Prairie Regional College. While my supervisor from the University of Victoria supported my decision, I also reached out for approval and support from GPRC's President & CEO [Don Gnatiuk], the Vice-President of Academics of Research [Susan Banskrove], and the Indigenous Liaison Coordinator at the time [Ashley Walker]. With excitement and warmth, these key stakeholders welcomed me back into the college.

Journal Entry – August 2017

So the fog has lifted a bit
and at times its overwhelming
and almost always
my heart is fluttering

But often,
it is beautiful
fulfilling, bright, lush,
and inspiring

Amidst the fluttering
of excitement and passion
I sometimes
find peace

The world doesn't stop
spinning around me
but for a quick moment
I feel sure

Sure that I am
where I am supposed to be
doing what I was meant to do
just as it was meant to be done

and it will all
be okay

To support my research project, Don and Susan worked with Bruce Rutley of the GPRC Research and Innovation team to offer me the position of Visiting Scholar. The Research & Innovation team “leads the development of applied research and innovation for the College and northwestern Alberta” (Grande Prairie Regional College, n.d.). Being a part of this team provided me with academic support and resources while living in Grande Prairie. Through the generosity of an office within the building, I was also able to work closely with the OCFC.

As the OCFC is only open during the school year (September to April), this totalled 16 months of the 2-year research process. For the first 5 months, I was in the ‘building community’ phase. I made connections and formed relationships within the OCFC and broader community in a variety of ways. I began by introducing myself at the first potluck of the year, and attending the Student Welcoming Celebration Pow Wow. I continued to spend time visiting with students and staff at the OCFC, and attending events.

For example, I enrolled in a workshop series called ‘Decolonizing Indigenous Peoples Experiences within Education’, which was created in partnership with Indigenous Studies Instructor Kirsten Mikkelsen at GPRC, and the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre. This series of workshops gave me the opportunity to gather with students who attend the OCFC and learn traditional teachings from various Elders and knowledge-keepers in the community. I attended two workshops on Dene Fish Filleting and Fish scale Art, two workshops on Drum-Making, and one workshop on Dunne Zaa Cattail Survival.

I also spent energy and time building relationships within the broader Indigenous community in Grande Prairie and across Canada. My involvement in the following events was not that of ‘researcher’, but they are important to recognize as they shaped my relationships with the community, and my research approach:

Indigenous Innovation Summit (Edmonton, Alberta): In November of 2016, I attended the National Association of Friendship Centres annual summit geared towards fostering and sharing stories of Indigenous innovation. Together, my mum and I were inspired by Indigenous speakers, entrepreneurs, and organizations from across Canada.

Spirit Seekers Youth Conference (Grande Prairie, Alberta): In March of 2017, I lead a workshop on post-secondary education at the annual youth conference, which brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth to build capacity and inspiration for their futures. In March 2018, I volunteered during the Elder's workshop.

Elder-Youth Dialogue on Indigenous Health Priorities (Ottawa, Ontario): In March of 2017, this event was hosted by the Canadian Institute of Health Research – Institute of Aboriginal People's Health (CIHR-IAPH). Through meeting with 24 other pairs of Indigenous youth and Elders' from across Canada, we worked together to identify ways CIHR-IAPH could effectively respond to the TRC Calls to Action to engage meaningfully with Indigenous peoples on health-related issues.

Blanket Exercise Training (Grande Prairie, Alberta): In March of 2017, I took training to become a Blanket Exercise facilitator along with the members of the Circle of Indigenous Students. The Blanket Exercise is an interactive history lesson which assists groups of people in understanding the experiences of Indigenous people today.

Honoring Our Women (Grande Prairie, Alberta): In May 2017, I led a workshop on post-secondary education to a program at the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre called 'Honoring our Women'. Along with input from the women in the group, we discussed successful steps when returning to post-secondary.

Urban Indigenous Research Ethics Development Circle (Ottawa, Ontario): In May of 2017, my mum, my Elder Loretta and I attended the National Association of Friendship Centre's Urban Indigenous Research Ethics Development Circle. This was a discussion on the need for a set of research ethics for those who wish to engage in research with the urban Indigenous population. This meeting was part of a partnership between the National Association of Friendship Centres and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Congress (Toronto, Ontario): In May of 2017, I attended the Canadian Sociological Association's annual conference. I participated in a session on 'Indigenous People in the City' and a roundtable on 'Decolonizing Sociology: Indigeneity in Theory & Practice'. It was very inspiring and thought-provoking to engage in such spirited discussion about the relationship between Indigenous research and sociology.

NAFC Aboriginal Youth Forum & Annual General Meeting (Montreal, Quebec): In August of 2017, I attended the National Association of Friendship Centre's Aboriginal Youth Council Forum, as well as the Annual General Meeting with my mum, the

Executive Director and a Board Member from the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre. This was a great opportunity to learn about the Friendship Centre movement and the unique roles they play across Canada.

Indspire Awards (Winnipeg, Manitoba): In March 2018, I attended the Indspire awards as my mum's guest, as she was giving an award to one of the recipients. Indspire is a "national Indigenous-led registered charity that invests in the education of Indigenous people" (Indspire, n.d. par. 1). Annually, they gather to honor and celebrate Indigenous people across the country. This event filled my heart with pride and excitement.

Through these opportunities I developed a better understanding of the urban Indigenous population, the role of post-secondary institutions, and the required research approach when engaging with the OCFC. I also formed relationships and connections that have fostered trust within my own community.

Gathering Knowledge

Throughout this time, I also began the 'gathering knowledge' phase. From February to July of 2017, I engaged in 23 interviews and 1 Talking Circle. Overall, there were 27 participants who fell within two groups: 1) Current or past students that are involved with the OCFC in any capacity, and/or 2) staff and community members that are involved with the OCFC.

The first group was chosen because they are the targeted group that the OCFC aims to support. They are currently or have previously been immersed in the post-secondary experience, and are/were familiar with the OCFC. Thus, they could potentially provide insight into the role that the OCFC has or has not played in their student life. The second group was chosen because they can offer a different perspective from students. Depending on their position within the community, they may have an administrative or broad understanding of the OCFC. If they work with students, they can offer insight into the needs of students.

Potential participants were *not* selected based on their level of involvement with the OCFC: Whoever wished to participate was welcome. Due to the OCFC being a space that welcomes *all* students, and the community broadness of this project, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people were welcome to participate. The only stipulation was that participants had to be of 18 years of age or older, as that is the legal age within the province of research.

Recruiting Participants for Interviews

As I had already introduced myself to the OCFC in September of 2016, and spent five months within the space, most people already knew about my research project by the time I needed to start recruiting. In February, I distributed posters to invite participate throughout the college, and the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre. I also left a sign-up sheet for participation within the On-Campus Friendship Centre. If I was in the OCFC, I would tell people in the space about my project and let them know about the sign-up sheet.

I also asked the Outreach Worker and Elder-in-Residence to let people know about the sign-up sheet as well. These methods were a combination of snowball and purposeful sampling, as most of the participants joined via word of mouth, but some were purposefully asked due to their role within the OCFC, college, or community. Purposeful sampling, and the role of the community assisting me in recruiting participants aligns with anti-oppressive research approaches (Potts & Brown, 2015).

Journal Entry – August 2017

The fog is now on top of me
weighing on my shoulders
thick in my throat
heavy in my lungs

Suddenly
there is so much
revealed around me
that I'm spinning frantically

Trying to water
each flower
hug every person
lay down every ribbon

How far have I come?
though its been
a long journey
I feel behind

but I'm holding too much
too go faster
there's too much
to tend too

just as I set my sights
on the path ahead
my head
swivels

The cry of a friend
the laugh of a baby
the embrace of a loved one
the loss of a loved one

I'm rooted in
so rooted I can't fly
torn between moving and staying
but never doing either

The fog is on top of me
where are the stars?

Interview Structure

Once people had signed-up, I would email them regarding a time and place, attach a consent form to read over beforehand, and present some information on the project. After the initial email, we would meet for the interview in a neutral place such as a room in the college or a coffee shop. After visiting, we would go over the consent form together. The consent form included information about myself as the researcher and the project in general, the option to authorize if the interview could be audio-recorded, and the option to authorize if findings could be used in future research projects. Concepts of anonymity, confidentiality, on-going consent and the right to withdraw were made clear, with a copy of the form given to the participant to keep. This aspect of informed consent is integral to anti-oppressive research practices, as it exemplifies our commitment to the rights of the researcher, community, and knowledge gathered (Potts & Brown, 2015).

Journal Entry – October 2017

Tricky Moon
hiding in fog
it's no longer foggy
I can see
with my heart
where I am going
where we are going
together

we have a story to tell
come share your voice...

Once the consent form process was complete, we would get talking. The interview was loosely structured with a set of guiding questions to draw from if they were necessary, but often the conversation was organic and had a natural flow. This method was drawn on from both qualitative and Indigenous methodologies.

Within qualitative research, “in-depth or unstructured interviews are one of the main methods of data collection” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013, p. 138). Generally, in-depth interviews are a purposeful conversation that combines both structure and flexibility, though they can vary greatly depending on the specific qualitative approach being employed (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). My approach to interviews can be related to certain aspects within anti-oppressive research,

which is geared towards fostering social justice, exposing power dynamics, and building reciprocal relationships (Potts & Brown, 2015). Within anti-oppressive researchers, the participant is situated as the keeper of knowledge, and to “not only have agency, but also as being deeply dialogical and relational” (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 88).

During my interviews, I worked to break down the researcher/participant power dynamic by encouraging the participant to choose the time and place and to direct the flow of conversation. I also treated our interactions as a respectful part of relationship building, ensuring to visit with them if I saw them afterwards.

Indigenous methodologies also guided my approach to interviews, specifically Kovach’s (2010) ‘Conversational Method’, which situates the participant as the knowledge keeper, focuses on knowledge acquisition through storytelling, and encourages dialogue between researcher and participant. While many qualitative approaches, such as narrative inquiry, utilize a conversational method for interviews, its use within Indigenous research is “based on oral story telling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm” (Kovach, 2010, p. 40).

Journal Entry – November 2017

So much, so much, so much

feeling so much beauty
slivers of pain
peeks into darkness
a greater knowing
and confidence
in the world
in myself

but also a closed door
so many questions
behind it,
why?

the grief pours
down the outside
if you put your hand
on the wood
its cold

but you're in a warm hearth
fire kindling and growing
warmth, love,
hope

you slowly open windows
to help a broken bird
then you return
to your sink and stove
and cook and clean

you look up to the sky
I love you moon
so bright and
unbelievably shining
amidst it all

the energy in me builds
my world shakes
rocks like the glass
ball of ash on my desk
formed from Mt. Helen
erupting

pretty, delicate, strong
susceptible, hard, resilient

According to Kovach (2010), the following elements of conversational method within Indigenous research make it unique from other qualitative approaches: its connection to an Indigenous epistemology or paradigm, the aim of decolonizing within research, the use of

specific protocols based on the Indigenous paradigm, and focus on relationship, collaboration, dialogue and reflexivity (p. 43).

Within my interviews, I fostered a conversational feel by visiting with participants beforehand and engaging in dialogue throughout, allowing a natural flow of conversation, and encouraging uninterrupted storytelling. The length of the interview would vary from about twenty minutes to two hours, as it was completely dependent on the participant's schedule.

After the discussion had wrapped up, I would ask the participant to fill out an optional questionnaire regarding their demographics. After each interview I emailed the participant to thank them for their time, and to provide them with their copy of the consent form. Every interview was one-on-one except for one scenario where two people were interviewed at the same time as they felt more comfortable together.

Talking Circle Structure

In addition to the interviews, the Indigenous Studies Instructor assisted me in arranging a Talking Circle. A Talking Circle is very similar to a 'focus group', which is often used within qualitative research, as both use group discussion to gather knowledge on a specific topic (Lavallée, 2009). Elements within a focus group are similar to a Talking Circle, such as the dialogue between participants, and the increased likelihood of spontaneity in discussion in comparison to a one-on-one interview (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013).

However, Talking Circles are different in that they are embedded in Indigenous values and ceremonial teachings (Lavallée, 2009). For instance, within Talking Circles, "there is

Journal Entry – November 2017

The fog is lifting
and there is work to do

but there's still time
to breathe

It's a clear night
I can see the ocean
I can see the land across
I can see the stars above

Ah

I revel in this moment

recognition that the spirits of our ancestors and the Creator are present in the circle and guide the process” (Lavallée, 2009, p. 29). This ceremonial aspect results in specific protocols, which can include sitting in a circle away from a table, participants speaking in a clockwise order, allowing time between each participant, passing a ceremonial object when speaking, and/or using medicines such as smudging with sage or offering tobacco (Lavallée, 2009).

As every Talking Circle can change with the person conducting it, I shared an information sheet that I created called ‘My Experience with Talking Circles’ and a preamble about the process. I chose to do a Talking Circle for a couple of reasons. Firstly, as I was engaging with a group of people who normally had a discussion formatted meeting, a Talking Circle was a good fit. Secondly, hearing from a circle offers a different perspective than an interview as it allows for participants to communicate with each other as well.

During our Talking Circle, I introduced myself and my project, reviewed the consent form with the participants, and circulated the information sheet I created. I chose to take notes instead of audio-recording the Talking Circle, as I felt it fit better with the ceremonial aspects. The Talking Circle was loosely-structured with a question guide prepared, yet the natural flow of conversation took the lead with the participants speaking in clockwise order. After wrapping up, I once again asked the participants to fill out an optional questionnaire and I emailed them their copy of the consent form. The Talking Circle had 5 participants, with 2 of them also doing a one-on-one interview.

Journal Entry – January 2018

You've been slowed
by the cold & cozy winter
but it's crisp and clear
each branch outlined
in delicate frost
not paralyzed
crystalized

the sky is the lightest blue
ready for you
match your eyes to it
let your eyelashes freeze
at the beauty
step out

crunch of snow
under your boot
Mother Earth
can hear you
move through
like warm water

go forward
with momentum
sink in

find your way
welcome

we're here

Discussion Topics

While the Talking Circle and interviews were loosely structured, there were guiding discussion topics that related to the role of the OCFC. These discussion topics were designed to explore the overall research question: ‘In what ways does the OCFC address and support the strengths and challenges of Indigenous students, and in what ways can this be improved?’.

Generally, the participants began by discussing their reason for attending GPRC, how and why they first became involved with the OCFC, and their level of involvement at the OCFC. Through these topics, participants often addressed the strengths they felt they brought to the college, the challenges they face, and the ways these were addressed by the OCFC and GPRC. Despite the similarities in discussion topic, every conversation was unique and revealed new insight into the experiences of Indigenous students in post-secondary and the role of the OCFC.

Making Meaning

I borrow the term of ‘making meaning’ from Absolon (2011), who uses it instead of ‘data analysis’ and to frame the “process of sorting the information and interpreting from all that was gathered and harvested” (p. 23). The term ‘making meaning’ is also used for analyzing data within anti-oppressive research, and refers to “processes of interpretation, reflection, and constructing meaning as the research journey unfolds” (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 30). This approach encourages the researcher to reflect on their journey from the beginning to now, their feelings throughout, the understandings they have formed, and power dynamics that have been present (Potts & Brown, 2015). My research journal was integral in this process, as it

Journal Entry – April 2018

The northern lights dance
a little buffalo running
chasing another
playing

A big buffalo moving along
Ancestors dancing
green, white, pink

A reminder that the Ancestors
are here

A reminder to dance
to see the magic

To be magic

allowed for me to look at the ways my research questions had evolved, the relationships I had formed, and the findings that had been gathered.

In addition to reflecting on my journal entries, I also spent time reading, transcribing, and interpreting the content shared within the interviews and Talking Circle. My respect for these findings aligned with the anti-oppressive perspective of data being a ‘gift’ from the participant to the researcher (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 27). I transcribed the interviews that were audio-recorded and compiled the notes from the non-recorded interviews and Talking Circle. To better understand each person’s experience and to make connections among the participants, I grouped emergent themes from the various discussion. For myself, this was a natural process of highlighting and connecting. However, there are qualitative methods that better articulate this process.

Through Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, I employed the qualitative method of open, axial and focused coding. The program allowed for me to upload the transcripts and code them effectively. For example, when I noticed that a participant was referring to their reason for attending the OCFC, I would highlight it and assign that code to it. Once I had finished looking over all the interviews, I could pull up that specific code and see every quote from each person relating to their reason for going to the OCFC.

This process can also be understood as Friese’s (2014) ‘Computer assisted NCT analysis’, which means “Noticing things, Collecting things, and Thinking about things” (p. 12). Friese draws on the work of Seidel (1998), Creswell (1998) and Strauss & Corbin (1998) in her discussion of NCT analysis, which is unique as it does not “prescribe any particular way of coding” (p. 13). Rather, this method recognizes that the researcher’s process of understanding

their findings can be linear, but usually goes back and forth between noticing, collecting and thinking.

Friese (2011) describes the ‘**noticing**’ aspect as simply identifying interesting things within the transcripts and labelling them with codes or titles, which can be inductive, deductive, descriptive or conceptual. When one starts to note the ways in which these interesting aspects relate to each other or can be grouped together, they are in the ‘**collecting**’ phase. When trying to understand the ways in which these different groups fit together in relation to the overall research question, the researcher is in the ‘**thinking**’ phase. For me, these phases overlapped throughout the entire research process. This encouraged me to continue reflecting on my discussion topics and questions in the interviews, a practice in reflexivity that is encouraged in both anti-oppressive and Indigenous research.

As the excerpts from my research journal show, my research process was greatly tied to the sky around me. Thus, in addition to Friese’s (2011) qualitative method for data analysis, I also related to Michell’s (2012) metaphor of a canoe trip to describe the experience of data-analysis, or making meaning within research:

Our thoughts become one with the northern landscape and we are transformed. And all that is heard is the sound of paddles touching water. We see the sun going down as evening begins to set in. The colour and patterns in the sky tell us what the weather might be like tomorrow... We are invigorated by what we have learned so far in the research journey... We are grounded and focused on the incredible diversity of perspectives. Like the boreal forest trees, we honour and respect the different shapes, sizes, colours, and ‘rooted-ness’... we look at the overall pattern of the messages. What are voices telling us?... The editing process will take the research team through winding rivers, small

streams, deep reflection in ponds, and down tight corridors ... We look at our emerging and collective knowledge. Did we cover everything that needs to be told? Has the initial research question been answered? What have we learned? We look across the vast lake and to our destination. The dark clouds begin to recede and there is a heavy smell of earth and soil in the air. We breathe it in deeply, Spirit touching where we need healing (p. 6).

These various methods of meaning making and data-analysis enabled me to group the findings into overall themes, which are discussed in the following chapter. I try to present the voice of the participant through longer, uninterrupted quotes. However, it is important to note that these findings are my interpretations of what was shared. Anti-oppressive research requires the researcher to recognize the power they hold as the one making meaning (Potts & Brown, 2015). As such, I acknowledge that the findings I developed have been shaped by my epistemologies and bias, and are limited as they were not analyzed by a group or team.

Chapter Summary

The methods I employed to carry out the Métis Sash Research Framework drew from both Indigenous methodologies and anti-oppressive research approaches. I describe the process in three parts: building community, gathering knowledge, and making meaning. ‘Building community’ refers to the steps I took to embed myself in the environment of the research, and to build relationships of trust and respect. This included offering tobacco to Nelson Mayer and Loretta Parenteau-English, moving home and taking on the role of Visiting Scholar, and immersing myself in the On-Campus Friendship Centre through attending events, visiting the space, and participating in workshops. I also built community on a more national scale via

attending Indigenous-based conferences across Canada, which created a foundation for engaging in this research project.

The ‘gathering knowledge’ phase involved recruiting participants who were involved with the OCFC either as current students, past students, staff, or community members. This resulted in 27 participants, 23 interviews, and 1 Talking Circle. The interviews were in-depth, loosely structured, and based on anti-oppressive research and Indigenous conversational method through a focus on relationships, dialogue, and storytelling. The Talking Circle, which is akin to a focus group often used in qualitative research, had ceremonial aspects to the group-based knowledge gathering process. The discussions within the interviews and Talking Circle revolved around the overall research question regarding the role of the OCFC in addressing the strengths and challenges of Indigenous students.

The ‘making meaning’ phase, also known as data-analysis, drew from both Indigenous and anti-oppressive research. The focus on reflection within these approaches encouraged me to utilize my research journal to make meaning of the entire research process. For the data analysis portion, I utilized a qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti, to code the transcriptions and notes from the interviews and Talking Circle. Qualitative methods of open, axial and focused coding, and noticing, thinking and collecting analysis, were employed to make meaning of the findings. From this, I could group the findings into overall themes, which I discuss in Chapter 8.

Chapter 8

- What I Found (Findings) -

“Pe kiyoke”

(Come and visit)

- *Cree*

Introduction

Throughout the next chapter, I will share what I found through the interviews and Talking Circle. I begin by explaining some terminology and sharing an overview of the participants. The bulk of this chapter explores two topics of discussion: The student and the On-Campus-Friendship Centre. I present four themes relating to the student: 1) Strengths, 2) challenges, 3) definitions of success, and 4) needs. Next, I present four themes relating to the On-Campus Friendship Centre: 5) Level of involvement, 6) reason for going, 7) role of the staff, and 8) the partnership with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre. I conclude with a summary of these findings. In Chapter 9, I discuss how these findings relate to the overall research question, and to the broader discussion of improving the experiences of Indigenous students within post-secondary institutions across Canada.

Terminology

‘What I Found’

While I use the term ‘findings’, I primarily refer to the knowledge gathered and shared as ‘what I found’. In contrast to the objective and distant term of ‘findings’, referring to the knowledge collected as ‘what I found’ adds a layer of subjectivity by inserting my voice and role as the researcher. This slight change in language has been inspired by values of self-location within Indigenous and anti-oppressive research.

Recognizing the influence of the researcher within the interpretation of the findings is a fundamental aspect of Indigenous research, as Indigenous “epistemologies are a way of knowing that does not debate the subjectivity in knowledge production – subjectivity is a given” (Kovach, 2009, p. 110). Paying attention to the power dynamics within knowledge production, decision making, and interpreting is also a central aspect within anti-oppressive research (Potts & Brown,

2015). As such, both approaches encourage the researcher to clearly communicate their ‘conceptual baggage’, referred to in Chapter 6, which consists of “the concepts, beliefs, metaphors and frameworks that inform our perspective on and our relationships to the research topic” (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 31). In both Indigenous and anti-oppressive research, the location of self is continually reflected on and shared throughout the research process.

As shown in my Métis Sash Research Framework presented in Chapter 6, ‘self’ is the central strand throughout the entire sash. Like Absolon (2011), who situated ‘self’ as the centre of her flower petal metaphor for Indigenous research, I recognize that when the researcher analyzes the data, “*who they are* does impact the interpretation and meaning” (p. 74). By unpacking my own conceptual baggage within my Métis Sash Research Framework, I have communicated the ways in which my perspectives and values influence my interpretation of the findings. By framing the findings as what *I* found, I am acknowledging the personal implications of data analysis, and the ways in which my perspectives and values have influenced what I share and interpret from the interviews and Talking Circle.

‘Pe Kiyoke’

This chapter has ‘pe kiyoke’ at the beginning, which is Cree for ‘come and visit’. While the structure of the knowledge gathering process can be described as conducting interviews or a Talking Circle, *visiting* or conversation was at the heart of every interaction. We were speaking with one another. The person across from me was not ‘outputting data’, but sharing about their life. In reference to my introduction, they were telling me how ‘they peel the onion’. I chose a Cree word because I am Oji-Cree Métis, and it is the dominant language of the area. Choosing a Cree term is also a reminder of the Indigenous values embedded within my research framework.

‘Píkiskwêhêw’

I also wanted to use a more ‘Indigenous’ term when sharing quotes. I use participant throughout, but when directly presenting their voice I chose to use ‘píkiskwêhêw’, which is Cree for ‘s/he speaks’. To differentiate the speakers, I used randomly assigned numbers. I use a different font for the quotes, as I feel that the sans serif style adds a personal feel when sharing the participant’s voice. I also switch to single spacing for an easier transition between the participants voice and mine.

About the Participants

In the questionnaire provided, the participants were given the option of sharing if they identified as Indigenous or non-Indigenous. Of 27 participants, 23 defined themselves as Indigenous, 2 defined themselves as non-Indigenous, 1 defined themselves as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and 1 defined themselves as between Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The ‘in-between’ person commented that they needed to connect to their culture before fully checking the ‘Indigenous box’.

Figure 19: Participant Representation



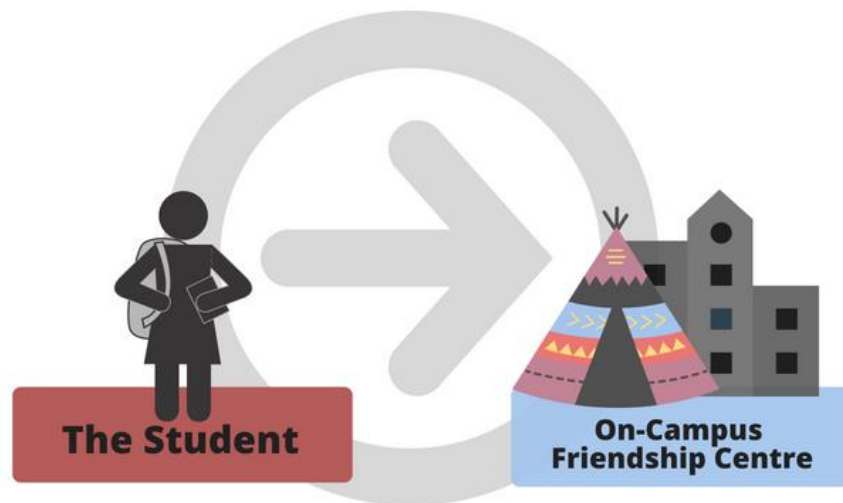
Participants were also given the opportunity to give further detail if they selected Indigenous. This resulted in a wide variety of representations: First Nations, Métis, Cree, Beaver,

Mohawk, Dene, Tłıchǫ, Mi'kmaq, Anishinaabe and Blackfoot. As these are not mutually exclusive groups, many participants selected a combination. Women made up 81% of the participants, which reflects the high female to male ratio at the college and within the OCFC. The participants were all between 20 and 60 years old.

What I Found: Overall

When learning about the role of the On-Campus Friendship Centre, it was important to keep a narrow and defined focus. This was difficult, as each discussion revealed interesting findings about the college, the Indigenous student board, community partnerships, etc. For this project, I focus on the following areas: The student, and the On-Campus Friendship Centre.

Figure 20: Topics of Discussion for Findings



To understand the role the OCFC played in the experience of students, I wanted to learn the participants' perceptions of the student experience in general. This resulted in four themes under 'student': 1) Their strengths, 2) their challenges, 3) their definition of success, and 4) their needs. Once these findings were determined, I found it easier to explore the ways in which the OCFC addressed each of these aspects of the student experience.

There were several avenues to explore within the OCFC which added onto the first four student themes: 5) The participant's level of involvement, 6) their reason for going, 7) their perception regarding role of the staff, and 8) their opinion of the partnership between the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre and the Grande Prairie Regional College. In the following section I review what I found about the student, then the On-Campus Friendship Centre.

The Student

There were four questions in the interview guide that pertain to the theme of 'the student'. These related to the strengths of students, the challenges students face, and personal definitions of student success. Taken together, these three themes led to a fourth theme: The needs of a student. These factors are all important when considering the role of OCFC, as it is an Indigenous-based intervention program geared towards supporting students.

Figure 21: Student Theme



1) Strengths

An obvious choice when exploring the role of a support program would be discussing the challenges that Indigenous students experience. However, I knew that I did not only want to talk

about barriers. To align with a strength-based paradigm, I also wanted to hear about what made Indigenous students resilient, the positive effect they can have on an institution, and the gifts they have to offer.

I quickly learned that asking people to talk about their strengths upfront could be awkward. For this reason, I introduced the question with a preamble about what a post-secondary institution can offer the student (education, degrees, etc.), and then explained that there were often things a student could offer back to the institution (personal talents, experiences, knowledge, etc.). Also, when participants discussed how they overcame a challenge, I would ask them about the strengths or skills they utilized to do so, which was often a more natural flow of discussion. While everyone discussed the strengths of Indigenous students in various ways, the main responses fell into three sub-themes: role modelling, promoting pride, and correcting stereotypes.

Figure 22: Strengths of Students



Strength: Role Modelling

Participants shared that their ability to work hard and persevere was a strength that allowed them to be a role model. For some, this meant setting an example for their children:

Pikiskwêhêw 12: It's been quite the journey. I'm still walking on it, I'm still trying to find my way, and I'm going to get there... I want to be a leader for my children. They know that I

am, they know all of the sacrifices I do for them, like coming to school, barely getting by sometimes. But it's the sacrifices that we make that we can look back and say holy...how did we do it?

Pîkiskwêhêw 8: I'm not there, [my child] is only a baby. But I know I'm doing this for them, getting my education so I can give [them] the stuff that I didn't have. So that's what keeps me going.

They also discussed the ability to role model perseverance to those within their community who may wish to attend post-secondary as well:

Pîkiskwêhêw 12: People coming off the reserve, like coming from my home community – it's nice to see some of them too...they look at me like...if you can do it, how do you do this? Resource wise I show them, tell them.

Pîkiskwêhêw 8: When people go: 'How do you do it? How are you going to school? How are you doing this? it gives me pride but I also extend that pride that if I can do it with [kids] then you don't have an excuse not to do it right. So, then they're like 'okay, if [they] can do it, I can do it, I got this'.

For Pîkiskwêhêw 1, role modelling as a strength also permeated into the classroom and their role within the Circle of Indigenous Students:

Pîkiskwêhêw 1: I feel that if I know that I can reach a certain level then I won't really stop until I do, so I kind of bring that perseverance and hard-working attitude to my classes and just kind of the same with the work we did with the [CIS]...if we said we were going to do something then we followed through with it.

Participants also said that they could role model by sharing experiences with their peers. Some of the participants were mature students who were attending post-secondary after years in the workforce. While the adjustment and age difference was sometimes a challenge, they noted that their life experience was a strength that they brought into the classroom and shared with other students:

Pîkiskwêhêw 9: Well I help a lot of young people, like interact with them and stuff. Give them my expertise I guess [laughs]. Yeah, whoever listens I will give them my advice if they want to hear it.

Pîkiskwêhêw 12: [Being a mature student] was actually an advantage because some of these kids just came out of high school or came back to upgrade and they look at me

and you know what, I have the life experiences but I'm still learning as you. So, we're in this together, you know!

Pikiskwêhêw 7: I feel like the path that I've gone has been 100% right for me ... because I am coming back ... almost a mature student, I feel like I have all that experience to bring with me to my education now, and everything just makes so much more sense like when I am in the classroom and learning things.

Pikiskwêhêw 18: I had spent hours on that couch talking [laughs]. Meeting people, and then became a role where I was like I've been through a lot of it and I went through a stage where I was getting a lot of younger girls coming in and I found myself giving them advice ... helping them, and like telling them my story.

Strength: *Promoting Pride*

In addition to role modelling, many participants spoke about their ability to promote pride for Indigenous people and culture within the classroom:

Pikiskwêhêw 19: It's funny because there was a lot of Indigenous students in my class, and because I'm such a strong advocate about being proud of your Indigenous roots, I think I encouraged more students to embrace their Indigenous roots.

Another student addressed their pride within themselves when they were offered the opportunity to give back by helping others learn their language:

Pikiskwêhêw 12: Some of the students here speak Cree and I can speak fluent Cree as well and what I felt really proud of is when they offered the Cree class here. There were some non-Indigenous students that could speak Cree and I felt like I could give back something to them, I could teach them. Even now I converse with them, and I'll show them little words here or there.

Pikiskwêhêw 12 also discussed the backlash they received from their community for attending post-secondary:

Pikiskwêhêw 12: With my own community. Like when I go home and visit I get called [Cree word] that's like a white girl, like I'm trying to be white. So it's hard to try and get off the reserve and do something for yourself and your family and you try and go home and now you're getting called that, you're being discriminated by your own people now.

Yet they pointed out they had responsibility to change that narrative by encouraging her kids and community to take pride in their experiences and choices:

Pikiskwêhêw 12: I told my kids: It's not that we're trying to act any better. I said really, the opportunity is there for anybody...it's a different world, a different ball game, they don't have to think like that anymore. Everything is there, opportunity is there. And that's what I'm showing my kids, I show them how to live off the reserve and when we go back on the reserve I tell them don't forget where you come from. Don't forget where you started off. And we're not trying to think we're any better, but I'm trying to be a role model. When I [graduate] I'm going to go back to my reserve, I am going to give back to my people and say, 'hey look, I did it, you do it'.

Strength: *Correcting Stereotypes*

Often, participants referred to their strength of correcting stereotypes within classroom conversations and curriculum. Sometimes participants did this by responding to statements made by other students and professors:

Pikiskwêhêw 2: In some classes I was always the only Indigenous person, so I definitely added to the conversation about Indigenous issues.

Pikiskwêhêw 16: Especially in classes that had the discussions about the treaty or the Indian Act and all of that jazz. I was able to say 'hey, it's not free' you know'.

Pikiskwêhêw 19: I was having a conversation with some of the other students and they said oh yeah, we know that in the [certain program] they have to have so many Native students in order to continue the program, you must be one of them. And it's like no, it's because I did the hard work just like you did. You know, and just kind of breaking those stereotypes... I just told them the truth you know, I'm here because ... I did all of the work...just because my skin color is brown doesn't mean I got into the program.

Many of these students used their own life experiences to correct stereotypes made about Indigenous people in the classroom, such as what it is like to live on a reserve:

Pikiskwêhêw 16: I was able to bring in my experiences from where I was from, 'cause we're in an urban setting there's a lot of urban Indigenous people, and a lot of them don't know their culture and I was from the reserve where you think there's culture, but there's none. So, I was able to say 'hey, I'm from the reserve, we don't have much culture either' ...So say they're having a discussion on reserves, and they're discussing it from a hearsay perspective, I was able to say, 'hey I'm from the reserve and this is what we have'.

Some of the participants spoke about their responsibility to participate within the classroom in this way:

Pikiskwêhew 7: I think for sure students have a role and maybe that's part of it, like because we're in this time of Truth and Reconciliation all of the curriculum are going to start pushing that way, so it really does require everybody chipping in and ensuring that things are going about in a good way.

2) Challenges

Participants were asked to talk about the challenges students face when attending a post-secondary institution. The types of challenges and the degree to which they were experienced varied between participants. However, prominent challenges addressed included: transitioning into post-secondary education, managing time and finances, and the colonial aspect of post-secondary education.

Figure 23: Challenges of Students



Challenge: Transitioning into Post-Secondary Education

For some, it was difficult to transition from high school to post-secondary. There were multiple factors that contributed to this challenge, such as making new friends, adjusting to new expectations, and taking more responsibility:

Pikiskwêhew 1: When you leave high school, there wasn't any of my friends that I had gone to school with or anything, like they weren't going to post-secondary. So just kind of even though I was in the same town that I grew up in, I didn't know anybody in my classes, so that was just like a whole new way of going to school that I had never experienced before.

Pikiskwêhêw 14: I guess all the homework they give us, because in high school you can finish all your work in class. So, here they always give us homework and I find that really hard. Because usually stuff is right there...and all the readings we do, we always did it together as a class. And here they expect us to finish something by ourselves, so that's different.

Pikiskwêhêw 1: Learning how to manage your time [is a challenge] because it's not the same as high school and you don't have to be there all day. You have classes and you have breaks and just kind of being more responsible for that.

Participants also spoke about feeling intimidated. This was especially true for mature students who felt out of place:

Pikiskwêhêw 6: I remember I was even scared to walk into the college.

Pikiskwêhêw 9: I cried for the first month [laughs]...Whose idea was this to come back to school? [laughs]. Oh my god. But the challenge for me was because I'm older than most of these people, and a lot of these people are the people I [worked with], like kids, like tots, and stuff. So, I didn't want to ask the teachers, if I didn't understand something ... especially when there's like 30 kids in the classroom, and then all these kids are just whipping out answers and I'm like still on number one [laughs].

Transition was also discussed as an Indigenous-specific issue for those who left their community to attend post-secondary education. For many of the participants, the transition from their home – often a more northern, smaller and isolated reservation or settlement – was a major challenge.

One participant discussed the drastic change for some students from the Northwest Territories:

Pikiskwêhêw 4: There's a lot of students from the Northwest Territories...It's a completely different lifestyle up there. The biggest city is Yellowknife – it's smaller than here...But if you're used to being around, I think [place] is 400 people...and the only way to get there is either by plane or by dog team in the wintertime, or skidoo and that...that's how disconnected we are from each community, so you have to think about that.

Many people discussed the loneliness and homesickness they experienced after transitioning from their home community:

Pikiskwêhêw 6: You see students that are leaving their home communities, which is you know, your uncle over here, your aunty over there, they come over for tea, they come over for dinner, so that's their lifestyle. And when you bring them here, what is here? Nobody.

Pikiskwêhêw 9: A lot of them now are just leaving home for the first time. I know a lot of them get lonely and stuff too, want to go home. It's emotional.

Pikiskwêhêw 22: Loneliness, I'd say. Because a lot of Aboriginal students that come...like they don't really know anybody around the college from their home community. Because you only have one or two. I think when you go home in the evenings or after classes, you're home by yourself and if you don't know anybody to go visit or whatever, like, you're going to go get lonely and that's the biggest thing I think.

Challenge: *Managing Time and Finances*

Participants often spoke about the challenge of managing time and finances together.

Often, these issues would take precedence over their studies:

Pikiskwêhêw 14: Time management is really hard, and managing money.

Pikiskwêhêw 1: Just balancing your work and fun and school and all that was I think one of the bigger challenges.

Pikiskwêhêw 16: The deadlines and all of that. Because it's all so sudden, right? And it's like whoa, and then you're at this stressful level and everything else becomes stressful in your life.

The challenge of time management often seemed magnified for those who had children:

Pikiskwêhêw 2: It was mostly personal, kind of balanced time and study time and homework time with having kids.

Pikiskwêhêw 19: Family time and school work time was [a challenge], because I had kids right. So, it became a juggling act for me.

Pikiskwêhêw 7: I don't have that 'oh I'll come take your kids away for you' so I am constantly struggling with time management with homework and spending time with my kids and then volunteering my time and I'm paying for a babysitter when it's after hours. And my daycare is \$1600 a month for [my] kids. So, it's a lot of struggles. Then the school. Coming to school here, time management. I'm falling very behind on keeping up with deadlines. So, it's a lot of stuff, those are some of the struggles.

While financial needs could sometimes be mitigated through funding, the unreliability of funding could sometimes add stress for students. Along with negative stereotypes about funding, the uncertainty could be a unique challenge for Indigenous students:

Pikiskwêhêw 19: Financial challenges were always a big issue. Even in saying financial challenges, people often say 'well you're Indigenous, don't you get your school paid for? But we don't. I, like everyone else, had to apply for funding. And I wasn't guaranteed from year to year, even though I was in a continuous program, it still wasn't guaranteed. So, finances were always a big thing.

A couple participants also discussed the challenge of keeping your time balanced when a major life event occurred, such as the deaths of a loved one:

Pîkiskwêhêw 6: [After speaking about loved ones passing away] ...These are the events, the life events, right? That happened and when I look at them that's the only reason why I withdrew [from school]. Because you can't go forward because there is just too much on your plate.

Pîkiskwêhêw 16: I've been through so much as a student during those years that I honestly had no idea how I finished. Because you know, there were a lot of deaths...it was quite the roller coaster.

Challenge: *Colonial Aspect of Western Education*

While many of the challenges already presented are magnified for Indigenous people, there were instances where participants directly spoke of specific colonial barriers that are embedded within the structure of a Western post-secondary institution. Pîkiskwêhêw 22 and Pîkiskwêhêw 23 explain this challenge:

Pîkiskwêhêw 22: It's hard being Indigenous and then almost done school, like those are two major things that are hard to combine in a lot of sense...Indigenous students are, we're out there and we have the same kind of issues and same kind of obstacles to face but sometimes we're also, we have different obstacles.

Pîkiskwêhêw 23: [Indigenous students face] multiple barriers. Whether it's arriving from an isolated community or just kind of going into a western post-secondary.

When asked if they felt that everyone understood the challenges Indigenous students face, one participant discussed the unseen struggles:

Pîkiskwêhêw 11: No, I think it's something that between the Aboriginal population they understand what's there and it's not talked about. It just kind of, you don't go there [laughs]. But then for people who are non-Aboriginal, not Indigenous, they don't always understand the gravity of what growing up in the Aboriginal communities, amongst the troubles, the social challenges we face, like the effect that has on people. And just no concept of those real struggles.

Another participant described the post-secondary institution as a western structure for Indigenous students to overcome:

Pikiskwêhêw 23: Just kind of going into a western post-secondary, because if you see this institution as a structure, it's still a western post-secondary institute. You know, for an Indigenous student to say show up and come here, as soon as they say walk in the door, even if it's a Douglas Cardinal designed building, even if it's got some Indigenous art here and there, it's still a structure. Trying to apply to the college and filling out a form, that's online or in person, whether it's approaching that booth style thing down in student services, it's almost like walking up to a bank teller, you know what I mean? [laughs]. Right? So, you start to think of it as really kind of a dominant structure, never mind once you're actually in and you're accepted, right?

Others discussed the colonial history of education as a challenge. They highlighted a potential intergenerational effect of residential school on their family's perception of education – which resulted in a lack of support from family when attending post-secondary:

Pikiskwêhêw 2: I didn't have a lot of support in attending post-secondary from my family, no one else had ever gone... because of that history of education with Indigenous peoples ... I never thought about it until now but that's probably why education wasn't really pushed. Because of the history with my family being in residential school ...they went there their whole life and left there not knowing how to read and write. What did they do? What did they teach you? You know, so it doesn't surprise me that education was never encouraged in my home life...There was a lack of importance there because of residential school that got passed down.

3) Defining Success

Figure 24: Definitions of Success for Students



As discussed in Chapter 3, success within post-secondary education cannot be solely measured through retention and graduation rates. For this reason, I asked participants to define what success within post-secondary meant to them. Asking this helped to draw a connection between strengths and challenge, as asking ‘what is a successful college experience’ would lead

into questions about how one's strengths contribute to success, or how challenges impede success. Definitions of success within post-secondary varied drastically between participants, with some focusing on grades and academic achievement, others on community involvement, and others taking it day by day.

Perceptions of success were sometimes fluid within one interview. For example, one participant began by sharing a typical definition of success:

Pîkiskwêhêw 7: I really like to get good grades, I like to get as high as I can, it makes me feel good ... I guess that's probably a pretty standard definition of success, but honestly, I am here to go to school and graduate and get my degree, to me that is what success would look like.

However, when they were asked about the time they spent volunteering, they expanded their definition:

Pîkiskwêhêw 7: I guess looking at it from a broader perspective, like building community to me is success. So like, Truth and Reconciliation is so important to me, it's in the fabric of who I am. So, to me, in the long-term goal, the Circle of Indigenous Students is working with the college and building those relationships and even like for me building career path relationships too. So not only am I working on my grades but oh you know, maybe this person within the college could offer me a job connection in the future. Who knows right? At the forefront I guess is a happy community that celebrates culture. That's a definition of success.

Another participant discussed academic standards and career-building within their definition of success:

Pîkiskwêhêw 10: I want to develop a network of people that will be able to help me build my career. Then also, I don't know why, but when I was a kid it's been drilled into my head a million times, that I always strive for 80% at least. I'll strive for an A, if I don't get more than an 80% I'm disappointed. So even if I do pass a course, I know a lot of students consider that a success, but I don't [laughs].

When this Pîkiskwêhêw 10 was asked about their volunteer work, they explained that while they were involved with other things, their main focus for success had to be academic:

Pikiskwêhêw 10: I think it's important [to be involved], but I think because I struggle so much academically that that's a goal for me afterwards. Just because school is my main focus.

For some participants, their success involved helping other people succeed:

Pikiskwêhêw 8: If I help people. To me, if I help someone stay in school and get through a degree and overcome their shyness and instill them with confidence, that is successful to me. And then yeah, getting what I'm doing but bringing people with me.

For many participants, success was as simple as 'showing up'. In the Talking Circle, there was a discussion on how life experiences determine one's definition of success. One participant who said they had a hard time staying on the 'normal path', considered showing up to school everyday to be a huge success. Another participant talked about how success for them was taking the 'first step':

Pikiskwêhêw 16: I think success is taking that first step. Whether it's the first step to ask about what programs [the college] has, or the first step in running for the Circle of Indigenous students. That first step is success to me, because you know, you could have someone that has been in their home for years, and this is their first time out, you know? So that first step is success, it's overcoming what was stopping you.

4) Needs of Student

Figure 25: Needs of Students



While I would directly ask participants about the needs of students, an understanding was also developed through looking at the strengths, challenges and definitions of success that were discussed. For example: How could one's strengths be encouraged? How could they be

supported to overcome the challenges they faced? What does a student need according to *their* own definition of success? The needs of students could be grouped into three sub-themes:

Connection to others, support from instructors, and Indigenous-specific support.

Need: *Connection to Others*

When asked what the most important need is for students, or specifically Indigenous students, the most dominant theme was connection to others:

Pikiskwêhêw 9: I think that to let them know that they're not alone, that we're here to help them.

Pikiskwêhêw 12: As far as getting good grades, that's where you need your little circle around you. You need that empowerment.

Pikiskwêhêw 13: Positivity I guess. It helps when people cheer you on, or get involved when you do your work.

Pikiskwêhêw 10: I find that in a lot of my classes people tend to have the regular group of friends and then people, I don't think they do it on purpose, but they get so comfortable with those groups of friends that they don't often go out of that circle.

Participants explained the emotional need of having somebody to talk with about their life. This went beyond academic support:

Pikiskwêhêw 20: I think most is just to talk [laughs]. A lot of them like to just sit there and talk about their hardships and life, their accomplishments and non-accomplishments.

Pikiskwêhêw 21: For the students I think it's just a voice, like a listening ear. Somebody to listen to them, help them sort out problems that are not relevant to their studies. Because they tend to come up when they're under pressure. They have problems that don't have any relation to their academic lives. So just helping them sort that out, you know, supporting them.

There was also discussion of the need for connection with other Indigenous students and people.

One participant addressed the role of Indigenous peers:

Pikiskwêhêw 11: I think it helps for being understood. Because, you know, the way I feel is that for an Indigenous person to stand out from the rest and pursue education, to accomplish it, it takes that much more effort to. Not that it doesn't take any effort [for non-Indigenous people], the efforts are just different. It takes a lot of effort and it's inspiring to see people trying to do that, no matter what age they are.

For some, a key aspect of community was knowing that there were other people having similar experiences. In the Talking Circle, the participants talked about how it was helpful for students who were single parents to meet other people in their situation, or to meet people who had also just moved from home:

Pikiskwêhêw 10: I think the sense of community that you develop with your friends and you realize that okay, I'm not the only one struggling. And so, you see that's normal. So, I think that, and really the network I guess, would be the most valuable resource. The network, the support.

Pikiskwêhêw 22: So it was good to like meet other people who knew what kind of classes I was taking and knew what I was talking about, and people I could approach for help.

Need: Support from Instructors

As post-secondary is an academic endeavor, many students also spoke about needing the right kind of support from their instructors. Some needed flexibility from their instructors, while others sought emotional support:

Pikiskwêhêw 11: I prefer a lot of autonomy and just understanding. I carry a heavy [course] load, so basically if people can say your assignment was due today but we'll let you bring it in tomorrow, we understand the circumstances, I don't require a whole lot else [laughs].

Pikiskwêhêw 10: I think the confidence and faith that my instructors have in me is often more than I have in myself [laughs]. So, something that one of my teachers constantly says is 'you got this'. This is going to be difficult, she tells us over the semester you're probably going to be in my office at least twice. But just her telling us that we knew right away that if this happens, this is normal.

There was also the obvious role instructors could play in helping students work through course material and homework. Some found approaching instructors very intimidating, so a friendly atmosphere was very appreciated:

Pikiskwêhêw 10: Like having somebody to be able to go to with your questions. I think I've been completely lost and being able to stop by my instructor's office, because often they are the only one who can answer my questions. [Some] courses are specific so I can't go to somebody in the library to ask how I do this... so being able to drop by [their] office or email any of my instructors, I find that was something that was definitely helpful.

Need: *Indigenous-Specific Support*

In addition to these needs, participants addressed supports that were specifically Indigenous. Some participants spoke about the difficulty some Indigenous students have in meeting their basic needs while attending school. Others spoke about the role of cultural support:

Pikiskwêhêw 23: Just those basic needs. Never mind the fancier stuff, just try to help Indigenous students who are struggling, so marginalized with just the basic stuff right? Like, they're hungry, and they're trying to focus on their learning, that kind of thing. So, anything that can support them.

Pikiskwêhêw 21: I think a lot of it is the cultural piece. Like smudging is really important for a lot of them, especially when they are under stress.... And just through sharing prayers ... it helps them feel grounded and it gets them back focused on what they need to do.... Just providing teachings, you know, spiritual teachings, and cultural teachings around the smudging and things like that. It helps them get grounded and focused.

This was especially important for students who were learning about difficult Indigenous topics within their classes. As there is an increase of conversations about colonization and residential schools, Indigenous-specific support was recognized as a growing need:

Pikiskwêhêw 16: The residential school piece, that opened a lot of wounds. So, it made me learn about something that I wasn't prepared to at that time yet, so I was at a very fragile state... to learn what truly happened is very, a shock to your core ... If they're implementing this new Indigenous awareness in classrooms and such, what about all of these Indigenous students that don't know the history and are like me? Hearing for the first time. Where are they going to go? Do they have someone to go to? Are the people that are there going to understand why they're upset?

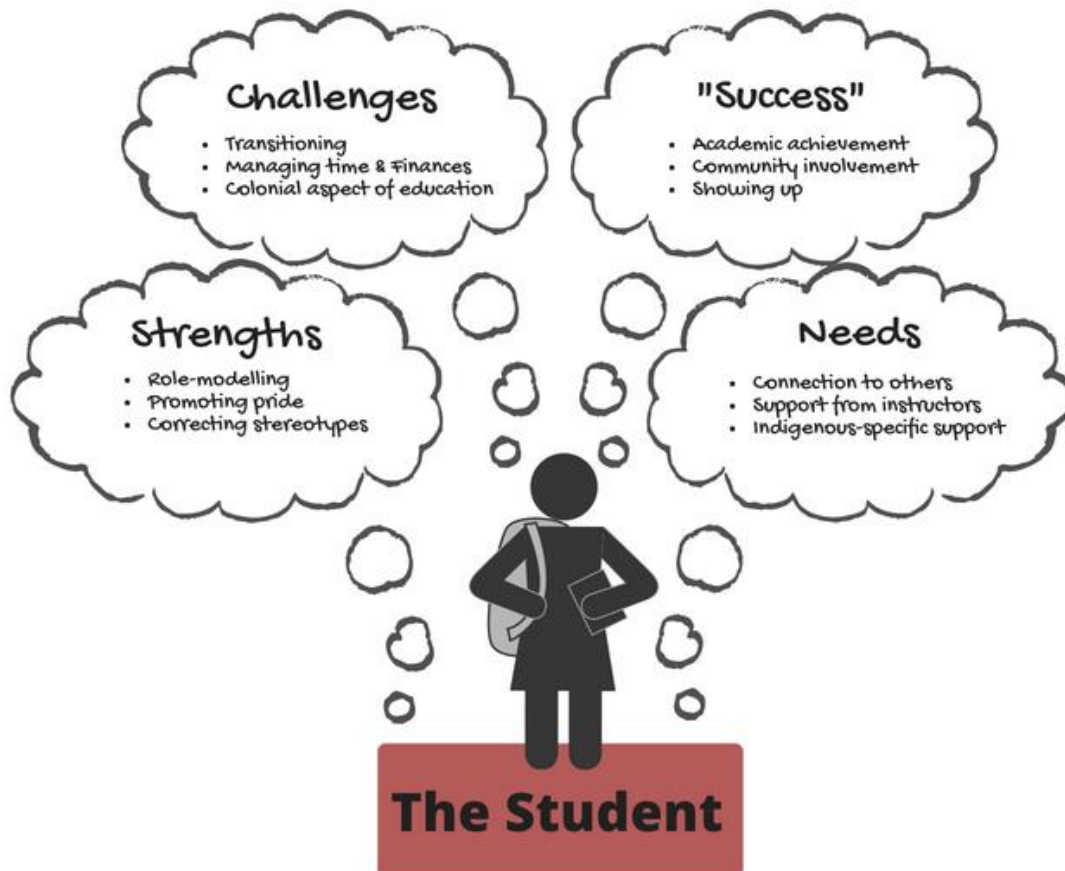
Pikiskwêhêw 21: Their highest needs...it is the cultural support. Providing teachings and understandings. Especially some of them that are in Indigenous studies programs, [they] have questions on what they learned in the program, or what was told to them. And we would go into conversation and sort of iron things out...it helps understanding for what they're going through.

Conclusion: *The Student*

As the OCFC is an Indigenous-based program geared towards supporting students, I felt it was important to develop an understanding of the students involved. Learning about the

strengths, challenges, and definitions of success led to a well-rounded comprehension of the needs of the students. This fostered an informed conversation regarding the role that the OCFC plays in addressing these factors.

Figure 26: Overview of Student Theme



The On-Campus Friendship Centre

After learning about 'the student', the conversations generally revolved around the On-Campus Friendship Centre. To attain a nuanced understanding regarding the role of the OCFC, I asked participants how frequently they attended, which aspects they appreciated the most, the general atmosphere, etc. This resulted in four themes that built off the student section: 5) Level

of involvement, 6) reason for going, 7) role of the staff, and 8) the partnership with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre.

Figure 27: The On-Campus Friendship Centre Theme



5) Level of Involvement

An integral part of learning about the role of the OCFC was developing an understanding about the level of involvement. Three sub-themes were explored: frequency of involvement, location and awareness of the OCFC, and feelings about non-Indigenous participation.

Figure 28: Level of Involvement at the OCFC



Level of Involvement: *Frequency of Involvement*

I felt that it was important to learn about the frequency that participants attended or utilized the OCFC. I approached this by asking participants how often they went into the OCFC, which resources they utilized most, and if they attended any events or workshops. The following quotes exemplify the substantial variety in frequency of involvement:

Pikiskwêhêw 10: Oh yeah, pretty much I'm there if I'm here in the school. Pretty much all the time, if I'm not in class I'm there.

Pikiskwêhêw 2: I would go there normally I always stopped in before my class, I always stopped after my class, I attended potlucks, I went to most of the events they hosted.

Pikiskwêhêw 7: I go to all the events and volunteer in the OCFC, I'm around.

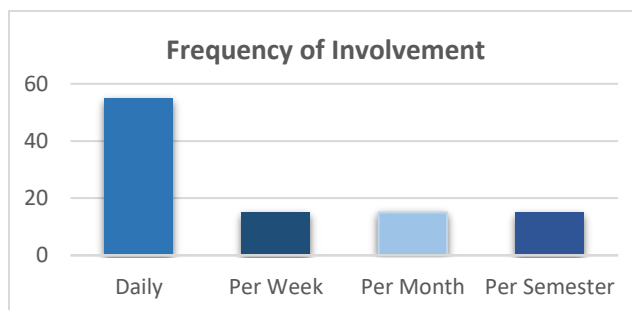
Pikiskwêhêw 6: I did a lot of sign ups with the OCFC to get my volunteering...it was always monthly.

Pikiskwêhêw 3: I've been there maybe a handful of times, but I'm not really involved.

Pikiskwêhêw 20: At the beginning there was a lot of interest, like in September, October, November. Then kind of after December it tapered off with events and stuff and potlucks. Especially of course around finals. Like April there was hardly anybody then in December there was not real interest because I think everyone was just burn out.

This was also part of the physical questionnaire I gave each participant, which asked how often they attended the OCFC. They were given the options of: Daily, a few times a week, a few times a month, a few times a semester, other, and room for comments. As the questionnaire revealed, 55% of the participants visited the OCFC daily, 15% visited a few times a week, 15% visited a few times a month, and 15% visited a few times a semester. Many of those who visited daily reported visiting the centre multiple times throughout a single day. Those who reported visiting a few times a semester explained that they had only been to the OCFC once or twice in their life. However, one of these participants stated that even though they didn't really use the OCFC, they would feel a great loss if it no longer existed. This drew attention to the ideological role the OCFC plays in the minds of students at GPRC.

Figure 29: Frequency of Involvement



Level of Involvement: *Location & Awareness*

I wanted to learn about the role of the OCFC actually being situated on-campus for two reasons: 1) The OCFC is the only Friendship Centre within a post-secondary institution in Canada, and 2) there is a local Friendship Centre down the street from the college. I wanted to know if level of involvement would vary if the support program was *not* on-campus and instead located in the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre. Many participants stated that the location was integral to their participation:

Pikiskwêhêw 7: I think that it's definitely important that it's on - campus, because we're so busy as students ... it would almost be an additional thing to do, you know, whereas because its here, in between classes we can go there.

Pikiskwêhêw 1: Oh, I don't think it would be the same at all ... it wouldn't be the college people hanging out there. ...[students] need a space on-campus to be able to connect.... I think that's crucial to the success to the program and to the students.

Pikiskwêhêw 10: Well it's a lot more convenient especially for people who don't have a vehicle, I mean we're already here so it makes a lot more sense to have it in the college rather than in the community centre ... It would get used a lot more here than there.

Though participants spoke of the importance of the OCFC being on-campus, many did not like the location of the OCFC *within* the college. For some it was hard to find, which potentially impeded students from getting involved:

Pikiskwêhêw 2: People never know where the OCFC is...they don't know how to get there. You can't go on the website and be told exactly how to get there.

Pikiskwêhêw 16: I think if it had better signage...there was always students 'I wish I would have known about this earlier', or 'I got lost and gave up finding it'.

Pikiskwêhêw 4: They need more of a visible presence. The [room] is great but it's like you're hidden, it's almost like they're ashamed that they're associated with the Friendship Centre, which is *not* the intention. It was probably the only place.

Some stated that the space was too small to encourage more involvement. While the space could accommodate daily activities, larger events such as potlucks were crowded:

Pikiskwêhêw 12: We need a bigger space in a better spot. Then you can have anybody coming in and out.

Pikiskwêhêw: Sometimes space is an issue. So if we get like a potluck for example, that room is packed. And it is a little room. And if we're going to start really reaching out, like if the goal was to reach all the students who wanted to use the OCFC, I don't even know if we could accommodate that.

Better promotion and awareness of the OCFC was also discussed as influencing levels of participation. It was recommended that more information be shared on the college website, the On-Campus Friendship Centre Facebook page, and via student emails:

Pikiskwêhêw: People don't even know, they don't even realize what is there and what is being offered. Like our students at GPRC.

Pikiskwêhêw 3: It would be nice if they would publicize [events] more...I just don't feel they reach out enough to students because you don't find out anything unless you go in there. Which is a good idea I guess, it gets people going in, but I wish they would send out more emails or something.

There could also be more information *about* the events, especially when they were cultural or ceremonial. This would allow students to feel prepared, which may encourage involvement:

Pikiskwêhêw: When I did a Full Moon Ceremony it wasn't my expectation. I didn't know what I was going into. So I think a brief 'you know, this is what we're going to do'. Don't just say 'Full Moon Ceremony on February 10th'.

Level of Involvement: *Non-Indigenous Participation*

Since the OCFC has the mandate that it is open to all, I wanted to learn about how participants felt about non-Indigenous involvement at the OCFC. As this could be a tense topic, I would wait until rapport had been established in the interview before bringing it up. To approach this, I started by asking participants if they perceived non-Indigenous students as feeling welcome. Many participants said that non-Indigenous students seemed to feel comfortable within the OCFC:

Pikiskwêhêw 7: Oh yeah, I think [so]...I see a lot of different people from different heritages come into that space and have coffee and visit and come to potlucks.

Pikiskwêhêw 10: Oh, by all means, I bring in non-Indigenous students all the time and there's no issue with it. They're very welcoming and there's actually several other people

... they're not Indigenous but they're volunteering there. They're well respected and well liked.

Pikiskwêhêw 19: We've had international students start volunteering ... wanting more of that cultural aspect of Canada ... and I think that the OCFC really adds to that and promotes it.

Pikiskwêhêw 6: There's diversity, like many cultures that came there even to pray in the backroom. There were a couple, I think they were Muslim students, there and they were in the backroom ... I'm like 'well say a prayer for me!' and they say 'yeah I will!' [laughs].

This conversation also led to participants discussing their own experiences as Indigenous people who 'don't look' Indigenous. Two people noted that they were welcomed within the OCFC:

Pikiskwêhêw 1: Nobody seemed to mind that I didn't like look more Native or that I didn't ever live on a reserve or talk an Indigenous language or anything. Like everyone was very welcoming, and there have been people on the [CIS] that are not Indigenous at all. So, I think it is a very welcoming environment.

Pikiskwêhêw 10: I don't look Indigenous. Not readily Indigenous, and I was always accepted right from the get go.

However, some participants did not describe the same experiences. In contrast, they stated that the space could be more welcoming to non-Indigenous people:

Pikiskwêhêw 2: I think we could do better at getting more non-Indigenous people there.

Pikiskwêhêw 3: I don't think many people who either look white or are non-Aboriginal feel comfortable going in there...Not very many people seem to talk to me, I don't know [laughs]. And maybe it's just because I don't look like I'm Aboriginal.

When discussing how to ensure non-Indigenous students feel welcome, one participant addressed the need to deconstruct the "stigma" about the Friendship Centre:

Pikiskwêhêw 2: There's a stigma with the Friendship Centre that it is just for Indigenous people when it's not. We still get that, where it's like 'I can't go there because I'm not Aboriginal'. Well no, everyone can go actually....in our own Friendship Centre Mission Statement, it's bridging the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. That's why we have that open-door policy.

This stigma was said to be perpetrated by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous people alike. As

Pikiskwêhêw 2 stated, one of their Indigenous friends had a negative perception of the OCFC:

Pîkiskwêhêw 2: [Person] referred to the OCFC as the place where the Indians go to hide, and I was like 'hmm, that's not how I see it' [laughs]. But it's all just like perspective right, ...I think that it's a place where we're welcomed and everyone's welcomed.

Pîkiskwêhêw 1 explained that the stigma around the OCFC would fluctuate from year to year.

Sometimes it seemed like people thought it was just for Indigenous people, whereas other times it seemed like people were aware it was open to non-Indigenous people as well:

Pîkiskwêhêw 1: Some [years] the OCFC was more viewed as a place only for Native students ... there was times where other people didn't feel comfortable coming to the events or like coming to the room as they I felt like it was only for people that were First Nations. But then over time it has grown...throughout all my time there it was very welcoming and there would be people of honestly every culture being a part of it.

To address this stigma, people offered suggestions to make the space more welcoming to non-Indigenous people:

Pîkiskwêhêw 2: We have to take a different look at how we advertise the OCFC and make sure it's inclusive to everybody...You know, maybe just be really blunt and put in there 'open to Indigenous and non-Indigenous' right?

Pîkiskwêhêw 7: Even bridging the partnership closer between the Student's Association and the Circle of Indigenous Students. If we're going to go anywhere, it seems like we should be building together, not apart.

Determining the level of non-Indigenous participation in an Indigenous-based support program can be a site for tension. To learn more about this, I informed the participants that Indigenous-only spaces existed in post-secondary institutions across Canada. I also noted that the OCFC followed the Friendship Centre mandate of 'bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people'. I then asked them if they thought the OCFC *should* be open to non-Indigenous participation.

While there was variation in each answer, every single participant argued the OCFC should be open to non-Indigenous people. Some participants explained that they were comfortable in a space open to everyone:

Pikiskwêhêw 15: I think that it makes it feel more welcoming...I think everybody should have the opportunity to learn.

Pikiskwêhêw 13: I think it should just be for everyone, 'cause it makes me feel comfortable and for somebody that's not Indigenous.

Personal growth was addressed as a positive outcome of welcoming non-Indigenous people through making connections and learning from one another:

Pikiskwêhêw 9: I think it's important to have other groups come in there. And you learn from them too, and a lot of times you find they're the same in some ways.

Pikiskwêhêw 10: I think it's good ... to be around other people and cultural backgrounds too, just to get a wider perspective of life and how people think ... It helps to foster understanding in the student body as well.

Pikiskwêhêw 16: I was able to learn Swahili from this lady and I was able to teach her Cree. Then we were sharing about our Elders ... it was interesting that she found a connection to a totally different culture across the world ... I think having open for everybody just makes more connections, it gets you further.

Some described an 'Indigenous only' space as potentially discriminatory:

Pikiskwêhêw 8: I think that's kind of racist in a way, because my [partner] is white. So if I picture that then I see him and me being separate.

Pikiskwêhêw 18: That's not fair...I think that would be kind of discriminatory in itself, you know? [laughs]

Pikiskwêhêw 22: It's not a good idea if we just keep it to only Aboriginal people, it's a form of racism too I think.

In addition to making non-Indigenous people feel unwelcome, two people addressed the way in which such spaces could also discriminate against Indigenous people who may not 'look Indigenous', who may be non-status, and who are in the early stages of exploring their Indigeneity:

Pikiskwêhêw 5: Who is to determine who is Indigenous and not, except for those status's?

Pikiskwêhêw 1: It's not fair to people that walk in both worlds, like a Métis person.

Some participants noted that an 'Indigenous-only' space did not fit with current society, and did not prepare students for life after post-secondary education:

Pikiskwêhêw 20: In this day and age I don't think that's right or possible anymore [laughs], because there's a lot of different people now, so I don't see how that, I think it should be an open-door policy to anybody really.

Pikiskwêhêw 7: I truthfully can't see really the benefits in doing it that way. I really don't feel like that's a reflection of the real world ... we have to sit and visit and get to know a lot of different people ... it's like a segregation but for what purpose?

Pikiskwêhêw 22: Ah well, you know, we've got to work in a society where we're all out there with everybody else right. And the more people you meet, the better. The more chances you'll succeed.

For many participants, an Indigenous-only space did not align with their cultural teachings or beliefs to turn away participation from non-Indigenous people:

Pikiskwêhêw 16: I think its important to have it open for all because that's how the culture is, you welcome all.

Pikiskwêhêw 12: I agree with 'for anybody'. I'm a full status, full blooded Cree, and that's one thing that you're taught right from small ...All of us stand in that circle: Red, blue, black, yellow, white ... We're all one, we're all connected ... Why not involve everybody? Rather than keeping closing those doors? How are we ever going to break through that problem that's always going to be there?

Pikiskwêhêw 19: One of the things I really love about the OCFC is that it's not just Indigenous students, you know many of the people that I met in that room were not Indigenous. And that's the beauty of it, is that we continue those traditions of our people in welcoming everyone. If it wasn't for us welcoming people on the shores of the rivers, this world would be different ... That's what we as Indigenous people do. We welcome everyone.

Participants explained that an Indigenous-based support program was about finding a balance between Indigenous-focused and driven, while also being welcoming to all:

Pikiskwêhêw 7: I get the ... culturally appropriate space, but...I think if we go about it where Indigenous people lead the way, but also like invite and include...we're getting away from segregation why go back? [laughs].

Pikiskwêhêw 8: It's a struggle because you want to install that pride and build [Indigenous people] up, but how do you build both people up together? Unified. Build together. Like [name] said, it's a Canadian thing, not an Indigenous thing.

Pikiskwêhêw 21: Indigenous teachings are going to be occurring, they're on top of the other teachings...[But also] that is one of the main foundations of the OCFC, is knowing that it has an open door.

Participants noted that post-secondary institutions have a responsibility to work towards reconciliation. They stated this could be achieved through non-Indigenous participation at the OCFC:

Pikiskwêhêw 1: There is a lot of education being done by the OCFC and events that are for Indigenous students, non-Indigenous people, for the community around. Things like [learning] about residential school or around just what First Nations cultures look like, I think that's part of reconciliation too. And a lot of personal healing and community healing has been promoted through the Friendship Centre.

Pikiskwêhêw 17: [The OCFC] has become more and more important to this college than ever anticipated. Because the CIS and the Elder in Residence have provided a resource, not only to Indigenous folks transitioning, but also to mainstream students. Which to me, speaks volumes to what is really going on here...the Indigenous group is bringing to us that awareness, that kindness, that wisdom that I think we all need.

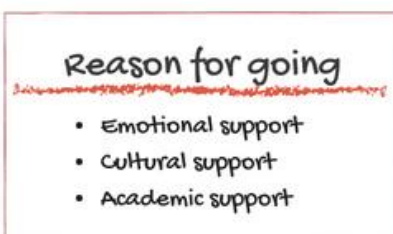
Pikiskwêhêw 7: Though the final report came out in 2015 for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, [reconciliation] been happening already within the college. So I think that's really cool as a student to know that it's almost as though GPRC has been ahead of the game the whole time.

Level of Involvement: *Conclusion*

Learning about the frequency of involvement, the location and awareness of the space, and feelings about non-Indigenous involvement, created a strong foundation for exploring the role of the OCFC. Next, we discuss what I found regarding participants' *reasons* for attending/utilizing the OCFC.

6) Reason for Going to the OCFC

Figure 30: Reason for Going to the OCFC



Perhaps most central to the entire interview was the participants' *reason* for attending the OCFC, or why they thought students attended. This offered insight into the role it played in the student's life, or the needs they were seeking to be fulfilled. Three sub-themes or reasons emerged: Emotional support, cultural support and academic support. These reasons could overlap or be isolated. Some found all three types of support at the OCFC whereas others only found or sought one.

Reason: Emotional Support

Many participants discussed the emotional support that the On-Campus Friendship Centre provided them through a variety of avenues. For some, the opportunity to create new connections and meet new people allowed them to build a community within the college. This was described as helpful to students as they transitioned into college life, whether they were youth coming from high school, mature students leaving their past situation, or people who had just moved to Grande Prairie. Participants often described the sense of familiarity or 'home' that the On-Campus Friendship Centre fostered. Finally, the role of Indigenous peer support was highlighted.

Emotional Support: Building Community

When asked why they went to the OCFC, some participants discussed the desire to meet new people and build community. This was described as a central aspect of the student experience:

Pikiskwêhêw 1: [It's] a place to meet people... like a good place to start building a community and relationships... the weekly potlucks were like really just like community building ... [the] tradition of coming together. I think was just really important and kind of helpful as a student to just have that time to just hang out with people and get to know them ... I really developed a lot of friendships through the OCFC.

Pikiskwêhêw 7: I like building community, it is my most favourite thing... The people within that space make it what it is and I just really love their smiling faces ... it reminded me of that Cheers song: 'Where everybody knows your name'. It's just like, your space where you can go in and you know everybody. And sometimes you don't know everybody and that's cool too because it's also a place where you can meet people.

For many, the community they found within the OCFC was described as integral to their emotional health while they were a student at the college. This community was illustrated as necessary for those students experiencing the 'normal' challenges of education, as well as for those who were away from their family or experiencing difficult life events:

Pikiskwêhêw 19: Seeing how one little space ... was such a huge impact to me continuing to go to school. Because, as students we become overwhelmed with exams and deadlines and home and work ... But when I sat in those couches it was like 'I can do this' ... I have all these other people who are like me, who are struggling financially, who are struggling to find childcare, who are struggling to get to work on time... Sitting in that space allowed me to almost 'ahh' breathe a sigh of relief and know I'm not alone.

The emotional support was also integral in overcoming day to day challenges while in school:

Pikiskwêhêw 8: Yes, there's days that I just felt like shit ... where I've just gone in there [OCFC] and not said anything and 'what's wrong?' and it just comes out, everything just comes out. There's always somebody on that couch who is willing to talk and has a break and to talk to you and help. I give them a hug and just don't let go.

Pikiskwêhêw 16: I would have a crappy class ... you got your first D or whatever, you go to the On-Campus Friendship Centre and you see people and they make you feel good.

Pikiskwêhêw 12: Not only is school hard, but life outside of these walls. Being a student, being a parent, going to work. Where do you find that balance? So, having that On-Campus Friendship Centre as a resource, a lot of us students can relate to one another and that's important to me because that helps me a lot. If I had a bad day it's okay, I can go in there and just whatever you know, I'm surrounded by people. I'm okay, I'm not alone.

A major aspect of the emotional support was knowing that someone was looking out for them, many people noted how nice it felt to have their presence or absence noticed. For them, it made the difference between showing up or giving up:

Pikiskwêhêw 1: There's somebody specifically watching out for you and asking you how things are going and checking in on you and giving you information and just providing that kind of safe space.

Pikiskwêhêw 7: I think it's a human need for people too, if you're not there, where are you? ... People need to feel needed ...that connection...That's seriously way undervalued. Like I think it's probably number one that student's have that. Otherwise it would be so easy, like if you were just trying to keep your head above water to just be like 'screw it'.

In addition to support during hard times, participants also discussed the emotional boost they experienced when people at the OCFC encouraged or celebrated them:

Pikiskwêhêw 1: Just people that congratulate you and give you a high five when you've done good on an assignment and you can kind of go in there and have a little party for yourself and other people.

Emotional Support: Transitioning

For many, the community they formed at the On-Campus Friendship Centre was integral in assisting them during their transition into college. It was often described as a safe haven amidst the intimidation of new classes, getting lost, and being in a new space:

Pikiskwêhêw 7: I was wandering through the halls, my heart was racing. And I was like 'I don't like this feeling, I just want to back to my bubble!'. And [the OCFC] really was like a bubble for me, and it really kept me sane, especially that first week ... I would just get out of class and race back to the [OCFC] and sit on the couch and be like 'ahh'.

Pikiskwêhêw 8: When I first started...I didn't know anybody and I was feeling the effects of being the minority. And it was just overwhelming coming here, being out of school for so long, not knowing anybody. Then I seen the [OCFC] and the Elder on-campus. I just felt welcome there and I knew it was safer because it was my culture and my people

Pikiskwêhêw 16 explained that their family back home was supportive, yet there was something about the physical presence of people during a time of need:

Pikiskwêhêw 16: I always had to write a letter every year to get my funding. I always spoke of the OCFC. And I compared it to like a rock, it kept me grounded. It kept me sane [laughs]. They give you the support the family can't, and I know that sounds harsh, but they are there when you need it most...Whereas it's not a phone call, you have the people right there.

Emotional Support: Feeling ‘Home’

When discussing transition, participants addressed the atmosphere of familiarity or ‘home’ at the OCFC. This was especially true for students who had moved away from their community to attend school:

Pikiskwêhêw 15: I just want to mention that it feels like home ... I didn't like it at first, 'cause I was like 'this is so cheesy' [laughs]. But it's such like home.

Pikiskwêhêw 10: I feel proud of the sense of community that's been established there and being a part of that. Also, but yeah, it feels like home. A little family.

Pikiskwêhêw 6: I always just go right immediately to the On-Campus Friendship Centre. It's like a gravitation thing, it's like then it's more familiar... more family-based, so you get good friendships and connections.

The feeling of home was magnified for those who felt safer in a space intended for Indigenous students. This was said to have improved their experience within the college:

Pikiskwêhêw 4: Just the atmosphere, it's very comfortable. I'm okay there, I don't feel threatened in a sense. Not to say the college is threatening, but I feel I can be there. I didn't have a sense of unwantedness I guess.

Pikiskwêhêw 12: I like that we have the On-Campus Friendship Centre. Because you know, you feel like you're not an outcast. I feel comfortable there, I know other Native people and I'm [more involved] now.

Pikiskwêhêw 7: It really keeps me rooted ... Everybody needs to have that place where they can get rooted, if we didn't have [the OCFC] I don't know where that would be for me, like, that's my spot.

Emotional Support: Indigenous Peers

As highlighted by those speaking of feeling space within the OCFC, a major aspect of that was being surrounded by Indigenous peers. Students said they could be themselves, and invest in a sense of ownership over the space:

Pikiskwêhêw 8: I just felt welcome there and I knew it was safer because it was my culture and my people.

Pikiskwêhêw 9: It's another place that you know you fit into, you don't have to act differently or be different. Like, you know, you can go there and people are going to be just like you... It's more of a spot for Indigenous people to go to.

Pikiskwêhêw 22: Well, just because the fact that there's other Aboriginal students there...For those, where you're coming from and stuff like that, your own nationality.

Beyond familiarity, being around Indigenous peers was also described as inspirational and motivating for some participants:

Pikiskwêhêw 11: One thing I really appreciate about the OCFC is that other Indigenous youth and adults are accomplishing things and that's nice to see, you know in the community I grew up in, you know, there's a lot of social issues that come up and a lot of my friends that I grew up with didn't even graduate high school, or got into a really bad way of life, and it's nice to see other Aboriginal youth doing something and making a difference and that means a lot to me.

Pikiskwêhêw 18 explained that they were intimidated to enter the OCFC at first, as they had experienced being excluded from Indigenous spaces due to their 'light skin'. This was combined with a lifetime of shame about being Indigenous:

Pikiskwêhêw 18: [The Indigenous Liaison Coordinator] kept pushing me to go in there and I kept saying no, I have, my skin's too white, I didn't want to go in there, they'll look at me and tell me I have to get out.

Once they finally entered the space, they said that they felt welcomed. Their involvement grew and they became a part of the CIS. Looking back, the participant explained that despite their fear, they were actually seeking a space that would help them connect to their culture. Thus, being around Indigenous people that were welcoming and supportive filled a gap in their life:

Pikiskwêhêw 18: So maybe that's why I wanted to really get in there, because I was still looking for where I belonged, where I fit in.

Indigenous peers were also supportive for students who were covering difficult Indigenous topics in class. They explained that OCFC was a place where they could debrief:

Pikiskwêhêw 7: I know for certain that there's been times when we've had difficult conversations in class and I've just needed a space to vent, and I've gone there and felt safe enough to do that ... it's only been met with understanding. Because we're of similar backgrounds and experiences.

One participant spoke about the trauma they experienced when learning about residential schools in class. They explained that learning about this history was extremely jarring and difficult to process while they were away from their family, some of which whom were Survivors. They emphasized the important role that the OCFC played in supporting them:

Píkiskwêhêw 16: There would have been a lot of damage done to people that are learning about the residential school at that time, like if there wasn't the OCFC. I think there would have been a lot of students possibly going home, maybe going on a bender. Because it takes you to a place that you don't want to go and thinking of all the things that may or may not have happened to your loved one...I'm very grateful that the OCFC was there because I felt truly alone. And that place, that room it just grounded me. It really helped, and throughout the years as well it helped with my healing process.

Reason: *Cultural Support*

Cultural support, which was often tied to emotional support, was another major role that participants highlighted when discussing the OCFC. Throughout the interviews the term 'culture' was left as undefined as possible, as what some consider 'cultural involvement' others do not. I would simply ask questions such as 'would you describe your involvement with the OCFC as having a cultural aspect?' or 'do you feel supported culturally at the OCFC?'. It was found that participants often referred to culture through practices such as smudging, learning to bead, watching performances, participating in ceremony, and engaging with the Elder-in-Residence. In other words, culture was described as engaging in activities that are rooted in Indigenous beliefs and teachings.

The importance of cultural support was addressed by Píkiskwêhêw 1:

Píkiskwêhêw 1: I think in college it's a big formative time of kind of discovering who you are and like that can be really stressful with your academics. Like, there is just a lot of just kind of stressors. So, I felt like the cultural support ... that was offered through the OCFC helped to make all that easier and more enjoyable.

Through these discussions, it was found that there were two prominent ways in which cultural support was achieved. For some it was a continuation of culture, and for others it was an

introduction to culture. A third sub-theme was also revealed: The challenge of cultural representation for the diverse group of Indigenous students.

Cultural Support: Continuation of Culture

Some of the participants already had their own cultural practices and teachings, yet needed support in finding ways to integrate it into their life as a student. Those who moved away from home no longer had access to the same ceremonies, events, or resources. They explained that the OCFC helped them continue their cultural practices through a variety of means:

Pîkiskwêhêw 8: I felt lost being away and not knowing anybody from here. I wasn't able to go to sweats or ceremonies and the On-Campus Friendship Centre just opened it up for me. 'Here you go'.

Pîkiskwêhêw 12: The smudging. I've always done smudging but offering it at the school was really awesome! ... [and] Like the round dances and stuff. You know, I've always loved that, like I like that about our ways. And being able to speak Cree, like they offer it here. You know what it is, it's a really good experience.

Pîkiskwêhêw 21: I think with the ones that are continuing to smudge, I think resources. Just like, medicines are limited in their household so they tend to ask questions on how they can obtain more medicines for them... And I think it's more about, like they're lives are busy so it becomes secondary to what they're going through.

Pîkiskwêhêw 5 described the OCFC to be a supportive place where they could practice what they know about their culture without having to defend or justify their knowledge or 'Indigenous roots':

Pîkiskwêhêw 5: For a person like me who does not really have 100% of the roots to back them up, it's the best place to be. Because then you can still do what you know about your background.

Smudging was addressed as a very helpful practice for many of the students. Participants liked to smudge with the Elder before an exam or after a particularly hard class:

Pîkiskwêhêw 8: It helps you ... for me, smudging before and after something stressful really helps and grounds me and just to destress, it's like a release.

Pikiskwêhêw 12: Smudge in the morning. Especially going to college, you have a heavy heart or you're confused or you're nervous about your exams. I smudge before my finals, and just give me a sense that I can do it, at least I could try. Clear minded, let my anxieties go.

Due to protocols within the college, permission has to be granted before smudging in certain space. Usually, students would go outside to smudge with the Elder. This was often uncomfortable during the intense winter months. For these reasons, many students were working towards implementing a smudge-room on-campus:

Pikiskwêhêw 21: One of the things I really feel is important is a smudge room. Like, just to have that continuous smudging and have the students themselves initiate the smudging.

Pikiskwêhêw 12: Rather than going outside...why not have it inside in our own place in the building here on-campus. Then that way non-Indigenous people like to smudge too, that's a good way to bring everybody together!

Cultural Support: Introduction to Culture

Some of the participants who spoke of cultural support at the OCFC were being immersed in cultural teachings and practices for the first time. They shared the impact this had on their college experience and life in general:

Pikiskwêhêw 1: I learned a lot about my culture, and Indigenous culture in general. So, I think it just played like a role in helping to form my identity and relationships.

Pikiskwêhêw 16: The smudging, the drumming, basically I found my voice ... I was taught that the Creator gave you a voice, you sing. You know? It's not a competition, you're singing to the Grandfathers, the Ancestors ... So now when I think of culture, it's not for me, it's not for anyone else, it's for the Grandfathers. It's for the Ancestors. That was a very important teaching, and that's when I started singing and it just shifted everything.

Many participants explained that they had always been interested in learning about their culture, or Indigenous culture in general. As such, they were appreciative of the opportunity given to them by the On-Campus Friendship Centre:

Pikiskwêhêw 18: Being in the OCFC it helped me, because that's what I was longing for. I wanted to know about culture.

Pikiskwêhêw 1: I am Métis and ... I have always been interested in learning about my culture... [the OCFC] allowed me to dig deeper into culture. And I got to be a part of

some pretty neat ceremonies, like the Teepee raising ceremony ... did some different Pipe Ceremonies and Moon Ceremonies, some things I had never done before ... the connection there with Elders was really helpful.

Pikiskwêhêw 12: I never really knew much about ... the traditional Cree ways. I made my first drum on the weekend. I never been that close to a drum or made one. That was an experience ... The way they tell us how we're supposed to do certain things like wear skirts. I never knew nothing about this because we never really practiced it at home. So, it's a good thing. I'm learning a lot about it.

Another participant explained that connecting to culture helped them 'heal':

Pikiskwêhêw 16: It helped with my healing process because learning the culture from the Elders, it gave me the tools that I needed for myself to take with me ... I learned how to smudge, I learned, there's so many teachings that I was given that I was able to help with my family...the culture piece was integral to the healing piece.

Cultural Support: Challenges of Representation

The topic of cultural representation within the OCFC arose in a few discussions. As these participants were speaking about cultural support, I asked them if they felt like their culture was represented. Most of those who sought cultural support explained that their culture was either represented well, or that they could cross over the teachings to their own culture. However, a few participants spoke of room for improvement:

Pikiskwêhêw 2: We're on Cree territory but it's more than just Cree people living here, and it's more than just Cree people coming to school here ... I think they could do a better job of encompassing more cultures from the students that are attending from up North, like the Territories, the Dene people.

Pikiskwêhêw 4: There needs to be more cultural sensitivity to the Dene students of the North ... To understand what the North really means.... I think the reason some of [the Dene students] don't connect is because the teachings are completely different from where they're from, and not to say that's a bad thing, but how are you going to be able to reach them?

Participants offered some suggestions for improving support of various cultures. These included bringing in performers and speakers from different areas:

Pikiskwêhêw 2: I guess just bringing in activities like if [name] came in and did a little conversational Cree thing ... [name] having like a Tea Dance ... where that is encompassing the North, that's also encompassing Beaver people and Cree people. It's actually encompassing quite a few different people.

Pîkiskwêhêw 4: We were trying to figure out something to bring the Dene culture from the Territories into the campus....to bring the Dene games here.

Pîkiskwêhêw 20: Dene Tha drummers ... I think it would be good if we got [them] because I know a lot of the students come from the ... North and I think it would be cool ... to have like their culture recognized.

Despite the need for more cultural representation, Pîkiskwêhêw 20 also noted that it was a very good experience to learn about cultures other than their own:

Pîkiskwêhêw 20: But it's also cool that you get to learn about other cultures, to be exposed to like the Elder in Residence's culture. Like I've never experienced that, and we're just like so similar even though we're thousands of miles away. It's like what, that's so cool.

Reason: *Academic Support*

In addition to emotional and cultural support, academic assistance revealed itself as a prominent reason for going to the OCFC. These people found that the people at the OCFC helped them stay focused on their studies, or even assisted them with homework. Some spoke of the role the on-campus tutor played in helping them, while others primarily appreciated the computers, printer, and board room. Quite a few of the students described the library as intimidating and said they preferred to work in the OCFC:

Pîkiskwêhêw 1: There was just really good people that I met through the OCFC that were just really positive and supportive of your academics and helping you to stay on track and just good to go in there and other people were working on assignments too so you know, you can always go work in the board room there or the computer, they'll be other people working so that's motivating.

Pîkiskwêhêw 2: I liked the support system that was there, like I knew that I could walk in and say 'oh I have this assignment in my [class] and I don't really understand it. And the Outreach Worker was really good...[they] always had advice and input.

Pîkiskwêhêw 15: I like to use the computers, it's more comfortable there I think, than the library...because I know people at the On-Campus Friendship Centre than at the library. And it's smaller too, so it's more comfy.

While these students utilized the OCFC for academic support, others could not get homework done within the space. They said they preferred to do work elsewhere and use the OCFC primarily for visiting:

Pikiskwêhêw 18: Some people [work there], but I don't know how they get any work done...It isn't that kind of space for me.

Pikiskwêhêw 10: I just relax there, I don't get any work done there [laughs]. Just because I end up visiting. So, I'll study in the library. So that's helpful.

However, they spoke of the academic role it played in a different way. For some, visiting was helpful. For example, Pîkiskwêhêw 10 found that people and friends within the OCFC were willing to help them with the tests that they had to perform on people:

Pikiskwêhêw 10: Yeah I think [the OCFC] made me a lot more successful ... I think it has a lot more to do with the sense of community there rather than just the resources. I remember one day I went there with [test related to studies] and I practiced ... on a bunch of different people. But I wouldn't feel that confident to just go into the cafeteria and do the same thing. I would probably get some weird looks. In the OCFC everybody is like oh yeah, [do the test].

Reason for Going: Conclusion

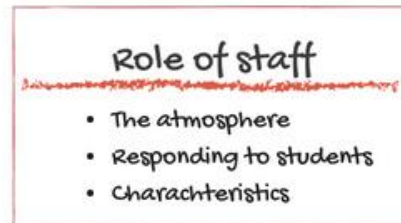
As exemplified throughout the stories shared, there were various combinations of reasons for going. Some participants *only* used the OCFC for academic support while others only used it for emotional and cultural support. However, one participant gave an interesting response stating that the OCFC met all their needs:

Pikiskwêhêw 1: I think that there is honestly a ton of support, like there is the cultural side of things with having the Elder...there is like cultural celebrations and ceremonies ... There is also the academic help...they had tutors ... And they're always relaying information and making sure that you know about things that are going on at the library or like encouraging you to go talk to your teachers if you're experiencing difficulties or you know letting you know of your options and resources. And there is also the kind of fun side of the community aspect. So I kind of feel like they hit all the bases and helped you out and you know, it's then it just kind of comes to you to utilize it.

Learning about the different reasons for attending the OCFC offered valuable insight into the role of the OCFC. It also led into discussions regarding the role that the staff play.

7) Role of the Staff

Figure 31: Role of the Staff at the OCFC



Throughout the discussions, many participants spoke of the important role of the staff at the OCFC: The On-Campus Outreach Worker, the Elder-in-Residence, and the Indigenous Liaison Coordinator. The staff were attributed to determining if the OCFC had a welcoming and positive atmosphere. There was also discussion on the role they play in responding to the needs of students, and the characteristics required to do so effectively.

Role of the Staff: *The Atmosphere*

Many participants addressed the role of the staff in controlling the environment at the OCFC. Generally, the atmosphere was said to be determined by the On-Campus Outreach Worker and the Elder-in-Residence, though the Indigenous Liaison Coordinator was also mentioned:

Pikiskwêhêw 2: The ILC, and the Outreach Worker and the Elder can control the atmosphere by what they're putting out there, and they can absolutely turn the conversation around, make it positive.

Pikiskwêhêw 8: [The Outreach Worker] sets the tone for the whole room. When you walk in there that's the first person you see. So if you don't feel welcome by that person you're going to turn right back.

Pikiskwêhêw 9: It helped that [the Outreach Worker] was friendly and always welcoming you in and reminded you of stuff [laughs].

One participant stated that setting the tone was especially important when considering the involvement of non-Indigenous students:

Pikiskwêhêw 2: I think the change comes with the staff and students. I've seen changes, I've seen some students come in that were like 'no this place is just for aboriginal people' ... the Friendship Centre Executive Director had to come in and say 'no this is a Friendship Centre, everybody is welcome'. So kind of have to say no that's not how we run the show.

Role of Staff: *Responding to Students*

In addition to setting the tone of the OCFC, participants addressed the role of the staff in responding to the needs of students. As the Indigenous Liaison Coordinator (ILC) is the designated person to support Indigenous students, their role was frequently addressed. For some, the ILC was the first person to truly believe in and encourage them as student:

Pikiskwêhêw 16: [The ILC] made me feel like I was worth it. [They] gave me strength and the courage to keep going.... They made me believe in myself because they believed in me... to have someone believe in you it just kind of makes you believe in yourself.

Pikiskwêhêw 2: I think that the role of the ILC at the college is that championing role... [the ILC] had high expectations and I really appreciated that because in my life I never had a lot of people that had high expectations of me. They expected me to fail. Whereas [the ILC] came along and was like 'you could do better'.

It was also discussed how the ILC could assist students in times of crisis. In some cases, this was as literal as noticing their absence and picking them up for school. During more serious times, the ILC played a major role in communication between the student and their professors:

Pikiskwêhêw 16: They went above and beyond to help me. There were times my car broke down and they were like, 'you know, [that student] is not here' and they would check up on me. And I would be like stuck at home and they came and got me.

Pikiskwêhêw 19: The ILC, just being the advocate for the students and ... knowing that if there's a death in the community that impacts that student, they're probably not going to be there for a couple weeks, and having that liaison tell the faculty ... it's not because they don't want to be in school, it's because they have cultural commitments ... that's

our tradition, to mourn. And ... it takes a long time for us to process that death and to honour that death.

Pikiskwêhêw 16: When an emergency happened ... I spoke with [the ILC] ... they said 'I'll take care of it', I was like really? She said 'no, no, it's fine, I'll contact your instructors, you take care of what you need'. So just by [the ILC] taking that on it was just like, oh, it helped with my struggles.

The role of the ILC was touched on by another participant, who referred to a time in the past when the position was potentially going to be phased out. For them, the ILC was integral to ensuring they felt supported as an Indigenous student within the college:

Pikiskwêhêw 19: There was a time when that position was almost being phased out so to speak. And at that time I really felt that our [Indigenous] voices weren't being heard, and how important that role is to the college ... [we] need that advocate for us. And I think that is what the [Indigenous Liaison Coordinator] was for us. First of all, keeping us accountable for what we're doing with our work, but keeping the college accountable for providing those services to us.

Participants also spoke about the role of the Outreach Worker and Elder in responding to the needs of the students. While they are now there full-time, during the research the Elder was there part-time. A few participants spoke to the necessity of increasing the Elder's presence:

Pikiskwêhêw 2: I think that the Elder-in-Residence being there full time is necessary.

Pikiskwêhêw 4: Physically being there more, it needs to be Monday to Friday.

There were also a few suggestions that there could be a female and male Elder:

Pikiskwêhêw 4: It should be equal as well. Male and female. There needs to be that balance, not just one sex.

Pikiskwêhêw 18: A part-time male and part-time female, I felt more comfortable with [one gender] just because it's my personality.

Role of Staff: *Characteristics*

When asked what characteristics the staff needed to create a welcoming atmosphere, participants explained that the Outreach Worker needed to be professional, open and empathetic:

Pikiskwêhêw 2: You can't have someone that's going to sit there and talk about their personal life, they need to be professional... they have a lot of responsibility in just making sure it's someone who is not cliquey and not going to divide it even more, someone who is open to everyone and all people going in.

Pikiskwêhêw 13: [The Outreach Worker needs to be] somebody that you can really open up to, like can help you either with your homework or points you in the right direction if you're having problems with something else, something serious.

Pikiskwêhêw 16: [The Outreach Worker needs to be] someone that has empathy, someone that is open...welcoming. And that empathy is big, because you have to be able to really put yourself in these student's position kind of thing, truly show them you care for them.

One participant explained that it was helpful when an Elder had a 'soft approach':

Pikiskwêhêw 21: [The Elder needs to have] a soft approach, not an aggressive approach. Because I really believe that ... if somebody is teaching me something I would appreciate a soft approach as oppose to being aggressive or assertive...We're all learners.

When asked what characteristics were important for someone fulfilling the role of the ILC,

participants described a balanced, positive, drama-free person:

Pikiskwêhêw 2: Someone that's a good leader ... doesn't get caught up in people's emotions ...can go in and look at the situation and give sound advice and not take sides... is able to go in there and be hard on [students]. That person needs to be hard on them, they can't be soft, and they can't sit and feel sorry for them you know...that person needs to have high expectations and needs to know how to do it in a healthy way. You know some people have high expectations but they're like dictators. [The ILC] is not really like that, [they] are kind of like, you know, somebody that is soft and supportive at the same time. There's got to be a good balance. Someone that is balanced basically.

Pikiskwêhêw 16: Just to be open, because the students share so much with [them] and they trust [them]. So [they] have to be able to make them feel safe and understand where they are coming from.

Role of Staff: Conclusion

For many participants, the success of the OCFC is dependent on the staff involved. Their role is integral in creating a positive and welcoming atmosphere, while also responding to the various and vital needs of the students. Learning about the ideal characteristics of each member

also offered insight into the role they play, and the type of support Indigenous students are seeking.

8) Partnership with Grande Prairie Friendship Centre

Figure 32: Partnership with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre



Finally, I was interested in learning about how the participants perceived the partnership between Grande Prairie Regional College and the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre to sustain the OCFC. As it is the only Friendship Centre situated on-campus in Canada, I wanted to know if students felt as though that partnership was important or unnecessary in fostering an Indigenous-based support program. To approach this, I explained that other post-secondary institutions had programs that were not connected to Friendship Centres. For instance, the Circle of Indigenous Students could technically function without the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre as it is an independent entity. I then asked participants how they felt about the partnership. This resulted in three sub-themes: connection to community, resource for the Circle of Indigenous Students, and accountability and stability.

Partnership: Connection to Community

Many participants responded that they found the partnership with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre to be very important as it connected the students to the broader community:

Pikiskwêhêw 1: I think that is a really crucial aspect of it too because it connects to the wider community and to those resources. And there are other Indigenous agencies in

the community, but they do connect with the Friendship Centre as well, so I just feel like...it provides more direction and community.

Pikiskwêhêw 16: We were always connected with the Friendship Centre...and as a student it always made me feel a part of the community. Because the Friendship Centre is for the community.

Pikiskwêhêw 8: [The OCFC] doesn't only aim for students, It's community-based, and that's where we need more inclusion. But it starts with the education, we set the tone. So, what we're learning we're going to branch out and show and teach other people, and with that community outlet [Grande Prairie Friendship Centre] it makes it more accessible and easier.

Participants explained that their prior connection to the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre helped them integrate into the OCFC, and vice versa. Thus, the bridge between the two encouraged involvement on both sides:

Pikiskwêhêw 10: I think that helped a little bit too, so because of the connection [at the OCFC] I felt more comfortable going into the community Friendship Centre.

Pikiskwêhêw 2: [The connection helped] for sure... I knew people from the Friendship Centre that was part of [the OCFC] being in my bubble.

The partnership was also said to foster opportunities for students in their life after college:

Pikiskwêhêw 1: [It makes] connections that can just help you even when you're done school ... it has helped me professionally even what I could put on my resume from being a part of the [CIS] Executive and just kind of my involvement with the Indigenous community made me stand out when I got hired...I have that community and those connections so [I can] bring Indigenous culture into the workplace.

Pikiskwêhêw 19: The beauty of the OCFC is that the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre pools from the student population. So, when the students are done their studies, they ... work for [the Friendship Centre]. ... The student population is encouraged to be a part of our events, they are encouraged to build that community.

Partnership: Resource for the Circle of Indigenous Students

Participants also stated that the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre was an integral resource for supporting the Circle of Indigenous Students:

Pikiskwêhêw 2: It doesn't make sense to me to split and have the Circle of Indigenous Students be on their own. They get a lot of leadership opportunities with the partnership with the Friendship Centre.

Pikiskwêhêw 7: I suppose it could go that way if it wanted to [split up], just to me it would almost be like going backwards because there is so much support at the OCFC and almost like it was a natural partnership.

Pikiskwêhêw 16: The Circle of Indigenous Students ... were able to help with the events for the community. So it gave us that connection, more so than at the college ... [It's] an opportunity to further those connections and networks ... it connects you directly to the resources in the community that you need as an Indigenous person.

Along with peer support, the resources of the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre assisted the growth of many CIS members:

Pikiskwêhêw 5: I saw them flourish. ... they went from just being behind the scenes to poof, right there in a powerful way. They know they have a voice, they know that they have a way of being able to make a difference now.

Pikiskwêhêw 21: Watching them grow..., it's almost like a flower, they just bloom and you just see it...they're believing in themselves that they can do this, they can speak in public.

Pikiskwêhêw 16: From the first speech to the end of the year I went from shaking, holding my paper, my knees buckling, to the end of the year I was able to like talk with making eye contact...my self-esteem got a really big boost because I never believed in myself much. And then to be there and see everybody work together and believe in you is like whoa.

However, one participant highlighted the need for clear explanation of the partnership. For them, there needed to be a better distinction between the CIS and the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre.

Pikiskwêhêw 4: Many people believe that the CIS is the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre are not ... separate entities and that's a misconception ... Because they're housed at the OCFC so that's where the assumption is coming from ... But that's not true and that's a myth that needs to be dispelled.

Another participant addressed the autonomy or independence this clarity could offer the Circle of Indigenous Students:

Pikiskwêhêw 18: [Separation] may help the people who are actually in the CIS to be able to do what they want, ... Spread their wings a little bit and not just feel like a shadow.... Maybe people have different ideas...so if it was independent it might be beneficial because it doesn't have to be done the exact same way over here. But at the same time, it's good coaching.

Partnership: Accountability & Stability

Many people discussed the partnership with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre as playing a role in connecting the college the community, and holding both entities accountable:

Pikiskwêhêw 17: This college has no value unless it's deeply connected with its community. Deeply, because we need to respond to the needs of the community. We have to understand the community, and so forth...The ties with the community Friendship Centre does exactly that.

Pikiskwêhêw 17: It's that connectivity that ensures that [the college] is accountable and we're with the right issues and we're looking at this beyond ourselves. And I like that....With the two Friendship Centres tied together, [the college] holds the Friendship Centre accountable and they hold [the college] accountable. That's good news. We're both at the table.

Pikiskwêhêw 1: It's not just the college, [the OCFC] is the Friendship Centre initiative. Which I think makes it stronger and ensures that it continues. And I think that's really powerful and that there's you know, written agreements between both. And I think that way it doesn't just belong to one, it's for all the students.

Participants also explained that the connection to the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre maintained stability with the changing student population at the OCFC:

Pikiskwêhêw 1: Because the students are always changing and coming and going, I think it's important to have that kind of relationship with the two entities of the college and the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre in order to just maintain relationships and continuity and to ensure that the program continues even if the group of students leave.

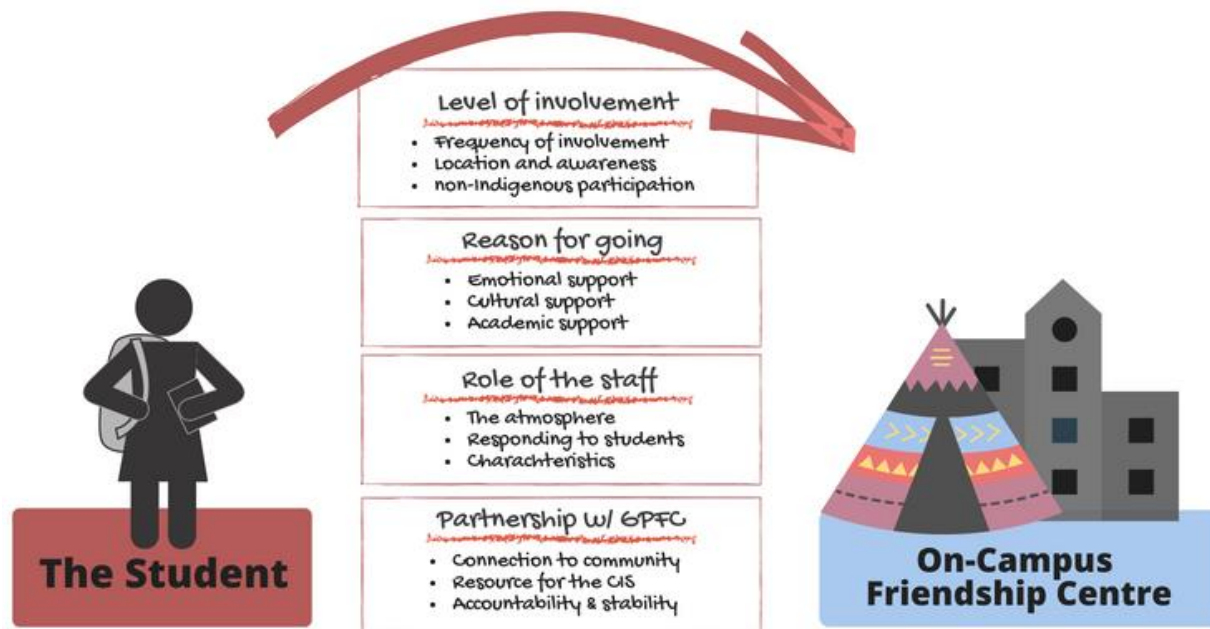
Partnership with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre: Conclusion

Overall, the partnership with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre was considered to be integral to the success of the Indigenous students involved, and Grande Prairie Regional College. The partnership achieves this through connecting students to the broader community, connecting them to resources, and holding the college accountable. While many found the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre to be a great supporter of the Circle of Indigenous Students, some felt that the distinction and autonomy between the two could be improved.

The On-Campus Friendship Centre: *Conclusion*

Through asking various questions about the student experience, I developed a holistic understanding of the role the OCFC plays in the participants lives. I also gathered suggestions for growth and improvement.

Figure 33: The On-Campus Friendship Centre Theme Overall



Chapter Summary

Through engaging with participants in interviews and a Talking Circle, I gathered eight general themes about the experiences of Indigenous students and the role of the On-Campus Friendship Centre. The first four themes pertain to ‘the student’, specifically regarding their strengths, challenges, definitions of success, and needs. Prominent strengths addressed were role modelling, promoting pride, and correcting stereotypes. Common challenges included transitioning into post-secondary education, managing time and finances, and navigating the colonial aspects of Western education. Student success was referred to in three different ways:

Academic achievement, community engagement, or ‘showing up’. The most vital needs identified were connection to others, support from instructors, and Indigenous-specific support.

Developing an understanding of the participants’ perceptions of student strengths, challenges, success and needs was an integral part of this research. This allowed for a more effective analysis of the role the On-Campus Friendship Centre plays in *responding* to these factors. The role of the OCFC was addressed in the next four themes: Level of involvement, reason for going, role of the staff, and perceptions of the partnership with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre. Level of involvement included sub-themes regarding the participants’ frequency of involvement, their perspective on the location and general awareness of the OCFC, and their opinion on non-Indigenous participation within the OCFC. Reasons for going included various combinations of emotional support, cultural support and academic support. Staff, who were described as requiring specific characteristics to be effective, were identified as playing an important role in setting the tone within the OCFC, and responding to the needs of students.

Figure 34: Findings Overall



In Chapter 9, I discuss the ways in which these eight themes respond to the research question exploring the role of the On-Campus Friendship Centre in the experiences of Indigenous students at Grande Prairie Regional College. I also address the way in which these

findings inform the overall role of Indigenous-based support programs, and as such respond to the need for research regarding better support of Indigenous students in post-secondary education.

Chapter 9

- Completing the Sash (Discussion) -

“It’s been quite the journey. I’m still walking on it, I’m still trying to find my way,
and I’m going to get there.”

- *Pîkiskwêhêw* 12

Introduction

Now is the time to make connections, answer the questions, and weave this project together. In a way, I am grouping the final strands and tying the multiple knots that close off the Métis sash. By sealing it, I can free my hands to trace each strand back to the beginning. I can step back and look at the entire sash and see how each color interacts, understand the directions in which the arrows flow, admire how it has come together.

In this chapter, I will discuss how my findings inform my overall research aim of exploring the role of the OCFC in the experiences of Indigenous students at GPRC. To further develop an understanding regarding the experiences of Indigenous students and the potential of Indigenous based-support programs, I will draw parallels with existing research and literature. By situating my research within the national discussion regarding Indigenization of post-secondary institutions, I can contribute my findings to areas lacking information, while also highlighting areas requiring further research.

This chapter will be organized into three sections: 1) Recognizing the intergenerational trauma and resilience of Indigenous students, 2) supporting Indigenous students in overcoming systemic barriers, and 3) addressing potential challenges of Indigenous-based support programs.

Recognizing the Intergenerational Trauma and Resilience of Indigenous Students

Indigenous people are reclaiming the narrative regarding their history and current experiences within Canada (Archuleta, 2006; Carson-Fox, 2017; Kovach 2015; Moretone-Robinson, 2003; Strega & Brown, 2015). This has resulted in a more nuanced understanding of the ongoing effects of colonization within the lives of Indigenous peoples, such as intergenerational trauma and resilience (Bombay et al., 2014; Cote-Meek, 2014; Elias et al.,

2012; Nicolai & Saus, 2013; TRC, 2015; Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 2003). Yet despite recognition of the role residential schools have played, most of the research regarding intergenerational trauma and resilience focuses on how it is manifested within Indigenous communities and families (Bombay et al., 2014).

Fast & Collin-Vézina (2010) address the need for further research on the intergenerational trauma and resiliency of Indigenous peoples within an urban setting, as “most of the studies examining the relationship between resiliency and community well-being are done with people living on-reserve” (p. 135). Further research within urban settings is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the impact of intergenerational trauma on *all* Indigenous peoples (Fast & Collin-Vézina, 2010). This information can assist programs and the government in providing effective funding and support for those suffering from the repercussions of intergenerational trauma, while also increasing recognition and opportunities for those enacting intergenerational resilience (Bourassa et al., 2015; Cailliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015; Nicolai & Saus, 2013; Voyageur et al., 2015).

This draws attention to the need for a better understanding of the specific ways in which intergenerational trauma currently affects Indigenous students within post-secondary institutions on a day-to-day basis, as well as the acts of resilience they carry out in response to systemic barriers (Hansen & Antsanen, 2016; Nicolai & Saus, 2013). Improved awareness regarding the experience of Indigenous students on this level can assist post-secondary institutions to mitigate the colonial barriers within their processes, policies and classrooms, while also encouraging the self-determination and success of the Indigenous student population (Bourassa et al., 2015).

Within my research, I learned about the ways in which intergenerational trauma and resilience

manifest themselves within the experiences of Indigenous students, and specifically within the classrooms of post-secondary education.

Indigenous Students and Intergenerational Trauma

Through the challenges addressed, I found intergenerational trauma to be manifested in two ways for Indigenous students: 1) The development of a poor relationship with education, and 2) re-traumatization within the classroom setting. In the first scenario, some participants spoke of the lack of importance that was placed on education within their family due to their negative and non-educational experiences within residential schools. These findings align with research that speaks to Indigenous peoples' loss of trust regarding education (Hansen & Antsanen, 2016; Nicolai & Saus, 2013). However, these findings also expand upon this research by revealing some of the supports that can assist Indigenous students experiencing a poor relationship with education.

For instance, some of the participants spoke about the important role the Indigenous Liaison Coordinator played in assisting them to rebuild a positive relationship with education by holding them to a higher standard of success while also supporting them through their struggles. The participants also acknowledged the role that community within the On-Campus Friendship Centre, and the mentorship within the Circle of Indigenous Students, could play in redefining education from a space of assimilation into an opportunity for self-determination, friendship and growth. This aligns with literature which refers to education as the 'new buffalo' or a place of empowerment for some Indigenous people (Stonechild, 2006; Pidgeon, 2006).

I also found that some Indigenous students had their intergenerational trauma triggered through re-traumatization within the classroom setting. Some participants spoke of the extreme

difficulty they had when their professors spoke about the history of the residential school system and the violence that was inflicted upon the Survivors. For these participants, the conversation was extremely upsetting as they had family members who had attended residential school. It was particularly challenging for students who were away from home and unable to access support from their family and community.

Though the participants appreciated the increased awareness regarding the Indigenous experience, they explained that the intergenerational trauma of Indigenous people needed to be acknowledged and the presentation of such discussion must be carried out with care while also providing support to anyone who may be triggered or upset. This is important to note when considering the Indigenization of post-secondary campuses, and responding to the TRC (2015) Call to Action #10, which calls for the implementation of culturally appropriate curricula *through the engagement with Indigenous peoples and communities*. These findings also align with Call to Action #62, which requires that instructors and faculties be trained to deliver such material in a respectful and progressive manner (TRC, 2015).

Many found the OCFC to offer the cultural and emotional support required to process feelings of intergenerational trauma. The role of the Elder-in-Residence was commonly addressed as providing irreplaceable cultural and emotional support for students when discussing experiencing intergenerational trauma. This aligns with research by Anonson et al. (2014) highlighting the impact Elders' can have on the experiences of Indigenous students. These findings also support existing research which calls for increased Indigenous programming, staff and faculty (Anonson et al., 2014; Hansen, & Antsanen, 2016; Timmons, & Stoicheff, 2016).

Indigenous Students and Intergenerational Resilience

The intergenerational resilience of Indigenous students was revealed through my findings regarding student strengths: Correcting stereotypes, role modeling and promoting pride. Interestingly, these strengths correspond with the challenges that Restoule (2011) found Indigenous youth to face when discussing access to post-secondary education: The youth found negative stereotyping by teachers and staff to be discouraging, and recommended increased Indigenous role models within the post-secondary education setting as a solution for encouraging pride, confidence and enrollment levels (Restoule, 2011). The need for more Indigenous role models within post-secondary education is also echoed within research by R.A. Malatest & Associates (2004), who found role modelling to be a strong support for Indigenous students during transition into post-secondary education.

That Indigenous students at GPRC felt these ‘challenges’ to be their strengths underscores the importance of encouraging opportunities for Indigenous students to utilize these skills in positions of leadership and mentorship. Many participants highlighted the role that the Circle of Indigenous students could play in advising the Board of Governors at GPRC, and assisting faculty and professors in delivering Indigenized curriculum. The inclusion of Indigenous students within these processes speaks to Kirkness & Barnhardt’s (2011) work, which calls for a paradigmatic shift within the post-secondary institutions which situates Indigenous students as contributing element of the *college’s* success (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2011).

Additionally, many participants described speaking out and correcting stereotypes within the classroom to be an avenue in which they could enact resilience in the face of trauma. That this was still a common occurrence for Indigenous students aligns with research that calls for

increased awareness and Indigenization of the educational environment – potentially through teaching faculty taking part in learning opportunities such as the Blanket Exercise (Hansen & Antsanen, 2016; KAIROS, 2017; TRC, 2015). The agency of the students in addressing these stereotypes themselves highlights the presence of their resilience, the role that Indigenous people must play in Indigenization process, and the reclamation of narrative that is happening within the post-secondary educational setting (Archuleta, 2006; Carson-Fox, 2017; Kovach 2015; Little Bear, 2009; Moretone-Robinson, 2003; Strega & Brown, 2015; TRC, 2015). Additionally, the On-Campus Friendship Centre was acknowledged by participants to be a revitalizing place to debrief after encountering stereotypes within the classroom.

These findings fit with research on the self-determination and agency of Indigenous students, and the ways in which education can be used as a tool to bring one's community forward (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Kuokkanen, 2008; Reading & Wien, 2013; Voyageur et al., 2015). The ways in which the Elder-in-residence supported students in enacting their strengths aligns with research that underscores the need for multigenerational and culturally-based relationships within education (Hansen & Antsanen, 2016). Additionally, the role that the Circle of Indigenous students played in assisting these students to promote pride and role model adds to the literature by addressing the importance of Indigenous student councils and their partnership with an Indigenous-based program and community organization (RAMA, 2004; Strega & Brown, 2015).

Supporting Indigenous Students in Overcoming Systemic Barriers

Improved understanding of intergenerational trauma and resilience has also led to increased recognition of the systemic barriers set against Indigenous people (Pidgeon, 2008;

Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001). Along with the TRC Calls to Action, the statistical achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in post-secondary education reveals that there is still much to learn and improve upon when supporting the success of Indigenous people (Restoule et al., 2013; TRC, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2011; Waterman & Lindley, 2013). In response, Indigenous academics, activists and community members encourage improvements within post-secondary institutions to be carried out in a strength-based manner, which recognizes the existing knowledge and practices of Indigenous people (Cailliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015; Fasta & Collin-Vézin, 2010).

This requires research a shift in allowing Indigenous peoples to determine their own definition of success within post-secondary education beyond ‘retention’ and ‘completion’, (CCL, 2007; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Kuokkanen, 2008; Timmons & Stoicheff, 2016; Voyageur et al., 2015). This also underscores the need for research of various Indigenous interventions that already exist within post-secondary institutions across Canada, along with a more nuanced understanding of what success in post-secondary education means to Indigenous students beyond ‘retention’ and ‘completion’, and consideration of the unique needs and challenges of Indigenous people in a specific area (CCL, 2007; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Kuokkanen, 2008; Timmons & Stoicheff, 2016; Voyageur et al., 2015). This in turn fosters an environment where Indigenous students can articulate the unique challenges they may face, and determine what *they feel* they need from a post-secondary institution.

Allowing Students to Define Success

Within my research, I found three definitions of Indigenous student success that could overlap or be separate: Academic achievement, community involvement, and ‘showing up’. The

variety in these definitions supports literature that emphasizes the need to respect diversity amongst Indigenous students, their goals, and the presence of culturally and community driven agendas (CCL, 2007; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Pidgeon, 2008). The addition of community involvement and ‘showing up’ alongside academic achievement aligns with the Canadian Council on Learning’s (2007) statement that “current approaches to measuring First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning in Canada do not reflect Aboriginal people’s articulation of holistic, lifelong learning” (p. 8). As such, success within post-secondary institutions, and the means in which to support students in achieving success, must be redefined to accommodate the experiences and desires of Indigenous students.

My findings also supports research by Peterson, Horton & Restoule (2016) that “local knowledge is essential to an accurate understanding of student needs within specific classroom contexts” (p. 27). While these definitions of success may be relevant across the country, they are also born out of the experiences and climate of the area in which Grande Prairie Regional College is located. It would be insightful to compare these definitions of success to the Indigenous student population of a different post-secondary institution – such as a university in a larger city, a post-secondary institution located on traditional territory that is not Cree, or a tribal college.

Discussions surrounding the OCFC’s ability to support these endeavours of success also addresses the role of Indigenous-based support programs in assisting students to meet their unique goals. For instance, some participants found support for academic achievements at the OCFC through peer encouragement and resources such as the computers, board room and tutor. By creating opportunities to volunteer, the OCFC provided participants with the opportunity for meaningful community involvement. The On-Campus Outreach Worker and the Indigenous

Liaison Coordinator were integral for students who defined success as ‘showing up’. For them, being checked on or contacted when absent by someone at the OCFC made the difference between continuing their studies or dropping out. These findings highlight the need for a holistic approach to Indigenous student support, which incorporates multiple tactics for varying definitions of ‘success’.

Addressing the Challenges that Students Experience

Participants highlighted three main challenges impeding their path to success while attending post-secondary education: Transitioning, managing time and finances, and overcoming the colonial aspect of education. Overall, these findings fell within the categories of challenges listed by R.A. Malatest & Associates (2004), while also fleshing out the unique experience of Indigenous students at GPRC. For instance, RAMA (2004) highlights geographical barriers as a prominent challenge for Indigenous students. This was supported by my findings, as many of the students discussed the difficulty they had in transitioning from their home community to Grande Prairie. However, these findings also shed light on the contrasting experiences of Indigenous students at the same post-secondary institution.

For instance, while both Dene and Cree participants discussed the distance from home to be a challenge, one Dene participant referred to a 13 hour journey, whereas one Cree participant referred to a 4 hour journey. Additionally, one Dene student spoke of geographical barriers in terms of the difference in physical makeup in Grande Prairie versus their home community. In contrast, a Cree participant spoke of the geographical barriers in terms of not being down the street from their family members. These findings highlight the need to recognize the varied experiences within one general ‘barrier’ referred to for Indigenous students.

Transition as a prominent challenge also relates to existing research which calls for the Indigenization of transitional supports in post-secondary education (Adelson, 2005; RAMA, 2004; Restoule et al., 2013). My findings around the intimidation and lack of preparation that some participants experienced when moving from high school to post-secondary education aligned with Restoule's (2011) research, which found that Indigenous youth faced many transitional barriers, such as overcoming stereotypes, lack of practical support, information and resources, and the need for better relationships between post-secondary institutions and remote Indigenous communities. My findings around the transitional challenges of mature students returning to school has added to an area which could be further researched. The issue of time and financial pressure supports the TRC Call to Action #10 which recognizes the need for increased funding along with improved *access to* funding for Indigenous students.

The challenge of post-secondary education having an inherently colonial structure speaks to the numerous calls to decolonize campus on all levels of operation (Anonson et al., 2014; Hansen & Antsanen, 2016; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2011; Little Bear, 2009; Sachs et al., 2011). The need to focus on the ways in which the institution itself needs to make changes aligns with the Canadian Council on Learning's (2007) research on redefining success within education, where it is acknowledge that often Western education systems "lack the capacity to teach Aboriginal culture, languages, traditions, values and approaches to learning" which has resulted in feelings of "racism and discrimination in the learning experiences of Aboriginal people" (p. 10). This is also supported by Kirkness & Barnhardt's (2011) call for a paradigmatic approach from Indigenous students 'coming' to 'going' to university, which requires the post-secondary institution to adapt and recognize the unique strengths and agendas of their students.

The ways in which the OCFC assisted participants in overcoming these challenges speaks to the four fundamental aspects of Indigenous-based support programs identified in the literature: 1) Transitional support, 2) building community, 3) providing connection to culture, and 4) fostering self-determination (Anonson et al., 2014; Little Bear, 2009; St. Denis, 2010; Pidgeon et al., 2014). Through the opportunity to meet people, and fostering a feeling of ‘home’, the OCFC was described by many as a safe place during the tumultuous transition period. Many participants described the small space as comforting in contrast to the other spaces within the college, such as the library or cafeteria. Some students found the OCFC to be financially supportive as they received and learned about bursaries at the OCFC, and met people who could watch their kids. Beyond actual resources, participants also addressed the solace they found in spending time with students experiencing the same challenges. For many, the opportunity to engage in cultural practices while surrounded by Indigenous peers assisted them in mitigating the colonial aspects of their experience. Once again, these findings underscore the need for many different approaches to support Indigenous students within one post-secondary institution.

Encouraging Students to Determine their Needs

I found three prominent themes regarding the needs of Indigenous students: Connection to others, support from instructors, and Indigenous-specific support. These findings align with research that highlights the need for Indigenous students to be provided with opportunities to build community, create peer mentorship relationships, and engage in their culture (Hallett, et al., 2007; Pidgeon et al., 2014; Voyageur et al., 2015). While these needs could be generalized to the broader student population, discussions with participants highlighted the ways in which connection to others and support from instructors can have a unique Indigenous element.

For instance, some participants required a community that resembled their home community, which could look very different from a general campus club or space. Some felt more at home when there was an Elder in the room, when they could talk with other Indigenous people, or when spending time in the Teepee. Support from instructors could also be culturally specific in that some participants needed permission for absences based on cultural protocol surrounding a family members death. Beyond connection to others and support from instructors, participants also discussed needs that were clearly specific to Indigenous students – such as the presence of Indigenous culture throughout the college and emotional support when learning about residential schools in the classroom.

The role that the OCFC (and the related staff) played in assisting students speaks to the literature regarding the potential of Indigenous-based support programs (Anonson et al., 2014; Little Bear, 2009; Pidgeon et al., 2014; St. Denis, 2010). For example, the role of the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre in fostering community connections was often highlighted, with many participants acknowledging the career building opportunities they experienced. The staff within the OCFC were also found to help students in attaining support from their instructors. This included the Indigenous Liaison Coordinator communicating the cultural protocol and reasoning behind a students' absence to an instructor. The Elder-in-Residence was also found to encourage support from instructors by working with the staff on Indigenous awareness and education. Indigenous-specific support was addressed through the OCFC being a space *geared* towards Indigenous students, while also providing cultural and Indigenous peer support.

Potential Challenges of an Indigenous-based Support Program

While much research has shown that Indigenous-based support programs can be helpful to Indigenous student's experiences, these initiatives still face inherent issues. Yet these

challenges and solutions to overcome them are generally under researched. In response, my research highlights three potential challenges of Indigenous-based support programs which I found present within the On-Campus Friendship Centre: 1) Creating a space that is culturally meaningful for all students, 2) determining the degree of non-Indigenous involvement, and 3) fostering successful partnerships between Indigenous programs and post-secondary institutions. I have also highlighted areas for future research that could assist programs in overcoming these challenges.

Cultural Representation

While many students were able to engage in cultural activities and access cultural support, some participants addressed the issue of cultural representation within the OCFC. There was specific emphasis placed on the need for better representation of Dene peoples, as they make up a large portion of the Indigenous student population at GPRC. To better support these students, participants suggested that the college as a whole develop a better understanding of what it means to live in the North, while also bringing in more Dene culture through performances and activities. Further research that explores how other Indigenous-based support programs accommodate diverse cultures within an urban setting would be helpful in addressing this challenge.

There were also suggestions for increased cultural practices via implementing a smudge room, moving the Elder-in-Residence from part-time to full time, and potentially adding more Elders of different genders. The lack of smudging protocol and the hurdles Indigenous students face in implementing a smudging room highlight the need for continued Indigenization of GPRC. Future research on places which have already achieved smudge spaces, or that allow smudging everywhere, would be insightful for Grande Prairie Regional College. Reflecting on

these suggestions within the next couple of years would be interesting, as some of the participants described them as changes they would make during their time at the college. In addition, changes occurred during the research period. For instance, as of 2017 the Elder was moved to full-time status within the OCFC. Also, the implementation of the Indigenous Education Protocol only occurred during the research process, and the creation of the Indigenous Initiatives Coordinator position was created afterwards. While these changes seem promising, assessment on whether they are symbolic or part of GPRC's core agenda will be required.

Non-Indigenous Involvement

Every participant stated that they felt the OCFC should be open to non-Indigenous students, thus there was no contestation when *determining* the degree of non-Indigenous involvement. However, participants did address the stigma that existed around the OCFC being an 'Indigenous-only' space, which potentially resulted in some non-Indigenous *and* Indigenous students feeling unwelcome. Participants provided suggestions to diffuse this stigma, such as increasing participation through better awareness of the OCFC's existence, location, programs and open-door policy. It was suggested that these aspects be made clear with better signage in the college, a clearer description on the college website, and potentially a bigger and more visible space to host the OCFC.

It was also advised to select staff members (Outreach Workers, Elder-in-Residence, and Indigenous Liaison Coordinator) who embody the appropriate skills for carrying out their role, such as openness, empathy, and the ability to foster a positive atmosphere. Further research on ways to increase non-Indigenous involvement would be helpful. In contrast, further research on spaces that are Indigenous-only would also compliment my findings by providing insight into the role of solidarity and safety within such programs.

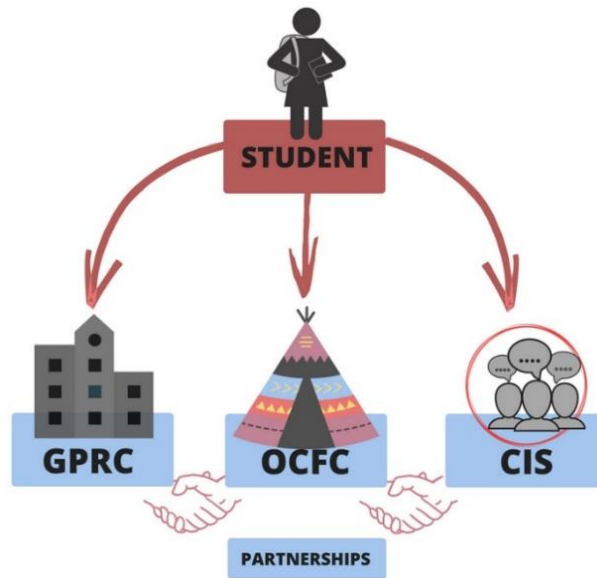
Healthy Partnerships

A final potential challenge within an Indigenous-based support program can be fostering successful partnerships between an Indigenous organization and a post-secondary institution. In general, the participants found the relationship between the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre and the Grande Prairie Regional College to be positive and important to the On-Campus Friendship Centres success. Discussion regarding the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre revealed that the collaboration fostered valuable opportunities and resources for the students, while also providing stability to the OCFC. Accountability was recognized as another benefit of partnership, as participants stated that the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre kept the college accountable and vice versa. However, some participants felt that the distinction and autonomy between the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre and the Circle of Indigenous Students could be improved. Further research on partnerships between post-secondary institutions and Indigenous program partnerships could be helpful in defining these roles and maintaining a necessary level of separation.

In addition, further research regarding the OCFC's partnership with GPRC and the CIS could also develop a better understanding of the OCFC's role within the college (See Figure 35). This could involve deeper exploration of the role of the Circle of Indigenous students, the relationship students have with GPRC and their reason for choosing it as a place to study. Researching the nature of the partnerships between all three entities would allow for a more nuanced understanding of the Indigenous students' experience. To learn about improving participation or other Indigenous supports on-campus, it would also be helpful to speak to Indigenous students who *do not* use the OCFC. Exploring these aspects would assist the college

in reflecting on the role of the OCFC, while also providing more information for those wishing to implement an Indigenous-based support program within their post-secondary institute.

Figure 35: Future Areas of Research for OCFC



Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I connected my findings to the overall research question, situated them within existing literature, and highlighted areas for future research. In Chapter 10, I will discuss knowledge mobilization and dissemination, share the wise-practices developed from my research, and offer a reflective conclusion of my journey.

Chapter 10

- The Give Away (Conclusion)-

“...Come
This is a give away poem
I cannot go home
until you have taken everything
& the basket which held it
*When my hands are empty
I will be full*”

- Chrystos

(1988, p. 100)

Introduction

This entire research project has been geared towards creating something to ‘give’ to my community, to academia, and to post-secondary institutions across Canada. The notion of ‘gifting’ or ‘giving away’ is a central aspect within many Indigenous cultures. When my mum gathers sage, she gives tobacco back to the earth. When my sister makes her first drum, she gives it to a friend. When I meet with the Grandmothers, I give them tea. When I learn from my community, I give them the knowledge I have collected. In this chapter, I will share what I have to give away from this research project by discussing knowledge mobilization and dissemination, and sharing the 8 wise-practices I have developed regarding the implementation or improvement of Indigenous-based support within post-secondary institutions. I will conclude with a reflection of my research journey.

The Knowledge Give Away

In academic terms, the ‘give-away’ process I describe is referred to as ‘knowledge mobilization’ and ‘knowledge dissemination’. As my Métis Sash Framework exemplifies, these are not an after-thought but a foundational aspect of the research process. I have woven knowledge mobilization throughout my journey by leading workshops, presenting in classes, giving lectures, and speaking at conferences. I also took part in a speaker series at Grande Prairie Regional College through the Research and Innovation Department. At this event, I was afforded the opportunity to share my findings *back* to those who could potentially benefit from what I learned: The On-Campus Friendship Centre and the Grande Prairie Regional College.

Once the students are back in school, I will invite those who participated to a ‘give away’ feast to thank them for contributing their voices. This will be a platform to communicate the

ways I interpreted their stories and the findings that were gathered. I will also be sharing my findings with specific departments at Grande Prairie Regional College. In addition, I will reach out to and offer presentations to the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre, the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association, and the National Friendship Centre.

To disseminate this knowledge into the academic world, I plan to publish within Indigenous and non-Indigenous journals. I believe that this research can compliment and contrast the dominant perspectives within both, while also bridging the gap between qualitative and Indigenous research methodologies. I feel that it adds to the necessary field of research that is strength-based, community-driven and Indigenous-led through a unique and underrepresented Métis perspective. To share my research nationally, I created the wise practices which I present in this chapter.

Sharing the knowledge gathered both informally and formally is an important part of Indigenous and anti-oppressive research. Sharing it within the academic sphere continues to claim space for research practices that are in the margins, while also inserting historically oppressed voices within dominant form of knowledge production, such as academic journals and publications (Kovach, 2015; Potts & Brown, 2015). In contrast, sharing the knowledge through accessible formats within my community ensures that I am engaging in what anti-oppressive researchers refer to as ‘knowledge democracy’ (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 33). It also allows for me to fulfill the commitments of engagement and reciprocity I made to the participants, community members and stakeholders. At the end of the day, it means recognizing I am still a strand among many, woven together to make a sash. In giving away, I free my hands so that I can raise them up in gratitude.

Wise-Practices

To share the knowledge gathered from this research with the rest of Canada, I have put together some wise-practices that could potentially assist post-secondary institutions looking to implement or improve Indigenous-based support through initiatives, resources and programs. Wise-practices are similar to, but also fundamentally different from best-practices. Whereas best practices are generally a rigid set of rules proven to be successful, wise-practices are adaptable suggestions based on knowledge gathered in a particular place (Cailliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015). As Indigenous communities have a negative history of non-Indigenous researchers coming in and enforcing best-practices in a colonial manner, wise-practices are often preferred (Cailliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015; CCL, 2007).

The concept of ‘best’ practices is competitive and implies that there is ‘one’ practice that works better than others in every situation. As such, best practices ignore the vast diversity there is between Indigenous peoples and communities across the country. For instance, what may be successful for the Indigenous population at the University of Victoria may be very different than what would be successful for the Indigenous population at Grande Prairie Regional College. Instead, the wealth of knowledge and experiences within these spaces needs to be shared through malleable wise-practices, which can be adapted to fit the unique agendas of each Indigenous population and post-secondary institution.

Drawing from ‘what I found’ throughout this research journey, I have created the following wise-practices and offered examples of how to put each into action. In addition to connecting my findings to the national discussion, it is my hope that these can assist other post-secondary institutions in better supporting their Indigenous student population:

Wise-Practices on Indigenous-Based Support in Post-Secondary Institutions

1) Keep it strength-based: When looking to support Indigenous students, consider the strengths they can bring to the post-secondary institute, in addition to the challenges they face.

- Change the language used. Rather than ‘helping’ Indigenous students ‘keep up’, encourage the post-secondary institution to value the strengths of Indigenous students.
- The Board of Governors can regularly meet with a group of Indigenous students for consultation on Indigenization of the post-secondary institution.
- Host celebrations of Indigenous culture and people. Bring in Indigenous speakers and performers. Encourage the implementation of Indigenous-driven courses and initiatives.

2) Decolonize the institution: When assessing challenges faced by Indigenous students, be sure to also address the colonial barriers that are in place within the institution.

- Raise awareness of Canada’s history and the experiences of Indigenous peoples within the classroom by bringing in the Blanket Exercise for staff and faculty members.
- Work across disciplines to ensure that courses are meaningful for Indigenous students (ex. Indigenous methodologies courses within the social sciences curriculum).
- Increase the amount of Indigenous awareness throughout the campus through signs that acknowledge the traditional territory.

3) Listen to the students: When highlighting the needs of students, continually gather information from *your* Indigenous population regarding changes that need to be made:

- This needs to be done continually, as the student population is always changing. Create an online platform where Indigenous students can provide feedback throughout the year.
- Surveys can be used to gather information the broader Indigenous student population.
- Ensure to also engage in meaningful conversations. This can be achieved through the Board of Governors meeting with a group or board of Indigenous student representatives.

4) Work with existing programs: Acknowledge already existing initiatives and programs within your post-secondary institution that are geared towards supporting Indigenous students.

- Compile a list of already existing programs. For instance, is there an Indigenous student board, an Indigenous support program, an annual Indigenous event?
- Consult with these existing groups for direction and support in improving resources campus wide. Address gaps where changes need to be made.
- Assess the appropriate role of each entity moving forward.

5) Create community partnerships: Create a partnership with an Indigenous organization in the community. Utilize this partnership for cultural advice, knowledge and resources.

- Compile a list of already existing programs. For instance, is there a Friendship Center, an Elders' Shelter, a space that holds cultural events?
- Create a partnership between the post-secondary institution and these places. Communicate these resources to Indigenous students.
- Utilize these resources for cultural guidance. For example, contract an Elder through an existing Indigenous organization that has connections and knowledge of protocols.

6) Fill the gaps: Assess what type of program or resources are needed and would be most useful to your Indigenous student population.

- If an Indigenous student home-base is desired, create a room or building with the resources suggested. Look to other institutions for examples.
- If career mentorship is desired, work with agencies throughout the community to foster a mentorship program for Indigenous students. For example: A job shadow day.
- Implement and address the TRC Calls to Action. Commit to this formally and take action.

7) Make roles clear: If partnerships are created, ensure that roles are made clear to everyone involved. Ensure that everyone sits at the table equally.

- If creating a joint program in partnership with community programs, make the fiscal responsibilities, and role of each group clear. For example, who provides the food at a welcoming feast? Where does the funding come from for an Elder-in-Residence?
- If an Indigenous student board is created, ensure that they are invited to meetings with the Board of Governors or stakeholders, so they can effectively represent the student body.
- Make it clear whether or not non-Indigenous or public participation is welcome.

8) Add roles where needed: Make sure that there are enough staff and faculty to support the students and any programs, resources or initiatives.

- When implementing Indigenous staff, ensure that they are respected by the community and capable of supporting students in an effective and culturally appropriate way.
- Implement one or more Elder as a resource for students and faculty. This can be through Elder visits, an Elder-in-Residence, or other innovative ways.
- Hire somebody to assess if current and new initiatives are meeting the needs of Indigenous students, and if the institution is working towards reconciliation.

Share your wise-practices with other post-secondary institutions!

Give Away Summary

Giving back has been a fundamental teaching that I have carried throughout this research process. I have shared my voice and the voice of my community through lectures, conferences, summits, workshops, and daily conversations. I am excited to share the knowledge I have gained to the organizations involved, such as the On-Campus Friendship Centre and Grande Prairie Regional College. I am the *most* excited to communicate my findings and experience with those who participated through the Give Away Feast in the Fall. I feel a responsibility to insert this research into both mainstream qualitative and Indigenous research journals and publications. Finally, I am proud of the wise-practices developed and I am eager to see how they can be adapted, utilized and improved upon by other post-secondary institutions.

Final Reflection

As I write this final reflection, I watch the candle flicker at my desk. It smells of sweetgrass, and was given to me by my mum to use during ‘the wrap-up’ portion of my thesis. It is getting closer and closer to its last days. I look to my research journal. It is full of color, memories, ideas, reflection, questions, answers, moments of despair, and overwhelming pages of euphoria and love. I remember the sky when I started this process: Foggy and mysterious over the ocean. I admire the sky tonight: Bright, blue, and full of promise as it sets over the prairies. I revel in the knowledge I have gathered, the stories I have heard, the lessons I have been given, and the inspiration that pumps through my blood. I feel my heartbeat, and I feel my buddy Nelson. Laughing aloud, smiling, and proud. Though there is more work to do, I know good work has been done. I raise my hands to you for understanding how I peel the onion.

Hiy Hiy

References

- Absolon, K. (2011). *Kaandossiwin: How we come to know*. Black Point, NS and Winnipeg, Manitoba: Fernwood Publishing.
- Adelson, N. (2005). The embodiment of inequity: health disparities in Aboriginal Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 96(2), 45-61. Retrieved March 2, 2016, from <https://journal.cpha.ca/index.php/cjph>.
- Anonson, J., Huard, S., Kristoff, T., Clarke-Arnault, V., Wilson, E., & Walker, M. (2014). The role of Elders in post-secondary institutes. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 34(2), 1-18. Retrieved March 1, 2016 from <http://www3.brandonu.ca/cjns/>.
- Archuleta, E. (2006). "I give you back": Indigenous women writing to survive. *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 18(4), 18-114. Retrieved April 1, 2013 from <https://muse.jhu.edu/journal/246>.
- Ball, J. (2005). 'Nothing about us without us': Restorative research partnerships involving Indigenous children and communities in Canada. In Farrell, A. (Ed), (2005), *Ethical research with children*, 81-96. Berkshire, UK: Open University Press/McGraw Hill Education/
- Barrera, J. (2018, March 29). The horrors of St. Anne's. *CBC News*. Retrieved on April 20, 2018 from <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/st-anne-residential-school-opp-documents>.
- Benoit, C., Carroll, D., & Chaudrhy, M. (2003). In search of a healing place: Aboriginal women in Vancouver's downtown Eastside. *Social Sciences & Medicine*, 56, 821-833. Retrieved June 14, 2018 from <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/social-science-and-medicine>.
- Benoit, C., Jansson, M., Millar, A., & Phillips, R. (2005). Community-academic research on hard-to-reach populations: benefits and challenges. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(2), 263-282. doi: 10.1177/1049732304267752
- Bombay, A., Matheson, K., & Anisman, H. (2014). The intergenerational effects of Indian residential schools: Implications for the concept of historical trauma. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 51(3), 320-338. Retrieved June 3, 2018 from <http://journals.sagepub.com/home/tps>.
- Bourassa, C., Blind, M., Dietrich, D., & Oleson, E. (2015). Understanding the intergenerational effects of colonization: Aboriginal women with neurological conditions – their reality and resilience. *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, 10(2), 3-20. Retrieved November 7, 2017 from <http://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ijih>.
- Brayboy, B., & Deyhle, D. (2000). Insider-outsider: Researchers in American Indian communities. *Theory in Practice*, 39(3), 163-169. Retrieved March 21, 2016 from <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/htip20/current>.
- Buck, W. (2009). Atchakosuk: Ininewuk stories of the stars. *First Nations Perspectives*, 2(1), 71-83. Retrieved June 3, 2018 from <https://mfnerc.org/resources/fnp/>.

- Burnette, C., & Billiot, S. (2015). Reaching harmony across Indigenous and mainstream research contexts: An emergent narrative. *Journal of Indigenous Social Development*, 4(1), 1-15. Retrieved June 1, 2018 from <http://www.hawaii.edu/sswork/jisd/>.
- Cailliou, B., & Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2015). A wise practice approach to Indigenous community development in Canada. In Voyageur, C., Brearley, L., & Cailliou, B., (Eds.), (2015). *Restorying Indigenous leadership, wise practices in community development*, (31-59). Banff, AB: Banff Centre Press.
- Canada. (1996). *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada.
- Canada. (2017). *Indigenous peoples and communities: First Nations*. Canada: Indigenous and Northern Affairs. Retrieved August 22, 2018 from <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100013791/1100100013795>
- Canadian Council on Learning [CCL]. (2007). Redefining how success is measured in First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning. *Report on Learning in Canada 2007*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Learning.
- Canadian Medical Association [CMA]. (2013). Health equity and the social determinants of health: a role for the medical profession. *Canadian Medical Association*, 1-10. Retrieved March 1, 2016 from <https://www.cma.ca/Assets/assets-library/document/en/advocacy/PD13-03-e.pdf>
- Carson-Fox, S. (2017, July 25). *Rise and Indigenise with Sarain Carson-Fox* [Video file]. Retrieved September 10, 2017 from www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXvC3uli6Ns.
- Castellano, M. (2004). Ethics of Aboriginal research. *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, 1(1), 98-114. Retrieved February 1, 2016 from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1131569450?pq-origsite=summon&accountid=14846>.
- Cave, K. (2017). Water song: Indigenous women and water. *Solutions*, 7(6), 64-73. Retrieved June 3, 2018 from <https://www.thesolutionsjournal.com/>.
- Centre de santé Inuulitsivik. (2018). *Northern life and culture: Who are the Inuits?* Retrieved August 22, 2018 from <http://www.inuulitsivik.ca/northern-life-and-inuit-culture/who-are-the-inuits>
- Chandler, J. & Lalonde, C. (1998). Cultural continuity as a hedge against suicide in Canada's First Nations. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 35(2), 1363-4615. Retrieved February 10, 2016 from <http://journals.sagepub.com/home/tps>.
- Chandler, J. & Lalonde, C. (1998). Cultural continuity as a hedge against suicide in Canada's First Nations. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 35(2), 1363-4615. Retrieved January 26, 2018 from <http://journals.sagepub.com/home/tps>.
- City of Grande Prairie. (n.d.). *History of Grande Prairie*. Retrieved August 14, 2018 from <http://www.cityofgp.com/index.aspx?page=667&from=mm>

- Coburn, E. (2013). Indigenous research as resistance. *Society for Socialist Studies* 9(1), 52 – 63. Retrieved September 3, 2017 from <http://socialiststudies.ca/journal/>.
- Collins, P. (1991). *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Cote-Meek, S. (2014). *Colonized classrooms: Racism, trauma and resistance in post-Secondary education*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Edosdi, J. (2008). Hede kehe' hotzi' kahidi': My journey to a Tahltnan research paradigm. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 31(1), 24-39. Retrieved January 15, 2016 from <http://www3.brandonu.ca/cjns/>.
- Elias, B., Mignone, J., Hall, M., Hong, S., Hart, L., & Jitender, S. (2012). Trauma and suicide behaviour histories among a Canadian Indigenous population: An empirical exploration of the potential role of Canada's residential school system. *Social Sciences & Medicine*, 74, (10), 1560-1569. Retrieved June 2, 2018 from <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/social-science-and-medicine>.
- Facing History and Ourselves. (2018). *Killing the Indian in the Child*. Retrieved October 1, 2018 from <https://www.facinghistory.org/stolen-lives-indigenous-peoples-canada-and-indian-residential-schools/chapter-3/killing-indian-child>.
- Fast, E., & Collin-Vézina, D. (2010). Historical trauma, race-based trauma, and resilience of Indigenous people: A literature review. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 5(1), 126-136. Retrieved November 1, 2018 from <http://journals.sfu.ca/fpcfr/index.php/FPCFR/index>.
- Fontaine, L. (2017). Redress for linguicide: Residential schools and assimilation in Canada. *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 30(2), 183-205. doi: 10.3828/bjcs.2017.11
- Francis IV, L., & Munson, M. (2017). Indigenous scholarship, survivance, tribalogy, and sovereign activism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 30(1), 48-57. doi: 10.1080/09518398.2016.1242807
- Friese, S. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis with ATLAS.ti*. London: SAGE Publications, Ltd.
- Gaudry, A. (2011). Insurgent research. *Wicazo Review*, 26(1), 113-136. doi:10.1353/wic.2011.0006
- Gaudry, A., & Hancock, R. (2012). Decolonizing Métis pedagogies in post-secondary settings. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 35(1), 7-22. Retrieved March 3, 2018 from <https://www.questia.com/library/p439413/canadian-journal-of-native-education>.
- Go, J. (2017). Decolonizing sociology: Epistemic inequality and sociological thought. *Social Problems*, 64(2), 194-199. doi: 10.1093/socpro/spx002
- Gordon, C. & White, J. (2014). Indigenous educational attainment in Canada. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 5(3). doi: 10.18584/iipj.2014.5.3.6
- Grande Prairie Friendship Centre [GPFC]. (n.d.). *Welcome to the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre*. Retrieved May 15, 2018 from <https://gpfriendshipcenter.wordpress.com/>.

- Grande Prairie Regional College [GPRC]. (2016, August 30). *News archives: First blended online and land-based learning course at GPRC*. Retrieved May 10, 2018 from <https://www.gprc.ab.ca/news/display.html?ID=894>.
- Grande Prairie Regional College [GPRC]. (2017a). *Annual report 2016-2017*. Retrieved March 2, 2018 from https://www.gprc.ab.ca/files/forms_documents/GPRC_Annual_Report_20162017_Web_Unsigned.pdf.
- Grande Prairie Regional College [GPRC]. (2017b, January 26). *News archives: GPRC signs Indigenous Education Protocol*. Retrieved March 3, 2018 from <https://www.gprc.ab.ca/news/display.html?ID=976>.
- Grande Prairie Regional College [GPRC]. (2018a). *Highlights of our history*. Retrieved June 13, 2018 from https://www.gprc.ab.ca/about/grande_prairie/history.html.
- Grande Prairie Regional College [GPRC]. (2018b). *News Archive: GPRC fall term enrollment strong*. Retrieved June 13, 2018 from <https://www.gprc.ab.ca/news/display.html?ID=779>.
- Grande Prairie Regional College [GPRC]. (2018c). *Services for Indigenous students*. Retrieved June 2, 2018 from <https://www.gprc.ab.ca/services/indigenous/index.html>.
- Grande Prairie Regional College [GPRC]. (n.d.). *Research & Innovation* [Brochure]. Grande Prairie AB: Grande Prairie Regional College.
- Gray, G. & Jones, M. (2016). A qualitative narrative policy framework? Examining the policy narratives of US campaign finance regulatory reform. *Public Policy & Administration*, 31(3), 193-220. doi: 10.1177/0952076715623356
- Gray, G. (2017). Academic voice in scholarly writing. *The Qualitative Report*, 22(1), 179-196. Retrieved June 2, 2018 from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol22/iss1/10>.
- Hallett, D., Chandler, M., & Lalonde, C. (2007). Aboriginal language knowledge and youth suicide. *Cognitive Development*, 22, 392-399. Retrieved February 20, 2016 from <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/cognitive-development/>.
- Hansen, J., & Antsanen, R. (2016). Elders' teachings about resilience and its implications for education in Dene and Cree communities. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 7(1), 1-10. doi:10.18584/iipj.2016.7.1.2
- Hossain, D., Gorman, D., Williams-Mozely, J., & Garvey, D. (2008). Bridging the gap: Identifying needs and aspirations of Indigenous students to facilitate their entry into university. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 37(1), 9-17. Retrieved December 9, 2017 from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/australian-journal-of-indigenous-education>.
- Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. (2017, March 29). *A Brief Definition of Decolonization and Indigenization*. Retrieved June 4, 2018 from <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/a-brief-definition-of-decolonization-and-indigenization>.
- Indspire. (2018). *2018 Indspire awards: Celebrating 25 years of Indigenous achievement* [Booklet]. Ohsweken, ON: Indspire.

- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. (2018). *Who we are*. Retrieved June 2, 2018 from <https://www.itk.ca/>.
- Johnston, J., Bailey, W., & Wilson, G. (2014). Mechanisms for fostering multigenerational resilience. *Contemporary Family Theory*, 36(1), 148-161. doi:10.1007/s10591-012-9222-6
- KAIROS. (2017). *What is the Blanket Exercise?* Retrieved October 9, 2018 from <https://www.kairosblanketexercise.org/>.
- Kaur, R. (2017). Honor the roots. In R. Kaur, *The sun and her flowers* (p. 126). Toronto, ON: Simon & Schuster Canada.
- Kikino Métis Children and Family Services Society. (n.d.). *Métis culture: The sash*. Retrieved June 3, 2018 from <http://www.kikino.org/metis-culture/the-sash.php>.
- Kirkness, V., & Barnhardt, R. (2001). First Nations and higher education: the four r's – respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 30(3), 1-15. Retrieved January 1, 2016 from <https://jaie.asu.edu/>.
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press Incorporated.
- Kovach, M. (2010). Conversational method in Indigenous research. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 5(1), 40-48. Retrieved October 23, 2018 from <http://journals.sfu.ca/fpcfr/index.php/FPCFR/index>.
- Kovach, M. (2015). Emerging from the margins. In Strega, S. & Brown, L., (Eds.). (2015). *Research as resistance: Revisiting critical, Indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches*, (2nd ed.), (43-64). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.
- Kuokkanen, R. (2008). What is hospitality in the academy? Epistemic ignorance and the (im)possible gift. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 30(1), 60-82. doi: 10.1080/10714410701821297
- Lavallée, L. (2009). Practical application of an Indigenous research framework and two qualitative Indigenous research methods: Sharing circles and Anishnaabe symbol-based reflection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), 21-40. Retrieved January 20, 2016 from <http://journals.sagepub.com/home/ijq>.
- Little Bear, L. (2009). *Naturalizing Indigenous knowledge, synthesis paper*. Saskatoon, SK: University of Saskatchewan, Aboriginal Education Research Centre, and Calgary, AB: First Nations and Adult Higher Education Consortium. Retrieved March 1, 2016 from www.ccl-cca.ca.
- Macdonald, N. & Campbell, M. (2017, September 13). Lost and broken. *Macleans*. Retrieved on June 3, 2018 from <https://www.macleans.ca/lost-and-broken/>
- Manitoba Métis Federation (n.d.). *Louis Riel Quotes*. Retrieved March 1, 2017 from http://www.mmf.mb.ca/louis_riel_quotes.php.

- McMahon, M. (1995). From the ground up: ecofeminism and ecological economics. *Ecological Economics*, 20(2), 163-173. Retrieved April 1, 2013 from <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/ecological-economics/>.
- Mendelson, M. (2006). *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education in Canada*. Ontario, Canada: The Caledonian Institute of Social Policy.
- Métis Nation. (n.d.). *The Métis Nation*. Retrieved August 22, 2018 from <http://www.metisnation.ca/index.php/who-are-the-metis>
- Michell, H. (2012). The canoe trip: A Northern Cree metaphor for conducting research. in *education*, 18(1). Retrieved July 10, 2017 from <https://ineducation.ca/ineducation/article/view/4>.
- Moosa-Mitha, M. (2015). Situating anti-oppressive theories within critical and difference-centred perspectives. In Strega, S. & Brown, L., (Eds.). (2015). *Research as resistance: Revisiting critical, Indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches*, (2nd ed.), (65-95). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2000). *Talkin' up to the white woman: Aboriginal women and feminism*. Australia: University of Queensland Press.
- Mosby, I. 2013. Administering colonial science: nutrition research and human biomedical experimentation in Aboriginal communities and residential schools, 1942-1952. *Social History* 46(91): 145-172. Retrieved November 2, 2016 from <https://hssh.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/hssh/index>.
- National Association of Friendship Centres [NAFC]. (2017). *About the NAFC*. Retrieved May 15, 2018 from <http://nafc.ca/en/who-we-are/about-nafc/>.
- Nicolai, S., & Saus, M. (2013). Acknowledging the past while looking to the future: Conceptualizing Indigenous child trauma. *Child Welfare*, 92(4), 55-74. Retrieved October 1, 2018 from <https://www.cwla.org/child-welfare-journal/journal-archives/>.
- Ondaatje, M. (1987). *In the skin of a lion*. Canada: McClelland & Stewart Inc.
- Peterson, S., Horton, L., & Restoule, J.P. (2016). Towards a shift in expectations and values: What we've learned from collaborative action research in Northern Indigenous communities. *Canadian Journal of Action Research*, 17(2), 19-32. Retrieved July 10, 2018 from <http://journals.nipissingu.ca/index.php/cjar/article/view/260>
- Pidgeon, M. (2008). Pushing against the margins: Indigenous theorization of "success" and retention in higher education. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 10(3), 339-360. Retrieved January 1, 2016 from <http://journals.sagepub.com/home/csr>.
- Pidgeon, M., Archibald, J., & Hawkey, C. (2014). Relationships matter: supporting Aboriginal graduate students in British Columbia, Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 44(1), 1-21. Retrieved March 15, 2016 from <http://journals.sfu.ca/cjhe/index.php/cjhe>.

- Plockey, F. (2015). Indigenous knowledge production, digital media and academic libraries in Ghana. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 8(4), 32-44. Retrieved June 2, 2018 from <http://www.jpanafrican.org/>.
- Potts, K., & Brown, L. (2015). Becoming an anti-oppressive researcher. In Strega, S. & Brown, L., (Eds.). (2015). *Research as resistance: Revisiting critical, Indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches*, (2nd ed.), (17-41). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.
- Preston, J. (2008). The urgency of postsecondary education for Aboriginal peoples. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 86, 1-22. Retrieved February 5, 2018 from <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjeap/>.
- Quan, D. (2015, May 15). 'This is somebody's young kid': The unmarked graves of Brandon's residential school. *The National Post*. Retrieved April 20, 2018 from <http://nationalpost.com/news/canada/the-secret-graves-of-brandon-residential-school-773123>
- R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd [RAMA]. (2004). *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education: What Educators have Learned*. Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation.
- Reading, C. & Wiens, F. (2013). *Health inequalities and social determinants of Aboriginal people's health*. Prince George, BC: National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. Retrieved February 12, 2016 from <https://www.ccnsa-nccah.ca/en/>.
- Restoule, J.P. (2011). Looking for a way in: Aboriginal youth talk about access to university in Ontario. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 31(2), 47-62. Retrieved June 10, 2018 from <http://www3.brandonu.ca/cjns/>.
- Restoule, J.P., Gruner, S., Metatawabin, E. (2013). Learning from place: A return to Mushkegowuk ways of knowing. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 36(2), 68-86. Retrieved June 10, 2018 from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/canajeducrevucan.36.2.68>
- Restoule, J.P., Mashford-Pringle, A., & Chacaby, M., Smillie, C. & Brunette, C. (2013). Supporting successful transitions to post-secondary education for Indigenous students: Lessons from an institutional ethnography in Ontario, Canada. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 4(4). Retrieved June 10, 2018 from <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/iipj/vol4/iss4/4>.
- Ritchie, J., & Lewis, J. (Eds.). (2013). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Sachs, Harris, Morris, Cajete, & Gagnier. (2011). Rebuilding the circle: re-establishing appropriate means for overcoming the economic, educational, psychological, and social problems of physical and cultural genocide. In Harris, Sachs, & Morris., (Eds.). (2011). *Recreating the circle*. USA: University of New Mexico Press.
- Schnarch, B. (2004). Ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) or self-determination applied to research: a critical analysis of contemporary First Nations research and some options for First Nations communities. *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, 1(1), 80-95.

- Retrieved February 1, 2016 from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1131158811?accountid=14846>.
- Smith, L. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: research and Indigenous peoples*, (2nd ed.). London, UK & New York, NY: Zed Books Ltd.
- Stanton, K. 2013. Intransigent injustice: truth, reconciliation and the Missing Women Inquiry in Canada. *Transitional Justice Review* 1(2): 59-96. Retrieved June 1, 2018 from <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/tjreview/>
- Statistics Canada (2017). *Grande Prairie [Census agglomeration], Alberta and Alberta [Province] (table)*. (Census Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001). Ottawa, Canada. Retrieved August 14, 2018 from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>
- Statistics Canada. (2011). *The educational attainment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada*. (2011 Census of Canada. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 99-012-XWE2011003). Ottawa, Canada. Retrieved November 5, 2016 from http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-012-x/99-012-x2011003_3-eng.cfm
- Stonechild, B. (2006). *The new buffalo: The struggle for Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.
- Strega, S. & Brown, L., (Eds.). (2015). *Research as resistance: Revisiting critical, Indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches*, (2nd ed.). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.
- The Canadian Encyclopedia [TCE]. 2017. *Grande Prairie*. Retrieved August 14, 2018 from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/grande-prairie/>
- The Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund. (2018). *Chanie Wenjack*. Retrieved October 20, 2018 from <https://www.downiewenjack.ca/our-story/chanie-s-path>.
- Thomas, R., & Green, J. (2007). A way of life: Indigenous perspectives on anti-oppressive living. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 3(1), 91-104. Retrieved March 1, 2016 from <http://journals.sfu.ca/fpcfr/index.php/FPCFR/index>.
- Timmons, V., & Stoicheff, P. (2016, Dec 12). *Post-secondary education in Canada: A response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Retrieved from <https://www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca/>.
- Toogood, K. (2018, February 22). GPRC takes first steps to university status. *Government of Alberta*. Retrieved March 10, 2018 from <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=5244974FB9693-0818-B327-79E94832267B3358>.
- Truth and Reconciliation Canada [TRC]. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
- Universities Canada. (2016, June 15). *Enhancing Indigenous student success at Canada's universities*. Retrieved April 10, 2018 from <https://www.univcan.ca/media-room/publications>.

- University of Regina. (2018). *Indigenization*. Retrieved June 4, 2018 from <https://www.uregina.ca/president/indigenization/index.html>.
- Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network. (2014). *About us*. Retrieved June 2, 2018 from <http://uakn.org/about-us/>.
- Vahabzadeh, P. (2009). Ultimate referentiality: radical phenomenology and the new interpretative sociology. *Philosophy and Social Criticisms*, 35(4), 447-465. doi: 10.1177/0191453708102095
- Voyageur, C., Brearley, L., & Cailliou, B., (Eds.). (2015). *Restorying Indigenous leadership, wise practices in community development*. Banff, AB: Banff Centre Press.
- Waterman, S., & Lindley, L. (2013). Cultural strengths to persevere: Native American women in higher education. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education*, 6(2), 139-165. doi: 10.1515/njawhe-2013-0011
- Waters, H. (2015). Truth and Reconciliation chair urges Canada to adopt UN declaration on Indigenous peoples. *CBC News*. Retrieved September 1, 2018 from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/truth-and-reconciliation-chair-urges-canada-to-adopt-un-declaration-on-indigenous-peoples-1.3096225>
- Wesley-Esquimaux, C., & Bolduc, V. (2015). *Aboriginal transition programs – literature review*. doi. 10.13140/RG.2.1.4203.5922
- Wesley-Esquimaux, C., & Smolewski, M. (2004). *Historic trauma and aboriginal healing*. Ottawa, ON: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.
- Wild Sweet Orange (2008). *Ten dead dogs*. On *We have cause to be uneasy* [CD]. Location: Red Ink Records.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is Ceremony*. Canada: Fernwood Publishing.
- Yellow Horse Brave Heart, M. (2003). The historical trauma response among Natives and its relationship with substance abuse: A Lakota illustration. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 35(1), 7-13. doi: 1080/02791072.2003.10399988

Pictures

- Picture 1: The Forks, Winnipeg, Manitoba [Photo]. Benning, B. (Photographer). (2018).
- Picture 2: Onion Painting by Katrina Shirley [Photo]. Benning, B. (Photographer). (2017).
- Picture 3: Grande Prairie Regional College [Photo]. (2018). Retrieved March 1, 2018 from <https://www.gprc.ab.ca/services/housing/offcampus/gpoffcampus.html>.
- Picture 4: On-Campus Friendship Centre Visiting Area [Photo]. (2018). Retrieved March 1, 2018 from <https://www.gprc.ab.ca/services/indigenous/friendshipcentre.html>.

Picture 5: The On-Campus Friendship Centre Teepee [Photo]. (2012). Retrieved March 1, 2018 from <http://www.dailyheraldtribune.com/2012/09/20/aboriginal-students-celebrate-new-teepee-on-campus>.

Picture 6: The Circle of Indigenous Students Logo [Picture]. (2018). Retrieved March 1, 2018 from <https://www.gprc.ab.ca/services/indigenous/cis.html>.

Figures

All figures created by Benning (2018) using www.canva.com .

Appendix A. Certificate of Ethical Approval



Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Administrative Services Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

Text42:

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Brigitte Benning	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER 16-447
UVic STATUS: Master's Student	Minimal Risk Review - Delegated
UVic DEPARTMENT: SOCI	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: 19-Jan-17
SUPERVISOR: Dr. Gary Gray	APPROVED ON: 19-Jan-17
	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: 18-Jan-18
PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the Role of Indigenous-Based Support in Post-Secondary Education	
RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER Brigitte Benning (PI, UVic), Dr. Garry Gray (Supervisor, UVic), Dr. Cecilia Benoit (Committee Member, UVic), Loretta Parenteau-English (Mentor/ Elder in Residence, On-Campus Friendship Centre), Kirsten Mikkelsen (Faculty Support, Grande Prairie Regional College)	
DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: SSHRC (Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship); UVIC (President's Research Scholarship), UVIC Graduate Award, UVic martlet Scholarship, UVic Hward E. Petch & David F. ong Scholarship, Indspire Post-Secondary Education Bursary)	
CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL	
This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol. Modifications To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol. Renewals Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date. Project Closures When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.	
Certification	
This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants. SIGNATURE REMOVED _____ Dr. Rachael Scarth Associate Vice-President Research Operations	

Certificate Issued On: 19-Jan-17

16-447 Benning, Brigitte

Appendix B. Certificate of Ethical Approval - Renewal



Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Administrative Services Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

Certificate of Renewed Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Brigitte Benning	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER: 16-447 Minimal Risk Review - Delegated
UVic STATUS: Master's Student	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: 19-Jan-17
UVic DEPARTMENT: SOCI	RENEWED ON: 09-Jan-18
SUPERVISOR: Dr. Garry Gray	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: 18-Jan-19

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the Role of Indigenous-Based Support in Post-Secondary Education

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER Brigitte Benning (PI, UVic), Dr. Garry Gray (Supervisor, UVic), Dr. Cecilia Benoit (Committee Member, UVic), Loretta Parenteau-English (Mentor/ Elder in Residence, Grande Prairie Regional College)

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: SSHRC (Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship); UVIC (President's Research Scholarship); UVIC Graduate Award; UVic Martlet Scholarship; UVic Howard E. Petch & David F. Strong Scholarship; Indspire Post-Secondary Education Bursary)

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Modifications
To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.

SIGNATURE REMOVED

Dr. Rachael Scarth
Associate Vice-President Research Operations

Certificate Issued On: 09-Jan-18

16-447 Benning, Brigitte

Appendix C. Script for Inviting Participation

Script for Inviting Participation – GROUP 1 AND 2

For my thesis I am doing a sociological research project. I am looking to discuss the role that cultural support on-campus plays in the experience of Indigenous students. In order to do this, I am interviewing current and past Indigenous students, that are involved with the On-Campus Friendship Centre at Grande Prairie Regional College. In addition, I am interviewing people in administrative positions that are related to the On-Campus Friendship Centre at Grande Prairie Regional College.

If you choose to participate, we would set up an interview where you would fill out a short questionnaire and I would ask you some questions about your experiences at/with the Grande Prairie Regional College and the On-Campus Friendship Centre.

Your involvement is voluntary and you would be able to withdraw at any time. Your privacy will be respected. In order to ensure this, your answers and information would be kept confidential and anonymous, and I am the only person who can access information shared. In addition, your names will not be used throughout the process; instead I will use pseudonyms [fake names]. This ensures that anything you share cannot be connected to you.

If you would like to participate, I have a sign up sheet and I can leave my contact info so that we can set up an interview. Do you have any questions?

Appendix D. Poster for Inviting Participation

Poster for Inviting Participation *GROUP 1 (NO POSTER FOR GROUP 2)*

Are/were you an
Indigenous student involved with
the On-Campus Friendship Centre?



If yes, then...

YOU'RE INVITED

- to participate in a research project -

to explore the role of Indigenous-based
support in post-secondary education

- if you would like to be interviewed -

please sign up below or contact Brigitte Benning

CONTACT INFO REMOVED

Appendix E. Email Script

Email Scripts to Recruit Group 1 (No Email Script for Group 2)

Dear _____,

You are being contacted to ask if you would be willing to be a part of a research project being conducted by Brigitte Benning. Brigitte is a graduate student at the University of Victoria, and a past student-member of the On-Campus Friendship Centre (FC) at the Grande Prairie Regional College (GPRC).

She is doing her Master's thesis on the role that cultural support on-campus plays in the experiences of Indigenous students in post-secondary, and is working with the On-Campus FC at GPRC. For her research, she will be interviewing current and past Indigenous students involved with the On-Campus FC, as well as people in related administrative roles.

If you choose to participate, she would contact you to set up an interview at a time convenient for you, where you will be asked to fill out a short questionnaire and answer some questions about your experiences at the On-Campus FC and GPRC.

Your involvement is voluntary and you would be able to withdraw at any time. Your privacy will be respected. In order to ensure this your answers and information would be kept confidential and anonymous, with the use of fake names throughout the process. This ensures that anything you share cannot be connected back to you.

I am forwarding this message for Brigitte as an uninvolved third party, and would like to make it clear that your choice whether or not to participate in this research project has no effect on your relationship with me, or your relationship/access to the On-Campus Friendship Centre.

If you would like to be involved, or have further questions, please let me know and I can forward them to Brigitte.

Thank you for your time,

Appendix F. Email Response to Sign-up Sheet***Email Response to Sign-up Sheet***

Hello NAME,

Thank you for your interest in an interview!

This interview is for my thesis research project which is exploring the role of on-campus support for Indigenous students in college. I have attached a form that introduces myself, explains my project a bit more, and informs you of what your participation would involve. I will bring a hard copy for you to sign when we meet.

My schedule is very flexible, so it might be easiest if you let me a time/place that works best for you. We can meet at the college, the on-campus during their hours, a coffee shop, or wherever is easiest for you.

Let me know what is best for you, or if you would rather I suggest a time/place I can do that as well.

Thank you again!
Brigitte Benning

Appendix G. Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

You are Invited to Participate in the Following Research Project:

Exploring the Role of Indigenous-based Support in Post-Secondary Education: The On-Campus Friendship Centre at Grande Prairie Regional College

About the Researcher

Brigitte Benning

I am a Métis woman, a graduate student at the University of Victoria, a Visiting Scholar at Grande Prairie Regional College (GPRC), and a past member of the On-Campus Friendship Centre (FC). I am passionate about the rights of Indigenous people and education. As a graduate student, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a M.A. in Sociology.

About the Research

Purpose and Objectives

Focusing on the On-Campus FC at GPRC, I aim to research the ways in which Indigenous-based programming in the college setting can affect the experiences of Indigenous students. For instance; what strengths might Indigenous students bring to post-secondary, what challenges might they face, and how might these strengths and challenges be addressed by a cultural program that is directly on-campus?

Importance of this Research

If 'reconciliation' is to occur within Canada, the voices, knowledge, and experiences of Indigenous people must be shared in every aspect of Canadian life. This is especially true when it comes to research that involves Indigenous people and education. While Indigenous people continue to face the barriers within the education system, they also continue to find ways to overcome these challenges. In order to respectfully support Indigenous students, these barriers and the wise-practices must be addressed and shared with the rest of Canada.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you hold one of the following positions which can offer insight into the program and the experiences of Indigenous students;

- 1) *You are/were a student at Grande Prairie Regional College that is/was involved with the On-Campus Friendship Centre.*
- 2) *You are in an administrative or alternative position in which you engage with the On-Campus Friendship Centre/Grande Prairie Regional College.*

What is involved

With your consent, your participation will include **one interview** with Brigitte Benning at a location of your choice. During this interview, you will be asked to sign a **consent form**, fill out a **short questionnaire**, and verbally answer some questions about your experiences at GPRC and the On-Campus FC. You will also be asked if I can take an **audio-recording** of our interview, so that I can accurately record and reflect upon your words. This recording will be deleted once I have transcribed your interview.

Please initial one of the following choices in regards to audio-recording:

I **consent** to this interview being audio-recorded: _____ (Initials)

I **do not** consent to this interview being audio-recorded: _____ (Initials)

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, for instance the time needed for the interview. However, we will make this as convenient as possible choosing a time and place that works for you.

Risks

A potential risk of your participation may be feeling emotional during an interview while discussing your personal experiences. If you do feel emotional, your comfort comes first and we can cease the interview. I can also direct you to the Elder-in-Residence, the Outreach Worker, or the Aboriginal Liaison Coordinator for support.

Benefits

With your participation in this research, there are potential benefits for yourself, society, and the state of knowledge. **For yourself**, there is the opportunity to share your voice regarding your experiences. **For society**, there is the chance for a better understanding of how to foster support for Indigenous students in post-secondary. **For the state of knowledge**, academic structures could be further indigenized through the presence of research that is informed by an Indigenous methodology, is Indigenous-led, and centers the voices of Indigenous people and programs.

Voluntary Participation & Ongoing Consent

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation.

If you do withdraw from the study your information will only be used with your permission, otherwise it will be destroyed. If you change your mind at any point you can contact myself or a third party and we will make the appropriate changes:

- **Lead Researcher** – Brigitte Benning – CONTACT INFO REMOVED
- **The Outreach Worker** – CONTACT INFO REMOVED
- **Executive Director at the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre** – CONTACT INFO REMOVED

Future Use of Data

It is possible that the information gathered in this project could be useful in future projects led by Brigitte Benning, such as a PhD thesis or paper on a similar topic. *For example, I may write another paper on the role of an Elder on-campus. If you addressed this in your interview, I could draw from that in this future paper.* However, this information would only be used with your permission:

Please initial *one* of the following choices in regards to future use of data:

I **consent** to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Initials)

I **do not** consent to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Initials)

Anonymity

All steps will be taken to decrease any risk to your personal anonymity, including the use of pseudonyms rather than your real name. This ensures your privacy while participating in this project.

Confidentiality

Any information that you share will be kept confidential, and stored securely with only access allowed to the lead researcher; Brigitte Benning.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways:

- Thesis
- Published Article
- Presentation at scholarly meetings/conferences
- Presentation with faculty at Grande Prairie Regional College and the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre
- Presentation with members of the National Association of Friendship Centers

Disposal of Data

If the participant has not consented to future use of data, information from this study will be disposed of after the research project. If destroyed, electronic information will be erased and paper copies will be shredded. If information is to be preserved for future use, then it will be stored securely in a space only accessible by the lead researcher (Brigitte Benning).

Contacts

Lead Researcher: Brigitte Benning - CONTACT INFO REMOVED

This research is being conducted under the supervision of **Dr. Garry Gray**. You may contact him at CONTACT INFO REMOVED In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the **Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria** (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Acknowledgements

This research is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

This research takes place on the traditional lands of the Beaver peoples in Cree Territory, and the Métis homeland on which Grande Prairie Regional College is situated. It also takes place on the traditional territory of the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ on which the University of Victoria is situated. I am grateful to the peoples whose land I live and work on.

This research has received approval from the Research Ethics Board of both the University of Victoria as well as the Grande Prairie Regional College. It has also been approved by the board at the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre, and by the late President of the National Association of Friendship Centers; Nelson Mayer.

Signature

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please provide your email so the researcher can send you a copy of this consent form:

Email Address of Participant

Appendix H. Interview Question Ideas (Group 1 A – Current Students)

Interview Questions – Group 1 (A)

[Group 1 (A) Current students of GPRC/On-Campus FC]

Intro:

1. How long have you attended GPRC?
2. How involved are you with the On-Campus FC?
3. What do you feel is the purpose of the On-Campus FC?

Strengths:

4. Do you feel that you bring certain strengths to the college as an Indigenous person?
If yes, what are they? If no, why not?
5. Do you feel that GPRC acknowledges and supports these strengths?
If yes, in what ways? If no, how could this be improved?
6. Do you feel the On-Campus FC acknowledges and supports these strengths?
If yes, in what ways? If no, how could this be improved?

Challenges:

7. Do you feel you face certain challenges in college as an Indigenous person?
If yes, what are they? If no, why not?
8. Do you feel that GPRC recognizes and supports you with these challenges?
If yes, in what ways? If no, how could this be improved?
9. Do you feel that the On-Campus FC recognizes and supports you with these challenges?
If yes, in what ways? If no, how could this be improved?

Conclusion:

10. What do you feel Indigenous students need the most when attending college?
11. Is there anything that I didn't ask or that we didn't talk about that you feel is important when discussing;
 - a. the success/experiences of Indigenous students?
 - b. the role of an-Indigenous based program in post-secondary?
12. Did you have any final comments?

Appendix I. Interview Question Ideas (Group 1 B – Past Students)

Interview Questions – Group 1 (B)

[Group 1 (B): Past students of GPRC/On-Campus FC]

Intro:

1. For how long did you attend GPRC?
2. Are you still involved with the On-Campus FC? If yes, in what ways?
3. What do you feel is the purpose of the On-Campus FC?

Strengths:

4. Do you feel that you brought certain strengths to college as an Indigenous person?
If yes, what were they? If no, why not?
5. Do you feel that GPRC acknowledged and supported these strengths?
If yes, in what ways? If no, how could have been improved?
6. Do you feel the On-Campus FC acknowledged and supported these strengths?
If yes, in what ways? If no, how could have been improved?

Challenges:

7. Do you feel you faced certain challenges going to college as an Indigenous person?
If yes, what were they? If no, why not?
8. Do you feel that GPRC recognized and supported you with these challenges?
If yes, in what ways? If no, how could have been improved?
9. Do you feel that the On-Campus FC recognizes and supports you with these challenges?
If yes, in what ways? If no, how could have been improved?

Conclusion:

10. What do you feel Indigenous students need the most when attending college?
11. Is there anything that I didn't ask or that we didn't talk about that you feel is important when discussing;
 - a. the success/experiences of Indigenous students?
 - b. the role of an-Indigenous based program in post-secondary?
12. Did you have any final comments?

Appendix J. Interview Question Ideas (Group B – Admin/Other)

Interview Questions – Group 2

[Group 2 Administration involved with the On-Campus FC]

Intro:

1. What is your role in connection to the On-Campus FC?
2. If you've been in this role for over a year, have you seen any changes over time in the program?
3. What do you feel is the purpose of the On-Campus FC?

Strengths:

4. Do you feel that Indigenous students bring certain strengths to the college?
If yes, what are they? If no, why not?
5. Do you feel that GPRC acknowledges and supports these strengths?
If yes, in what ways? If no, how could it be improved?
6. Do you feel the On-Campus FC acknowledges and supports these strengths?
If yes, in what ways? If no, how could it be improved?

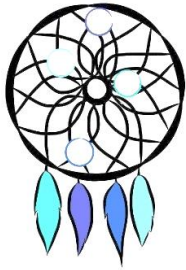
Challenges:

7. Do you feel Indigenous students face certain challenges in college?
If yes, what are they? If no, why not?
8. Do you feel that GPRC recognizes and supports students with these challenges?
If yes, in what ways? If no, how could it be improved?
9. Do you feel that the on-campus FC recognizes and supports students with these challenges?
If yes, in what ways? If no, how could it be improved?

Conclusion

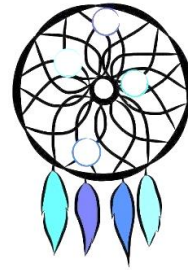
10. What do you feel Indigenous students need the most when attending college?
11. Is there anything that I didn't ask or that we didn't talk about that you feel is important when discussing;
 - a. the success/experiences of Indigenous students?
 - b. the role of an-Indigenous based program in post-secondary?
12. Did you have any final comments?

Appendix K. ‘My Experience with Talking Circles’ Information Sheet



My Experiences with Talking Circles

Created by Brigitte Benning



I always like to acknowledge that being in circle is **Ceremony**. This means different things to each person, but for me it is a reminder that we are all here together and that we should respect each other through our body language, word choice, and energy.

I have found that **sitting in a circle** is not only appropriate, but it helps the flow of conversation.

I try to take **one breath** after someone speaks before I respond. This allows their words to sink in, and ensures we aren't interrupting anyone.

In this circle, we are expressing our own experiences and thoughts. Naturally, we will respond to others. When doing so, I find that it is helpful to use phrases such as **“I feel...”/“For myself...”**, rather than “You” phrases.

Sometimes, conversations about our experiences can trigger unexpected emotions. For this reason, only share what you are **comfortable** with, and keep in mind the emotions of those around you.

If you need to leave - please give a thumbs up, head nod or some form of ‘ok sign’ to show you are alright. If you do not give an **ok sign**, I will send someone to check on you. If you would like to discuss or debrief after the circle, please feel free to talk to me. I can also recommend resources.

If participants would like, we can use a **Talking Stick** or similar object to hold during the circle. (*Whoever is holding the object is the one who speaks, and they pass it to the next person who would like to speak*). Sometimes, this gives people comfort, and helps the flow of conversation. For others, it might be a hindrance and interrupt the conversation. For this reason, I leave it up to the circle to decide if they would like to use one or not.

Most of all, I love to **thank everyone** for being a part of a beautiful and unique circle!

Appendix L. Talking Circle Question Ideas

Talking Circle Prompts

As students, what do you feel you need from the college? *Challenges, Support, On-Campus FC.*

What do you feel you bring to the college? *Strengths, Support, On-Campus FC.*

What does Indigenous-Based support look like to you? *Who, what, when, where, why.*

Appendix M. Questionnaire for Participants

Questionnaire

Please remember to only answer questions you are comfortable with, and feel free to ask me any questions throughout.

1) What is your age? _____

2) Where is your home community? _____

3) Do you identify as (please select): ☐ Indigenous ☐ Non-Indigenous

a) If you selected Indigenous, please provide further detail (select all that apply):

☐ First Nations

☐ Métis

☐ Inuit

☐ Cree

☐ Blackfoot

☐ Dene

☐ Anishnabe

☐ Beaver

☐ Sauteaux

☐ Mohawk

☐ Carrier

☐ Gwiichin

☐ Not Listed (please write): _____

4) How often do you visit the On-Campus Friendship Centre in a semester? (Please select one)

☐ Daily

☐ A few times a week

☐ A few times a month

☐ A few times a semester

☐ Never

☐ Other: _____

Comments: _____

Thank you for taking the time to be a part of this project! This interview is now complete.

Appendix N. Visiting Scholar Agreement



VISITING SCHOLAR AGREEMENT

Between

Grande Prairie Regional College (Research & Innovation)

and

Brigitte Benning (MA Student)

University of Victoria (Department of Sociology)

A feature of post-secondary life is collegiality and institutional collaboration. This collegiality also includes hosting scholars and graduate students from other institutions. Consistent with the Visiting Scholar academic policy we at GPRC provide visiting scholars like Brigitte Benning with the opportunity to work in collaboration with GPRC's faculty and/or staff members while conducting her postgraduate work in the region.

Having met the following policy criteria, Brigitte Benning has hereby qualified for Visiting Scholar status:

- 1) Registered at a recognized university (University of Victoria);
- 2) Is self-funded;
- 3) Has an approved course of study (Master of Arts) and research associated with the region focused with the GPRC On-Campus Friendship Centre;
- 4) Sending institution (University of Victoria) is willing to formally acknowledge the 'visiting scholar agreement' recognizing a semi-formal ad hoc (non-binding) relationship exists; and
- 5) Has secured GPRC sponsors (Dr. Kirsten Mikkelsen, Indigenous Studies Instructor and Lorretta Parenteau-English, Elder-in-Residence).

GPRC believes that collaboration in learning and research with faculty and students is integral to robust scholarship. An opportunity to study and participate in the GPRC college community requires the creation of an in-kind support based Visiting Scholar Program.

Grande Prairie Regional College will support the visiting scholar by providing support in the way of:

- 1) Office space (E401);
- 2) Access to college facilities including: library access and services, telephone and voicemail access, email address, bookstore access and services; and
- 3) Permission (on a case-by case basis) to use GPRC as a host institution when applying for research grants.



Now therefore, the University of Victoria hereby agrees to acknowledge and support Brigitte Benning's participation as a GPRC Visiting Scholar in support of her studies at the University of Victoria.

The Visiting Scholar will be hosted within the Department of Research & Innovation from the period commencing the 15th of August, 2016 and concluding on the 30 day of June 2017 inclusive.

The Visiting Scholar will only use such facilities as authorized by the Director of Research & Innovation, and will abide by the core values of GPRC and its policies while a Visiting Scholar.

In addition, the Visiting Scholar will ensure that any and all research is conducted consistent with the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 with a current approved Research Ethics Board research protocol and work plan.

Dated 7th day of August 2016

SIGNATURE REMOVED

Brigitte Benning, Visiting Scholar
University of Victoria
CONTACT INFO REMOVED

SIGNATURE REMOVED

Bruce Rutley PhD PAg
Director Research & Innovation Grande
Prairie Regional College
CONTACT INFO REMOVED

SIGNATURE REMOVED

Dr. Garry Gray
Thesis Advisor Department of Sociology
University of Victoria
CONTACT INFO REMOVED

APPENDIX O. Letter of Support – Nelson Mayer (Executive Director of ANFCA)



July 20/16

ALBERTA NATIVE FRIENDSHIP CENTRES ASSOCIATION

10336-121 Street
Edmonton, AB T5N1K8
Telephone: (780) 423-3138
Fax: (780) 425-6277
director@anfca.com

Aboriginal Friendship
Centre of Calgary

Athabasca Native
Friendship Centre Society

Bonnyville Canadian
Native Friendship Centre

Canadian Native
Friendship Centre

Cold Lake Native
Friendship Centre

Edson Friendship Centre

Grande Prairie
Friendship Centre

High Level Native
Friendship Centre

High Prairie Native
Friendship Centre

Hinton Friendship Centre

Lac La Biche Canadian
Native Friendship Centre

Lloydminster Native
Friendship Centre

Mannawanis Native
Friendship Centre

Napi Friendship
Association

Nistawoyou Association
Friendship Centre

Red Deer Native
Friendship Society

Rocky Native
Friendship Centre Society

Sagittawa
Friendship Centre Society

Sik-oooh-kotoki
Friendship Society

Slave Lake Native
Friendship Centre Society

Dear Brigitte,

I am writing to you to indicate the full support of your research project focusing on the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre's "On Campus Friendship Centre" in partnership with the Grande Prairie Regional College.

Due to the location of GPRC, and it being the first post-secondary institution with a Friendship Centre in Canada, it is an important place that holds experience, knowledge and insight into programming that works to close the education gap through supporting Indigenous peoples culturally. It also sets an example for programming that fosters reconciliation by welcoming non-Indigenous peoples.

If there were to be potential interest in expanding on-campus FC's to other institutions within Canada, this research with the on-campus FC at GPRC could work as a foundation for best-practices in moving forward. Hearing from those who experience the on-campus FC can aid in learning more about the program so that it may be further supported and adapted to reach its highest potential.

It could also be an opportunity to exemplify programming and policy to all areas of reconciliation within Canada. Programs such as this deserve recognition, and as many Indigenous scholars have noted, there is a need for strength-based paradigms within academics involving Indigenous peoples. Examples of programs that are working towards a better future are important in fostering a hopeful spirit of resilience and growth.

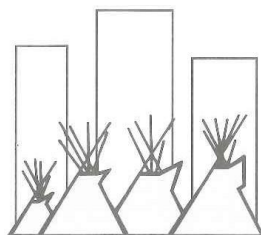
It is for these reasons that the ANFCA is in full support of your project, good luck Brigitte and please keep us aware of your progress.

In Friendship

SIGNATURE REMOVED

Nelson Mayer
ANFCA Executive Director

Appendix P. Letter of Support - Joseph Redhead (GPFC President)



Grande Prairie Friendship Centre

**10507 - 98 Avenue
Grande Prairie, Alberta
T8V 4L1**

**Telephone (780) 532-5722
Fax (780) 539-5121**

August 5, 2016

To whom it may concern :

RE: Support letter for Brigitte Benning's thesis on Northern students and post-secondary supports.

The Grande Prairie Friendship Centre is honoured to have this opportunity to support Brigitte Benning in her studies for her thesis on 'Northern students and post-secondary supports'.

The Grande Prairie Friendship Centre has an On-Campus Friendship Centre in partnership with the Grande Prairie Regional College, it is the only On-Campus Friendship Centre in Canada and has been a part of the College since 2000. Brigitte was a student here in Grande Prairie and has always been a big supporter of the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre and the programs that are offered by participating, attending and volunteering her time. The Board of Directors passed a motion in February 2016 in support of Brigitte's endeavors.

Motion 02-06: Moved by Debra Jones

Seconded by: Len Morissette

"For Brigitte Benning, to research and compile data from the On-Campus Friendship Centre at Grande Prairie Regional College."

All in favour

Carried

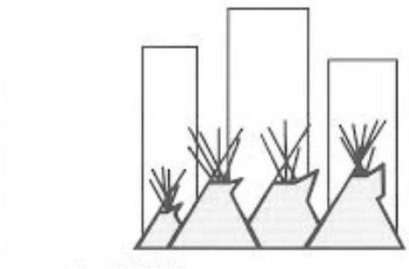
We look forward in working with Brigitte and are very excited to have her begin her work at the college. We fully support her endeavours and will offer her any supports she needs to complete her thesis.

In Friendship :

SIGNATURE REMOVED

Joseph Redhead
GPFC President

Appendix Q. Letter of Support - Loretta Parenteau-English (Elder-in-Residence)



Grande Prairie Friendship Centre

*10507 - 98 Avenue
Grande Prairie, Alberta
T8V 4L1*

*Telephone (780) 532-5722
Fax (780) 539-5121*

July 19, 2016

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter in respect of Brigitte Beginning who will be doing research at the Grande Prairie Regional College.

Through the years of knowing Brigitte she has displayed her abilities to bring change within herself and in the community. As the Elder in Residence, part of the knowledge I bring to her research is the support I provide to the Indigenous students at Grande Prairie Regional College.

I am also truly honoured to support Brigitte in her research with the guidance and Traditional knowledge of Indigenous World View.

With Respect.

Loretta Parenteau-English

Elder in Residence

Grande Prairie Regional College/Grande Prairie Friendship Centre