

Creating Trans-Systemic Spaces in Critical Literacies Education with Indigenous Adolescents

by

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## Abstract

The study of critical literacies education (CLE) (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2014) with Indigenous adolescents is significant to working towards a more culturally relevant curriculum (CRC) that supports Indigenous learners within a broader Western context. As well, a focus on creating CRC within culturally responsive education (CRE) for Indigenous adolescents should also foster culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy (CSRP) (McCarty & Lee, 2014) that works towards reconciliation (TRC, 2015). Significant to the development of authentic CRC for Indigenous learners is the need for an interchange of Western Knowledge (WK) and Indigenous Knowledges (IK) in order to find a new space – a trans-systemic space – that opens up a “dialogue of the assumptions, values and interests each holds” (Battiste, p. 105, 2013). Using the theoretical frameworks of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1986), Gee’s (2015) concepts of d/Discourse, and Indigenous ways of knowing and learning (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste, 2002), the purpose of this case study was to explore how a trans-systemic space in CLE can be created for Indigenous adolescents. The research took place in an Indigenous Cultural Program (ICP) located in an alternative high-school in the interior of British Columbia, Canada, with 16 Indigenous adolescents, two members of the school staff, an Indigenous artist-in-residence, and an Elder. Data were collected during a Critical Media Literacies (CML) course that ran from January to May 2017. The findings from this study highlight characteristics of CLE in a trans-systemic space (storytelling; family and community; and personal and cultural multimodal expression), along with the benefits (pride and acceptance in self, family and community; growth and development of cultural competencies; and self-growth and healing) and the challenges (emotional labour; navigation of cultural protocols; and re-traumatization) of engaging in CLE with Indigenous adolescents.

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## Dedications

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

This chapter is divided into seven sections. In the first section I describe the broad context of the research and in the second section I locate myself as a researcher and state my intent for this research. In the following sections, I describe the research rationale, the research purpose, the research questions, and the significance of the research, and provide an overview of the content and organization of the chapters.

Canada's history with Indigenous peoples is marred by policies of colonialism, paternalism, and racism. Residential schools in particular were the implementation of one such policy, the Indian Act (Joseph, 2018). The overall intent of residential schools was to separate Indigenous children from their families and culture in an effort to assimilate Indigenous peoples into Canada's European society (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Kwakwaka'wakw author, Bob Joseph, stated that residential schools were "the most aggressive and destructive of all the Indian Act policies" (p. 52) and that

the legacy of the residential school system continues to impact Indigenous people, families, and communities. On its doorsteps we can lay the responsibility for high poverty rates, the large number of Indigenous children in foster care, the disproportionate number of incarcerated Indigenous people, and the hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women. (p. 63)

In 2008 the Government of Canada issued a formal apology to the Indigenous Peoples of Canada for its role in the administration of the residential schools. Along with the official apology came the development of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* ([TRC], 2015). Significant to the TRC (2015) was the collection of thousands of testimonials from

residential school survivors, and concluded with a set of 94 *Calls to Action* (TRC, 2015). The *Calls to Action* advocate for all Canadians to learn and acknowledge the truth of the past historical injustices caused by the residential school system, and to work towards reconciliation – the action that can shift our system to one where mutual respect can be developed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and where all people can thrive (TRC, 2015). Within education, truth also means recognition that such institutionalized structures still continue to maintain the status-quo, and that reforming the education system is one way to engage in reconciliation.

As such, the TRC (2015) identified that educational reform “must recognize the importance of education in strengthening the cultural identity of Aboriginal people and providing a better basis for success” (p. 149). The TRC (2015) called to action a commitment to “improving education attainment levels and success rates” (section 10. ii, p. 149) and “developing culturally appropriate curricula” (section 10. iii, p. 149). Furthermore, the TRC (2015) has established that educational reform for reconciliation must involve not only the voices of residential school survivors, Elders, and Indigenous communities, but also Indigenous youth. The TRC (2015) recognizes that young people are the “lifeblood of reconciliation into the future” (p. 243) and that youth “must have strong voice in developing reconciliation policy, programs, and practices into the future” (p. 243). Although many institutions, scholars, and educators across the country are working towards addressing the TRC’s *Calls to Action*, much work remains to be done in education and working with Indigenous youth. For my dissertation research, I took up the TRC’s (2015) call to action to examine how culturally appropriate *critical literacies education* (CLE) can be designed and implemented with Indigenous youth.

## **Locating Myself as a Researcher**

Being able to locate self and purpose in research is significant to being accountable to oneself as a researcher, the research, and the community (Kovach, 2009). As such, I am a Canadian-born white female of settler and immigrant decent – my maternal lineage is Italian and my paternal lineage is English. I recognize the place of power and privilege in which I exist within the constructs of Western society and the education system. I also acknowledge the tensions that exist as being both colonizer and working towards decolonization education (Regan, 2010). I have come to this research as a learner, and as such acknowledge how my experiences, background, and histories, contribute to and shape my relationship with Indigenous peoples generally, and Indigenous youth specifically.

For 10 years I worked as an English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies (SS) teacher in eight different high-schools in a district in the interior of British Columbia (B.C.). Important to my teaching experience is the population diversity of the school district, which services communities up to 2.5 hours away from the city center. Indigenous students make up approximately 15-16% of the student population and include seven First Nations bands (School District #73, 2018). The positions I have held in the district often required me to engage in a mix of humanities courses, and resulted in me teaching every ELA course and most SS courses offered through the provincial curriculum. Included in the courses I taught were B.C. First Nations (BCFN) and English First Peoples (EFP).

As I navigated teaching so many different courses in my early professional career, I was also enrolled in a Master of Education program. As such, I began to experience a shift in my thinking and understanding about the role of curriculum and pedagogy. Although I taught about the historical policies and injustices placed upon Indigenous Peoples in Canada, as well as

understood the importance of committing to the First Peoples Principles of Learning<sup>1</sup> ([FPPL] <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/instructional-samples/first-peoples-principles-learning#>) within my pedagogical practice, I did not always see the contemporary implications of the Western-focused curriculum, or my own complicities as a non-Indigenous teacher.

When I taught BCFN for the first time, it was at an arts-based school of choice. The student population was composed of 20% students who self-identified as Indigenous (School District 73, 2019). The school is a K-12 school, with one full-time Aboriginal Education Worker (AEW). I was fortunate enough to work closely with the AEW at the school. She became both a mentor and friend, and she helped to guide my learnings as an educator. She possessed a wealth of knowledge as a member of the local community, and was passionate about her role in the district. On my first day teaching BCFN, she introduced herself to me and said she would be happy to help arrange any experiential learning opportunities, bring in guest speakers, and attend any class discussions (and indeed I invited her to all of them). Her presence, knowledge, and participation in the classroom helped to foster an environment in which all of us were co-learners. Our class went on multiple field trips and participated in off-site learning; we had seasonal feasts and celebrations; we fundraised for our feasts by baking and selling bannock to the school; we had members of the local community come in to share knowledge and stories; and we learned to share in talking circles the collective rage, hurt, hope and joy in our learning. The AEW showed me how to move beyond valuing the FPPL to actually doing and centering FPPL.

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<sup>1</sup> The FPPL was developed by the First Nations Education Steering Committee in British Columbia to guide educators pedagogical practices in supporting Indigenous learners. The principles include: learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community the land, the spirits, and the ancestors; learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational; learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions; learning involves generational roles and responsibilities; learning involves patience and time; learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge; learning is embedded in memory, history, and story; learning requires exploration of one's identity; and learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

The shifts in my pedagogical practices, which were significant, served as a catalyst to my thinking about teaching and the curriculum more broadly.

Shortly after my BCFN course contract ended, I started a permanent position within the alternative school. It was in this position that I was particularly confronted with the complexities of my role as a teacher within a larger social system. I was becoming acutely aware of how the privileges, experiences, and histories of my family, positioned and shaped my relationship to Indigenous students. At the alternative school, I was working as a teacher for a justice program – a program for youth who were in custody or pre-trial release – where the majority of students self-identified as Indigenous. While I was working for the alternative school, I was also responsible for helping my students transition back to their home schools at the end of the youth program. As such, I started to advocate for my Indigenous students, who expressed a need to be culturally grounded within the context of school, to enroll in the Indigenous Cultural Program (ICP) – also attached to the alternative school. Through my work at the alternative school, I realized I needed to understand how to better support and advocate for the Indigenous students as a non-Indigenous educator, and how to shift the always present Western-lens (i.e. in-class and decontextualized learning) of the curriculum and my practices. It was also during my time as a teacher in the alternative school that I came to know the staff and students in the ICP – where this study took place.

As such, my experiences as an educator working with and for Indigenous youth is how I came into this research, and these experiences fostered my intent in this study (Kovach, 2009). I further discuss the importance of situating myself as a non-Indigenous researcher within an Indigenous education context in Chapter 3 (Methodology), as I work towards allying myself with those engaged in decolonizing education (Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Regan, 2010).

## **Rationale and Research Problem**

The public-school systems across Canada are not meeting the needs of Indigenous learners at the same rate as their non-Indigenous peers (Battiste, 2002; 2013; Kelly-Scott & Smith, 2015; TRC, 2015). In B.C., the Ministry of Education has begun to take up the TRC's *Calls to Action* (2015), and has acknowledged the *United Nations Declaration of Rights for Indigenous Peoples* ([UNDRIP], 2007) through the creation of the *Equity in Action Project* (B.C. Ministry of Education, n.d.-a). One of the aims of the Equity in Action Project is to “address systemic barriers impacting Indigenous student achievement” (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2020, para 1). Although such programs are being developed, and success for Indigenous learners is increasing, a graduation gap exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (B.C. Ministry of Education, n.b.-c). For example, when this research began in 2017, the completion rate (graduating within a six-year time frame with either a Certificate of Graduation or Adult Graduation Diploma) was 87% for all B.C. residents generally, and 66% for Indigenous students specifically (B.C. Ministry of Education, n.b.-c). By 2020, the completion rate for all B.C. residents had increased to 90%, and for Indigenous students it had increased to 71% (B.C. Ministry of Education, n.b.-c).

Graduation requirements in B.C. include successful completion of two Literacy exams, administered in Grade 10 and Grade 12. The Literacy 12 exam is the only Grade 12 exam required for graduation. As such, there is a need to focus on literacy success for Indigenous adolescents, as the school system is still lacking in supports for Indigenous learners.

According to documents published by the B.C. Ministry of Education (n.d.-b), literacy is “the ability to understand, critically analyze, and create a variety of forms of communication, including oral, written, visual, digital, and multimedia, in order to accomplish one's goals”

(Literacy and numeracy foundations section, para 1). When individuals engage in multiple forms of communication, they are engaging in *literacies* (plural). Literacies are communicative tools that individuals use to interact with, and to participate in, public, community, and economic life (New London Group [NLG], 1996). Literacies learning and practices are fundamental in education to foster democratic citizenship and to remove barriers to access and participate in society in just and equitable ways (B.C. Ministry of Education, n.d.-b). In order to achieve literacies for equitable participation in a democratic society, CLE can support students in examining power, language, and discourse utilized in institutions and evident in many facets of their social lives (Alvermann, 2012; Janks, 2014). I define CLE as the ability to examine, recognize, challenge or critique social, political and historical power structures embedded in various communications; as well as to enact and engage in social change (Alvermann, 2009; Delpit, 2006; Freire, 1970; NLG, 1996; Shor, 1999; Street, 2003).

Furthermore, in order to better support Indigenous learners within the context of literacies education generally, and CLE specifically, a shift needs to occur in the approach to both curriculum and instruction (Battiste, 2013). *Culturally appropriate/relevant curricula* (CRC) have been called upon by the TRC (2015), and viewed as a promising framework for improving education for Indigenous learners (Battiste, 2013; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; TRC, 2015). More specifically, CRC for Indigenous learners must include Indigenous Knowledges (IK) and pedagogies (Battiste, 2002; 2013; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

Shared understandings of IK and ways of learning include observation, demonstration, experience, and thoughtful stories; all of which are embedded and learned on the land (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). IK is tied to land-based practices such as observing natural processes, obtaining sustenance, making tools, and adapting modes of survival; and oral pedagogies such as

talking or sharing circles, dialogues, participant observations, experiential learning, modelled learning, meditation, prayer, ceremonies, and storytelling (Archibald, 2008; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste, 2002; Davidson & Davidson, 2018).

In addition to the inclusion of IK and pedagogies as CRC for Indigenous learners, McCarty and Lee (2014) argue that CRC must also be *sustaining* and *revitalizing*. Within the broader Western education system, sustaining and revitalizing refers to learning and engaging in both Western knowledge (WK) and pedagogies and IK and pedagogies (Battiste, 2013; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Paris & Alim, 2014). Castagno and Brayboy (2008) argue that there is both “a need and desire for Indigenous youth to become bi/multicultural and [...] to graduate youth who are academically prepared, connected to and active members of their tribal communities, and knowledgeable about both the dominant and home cultures” (p. 961).

As such, Battiste (2013) argues that when educators authentically engage in CRC for Indigenous learners, one that is sustaining and revitalizing, IK and ways of learning are not an “add-on” to the current Western system that already exists, but instead a systemic shift that centers IK and pedagogies. When space is created for both WK and IK, a *trans-systemic space* (Battiste, 2013) may form; that is, a space that opens up new understandings and dialogues that challenge the assumptions and values of participants. However, in order for such a space to be created, new relationships among and between knowledge systems must be formed; and those working to form such relationships should be competent in both systems (Battiste, 2013).

Significantly, the development of a trans-systemic space, which Battiste (2013) defines as an ethical space that reaches “*beyond* the two distinct systems of knowledge to create fair and just educational systems and experiences so that all students can benefit from their education in multiple ways” (p. 103), can also aid in the development of critical literacies skills (Kee & Carr-

Chellman, 2019; Stanton et al., 2020; Stanton & Sutton, 2012). Therefore, a focus on creating CRC in CLE for Indigenous adolescents has the potential to foster culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogical practices that work towards reconciliation.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of the study of CLE with Indigenous adolescents is significant to working towards CRC that supports Indigenous learners. Within the field of literacy education, many educators and researchers continue to advocate for, and position CLE as a tool for fostering literacy development for adolescents (e.g., Alvermann, 2012; Janks, 2014; Vasquez et al., 2019). Importantly, adolescents, as a distinct group of learners, enact and engage in their own literacies practices (Alvermann, 2009, 2012). *Adolescent literacies*, which are the social practices and multiple modes of communication that young people engage in and with (Alvermann, 2009), inform how adolescents know and respond to their world.

For example, research findings on adolescents' online and digital practices have revealed that adolescents learn in collaboration with others (Smith, 2019), and thrive in spaces that feature a wider audience (Davis, 2012). Adolescent online and digital engagement also provides a space for individual experiences and expertise to be honoured, and one's identity and values to be expressed (Smetana, 2011; Yau & Reich, 2018). Indeed, how adolescents engage in their own literacies practices can help inform ways in which educators can empower their students while supporting CLE in the classroom (Rogers et al., 2015). However, as Rogers et al. (2015) observe "to date *adolescent critical literacy practices* [emphasis added], with their rich fusions of arts and new media in and out of schools, in all their power, complexity, and reach, remain under-theorized in relation to pedagogy" (p. 115).

Furthermore, previous research findings have highlighted how the use of Indigenous pedagogies with Indigenous learners act as a lens for understanding culturally responsive approaches to literacies learning more broadly (Kanu, 2011; Mills et al., 2016; Patrick et al., 2013; Stanton et al., 2020; Stanton & Sutton, 2012). Such research findings indicated that Indigenous youth were more engaged in school when Indigenous pedagogies were connected to and utilized in their learning (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Kanu, 2011). As well, findings from previous research involving Indigenous learners have revealed that students were more engaged when school projects were connected to their lived experiences through community and place-based pedagogies, and when they were positioned as knowledge-holders through storytelling and oral literacy practices (Patrick et al., 2013; Stanton & Sutton, 2012). Researchers have also documented other forms of literacies expression by Indigenous youth including interviews, digital and non-digital artwork, dance, music, and writing (Mills et al., 2016; Patrick et al., 2013; Stanton et al., 2020; Stanton & Sutton, 2012).

Nonetheless, limited research exists on Indigenous adolescents' literacies practices generally, particularly in a Canadian context, and even fewer researchers have explored the intersection of CLE and CRC for Indigenous adolescents in Indigenous education contexts specifically. Inclusion of Indigenous pedagogies is crucial to developing CRC for Indigenous learners (Battiste 2002; 2013; Kanu, 2011; Mills et al., 2016; Patrick et al., 2013; Stanton et al., 2020; Stanton & Sutton, 2012). But, in order to work towards CRC in CLE for Indigenous learners, culturally sustaining and revitalizing practices (McCarty & Lee, 2014) must be understood within trans-systemic spaces (Battiste, 2013) in order to prepare students to access and participate in society in just and equitable ways (B.C. Ministry of Education, n.d.-b).

## Research Questions

In order to understand ways in which CRC for CLE can be created for Indigenous adolescents, this case study was focused on the following questions:

1. How do Indigenous knowledges and Western knowledges intersect in a *Critical Media Literacies* course?
  - a. What are the influences of critical literacies instruction on this intersection?
2. What characterizes trans-systemic spaces for Indigenous adolescents in a high-school classroom?
  - a. How can Indigenous adolescents, Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and other community members create trans-systemic spaces?
  - b. What are the benefits and challenges of trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education for Indigenous adolescents?

These questions address the research gap in CLE with Indigenous adolescents generally, and with urban Indigenous youth in a Canadian context more specifically. The questions also address the limited literature and *Calls to Action* (TRC, 2015) on the design and implementation of CRC for CLE with Indigenous adolescents.

Several frameworks were selected to situate my exploration of how trans-systemic spaces are created with and for Indigenous adolescents. First, I drew on *sociocultural theory* as I subscribe to the notion that learning and language is social and embedded in cultural, political and historical contexts (Vygotsky, 1986). Second, I used Gee's (1992, 2015) *d/Discourse conceptual framework*. Gee (2015) argued that if literacy learning was embedded in social, cultural and political contexts, then literacy practices also include being members of various Discourses – which are particular ways of being, speaking, acting, valuing, thinking, reading and

writing. Third, I drew on *Indigenous ways of knowing and learning (IK)* as a particular Discourse in which learning is embedded in place, experience, stories and community (Archibald, 2008; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste, 2002; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). IK situates learning as holistic (mental, physical, emotional, spiritual), learning as a lifelong process, and learning as experiential (observing and doing) and authentic (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste, 2002, 2013; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Kanu, 2011).

The research questions are based upon an epistemological belief that learning is socially co-constructed between/by individuals and their contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The use of an *embedded single-case study approach* (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014) enabled a holistic understanding of the proposed questions, while honoring the experiences of the participants from within the case. Furthermore, the use of an embedded single-case study approach illuminated the process and characteristics that make up trans-systemic spaces in CLE for Indigenous adolescents. The research was situated in a real-world context in which the boundaries between the phenomenon (trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education) and context (Indigenous cultural high-school program) were blurred, and where individual voices provided depth and understanding with regards to experience.

The research questions were answered through observations and semi-structured interviews with 16 Indigenous adolescents enrolled in a Critical Media Literacies (CML) course in an ICP, as well as two educators and two community members. The CML course was designed to have students create, discuss and share social justice issues, or educational topics, of importance to them through a variety of media.

### **Research Significance**

This study contributes to educational knowledge, research, and practice. First, research

featuring culturally relevant CLE with Indigenous adolescents is underrepresented in the scholarly literature. More broadly, the descriptive experiences and stories from the participants inform culturally responsive CLE practices for Indigenous adolescents, and more specifically for those who may not be living on their traditional territories, or directly connected to their communities. As well, the themes presented in the Findings (Chapter 4) and Discussion (Chapter 5) provide both a model for characterizing trans-systemic spaces in CLE, as well future considerations for exploration in research and practice.

Additionally, this study featured methodological approaches and learnings that have the potential to assist future researchers to consider ways Western and Indigenous methodologies can be combined to show strength, respect, and authenticity in the research process. When non-Indigenous researchers, such as myself, are engaged and working with Indigenous communities and in Indigenous education contexts, it is significant that researchers also enter into a trans-systemic space (Battiste, 2013). Westernized approaches to qualitative data analysis and interpretation need to shift in order to be more congruent with Indigenous methodologies. As well, the research process needs to be demonstrative of the ethics of reciprocal actions taken by the researcher (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). In particular, when conducting interviews, narratives emerge as a way to identify and share personal experiences (Creswell, 2013). Within the context of Indigenous research, I take narrative to mean the stories told that concern “a particular aspect of an individual’s experience that pertains to the research topic at hand” (Kovach, 2009, p. 96). Archibald (2008) terms such an ethical framework – *Storywork*. Storywork is guided by the principles of respect, relevance, responsibility, holism, interrelatedness, synergy, and reciprocity (Archibald, 2008).

Within education, the TRC's (2015) calls to action requires educators to take-action to have any significance, and it is incumbent on the academic world to contribute and provide leadership towards these recommendations. The findings of this research contribute to the reconciliation process by describing the experiences of urban Indigenous adolescents engaging in CLE in order to inform CRC and practices.

### **Terminology**

Throughout this dissertation I primarily use the term *Indigenous* or *Indigenous Peoples* to refer to individuals or groups of individuals that self-identify as First Nation, Inuit, or Métis Peoples who live in Canada. The United Nations (U.N., n.d.) defines Indigenous Peoples more broadly as “inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment” (para. 1) with a collective shared experience of colonization and issues “related to the protection of their rights as distinct peoples” (para. 1).

As the research was located within an urban school setting, most of the participants were not from the local First Nation/Band (see Student Participant chart in Chapter 3). As such, the use of the term Indigenous when referring to the participants as a group is most appropriate. However, when referring to individual participants, I introduce them in relation to their self-identified nation (located in brackets following their name) and home community. I use the terms, language, and spelling as identified by each participant to respect the relationship they have with their communities.

In 2016 the Government of Canada replaced the term *Aboriginal* with the term *Indigenous*. At the time of my research the term Aboriginal was still used widely. In the particular school district where the research was conducted, the term Aboriginal is still used in the titles and roles, and refers to the collective and district groups with rights under the *Indian*

*Act and Constitution* (Joseph, 2018). Therefore, the term Aboriginal appears in official titles given to a role within the school district, or if named in any official government document or report prior to 2016.

Finally, when referring to previous studies in which a broad term other than Indigenous is used, I use the term Indigenous when speaking of the participants within the study. However, direct quotations from a study feature the term used by the author(s). This clarification of terminology is important as studies conducted in the United States use the broad term *Native American*, while studies from Australia (and some from Canada) use the term *Aboriginal*.

### **Overview of the Chapters**

In Chapter 1 I have discussed the broader contextual issues in which my study's research questions were drawn from. I have also presented the study's rationale, purpose, questions, and significance.

In Chapter 2 I present and discuss the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guided this study, as well as review the current relevant research literature. In Chapter 3 I present the methodology used to approach the research questions, and describe the research design, context, participants, and data analysis procedures. In Chapter 4 I describe the research findings in the form of themes that emerged from the analysis. In Chapter 5 I discuss the findings in relation to the literature from Chapter 2, and present implications for future research and practice.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

Investigating Indigenous adolescents' critical literacies practices requires understanding how adolescents engage and take up critical literacies practices in general, and ways that Indigenous adolescents take up literacies practices in particular. Significant to this investigation is also understanding how Indigenous pedagogies contribute to the development of culturally relevant critical literacies curriculum in Indigenous contexts. In this chapter, I address the aforementioned topics in three sections. In the first section, I present the literacy and learning frameworks that guided the study: sociocultural theory, Gee's concepts of d/Discourse, Indigenous ways of learning and knowing, culturally relevant curriculum (CRC), and critical literacies education (CLE). The second section of the chapter, which is divided into two parts, features an examination of research relevant to the study. The first part is focused on CLE with adolescents and addresses adolescent literacies practices, the ways that CLE can facilitate adolescent literacies practices, and the challenges and tensions of enacting CLE in a school-context. The second part of the review of pertinent literature describes research on CRC with Indigenous adolescents with a focus on the contemporary school-context for Indigenous adolescents; and Indigenous pedagogies and Indigenous adolescents' literacies practices within culturally relevant contexts. The final section of the chapter includes ways CRC and Indigenous adolescents' literacies practices can inform how CLE can be taken up with Indigenous adolescents. I end the chapter with positioning the study's research questions within the context of the literature review.

#### **Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks**

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding this study are socio-cultural theory, (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986), d/Discourse framework (Gee, 1992, 2002, 2015), Indigenous ways of

knowing and learning (Archibald, 2008; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste, 2002; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009), CRC (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014), and critical literacies (Janks, 2014; Freire, 1970; Shor, 1999). These theories and frameworks were selected as they provide the concepts and discourse needed to explore trans-systemic spaces (Battiste, 2013) in CLE (Janks, 2014; Luke, 2012), as well as the basis for planning and designing the study, and analyzing the data.

### ***Sociocultural Theory***

According to the tenets of sociocultural theory, learning and literacies practices are socially constructed through experience, and are embedded in cultural, political, and historical contexts (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Traditional concepts of literacy learning and practices reflected literacy as something that was independent, inside the mind, and decontextualized (Gee, 1992; Smagorinsky, 2013; Street, 2003). This traditional view has been argued as inadequate in understanding literacy learning and development (Alvermann, 2009; Gee, 1992; Street, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986). Alternatively, Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) beliefs about the relationship between learning and instruction positioned speech as a socially constructed tool for thinking and learning, lending current notions of literacy learning and practices as constructed in context and collaboratively with others (Smagorinsky, 2013). As such, sociocultural theorists draw on Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) notion that speech is a tool that mediates thinking and learning, and that speech is socially-constructed and embedded in cultural contexts. Literacy and language scholars working in 21<sup>st</sup> century educational contexts continue to apply significant aspects of Vygotsky's notions of learning today (Smagorinsky, 2013). In consideration of how I understand literacy learning, and how it relates to this particular study, three of Vygotsky's notions are discussed in further detail below.

First, Vygotsky (1978), in *Mind and Society*, sought to examine the nature of the relationship between the use of tools and the development of speech. He posited that speech is a tool used to obtain higher-order thinking processes because speech is a type of sign system used to communicate meaning. Much like tools are used in order to influence external activity, “language enables children to provide for auxiliary tools in the solution of difficult tasks, to overcome impulsive action, to plan a solution to a problem prior to its execution, and to master their own behavior” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 43). Vygotsky viewed speech as both oral and written, and suggested that speech was used to both represent meaning and to generate meaning. Smagorinsky (2013) summarizes Vygotsky’s notion of speech as a tool by stating that “[s]peech thus can both represent an idea and contribute to the formation of an idea, and when speech is coordinated and orchestrated to produce a text, the sign function of its form may then serve as a tool for yet new thinking by either the speaker or others” (p. 194). Therefore, through the act of communication (speech) with others, learning can occur as speech mediates internal activities such as memory and thinking, and helps to produce and generate meaning for individuals and others.

Second, Vygotsky (1986), in *Thought and Language*, argued that thinking and learning is socially-developed because “[t]he primary function of speech, in both children and adults, is communication, and social contact. The earliest speech of a child is therefore essentially social” (pp. 34-35). Vygotsky used *word meaning* as his unit of analysis, and posited that word meaning is developed in context for the purpose of communication. Vygotsky suggested that if speech is primarily meant for communication, then some natural generalizations through shared experiences would be present in order for meaning to occur. By analyzing word meaning, Vygotsky was able to consider the wholeness of verbal-thought, one that not only includes

phonetics and definition of a word, but sociocultural experience, environment and generalizations. Vygotsky argued that when a child has difficulty learning a new word, it is not the actual phonetics of the word but the meaning, or lack of experience, that makes the word difficult for the child to grasp.

Third, Vygotsky (1986) explored how new ideas are learned through meaningful activities that are facilitated by cultural tools. He used the terms *scientific concepts* (or academic concepts) for concepts that children learn as formal or generalized principles in school, and *spontaneous concepts* (or everyday concepts) for concepts that children learn and experience outside of school (Smagorinsky, 2013; Vygotsky, 1986). Vygotsky argued that both types of concepts were involved in meaning making, knowledge acquisition, cognitive development, and higher order thinking; and that use of spontaneous concepts could act as a mediator or tool for learning scientific concepts. Furthermore, Vygotsky suggested that any cultural tool or activity involved in meaning-making, not just speech, was significant to understanding how individuals understood themselves in relation to society. Smagorinsky (2013) states that a central facet of Vygotsky's understanding of learning is that "people learn by making things that they find useful and important – that is, meaningful to them – particularly as the forms that these things take bear signs of broader cultural meaning" (p. 198). Thus, past experiences, as well as what individuals attribute as meaningful to them, can act as a mediator to learning as people apply what they already know to new experiences, contexts, and concepts.

Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) research leads to three important propositions to literacy learning and research: 1) speech is a tool for thinking and learning; 2) thinking and learning are embedded in the cultural environment that one belongs to; and 3) learning occurs with meaningful activities. Therefore, in considering literacy curriculum and instruction, the local

context and individual students' culture, background and experiences need to be included and utilized as a mediator between already acquired and new concept formation.

Gee's (1992, 2002, 2015) work on d/Discourse expanded on Vygotsky's (1986) idea of experience as mediator to literacy learning, as Gee argued that individuals are members of multiple types of "Discourses", or cultures of practice.

### ***d/Discourse Framework***

Gee (1992, 2002, 2015) uses the term Discourse, with a capital "D", to describe such social practices as talking, interacting, thinking, valuing and believing; and describes discourse, with a lowercase "d," to be understood as language in use. Gee (2015) argues that literacies learning is embedded within the framework of Discourses as communication with others is integral to being a member of a Discourse. As such, reading, writing, viewing, representing, speaking, and listening are not decontextualized or isolated practices; they are practices that involve a level of immersion and interaction with others who are already members of a particular Discourse.

Gee (2015) discusses the notion of Discourse within the context of acquisition and learning. Gee (2015) defines acquisition as "a process of acquiring something (usually subconsciously) by exposure to models, a process of trial and error, and practice within social groups, without formal teaching" (p. 189). He proposes that acquisition is often meaningful and functional, such as the learning of a first language. Gee (2015) contrasts acquisition by defining learning as "a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching or through certain life experiences that trigger conscious reflection" (p. 189). Gee suggests that learning is something that involves explanation, analysis, compartmentalization of knowledge, and some degree of meta-knowledge. Therefore, Gee argues that when individuals are able to both acquire

and learn knowledge, they are able to master a Discourse as they are able to both perform and reflect on their cultural practices.

Gee (2003, 2015) further distinguishes the difference between acquisition and learning by dividing Discourses into two domains: primary Discourses (gained through acquisition at home) and secondary Discourses (also called lifeworlds, which are gained through both acquisition and learning). Primary Discourses “are those to which people are apprenticed early in life during their primary socialization as members of particular families within their sociocultural settings” (Gee, 2015, p. 187). Primary Discourses constitute a person’s first social identity and taken-for-granted understandings, and are the Discourses individuals use to base further acquisition of, or resistance to, secondary Discourses. Gee (2015) describes secondary Discourses as “those to which people are apprenticed as part of their socializations within various local, state, and national groups and institutions outside early home and peer-group socialization” (p. 187). They make up people’s public and formal acts within the different lifeworlds to which a person belongs. Gee further argues that the boundary between the two Discourses is constantly negotiated and contested, and that many groups borrow secondary Discourses for socializing their children in which the secondary Discourse becomes part of the primary Discourse. When secondary Discourses are part of the primary Discourse, it is easier for children to further acquire and learn secondary Discourses.

In consideration of literacies learning, Gee (2003, 2015) argues that being able to transfer between primary Discourses and secondary Discourses helps students become critical learners as they must be able to “attend to, reflect on, critique, and manipulate design grammars at a metalevel” (Gee, 2003, p. 40). Learners should be able to think about their acquired skills, and determine how and when to transfer those skills to other domains.

The implication of Gee's (1992, 2002, 2015) concept of d/Discourse in literacy curriculum and instruction involves a shift in focus on the importance of the various Discourses used by each person. Students come to school with many different Discourses, and if teachers use and/or privilege only a school Discourse it can cause miscommunication, lack of cultural understanding, and marginalization of students. Gee (2015) states that

[g]ood classroom instruction can and should lead to meta-knowledge, to seeing how the Discourses you have already got relate to those you are attempting to acquire, and how the ones you are trying to acquire relate to self and society. But to do this, the classroom must juxtapose different Discourses for comparison and contrast. Diversity, then, is not an 'add-on', but a cognitive necessity if we wish to develop meta-awareness and overt reflective insight on the part of learners. (p. 192)

Therefore, a teacher's understanding of the need to merge home and school Discourses is crucial to students' literacy learning. Literacy scholars who apply Gee's work on d/Discourse to literacies learning and practices argue for the need to connect the multiple types of Discourses students are members of, in order to facilitate deeper learning (Cazden, 2001; Delpit, 2006; Gee, 1992; New London Group [NLG], 1996). As such, educators, researchers, and policy makers need to examine and understand what students know and value in their primary Discourses, and then build connections for learning through curriculum development and pedagogical practices. For Indigenous learners in particular, understanding the local community, as well as Indigenous ways of knowing and learning, are critical in order to connect and facilitate learning in the school context.

### ***Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Learning***

Indigenous ways of knowing and learning are congruent with sociocultural and

d/Discourse understandings of literacies learning in that Indigenous learning is embedded in place, experience, and community (Archibald, 2008; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste, 2002; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). Within Indigenous contexts, Battiste (2002) recommends the use of Indigenous Knowledges (IK) and pedagogies in order to draw on the prior knowledge and experiences of Indigenous learners. Furthermore, the use of IK allows for researchers, educators and policy makers “to find educational advantages and opportunities in specific meaning-making practices, such as those of [I]ndigenous peoples” (Hare, 2011, p. 393).

While IK does not have a singular definition as it is not a homogenous concept, Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) suggest there are shared understandings of IK and ways of learning which include observation, demonstration, experience, and thoughtful stories; all of which are embedded and learned on the land. Battiste (2002) further adds that IK is tied to the land, and in particular to landscapes, landforms, and biomes, as these are areas of significance: they are places where ceremonies, stories, and medicines are shared and where knowledge is transferred. As such, the pedagogical practices for land-based learning includes observing natural processes, obtaining sustenance, making tools, and adapting modes of survival (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005).

IK is also tied to language, as language is symbolic, verbal, and has orders of structure – ideas consistent with sociocultural understandings of literacies. Vygotsky (1986) argued that language is a cultural tool used to communicate ideas embedded within a social context. Oral IK pedagogical practices can include talking or sharing circles, dialogues, participant observations, experiential learning, modelled learning, meditation, prayer, ceremonies, and storytelling (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2002; Davidson & Davidson, 2018). As Murry-Orr et al. (2013) explain: “[i]n these characteristics of Indigenous knowledges, we can see that they are rooted in

context and experience, involve sophisticated and complex responses to the natural world, emerge in relation to place, and are embedded in Indigenous languages” (p. 321).

Within the context of a Western education system, Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) argue for a need to recognize the co-existence of multiple worldviews and knowledge systems, and to find ways in which these worldviews can relate to the world and each other. Western Knowledge (WK) is the dominant knowledge system embedded in the North American school curriculum that privileges and prioritizes compartmental learning, in-class learning, and assessment measured indirectly through various tests (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). Comparatively, IK is not decontextualized or assessed in terms of what someone should know theoretically, but rather knowledge is demonstrated through practical application (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). However, Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) and Battiste (2002) argue that IK are not a binary opposite to WK, but that IK extends the limitations of WK. That is, IK “fills the ethical and knowledge gaps in Eurocentric education, research, and scholarship” (Battiste, 2002, p. 5), and extends the understanding of relationships and “interconnectedness of all elements of the world around us” (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005, p. 12).

It is necessary then, when considering literacies learning and practices, particularly with Indigenous learners, that IK and ways of learning are put at the forefront of developing curriculum and pedagogy for all learners. As Hare (2011) states “[a]n indigenous knowledge framework allows us to link indigenous-specific cultural practices, learning processes, and values with school-based literacy” (p. 393). Land-based and oral pedagogies are rooted in the experiences of individuals and the community (Battiste, 2002; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). As such, Indigenous ways of knowing and learning include recognizing the diverse needs of each learner and understanding that learning is a life-long responsibility for themselves and for others;

that experiential knowledge is about connecting to multiple ways of knowing; and that learning occurs in various contexts and needs to be applied to unfamiliar circumstances (Battiste, 2002; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). As Battiste (2013) notes, the inclusion of voices and experiences of Indigenous peoples, and the integration of IK into the educational process, has the potential to create a more balanced center point for Indigenous learners within a Western education context. Indeed, the inclusion and re-centering of IK and pedagogies in school will begin to shift curriculum to one that is more culturally relevant for Indigenous learners.

### ***Culturally Relevant Curriculum***

In the *Final Report* (TRC, 2015) by the TRC, educational reform is identified as “a need for a complete restructuring based on principles of self-government, a culturally relevant curriculum, and stable funding” (p. 148). Certainly, the development of “culturally appropriate curricula” (TRC, 2015, 10, iii, p. 149) is crucial to the reform of literacies curriculum and instruction for Indigenous learners. *Culturally relevant pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014), also called *culturally appropriate curriculum* (Au & Jordan, 1981), is not a new concept nor is it limited in quantity of research (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). However, significant to understanding culturally relevant or culturally appropriate curriculum within the context of my study is the fact that the term is not exclusive to Indigenous learners but rather is grounded more broadly in multicultural education (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Gay, 2002; Klump & McNeir, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014). Therefore, for the purpose of understanding the term CRC as referred to by the TRC (2015), I first define the term based on the most current concepts of CRC generally, and then in Indigenous contexts specifically.

Ladson-Billings (1995) defined the term *culturally relevant pedagogy* as “a pedagogical practice that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm

their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 469). Ladson-Billings’ (1995) use of the term culturally relevant pedagogy was in response to previous educational models that were focused on deficit thinking and educational interventions used with marginalized students in complex urban environments. Her research in particular occurred in predominantly African American school districts, in which she sought to understand how outstanding teachers working with African American students were facilitating success in the classroom. Over a three-year period, Ladson-Billings collected interviews, observations, and videos of instructional practices of eight teachers who were nominated as outstanding educators by both the local community and school district. Using grounded theory during the collaborative analysis stage with the teachers, Ladson-Billings argued that culturally relevant pedagogy produced students who could: achieve academically; demonstrate cultural competence; and understand and critique the existing social order within institutions and society. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings identified the shared beliefs and ideologies of teachers practicing culturally relevant pedagogy: a commitment to academic success for everyone; reciprocal and equitable relationships between students and teacher; collaborative and community learning; and conceptions of knowledge as multifaceted, shared, recycled, reconstructed, and viewed critically.

In order to understand the role of curriculum as part of culturally relevant pedagogy, Belgarde et al. (2002) use the term *culturally responsive education*, and define it as “curriculum and instruction that generally validate the cultures and languages of students and allows them to become co-constructors of knowledge in the school setting” (p. 43). Belgarde et al.’s definition positions curriculum that is culturally relevant as embedded in a particular set of pedagogical and instructional practices that creates space for the multiple languages and cultures of students in the

school context. Aronson and Laughter (2016), in their synthesis of literature on culturally relevant education (CRE), suggested that the pedagogical practices informing curriculum and instruction include committing to collective and individual empowerment; supporting long-term academic achievement; fostering cultural competences of students' own beliefs as well as dominant cultures; finding ways for students to recognize, understand and critique social inequalities; and recognizing one's own issues with race, class, and gender. As such, Aronson and Laughter developed four criteria of CRE: 1) CRE builds bridges between cultural references and academic skills and concepts; 2) CRE engages students in critical reflection about their own lives and society; 3) CRE facilitates students' cultural competencies by developing pride in their own culture, and understanding of others' culture; and 4) CRE explicitly critiques discourses of power.

In order to extend the concepts of CRE and CRC to be appropriate for Indigenous learners, McCarty and Lee (2014) argue for the use of *culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy* in Indigenous contexts. In response to recent literature expanding the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy to *culturally sustaining* pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014), McCarty and Lee (2014) address the question "what are we seeking to sustain?" within Indigenous contexts. The authors respond with three components: 1) educational sovereignty; 2) reclamation and revitalization of language and culture; and 3) community-based accountability. McCarty and Lee (2014) argue that sustaining and revitalizing language and culture are necessary "to address the sociohistorical and contemporary contexts of Native American schooling" (p. 103) as Indigenous communities continue to fight for their linguistic and cultural survival. The concept of sustaining pluralism and revitalizing language and culture in an Indigenous context can further be explained by Battiste's (2013) call to create *trans-*

*systemic spaces*. Battiste (2013) suggests that engagement in CRC is about addressing how to bring two diverse knowledge systems into a new space – a trans-systemic space - which “is not a merge or a clash, but a space that is new, electrifying, and even contentious, but ultimately has the potential for an interchange or dialogue of the assumptions, values, and interests each holds” (p. 105). The “interchange or dialogue of assumptions, values, and interests” that Battiste advocates, is one such way of sustaining pluralism and revitalizing language and culture.

**Sustaining pluralism: Creating trans-systemic spaces in Indigenous contexts.**

In their literature review on CRC for Indigenous youth, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) state clearly that the inclusion of tribal sovereignty, self-determination, and Indigenous epistemologies are not to replace the development of other cultural competencies but that there is

a need and desire for Indigenous youth to become bi/multicultural and [...] when teachers, curricula, and schools provide a challenging and high-quality education that is intimately connected and relevant to tribal communities, they will be far more likely to graduate youth who are academically prepared, connected to and active members of their tribal communities, and knowledgeable about both the dominant and home cultures.

(p. 961)

Paris and Alim (2014) propose that culturally sustaining pedagogy “seeks to perpetuate and foster – *to sustain* – linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as needed in response to demographic and social change” (p. 88, italics are original); that is, to create a context in which sustained pluralism is present. The authors further argue that success and power is not about access to the monolithic, singular discourse of dominant White society. Rather, based on increasing global populations, it is necessary to be multilingual. Thus, sustained pluralism, understood as learning dominant skills and knowledge

and maintaining one's own cultural ways of speaking and being, are "a necessary pedagogy for supporting access to power in a changing nation" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 90).

Battiste (2013), in her book *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*, theorizes the notion of what can happen when sustained pluralism occurs within an Indigenous context. At the center of Battiste's theory is the significance of nourishing the *learning spirit* – "the entity within each of us that guides our search for purpose and vision" (p.18). Battiste expands on this definition by explaining that the learning spirit enables learners to find their identity, their purpose and passion in life, and the talents and skills needed to put their passion to work. It is the learning spirit that is connected to Indigenous learning. As stated by Battiste (2013), individuals' "gifts unfold in a learning environment that sustain and challenge us as learners" (p. 18).

As such, Battiste argues that when educators authentically engage in CRC, one that nourishes the learning spirit, it is not an "add-on" to the current Western system that already exists, but instead a systemic shift that centers IK and ways of learning. For example, Battiste (2013) advocates for the use of Indigenous humanities as a "concept seeking to live beside and in balance with the discursive Eurocentric categories and regimes of the humanities as knowledge" (p. 113). Indigenous humanities centers humanity in relation to place, location and ecology. As well, Indigenous humanities privileges action and sharing through creative and artistic expression that brings humanity, knowledge, and wisdom to life. Battiste also provides examples of creative and artistic expressions of Indigenous humanities as shared through storytellers, performers, singers, poets, dramatists, dancers, and writers. Finally, Battiste notes that Indigenous humanities also function as acts of critique and resistance against dominant culture and celebration of Indigenous identity and culture.

Accordingly, during my study I took up CRC within the context of the TRC (2015) *Calls to Action* as curriculum that should be focused on the use of IK and pedagogies including place-based, community-based, and storytelling (Archibald, 2008; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste, 2002; 2013; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009) to work toward creating learning environments that were appropriate, relevant, responsive and revitalizing (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Furthermore, curriculum that is sustaining and revitalizing is one that continues to build the culture competencies of the individual and community, to participate in dominant and other Discourses, and to enter into trans-systemic spaces. As such, one approach that has the potential to facilitate sustaining and revitalizing pedagogies is CLE.

### ***Critical Literacies Education***

Literacies are communicative tools which individuals use to interact with, and to participate in, public, community, and economic life (NLG, 1996). The NLG (1996) developed the term multiliteracies, “the multiplicity of communications channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity” (p. 63), and argued that traditional understandings of the term literacy (singular) are no longer sufficient for learning in a multicultural, diverse, and globalized society. Literacies (plural) learning and practices are fundamental in education to foster democratic citizenship and participation in today’s society.

Critical literacies, a conceptual framework and pedagogical approach to literacies learning (Alvermann, 2012; Avila & Pandya, 2012; Vasquez et al., 2019), is underpinned by sociocultural theory (Gee, 1992, 2002; Vygotsky, 1986), and has its roots in critical theory (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1999) and multiliteracies (NLG, 1996; Street, 2003). Although various critical literacy scholars (e.g., Luke, 2012; Shor, 1999; Street, 2003; Vasquez et al., 2019) have offered different definitions of critical literacy, most of them draw on Freire’s (1970) critical

theory, discussed further below, and understand critical literacy to involve an examination of power relationships that works towards empowerment of those who are marginalized by dominant society.

For the purpose of defining and understanding critical literacies for this study, I draw on Shor's (1999) definition of critical literacy as:

language use that questions the social construction of the self. When we are critically literate, we examine our ongoing development, to reveal the subjective positions from which we make sense of the world and act in it. All of us grow up and live in local cultures set in global contexts where multiple discourses shape us. (p. 2)

This definition is significant to understanding how critical literacies align with sociocultural approaches to literacies learning and practices. It also resonates with aspects of IK and Indigenous ways of learning. Shor (1999) acknowledges the subjective or personal experiences in which individuals live and make sense of the world. Experiences shape how people understand, interact with, and communicate in the world. Thus, learning is not decontextualized, and significant to learning is the act of utilizing experience as a mediator. A critical literacies approach to education then “should look, feel, and sound different in different contexts” (Vasquez et al., 2019, p. 300). Furthermore, a critical literacies approach to education is “a way to talk and think about students as knowledge-holders and producers, and a way to talk and think about teachers’ pedagogical practices” (Avila & Pandya, 2012, p. 1).

As such, CLE is not merely learning a set of skills for the purpose of success within an education context. Rather, as Vasquez et al. (2019) suggest, CLE is a way of being and participating in the world, both inside and outside of school. Understanding that critical literacies is a way of being in the world is significant because learning only school-based literacies is

insufficient to prepare students for full democratic participation in society. More specifically, globalized learning spaces such as digital technologies have changed the way people engage with learning (Albers et al., 2018). Access to online information, along with ways to navigate, interact, engage, and enact information has created new landscapes for participation in society. Learners need to be critically aware of how digital platforms are used, for what purposes, and for whose benefit. As such, Janks (2013) argues that “in a perfect world in which social difference didn’t matter and didn't determine who gained access to resources and opportunities, we would still need *critical literacy* [emphasis added] to help us read the texts and construct the politics of everyday life” (p. 30).

Freire (1970), drawing on Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) notion of language used to transmit cultural ideologies, posed questions around dominant culture, power, and the purpose of education. More specifically, Freire (1970), in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, examined the relationship of education with those who are oppressed in society. Freire defined oppression as occurring when the voices of people who are not in power are silenced, and argued that traditional forms of Western education created passive and uncritical learners who perpetuated the ideologies of dominant culture. Freire (1970) referred to Western education as a “banking model” (p. 72), in which learning is an act of depositing, with teachers as the depositors and students the depositories. He argued that a banking model of education meant learning was passive and decontextualized, resulting in learning as inauthentic and lacking any true meaning to the learners. According to Freire, the purpose of education should be to liberate those who are oppressed through conversations that include and recognize the experiences and contexts in which individuals live. Freire also stated that education must be “problem-posing,” which involves acknowledging, and creating space for, students’ lived experiences and thinking in

conjunction with a teacher's lived experiences and thinking. Within a "problem-posing model" students are also experts as their knowledge and experiences are resources for solving problems and reflecting on learning.

According to some scholars (e.g., Luke, 2012; Shor, 1999; Street, 2003; Vasquez et al., 2019), four key concepts create a CLE framework that guides instructional practice: 1) examination of political, and historical understandings of power and control of information; 2) learning occurs in collaboration with others; 3) students engage in multimodal learning; and 4) individuals and groups are engaged and empowered toward social change. These four concepts highlight the pedagogical and instructional approaches of CLE.

The first concept of CLE, drawing from both Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and Freire (1970), is the examination of social, political, and historical understandings of power and control of information. Luke (2012) argues that CLE aims to critique dominant ideologies, cultures, economies, and institutions, as the basic meaning of "critical" is the ability to argue or judge. Therefore, CLE is a means to examine, critique, and transform dominant culture by looking at the social, political, historical, and economic contexts of language and culture. Other critical literacy researchers such as Delpit (2006) and Shor (1999) advocate for the development of critical literacy in order to expose power structures through dominant discourses and to create a discourse of resistance. Delpit and Shor also believe that learning the language of power is the key to transformation, and that such learning must be explicit so it exposes the dominant culture.

The second key concept that emerges from the literature on CLE is that learning occurs in collaboration with others. As discussed above, the notion that learning and knowledge are a shared social construct is based on the work of Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and Freire (1970). More recently, critical literacies scholars (e.g., Alvermann, 2009, 2012; Cazden, 2001; Gee, 2002,

2015; Vasquez et al. 2019) have continued to examine ways learners share, construct, and make meaning of their world. For example, Cazden (2001) argued that students themselves can take on the role of expert through the formation of a community of learners (Brown & Campione, 1990) – a student community in the classroom where knowledge is shared and constructed in collaboration with each other and with the teacher. The creation of communities of learners allow students to foster common knowledge in order to build, co-construct, and re-construct meaning. Sharing multiple experiences not only offers different perspectives, but also allows learners to share in common knowledge. Collaboration can also help learners achieve higher understanding and share power and information. Thus, collaboration can provide authentic learning and engagement for learners.

The third concept of CLE is student engagement in multimodal learning, which recognizes that design and/or expression of learning must be relevant and meaningful to the learner. Scholars of critical literacy draw on multiliteracies pedagogy and multimodality theory (Alvermann, 2009; Gee, 1992; NLG, 1996; Street, 2003), maintaining that individuals should be able to communicate in a variety of ways within a variety of Discourses (Gee, 1992, 2003, 2015) that go beyond traditional concepts of literacy as just reading, writing, and working with only print text. Multiliteracies includes speaking, listening, viewing, representing, reading and writing; and multimodal expressions of learning include linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial (Alvermann, 2009; NLG, 1996), and can be in any combination of expression as texts are produced in different formats for different audiences and purposes. Alvermann (2009) argues that “through the representations people make of the resources available to them, it is possible to infer what matters to them” (p. 17). Further, the design, production, and re-design of texts offers individuals the chance to locate and position themselves in the world (Vasquez et al., 2019). As

such, locating and positioning oneself through representation and design provides opportunities to extend learning beyond critical analysis to something more transformative and meaningful to the learner (NLG, 1996; Vasquez et al., 2019).

The final concept emerging from the scholarship on CLE is that critical literacies engage and empower individuals and groups towards social change. Freire (1970) maintained that if the purpose of education is to make visible the power relationships that exist, along with challenging dominant culture and ideologies, then the ultimate goal is to transform society. Freire argued that reflection and action are key to transformation or real change. It is not enough to have only reflection or action: “[l]iberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 79). Thus, the combination of reflection with action gives CLE its purpose.

According to Freire (1970), students must have a voice in order to empower and enact real change. Shor (1999), echoing Freire’s advocacy for enacting social change, stated that critical literacy “challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development” (p. 1). More recently, Janks (2014) interprets Freire’s ideology of empowerment for social change as a need for students to develop a social conscience in order to enact social change. Janks suggests that through a developed social conscience the desire to transform will occur. The arguments of both Shor (1999) Janks (2014) are rooted in notions of responsibility for self and the larger the community, in which reflection and action are needed to evoke change.

CLE is a framework and a pedagogical approach meant to reform education systems that reinforce inequality, inequity, and hierarchy (Delpit, 2006; Luke, 2012; Shor, 1999). As a framework to examine power, language, and discourse, including the language and discourse

used in education, CLE “can be pleasurable and transformational as well as pedagogical and transgressive” (Vasquez et al., 2019, p. 300). Thus, CLE should be an important focus in education as a means to learn, take up, and enact various literacies practices as well as to provide explicit access to the dominant culture in which individuals can engage more equitably in civic life (Alvermann, 2012; Janks, 2014).

### ***Summary***

Sociocultural theory, d/Discourse framework, Indigenous ways of knowing and learning, CRC, and critical literacies shape how I understand both literacies learning in general, and CRC for Indigenous learners in particular. The aim of CRC for Indigenous learners should be to sustain pluralism and revitalize language and culture. Therefore, it is fundamental to understand ways in which literacies curriculum can shift to include IK and pedagogies, particularly within CLE.

### **Literature Review**

The following section focuses on the literature relevant to the study. In the first part of the literature review I examine scholarship related to critical literacies education with adolescent learners. More specifically, adolescent literacies practices are discussed in relation to critical literacies education research as a way for adolescents to make meaning through lived experiences, collaboration, and community. In the second part of the literature review, I examine research on culturally relevant curriculum with Indigenous adolescents; topics discussed include the contemporary school-context for Indigenous adolescents, as well as Indigenous pedagogies and Indigenous adolescents’ literacies practices.

### *Critical Literacies Education with Adolescent Learners*

Significant to my study was consideration of how adolescents, as a distinct group of learners, enact and engage in their own literacies practices. Below I examine previous research conducted with adolescents engaging in CLE, with a focus on how adolescent literacies inform, support, and come into tension with CLE. I conclude with a discussion of the challenges and tensions to enacting CLE within a school context, particularly for those students who are already marginalized.

**Adolescent Literacies.** Poulus and Exley (2018) state that “[t]he ultimate objective of critical literacy is to empower students to re-create a more equal version of reality” (p. 279). However, in order to empower students, and in particular adolescents, it is important to understand how they position themselves within the broader construct of their realities. How adolescents make sense of themselves can, in part, be understood by applying the concept of adolescent literacies, which Alvermann (2009) defines as “social practices that involve reading and writing as well as other modes of communications in which young people engage” (p. 8). Understanding adolescents as a distinct group of learners is significant to the instruction and practice of CLE, and in particular understanding the benefits and challenges that critical literacies instruction and practices present (Rogers et al., 2015).

Research on adolescent development characterizes adolescence as a period of change and transition in relationships, identity, and self-consciousness (Blakemore, 2012; Smetana, 2011; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). More specifically, it is the psychological change in self-consciousness that leads to adolescents’ changes in relationships with peers as well as how they think about themselves, others, and their communities (Smetana, 2011; Yau & Reich, 2018). As Blakemore (2012) explains, the “evidence from social psychology studies shows substantial

changes in social competence and social behavior during adolescence, and this is hypothesized to rely on a more sophisticated manner of thinking about and relating to other people” (p. 114).

Furthermore, adolescents’ quest for autonomy and the development of their identity, morals, and values (Smetana, 2011) demonstrate how adolescents are learning to position themselves in the world. As such, understanding adolescents’ development of the social brain has implications for understanding adolescent learning in general, and critical literacies learning in particular.

Digital spaces are one such place that adolescents are currently finding ways to support identity development, relationship development, and community participation. Yau and Reich (2018) state that if “almost all teens are using social media to connect to others, it is likely that they are using these digital spaces for identity exploration and construction” (p. 196).

Furthermore, digital spaces are a place where adolescents can create more thoughtful identity constructions of themselves as they have time to craft and edit posts (Davis, 2012). As such, adolescent literacies practices identified in digital spaces demonstrate the value placed on collaboration with peers, collective knowledge sharing, and knowledge remixing, remodeling and remaking (Alvermann, 2009; Rogers et al., 2015; Smith, 2019). The making, reshaping, and sharing of multimodal and multimedia content in digital spaces can serve as a way for adolescents “to make material and cultural claims about their lives and social worlds” (Rogers et al., 2015, p. 102), to act as “valuable tools for thinking” (Smith, 2019, p. 215), and to locate themselves within the morals and values they are shaping (Smetana, 2011; Yau & Reich, 2018).

Adolescents’ online and digital practices reveal that adolescents learn in collaboration with others (Smith, 2019), and thrive in spaces where there is a wider audience (Davis, 2012). Learning in collaboration with others aligns with research on adolescent development and the importance of relationships with peers (Smetana, 2011). As well, having a wider audience is

appealing to adolescents (Davis, 2012) and digital spaces gives them a platform and space where community comes together with shared interests. Adolescents engage with one another through creating online representations of their thoughts and identity, receive feedback from those they value within their chosen space, and teach each other how to use programming, software, or editing tools (Alvermann, 2009; Davis, 2012; Smith, 2019; Yau & Reich, 2018).

Recognition of adolescents as knowledge-holders, validating their experiences and expertise, acknowledges that adolescent literacies practices are distinct expressions of learning, and as such shifts the focus of researchers, educators and policy makers to consider how adolescents make sense of themselves and their learning. Alvermann (2009) suggests that even though scholars have begun to take up the concept that adolescents have their own place in society, many politicians, curriculum developers, and educators fail to incorporate this understanding into policies, curriculum and classrooms. As a result, many adolescents have limited self-agency in their learning. Instead, inclusion of adolescent literacies practices such as utilizing individual experiences and expertise, collaborating on knowledge production, expressing one's identity and values, and interacting with a variety of audiences, can challenge a lack of self-agency that many adolescents experience in a school-setting (Roger et al., 2015).

**Critical literacies education and adolescent literacies.** When adolescent literacies practices are considered within the context of CLE, space is provided for adolescents to enact and engage authentically and critically with the world around them (Alvermann, 2009; Janks, 2014; Rogers et al., 2015). Riley (2015) argues that taking up critical literacies in the classroom increases “students’ opportunities to learn by enabling them to see and respond to instances of injustice, [and] expand the identities that they might take up and participate in communities in service of social change” (p. 413). Like Riley, many scholars continue to advocate for the

importance of critical literacies approaches to education with adolescents (e.g., Comber, 2015; Janks, 2014; Luke, 2012; Rogers et al., 2015). Researchers have begun to identify successful critical literacies practices with adolescents such as discussing and questioning language and power (Delpit, 2006; Fecho et al., 2012; Janks, 2014; Luke, 2012), giving students more agency in their learning by acknowledging the expertise and experiences they bring to the classroom (Alvermann, 2009; Fecho et al., 2012), using collaboration in the process of learning (Riley, 2015; Park, 2012), and engaging and enacting social change (Avila & Moore, 2012; Janks, 2014). All of these practices facilitate adolescent literacies by connecting experience, collaboration, autonomy, and agency to the classroom.

Below, I discuss studies by Pirbhai-Illich (2010), Dunkerly-Bean et al. (2014) and Sanders et al. (2016) that involve adolescents engaging in CLE, with a focus on how adolescent literacies inform, support, and come into tension with CLE. The researchers provide insights into the implications of CLE within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts, and with adolescent learners in particular.

*Meaning-making through lived experiences, collaboration, and community.* The participatory action research (PAR) conducted by Pirbhai-Illich (2010) examined whether a critical multiliteracies approach could provide an opportunity for Indigenous adolescents to positively engage in literacy learning and identity construction. The study took place in an alternative school setting in British Columbia, Canada. The participants in the study included eight Indigenous students in a Grades 7-8 classroom and one non-Indigenous teacher. Pirbhai-Illich, using a PAR methodology, developed and implemented the project at the request of the teacher. Pirbhai-Illich described the research as being comprised of two cycles and each cycle involved the following three stages: conceptualization of the pedagogical approach;

implementation of the pedagogical approach with the researcher supporting the teacher in lesson planning and instruction; and interpretation of the pedagogical approach.

The first cycle of the research project focused on how the teacher could engage the students in critical multiliteracies by having the students examine ways Indigenous identity is constructed in the media. The teacher used newspaper articles on recent gang arrests and a Hollywood movie in an attempt to engage students in discussions on stereotyping, racism, and oppression found in mainstream media. The second cycle also focused on how the teacher could engage the students in critical multiliteracies, but differed from the first cycle in that students were asked to draw on personal experiences and interests, include members from the local community, and create a multimodal project. During the second cycle, the students constructed an eight-minute video on gang and drug prevention, followed by a six-page collaborative information report. Data collected included observations, lesson plans, student artefacts, interviews, teacher's reflective journal, and field notes. Pirbhai-Illich analyzed the data by using the three stages of classroom action research: conceptualization, implementation, and interpretation.

Pirbhai-Illich (2010) found that a critical multiliteracies orientation within the first cycle of the project, which was focused on race, oppression and privilege through media constructions of identity, did not engage students. However, during the second cycle of the project, the students showed interest in exploring why individuals choose to be involved in gangs as a form of belonging and resistance against dominant culture. The students also engaged in authentic learning through multiliteracies by drawing on personal and community-based issues that mattered to them and using digital media as a means to express their learning. Students collaborated on the design of, the messages communicated in, and the nature of the background

music for the video. Furthermore, the students jointly wrote and constructed the report.

Empowerment and advocacy for enacting social change was made evident in both the video and the written report as students suggested plans and resources of support for those involved in gangs or suffering from addictions.

Pirbhai-Illich's (2010) research demonstrated tensions between the teacher and the students when engaging with critical multiliteracies, and how adolescent literacies practices contributed to, and came into tension with, critical literacies education. Pirbhai-Illich attributed initial resistance of students in the first phase of the project to anxiety related to those who often do not feel in power, and a lack of interest in the topic. With the second phase, not only did the teacher and researcher include the students in co-constructing a topic relevant to their lived experiences, they included members from the local community to work with the students on understanding storytelling structures. Pirbhai-Illich suggested that allowing students to connect to topics that were meaningful and personal to them, and having members from the local Indigenous community to help connect and employ IK and ways of knowing, successfully engaged the students.

Similarly, Dunkerly-Bean et al. (2014) examined how adolescents understand global human rights issues through cosmopolitan critical literacy and multimodal projects. The study was conducted over 16 weeks in a Global Topics course in an international urban school in the United States with students in Grades 6 to 8. The students in the course were primarily international students, with most students having immigrant or refugee status. The Global Topics course was designed to develop students' understanding of global human rights through the integration of film and literature. The course format was one where students would watch short film clips and read print texts on various human rights issues, and then participate in simulations

or discussions in order to critically explore the topic. During the last month of the course, the students were tasked with selecting a topic of interest to investigate and co-create a multimodal project. The students decided that human rights for immigrants would be the focus of the project as it was a topic each of them had personal experiences with, or connections to, or both. Students then chose to compose a screenplay using iMovie as a demonstration of their learning. The students drew from the print readings and multimedia texts offered in class, as well as their own personal experiences. Data collected for the study included media-produced artefacts, class discussions, semi-structured interviews, and field notes. Data analysis involved a constant comparative method to generate interrelated themes. The authors found that throughout the course and development of the video, students identified and understood “othering” at both the school and global level, recognized and articulated identities that showed both insider and outsider in dominant society, recognized power relationships, and expanded their understanding of human rights and advocacy (Dunkerly-Bean et al., 2014).

Although the study by Dunkerly-Bean et al. (2014) was set in the United States within an international school rather than with Indigenous students in Canada, the findings revealed ways that students who are often marginalized within the contexts of Western society addressed and acted on power relationships through critical literacies. Many of the students expressed personal struggles with group identity, bullying across racial lines, and feelings of “othering.” The tensions felt by the students were used as the backstory for their film. Furthermore, the backstory became an opportunity for students to discuss personal experiences with immigration and explore how discrimination is at the heart of many immigration issues (Dunkerly-Bean et al., 2014).

Finally, research by Sanders et al. (2016) sought to provide a concrete example of critical media literacy in action. They examined how five high school students and their teachers actively engaged in a public dialogue through social media after a whole-school presentation by a motivational speaker. The speaker was a local entrepreneur whose TEDx talk had gained popularity for the importance of identifying and going after your dreams. The speaker spoke explicitly about not having a plan B in life, only a plan A, and used the hashtag #besomebody to promote his digital app that helped to connect people to their dreams. Students, through the school newspaper and Media Arts class, engaged in a critique of the speaker's ideas and made their critiques public through various social media platforms. Using a narrative approach to construct the events that unfolded, the researchers collected the publicly available data in real-time as the dialogue occurred over the course of two months. Data collection included online essays, blog posts, news stories, Reddit posts, and tweets. The data were analyzed using a critical media literacy lens to understand and unpack the narrative of events and to understand the implications of engaging in online public dialogue. The findings were written in conjunction with one teacher and five students from the school.

Sanders et al. (2016) found students' authentic and active engagement through the online essays, blog posts, Reddit posts, and tweets were empowering and meaningful in their ability to critically engage with the speaker outside of school by positioning themselves as "we're already somebody" (p. 522) in response to the speaker's #besomebody. This finding is connected with Roger et al.'s (2015) call to include adolescent critical literacies within the curriculum as ways for adolescents to continue to make meaning of themselves and the world. Students' responses through the various online platforms gained wider audience attention through online chats, comments, shares, and re-tweets; which were further supported through shares, comments, and

re-tweets by teaching staff. The support of the teaching staff through online sharing, comments, and re-tweets of the students' responses, also aligns with previous research findings that indicated collaborative and collective knowledge building, along with sharing knowledge with a wider audience, increases adolescents' motivation to learn in a school context (Davis, 2012; Rogers et al., 2015; Smith, 2019).

According to Sanders et al. (2016), the successful enactment of critical literacies skills was partly fostered by teachers who supported students in the quest to engage in a public dialogue. The teachers who facilitated the school newspaper, who taught the Media arts class, and who also contributed to the online blog discussions were all referenced as individuals who the students felt supported them (Sanders et al., 2016). Furthermore, the teacher who contributed to the online blog discussions also demonstrated their own critical literacies lens and advocated for the students in the school. The research findings emphasized the significance of the school context: competent teachers understanding their student population and creating a space in which students feel safe to learn, develop and grow.

***Challenges and tensions in critical literacies education.*** Challenges addressed in the studies above included constraints of policy and curriculum on pedagogy and instruction. The constraints and challenges appeared in discussions such as what is considered “appropriate” for school contexts. As such, teachers are often tasked with selecting topics that will engage students, thus re-creating power relationships in which the teacher is the ultimate authority (Fecho et al., 2012), and risking students either being resistant or completing the task in an inauthentic way (Pirbhai-Illich, 2010; Sanders et al., 2016). For example, Pirbhai-Illich (2010) found that students showed little interest, and even exhibited resistance to the original topics chosen by the teacher and researcher. When the teacher and researcher discussed the students

utilizing their lived experiences and interests for the project, the discussions around what is “appropriate” stemmed from barriers set out by the curriculum and the discourse that dominated school culture. In particular, the lived experiences and identity construction of the students, specifically the visibility of gang life and its influence in their community, was not deemed appropriate content for school.

Similarity, Sanders et al. (2016) raised concerns for educators about engagement in issues outside of the school setting, recognizing that a significant challenge to authentic engagement is working within real life contexts. In the study by Sanders et al. (2016), discussion with educators was centered on the paucity of “research advising teachers on how to withstand a media maelstrom” (p. 525), and teachers lacking knowledge about how to deal with the implications of students working within the public domain. Ultimately, teachers’ expression of the lack of training and curriculum support received in engaging students in authentic and real-life contextual learning, results in teachers passively selecting topics that they perceive as “appropriate” for school (Fecho et al., 2012). However, as addressed in Pirbhai-Illich’s (2010) study, teachers’ concern of choosing topics that feel “appropriate for school” can result in students continuing to lack self-agency and not developing the necessary skills to fully participate in democratic life.

The findings from the studies discussed in this section reveal that more attention needs to be focused on the school context and the role of the teacher in developing curriculum that is authentic, engaging, and appropriate for learners to succeed in a multifaceted world. More specifically, when considering a critical literacies approach with Indigenous learners, it is fundamental to acknowledge the following tension: the use of content that is “appropriate” for school is one that continues to privilege and centre dominant language and Discourse (Kee &

Carr-Chellman, 2019). As such, a critical literacies approach must be re-positioned to centre IK and ways of learning. Kee and Carr-Chellman (2019) argue that a critical literacies approach, when aligned with Indigenous pedagogies, has the potential to be transformative for Indigenous learners but they note the “need for more scholarship, dialog, and activism in favor of a critical pedagogy rooted in multiple cultural literacies and an ethical commitment to resisting destructive narratives of cultural oppression” (p. 102).

**Culturally relevant curriculum with Indigenous adolescents.** Content in the previous section highlighted that both school context and culturally-competent teachers are significant to the successful enactment of CLE with adolescents. As such, understanding pedagogical and curricular practices that are in alignment with IK and ways of learning will provide further insight into the literacies practices of Indigenous adolescents. In this section I review the literature on the socio-historical impacts of the contemporary school context for Indigenous adolescents; examine recent research on Indigenous adolescents’ literacies practices within culturally responsive (Gay, 2002), culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014), and culturally sustaining/revitalizing (McCarthy & Lee, 2014) school contexts; and summarize findings from research that focused on Indigenous adolescents’ literacies practices and culturally appropriate curricula. Within the final part of this section, I position my study to consider the role of CLE in creating trans-systemic spaces (Battiste, 2013) with Indigenous adolescents.

**Contemporary school-contexts for Indigenous adolescents.** As discussed in Chapter 1, the impacts of the residential school system, along with other assimilation policies, have continued to persist within Canada’s education system, despite the findings from numerous reports conducted on the state of Indigenous education that emphasize the need for change to the status quo (Final Report, TRC, 2015). In particular, racism embedded in school policies,

curriculum and teacher practices continues to impact the relationship of Indigenous adolescents with a Western school system (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). Findings from previous studies have shown that Indigenous adolescents encounter negative experiences in school such as facing overt and covert racism by non-Indigenous peers, silencing of voice, not validating IK or ways of learning, and having a lack of self-agency (Banister & Begoray, 2013; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Kanu, 2011; Pedro, 2015). These negative experiences contribute to Indigenous adolescents feeling disengaged with school.

However, research conducted by Hare and Pidgeon (2011) in a Northern region in Ontario with 39 Anishinaabe youth, ages 16-20, provides insight into ways that policy and curriculum can be shifted to address the issues of embedded racism and meet the needs of Indigenous learners. Hare and Pidgeon (2011) positioned their study by referring to previous research findings that indicated that “Indigenous youth confront racism on a regular basis in their school[s]...[and] struggle to find relevance in mainstream curriculum and pedagogies that largely ignore Indigenous histories, worldviews, and perspectives” (p. 94). More specifically, the racism faced by Indigenous students takes many forms including verbal and psychological abuse, low expectations by teachers, and limited educational opportunities. In their research, Hare and Pidgeon invited the youth to talk about their lived experiences as Indigenous students in both public school and reserve school contexts, and to consider ways in which they respond to educational challenges. Significant to this study was the researchers’ aim to engage “youth in research that is concerned with the reality of their lives” (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011, p.97) in order to give voice to Indigenous youth perspectives as a method to inform policy and practice. The researchers used an IK conceptual framework, specifically the metaphor of the “new warrior” (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011, p. 95), to guide the analysis of the interviews with the youth. The use of

the new warrior metaphor helped direct the researchers towards the categories of which three themes emerged: agency and resistance; Indigenous knowledge systems; and cultural integrity. Hare and Pidgeon found that the youth encountered racism through interactions with non-Indigenous peers and teachers, but that the youth drew strength from families and community as sources of agency, resilience, knowledge systems, and cultural integrity.

Similarly, Kanu's (2011) study sought the voices of Indigenous youth in order to investigate the influence of culture on learning; and to identify aspects of cultural socialization that mediate how Indigenous students received, negotiate, and respond to teaching and learning within a school-context. Kanu's research took place in a Grade 9 Social Studies class in Manitoba with 10 Indigenous students over two months. Kanu observed lessons and activities developed by the classroom teacher. The student-participants were asked to journal their experiences with the social studies curriculum and content. Data were collected through site observations, focus groups/talking circles, student journals, and research conversations with participants and their families. All data were coded and analyzed for emergent themes. Kanu found that students' self-identity and learning were drawn from community and family resources, and that when community resources were utilized, students demonstrated more comfort, authority and knowledge in their learning. The findings revealed that Indigenous adolescents experienced enhanced learning in the classroom when the instructional approaches aligned with cultural practices and community structures such as collaboration, cooperative learning, respect of individuals' choices, and ability to make decisions for oneself.

It is important to recognize that Indigenous adolescents are a diverse group, and tensions, issues, and challenges faced in schools are also linked to individual contexts and experiences. However, as a group that has been historically targeted and marginalized by colonial policies and

practices, a shift in pedagogical approaches, reflected through curriculum and instruction, is needed in order to address the challenges and tensions experienced by Indigenous adolescents in schools.

*Indigenous pedagogies and Indigenous adolescents' literacies practices.* In order to appropriately support Indigenous learners, it is fundamental to understand the relationship between the school context, instruction, and the local community. Using Indigenous pedagogies as a lens for understanding culturally relevant approaches to literacies, in this section I highlight current research on literacies practices enacted by Indigenous youth in a school context. Of importance is the acknowledgement of a notable gap in the literature regarding Indigenous adolescents' literacies practices specifically, and as such I draw on multiple studies with Indigenous learners approaching adolescents. Information gained from the research reviewed below can inform ways in which CRC for Indigenous adolescents can be explored within CLE.

In a study conducted by Patrick et al. (2013) with urban Inuit families in Canada, the researchers explored the use of multimodal projects for culturally responsive literacy education. The researchers sought to support ways in which families can contribute to the development of urban Inuit identities and literacy practices. The study was conducted in a family literacy program (FLP), run through the Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre (OICC), which is designed to promote Inuktitut and English literacy skills for Inuit families living in Ottawa. Participants included members of the OICC Literacy Working Group, researchers, eight children (ages 4-14), and nine parent/care-givers. The research was focused on two multimodal activities completed in the FLP, designed for children and their families to do together: the Photovoice Project and the "Sculpin Fishing Song" activity. The Photovoice project involved three workshops which included information about the aim of the photography project and how to use photography,

discussion of the photographs and selection of their best shots, and compilation of photos with the stories and captions (both in English and Inuktitut). The “Sculpin Fishing Song” activity included the following three components: learning about the sculpin fish; learning the sculpin fishing song in Inuktitut; and constructing the fishing rod. Data collection included activity artefacts, field notes, and workshop transcripts. Data were analyzed using visual ethnography methods.

Patrick et al. (2013) identified three themes in the Photovoice Project. The first theme was that the participants drew on various kinds of semiotic resources that connected interlinking lifeworlds relevant to urban Inuit such as landscapes, activities, and language use. The second theme was that the role of visual, oral, and written modes of intergenerational dialogue between the family member/care-taker and the child led to the creation of a story by the child. The final theme was that the role of the literacy artefact (the photographs) fostered a transfer in institutional literacy practices to the home. In the second project, the Sculpin Fishing Song activity, data analysis revealed an extended understanding of the role of the literacy artefact in transferring literacy practices from home to school to home again. For example, the participants learned that the fishing rod cannot be separate from the song, as the rod is necessary for the actions in the song to take place, and separating the song and object is inappropriate. The creation of the fishing rod meant the child could enact the song and by taking the rod home, the child could also practice the song at home.

Significant to Patrick et al.’s (2013) study is the consideration of how IK and ways of learning and Indigenous pedagogies inform culturally relevant multiliteracies practices. The researchers argued that “objects are a focal point of action and cultural practices” (Patrick et al., 2013, p. 58) which foster social bonding and intergenerational dialogue, transmission of culture

and linguistic knowledge, and enact movement and social network connections between home, community, and land. In particular, the creation of photographs through the Photovoice project, and the fishing rod, enabled the use of story and oral literacies that are valued in Indigenous communities, and demonstrated the strength of pedagogical practices that link visual and oral modes of communication.

Similarly, Stanton and Sutton's (2012) participatory action research with Indigenous high school students in the United States explored how students draw on oral and visual literacies as IK and ways of knowing to enhance written literacy skills through multimodal projects. The researchers argued that culturally responsive education includes use of place-based and story-telling pedagogies, and that literacies other than writing can increase motivation and engagement for Indigenous youth in school. The researchers examined two multimodal projects including a photovoice project on food sustainability and critical story-hearing through Elder interviews. The projects were completed over two years in an English Language Arts class located in an alternate high-school that bordered a reserve in the western United States. During the first project, the only grocery store on the reserve was shut down due to conflict with taxation on non-Native items. The students used this opportunity to discuss sovereignty, and access to food, and in turn focused their photovoice projects on local food sustainability. The students consulted with members in their local community before generating suggestions for how to help the community in maintaining dignity and sovereignty with access to healthy food sources. The students disseminated their findings at regional conferences, to the school district, to food organizations, and to local and federal government agencies. Their project also led to the development of community gardens and reintroduction to traditional foods on reserve (Stanton & Sutton, 2012). The second multimodal project was focused on critical story-hearing through Elder interviews.

The students were paired up with Elders who agreed to have their stories recorded, and then the students were responsible for transcribing and interpreting the stories in written form.

Throughout the project the students continuously consulted with the Elders to ensure culturally-responsive listening was being followed.

The authors used a placed-based literacy framework to guide their analysis and provide examples of spoken and visual forms of literacy. Stanton and Sutton discussed their findings in relation to field observations, discussions with mentors in the community, discussions with students, and project artefacts. They found that through the projects, students explored community challenges, identified themes found in the community challenges, acted in response to the information gathered, connected to cultural and civic forms of literacy, collaborated and connected to their local community, and shared their findings. Stanton and Sutton (2012) also found that the projects “helped students view literacy development as a holistic, collaborative, and a powerful process” (p. 83).

Stanton and Sutton’s (2012) community-based projects strongly demonstrated authentic, experiential, and multimodal learning. As well, the students felt empowered and able to advocate for issues that were important to the local community because of the collaboration and connections that were fostered with members within the community. Stanton and Sutton reported that literacy practices utilized and taken up by the students in this project included photography and interviews, as well as written forms such as brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing. Stanton and Sutton concluded that culturally responsive literacy education that includes authentic and community contexts offers possibilities for students to deconstruct and challenge dominant texts. Although the projects did not necessarily involve identifying and deconstructing language and power, they were a starting point for discussions on dominant discourse.

In another study conducted by Mills et al. (2016) in an independent Indigenous school in Queensland, Australia, the researchers worked with Indigenous youth ages 9-12, teaching staff, and community members to identify essential features of Indigenous ways of multimodal literacy. The researchers asked “what are the central themes of Indigenous knowledge represented in the talk and multimodal texts of Indigenous students?” (Mills et al., 2016, p. 2). Using cross-cultural participatory research over the course of one year in the school, the research team included a university professor (non-Indigenous), two teachers (one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous), and a school principal (Indigenous). The research was conducted in two classrooms, Years 4-5 and Years 6-7, and the students were tasked with retelling an Indigenous Dreamtime story from South East Queensland using multimodal forms and specific digital technologies. The teachers of the two classrooms developed and taught the curriculum with support from Elders who came to the classrooms as special visitors to share their cultural knowledge. Data collection included multimodal artefacts produced by the students, and semi-structured interviews with the students about their multimodal texts and practices. The interviews and texts were coded for recurring themes and analyzed for specific cultural meanings of Indigenous history and practices. The results were shared with Indigenous Elders and the teachers to ensure the authenticity of Indigenous perspectives and to respect the knowledge structures in the community.

The interpretive themes and key findings discussed by Mills et al. (2016) focused on Indigenous ways of multimodal literacy in order to make the literacies curriculum more culturally relevant. The interpretive themes included transgenerational knowledge, multimodal forms of knowledge, place or territorial knowledge, and collective knowledge. The first theme, transgenerational knowledge, revealed the significance of the flow of knowledge from Elders to

students to future generations. The second theme, multimodal forms of knowledge, included the value of dance, storytelling, art and music to reflect culture, understanding, and identity. The third theme, place or territorial knowledge, was significant in that all the stories and multimodal forms reflected the value of location and the land on understanding knowledge and positioning oneself in the world. The final theme, collective knowledge, revealed the importance of individual and collective nature of social action (Mills et al., 2016). Overall, Mills et al. concluded that current literacy pedagogy must follow Indigenous knowledge; that creating culturally appropriate curriculum means students must be introduced to and provided access to powerful forms of language; and that students have a public platform/audience to convey their messages.

Finally, in a recent case study conducted by Stanton et al. (2020), the researchers looked at digital storywork as an advanced pedagogical and methodological approach to critical media literacy (CML) research and practices with Indigenous youth. Stanton et al. used youth participatory action research with two Indigenous communities. The participants included 19 self-identifying Indigenous youth from the Piikani (Blackfeet) Reservation and the Apaalooke (Crow) Reservation; Elders, cultural and tribal leaders, program directors, educators, and high school teachers from both communities (all community members and school leaders identified as Indigenous with the exception of the four high school teachers from the Piikani alternative school); and three researchers (two Indigenous and one non-Indigenous). The student filmmakers were tasked by their teachers with creating videos connected to a topic of importance in their community. All the participants engaged in five workshops: three workshops were conducted in each community, and two workshops were done at the university. The workshops featured research preparation on protocols and filmmaking, techniques for interviewing, the use of video

equipment, and information about storyboarding and editing. The university labs were used for storyboarding and editing the digital storywork videos, and then the videos were shared and presented back to the respective communities. Data collection included planning resources from the teachers, interviews with the participants and educators, social media discussions and posts, artefacts from the workshops, and researcher memos and field notes. The data were analyzed in four stages: in-vivo open coding; collaborative coding with student filmmakers; participatory sense making (going beyond member checking by having a constant dialogue between the research team and the participants); and alignment of coding with storywork values.

Three main findings emerged from the data analysis that were significant to understanding the use of digital storywork with Indigenous adolescents. First, digital storywork advanced holistic and respectful understandings of Indigenous experiences, including enhancing critical thinking and IK and ways of learning. Second, digital storywork promoted responsibility and reverence through civic engagement in which students learned to tell stories and share knowledge “in a good way” (Stanton et al., 2020, p. 57). Third, digital storytelling generated interrelatedness and synergy through dialogue; that is students and Elders collaborated and shared knowledge with one another.

**Summary.** The studies discussed above featured students engaged in multimodal projects that were connected to their lived experiences through community and place-based pedagogies, and positioned them as knowledge-holders through storytelling and oral literacy pedagogies. The projects provided opportunities for social advocacy through multimodal expression. Students utilized multiple forms of expressions of learning that are consistent with current adolescent literacies practices, and included appropriate fusing of digital technologies with cultural knowledges, such as the digital stories (Mills et al., 2016; Stanton et al., 2020) or the photovoice

projects (Patrick et al., 2013; Stanton & Sutton, 2012). Other forms of literacies expression by Indigenous youth included interviews, non-digital artwork, dance, music, and writing (Mills et al., 2016; Patrick et al., 2013; Stanton & Sutton, 2012). With regard to implementing literacies curriculum and instruction with Indigenous youth, successful approaches included connections to community, collaborative learning, and knowledge as shared and co-constructed.

### **Chapter Summary**

In Chapter 2, I discussed the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding the study: sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1986), D/discourse framework (Gee, 1992, 2003), Indigenous ways of knowing and learning (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2002; Battiste, 2002; Hare, 2011) culturally relevant curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014); and critical literacies (Janks, 2013, 2014; Freire, 1970; Shor, 1999). The theoretical and conceptual frameworks provide lenses that emphasize how adolescent literacies and critical literacies education practices are significant to the development of curriculum and instruction. Finally, a review of current research on Indigenous pedagogies and Indigenous adolescents' literacies practices inform my research questions about ways in which CRC (TRC, 2015) for critical literacies education can be developed.

By listening to the voices of Indigenous adolescents, drawing on successful enactments of critical literacies, and recognizing the tensions and issues educators and students experience when enacting critical literacies, researchers and teachers can begin to identify gaps in the critical literacies literature by expanding their understanding of and potential for culturally relevant critical literacies education. As such, researchers and educators must continue to: 1) include students' various knowledge systems in order to bridge academic skills and concepts (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Alvermann, 2009; Janks, 2014); 2) develop and nurture students'

culture competencies (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2014; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014); 3) engage students in reflecting upon their own lives (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Pirhbay-Illich, 2010); and 4) engage students in critiquing and challenging dominant discourses (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Janks, 2014; Poulus & Exley, 2018). Inclusion of Indigenous pedagogies is significant to developing CRC for Indigenous learners (Battiste 2002; 2013; Kanu, 2011; Mills et al., 2016; Patrick et al., 2013; Stanton et al., 2020; Stanton & Sutton, 2012). But, in order to work towards CRC in CLE for Indigenous learners, culturally sustaining and revitalizing practices (McCarty & Lee, 2014) must be understood within trans-systemic spaces (Battiste, 2013) so as to prepare students to participate in their communities both locally and globally (Paris & Alim, 2014). Consideration of the aforementioned lead to my research questions:

1. How do Indigenous knowledges, Western knowledge, and adolescent knowledge intersect in a *Critical Media Literacies* course?
  - a. What are the influences of critical literacies instruction on this intersection?
2. What might characterize trans-systemic spaces for Indigenous adolescents in a high-school classroom?
  - a. How can Indigenous adolescents, Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and other community members create trans-systemic spaces?
  - b. What are the benefits and challenges of trans-systemic spaces for Indigenous adolescents?

Through my research questions I sought to examine the characterization of cultural pluralism, and more specifically how trans-systemic spaces for Indigenous adolescents are actually created and sustained within the context of critical literacies education.

In Chapter 3 I discuss the study's methodology including methodological assumptions, data collection methods, and methods of analysis used to answer the research questions.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Methodology**

In this chapter I detail how qualitative research methodologies in general, and case study methodology in particular, were appropriate for the purposes of the study. To review, the research focused on how trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education (CLE) are created for Indigenous adolescents, and illuminated how Indigenous adolescents responded to CLE within an Indigenous education context, in order to reveal the characteristics of such spaces.

In the first section of this chapter I present my rationale for the research methodology in which I discuss the philosophical assumptions in qualitative research methodologies, my position as a researcher, and the use of case study as a qualitative research methodology. In the second section I describe my research design, including the setting and context, research participants, procedures for recruitment of the research participants, and the data collection and analysis procedures. In the final section I discuss the credibility of the research design. Finally, I provide a chapter summary and introduce connections to the findings as discussed in Chapter 4.

#### **Rationale for Research Methodology**

This study is grounded in the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research methodologies in general, and developed from case study methodology in particular. Qualitative research has the potential to develop a holistic understanding of a phenomenon, and create depth and richness to contextual understandings by making the world visible in different ways with multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The overarching purpose of qualitative research is to make sense of a contemporary phenomenon found within a natural setting (Merriam, 1985, 1998, 2009; Yin, 2014) through the investigation of the world of lived experiences, “where individual belief and action intersect with culture” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 28). In order to investigate the world of lived experiences,

collecting and analyzing data includes a set of procedures that are purposeful and involves the intentional sampling of “a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination” (Creswell, 2013, p. 147). As such, qualitative research in general, and case study methodology in particular, are characterized by methods and approaches of data collection and analysis appropriate for exploring the research questions of my study.

### ***Qualitative Research***

The philosophical assumptions of qualitative research methodologies are a set of beliefs that inform research practices, methods, and approaches. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest five assumptions about the nature of doing qualitative research: 1) qualitative research relies on multiple methods for capturing multiple realities in order to form a holistic understanding of what is being studied; 2) there are multiple ways to tell a story about society or the social world; 3) qualitative researchers use interviews and observations in order to commit to capturing individual points of view; 4) the constraints of everyday social life are the focus of qualitative research; and, 5) qualitative researchers believe in the value of “thick”, or rich, descriptions of the social world and the context in which they are studying. These assumptions inform how qualitative research data are collected, interpreted and valued for the purpose of exploring emerging issues or ideas within a social context and the meaning that people bring to them. This approach to research is also linked to the researcher’s axiological, ontological, and epistemological positions (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1985; 1998).

**Researcher’s Position.** When considering a qualitative researcher is looking at lived experiences, then the qualitative researcher needs to acknowledge the existence of competing and multiple paradigms and perspectives. This stance becomes the qualitative researcher’s axiological position as there is an acknowledgment that the researcher is shaped by their own

personal background, experiences, and values; and that the researcher comes with their own situated perspectives on theory, method and analysis that position the research questions, design, and findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 1998).

It is important in qualitative research for the researcher to make their situated perspectives explicit (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), not only to acknowledge the subjectivity embedded in this type of research, but also as part of the process of decolonizing research and practices within Western institutions (Kovach, 2009; Regan, 2010). More specifically, Kovach (2009), in explaining positioning one's self in relation to research with Indigenous communities, suggests the need for specific multi-layered preparation on behalf of each individual researcher. Kovach (2009) defines preparatory work as "clarifying the inquiry purpose, which invariably gets to the motivations. Preparation assumes self-awareness and an ability to situate self within the research" (p. 107). In Chapter 1, I locate myself within the research and make explicit my purpose and intentions, in order to be accountable as a researcher, and to be accountable to the research and the community (Kovach, 2009).

Based on my knowledge, perspectives, and views, I value educational spaces as places of opportunity for creating systemic change when power structures are made explicit. I also believe that critical literacies education has the capacity to encourage adolescents to understand their role, relationships, beliefs, and attitudes in society and empower them to have a voice, take action, and participate in everyday issues that matter to them. I chose critical literacies as a conceptual framework as it supports my values and beliefs in working towards empowerment of Indigenous adolescents, and enables me to advocate for the continuous development of culturally appropriate curriculum. My choice of qualitative, interpretive, and inductive research methods and approaches are meant to reflect the influence of my axiological position, particularly the

uniqueness of the case, the use of multiple sources of data, and the analysis for emergent themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014).

**Ontological, Epistemological, and Axiological Perspectives.** The ontological position, or nature of reality of my study is a belief in multiple realities which are socially co-constructed between/by individuals and the contexts in which the individuals' experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours are shaped (Gee, 1992, 2002; Vygotsky, 1986). My research was primarily exploratory while seeking to build a descriptive understanding of trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education. The descriptive account is intended to show the multiple realities of the study participants through interpretive meanings the participants gave to their experience.

Consistent with my ontological position, the epistemological perspective, my belief about how reality is known, is that learning is socially co-constructed between/by individuals and their contexts. Therefore, the context of the study is just as important to consider in qualitative research design in terms of interpreting and understanding individual experiences. Creswell (2014) argues that knowledge is known through the subjective experiences of people and explains that it becomes important "to conduct studies in the 'field,' where the participants live and work – these are important contexts for understanding what the participants are saying" (p. 20).

In acknowledging the multiple realities of the participants within the study, it is also important to recognize that a researcher's axiological position will influence how the findings are interpreted and reported, and that readers of the qualitative research generate their own interpretations (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1998). As such, my axiological stance is one that values and honors individual experiences and my belief is that those experiences are co-constructed between/by individuals and their contexts. The interpretation of any qualitative

research data then, exists at the intersection and co-construction of the interactions of the researcher, the participants, and the context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

In order to reveal multiple realities and deepen understanding of a complex contemporary phenomenon, I used inductive approaches for both data collection and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Data collection for the study, which included numerous sources from the field such as semi-structured interviews, observations, classroom artefacts, and student produced artefacts, revealed multiple experiences and meanings (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Multiple sources of data are useful for understanding issues and gaining a holistic understanding of a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Inductive approaches to analyzing data include looking for emerging *themes* and *patterns* (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Themes and patterns help to reveal structure, significance in experiences, and capture meaning in relationship to the research questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2014).

In order to reveal emerging themes and patterns, a qualitative researcher engages in a dialogical data collection process through the use of semi-structured or open interviews (Abma & Stake, 2014; Merriam, 1998). In this study, the semi-structured interviews provided the participants with an opportunity to explain or discuss experiences, and for myself to clarify information. In addition, classroom and student produced artefacts facilitated further dialogue during the semi-structured interviews, as meanings of those artefacts were discussed between the myself and participants to further clarify and understand beliefs, attitudes and experiences (Pink, 2001; Rogers & Wetzel, 2014).

The use of inductive approaches to data collection and analysis helps a researcher to build a descriptive account of a phenomenon and highlight participants' multiple realities and

individual experiences. In the next section I discuss case study as a qualitative methodology, explain why qualitative case study was the most appropriate methodology for my research, and address the strengths and limitations to a case study approach.

### *Case Study as a Qualitative Methodology*

Case study, as a type of qualitative research methodology, offers a certain approach to a research issue or phenomenon. Defining case study research has been challenging in the past in part because case study has been criticized for its lack of rigor (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). In addition, those who write about case study methodology come from different philosophical orientations and have different approaches to research purpose and design (Yazan, 2015). However, Creswell (2013), combining what case study methodologists agree on, defines case study as:

[A] qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a *case*) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a *case description* and *case themes*. (p. 97; italics and bold print in original text).

It is also agreed upon by case study methodologists that case study is particularly suited for answering *how*, *why*, or *what* questions (in search of process or understanding) in situations in which the context and phenomenon being studied cannot be separated, or the boundaries between context and case are blurred (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2014). For the purpose of my study, I combined case study approaches of Merriam (1998; 2009) and Yin (2014). Each scholar has outlined a clear structure and design that are best suited to the study's

questions, which provide guidance on maintaining an element of rigor for a novice researcher (Yazan, 2015).

Case study is selected when a researcher is interested in a process rather than an outcome, and the process is conflated with the phenomenon/unit of study (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) argues that the most defining characteristic of a case study is in defining the phenomenon occurring within a bounded system, and that by “concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon” (p. 29).

The purpose of my study was to describe a phenomenon (how trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education is created) to further understand the processes and characteristics that make up trans-systemic spaces in CLE. The research was situated in a real-world context in which the boundaries between the phenomenon (trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education) and context (Indigenous cultural high-school program) were blurred. My research questions focused on *how* different knowledges intersect and the influence of critical literacies instruction on this intersection, as well as *how* trans-systemic spaces are created and the elements that *characterize* these spaces – all of which are focused on understanding a process in order to illuminate significant factors in such a space. Although the questions could be explored in another context, the particular program in which the students were enrolled is one chosen by students interested in the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing. As discussed in Chapter 2, a space that is inclusive and centralizes Indigenous knowledges (IK) and ways of knowing is significant to understanding and characterizing trans-systemic spaces in a Western education setting.

The procedures for designing a case study follow the same principles of qualitative research but with a focus on the bounded system/case over a certain period of time. A bounded system is selected on the bases of its uniqueness and can include a particular program, classroom, organization, person, or phenomenon in order to answer a question; the bounded system generally becomes the main unit of analysis (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Yin, 2014). In this study, the phenomenon (bounded case) of trans-systemic spaces in CLE was the main unit of analysis. However, individual students also represented *embedded cases/units of analysis* (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014), where their individual voices could provide depth and understanding with regards to experience. Kincheloe et al. (2011) argue that multiple perspectives of difference can provide new and alternative ways of producing knowledge. They also contend that it is important for

a social researcher from a metropolitan center to understand forms of Indigenous knowledge, urban knowledge, and youth knowledge production [because] incongruities between such cultural modes of inquiry are quite valuable, for within the tensions of difference rest insights into multiple dimensions of the research act” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 339).

In case study research the defined units of analysis enable a researcher to focus on which types of data to collect and analyze, as well as to keep the research within feasible limits (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). A case description, along with themes and patterns, are reported in order to understand the phenomenon under study, examine theoretical constructs, and report new learnings that will contribute to moving knowledge forward (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Before discussion of the research design for this study, it is important to

acknowledge the strengths and limitations of qualitative case study research, and how the research design of my study addressed such limitations.

**Strengths and Limitations of Case Study Research.** Case study research has many strengths as a qualitative research methodology including offering a way to investigate complex social phenomena with many variables; being embedded in real-life contexts; offering holistic understandings; illuminating meaning and insights to expand understanding and knowledge of theory, practice, or both; advancing a field's knowledge base; and informing policy and practice (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014).

However, as with all research methodologies, case study has limitations, which need to be considered and addressed through the research design. Limitations to case study research include the amount of time and money needed to collect data, the researcher's sensitivity and integrity during data collection (ability to understand and be empathic towards their participants and adjust data collection as needed), researcher bias during the data analysis, and issues of reliability, validity, and generalizability (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Most of these limitations such as time and money, and researcher sensitivity, integrity and bias are addressed through the research design via methods and approaches such as binding the case, being an observer-participant, following observation protocols, and using a constant-comparative approach to data analysis (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014), all of which are discussed below. I specifically address the reliability and validity of the research design under the subheading of "credibility."

In the next section on the research design, I describe the setting and context, and the procedures for recruitment, data collection and data analysis that were used based on case study methodology.

## Research Design

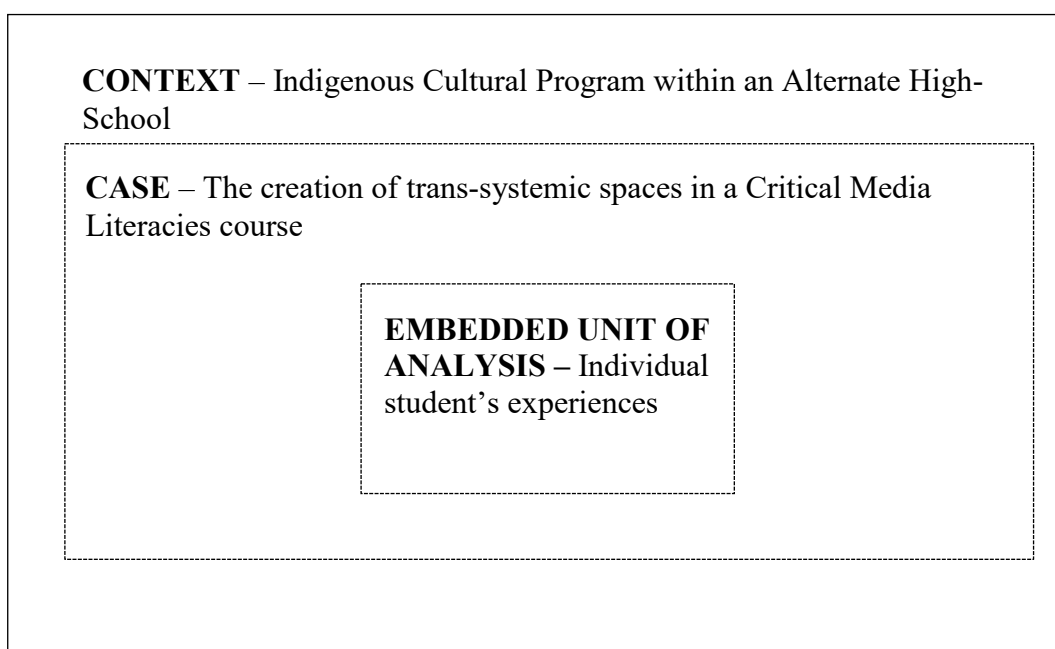
The study was designed as a qualitative case study for the purpose of describing and characterizing trans-systemic spaces at the intersection of CLE, IK, Western knowledge (WK), and adolescent knowledge for Indigenous adolescents. In order to address both a holistic understanding of the research questions, as well as detailed descriptions of individual experiences from within the case, I chose *an embedded single-case approach* (Yin, 2014). As more than one identifiable unit of analysis was embedded in the context of the study, I draw on Yin's (2014) embedded single-case study design to illustrate the context, case (main unit of analysis), and embedded units of analysis for answering the research questions (see Figure 1).

The context of the study was an Indigenous Cultural Program (ICP) within an alternative high school in British Columbia. The ICP was purposefully selected for its unique attributes that can facilitate trans-systemic spaces for Indigenous adolescents (Merriam, 1998). The mandate of the ICP centers IK and ways of learning as the pedagogical practices for both the humanities and science curriculum. In particular, the ICP is committed to the Indigenous humanities by focusing on learning and knowledge-sharing from the local community and Elders, place-based and hands-on activities, and knowledge expression through language, culture and the arts (Battiste, 2013). As described in Chapter 1, I had a standing relationship with the school, as a former teacher, and the ICP program, in which I had previously worked with staff, students, and community in a research capacity (Smith, 2012).

The case was bounded by a *Critical Media Literacies* (CML) course that was offered over five months during the 2016-2017 school year. The main unit of analysis was the phenomenon of trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education. The experiences of individual student-participants within the CML course were identified as embedded units of

analysis as experiences provide an in-depth understanding of ways individuals construct knowledge within a particular context.

In the following sections I present an overview of the study's context, which includes the research setting, participants, and CML course. As previously discussed, the context of the study is significant for understanding the case and units of analysis (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). The description of the context is based on my observations and interactions with the individuals in the ICP where the study took place.



*Figure 1.* Embedded single-case study design showing the context, case (main unit of analysis), and embedded units of analysis for the study.

### ***Research Setting and Context***

The setting of this study was an ICP being offered through an alternative high-school located in the interior of British Columbia. The term “alternative” in this setting is in reference to enrolment at the high-school based on referrals from a student’s regular catchment school (School District #73, 2014); the school is publicly funded and administrated through the local

school district. Students who attend the alternative school have been referred because conventional high-school settings are not meeting their academic, social, emotional, and/or cultural needs. The alternative high school offers seven different programs in order to better meet the needs of the students, increase their attendance in classes, and support their learning goals. Each program at the school has its own set of guidelines for the students, including part-time or full-time programming based on individual needs. As noted in Chapter 1, within the local school district, Indigenous students constitute 15-16% of the general student population (School District #73, 2018). However, within the alternative school Indigenous students represent 51% of the student population (School District #73, 2019). The ICP, one of the seven programs offered, is a choice program for Indigenous students enrolled through the alternative school, who self-identify as Indigenous (inclusive of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) and “includes a significant focus on Aboriginal culture and a variety of out of school activities” (School District #73, 2014, p. 2). The ICP takes up to 40 students in Grades 9-12. If students choose to participate in the ICP, they attend school for the full-day to work on academic courses required for graduation, as well as to have access to the cultural enhancing activities such as Elders’ circles, drum group, art, *lahal* tournaments<sup>2</sup>, outdoor retreats, and canoeing. The program also offers seasonal dinners for the students and their families throughout the year.

The school building itself has three wings, two of which are utilized by other programs. The wing used by the ICP is marked by visuals of student projects, both externally (Figure 2) and internally, with the hallway walls decorated in celebration of students and their successes (Figure 3).

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<sup>2</sup> *Lahal* is a traditional Secwepemc guessing game that includes teams of six people, and the use of 11–13 sticks and 4 bones. *Lahal* is played on special occasions, celebrations, and gatherings.



Figure 2. Main entrance to ICP with student artwork lining the fence.



Figure 3. Wall of Success in the ICP hallway at the school.

The ICP staff consists of two full-time teachers, an Aboriginal Education Worker (AEW), a counsellor, and two classroom education assistants. Additional members of the community are involved in the program at various points in time depending on community members' availability and access to funds. At the time of the study, the program had three Elders attached to the school, a youth leader (funded through a federal government program), and an artist-in-residence (funded through an *ArtStarts* in schools grant<sup>3</sup>).

The ICP has three classrooms, a computer lab, a counselling office, and a kitchen with student seating at tables and couches. The ICP shares a gymnasium and weight-room with the other programs offered in the building. The three classrooms and computer lab are divided into spaces where students attend to various aspects of their programming. The first of the classrooms is designated as a space for the AEW to run cultural components of the program such as Elders' circles; making gifts such as tobacco pouches, soap, or mini moccasins; or hosting community and family members for celebrations. The second classroom is used as the science and art room; the third classroom functions as the humanities room; and the computer lab is primarily used for math courses. The program coordinator, who participated in my study, is also the humanities instructor. The program coordinator's classroom is where student's check-in upon arrival each day. The room also hosts the bulk of their print-based resources (see Figure 4) as the school does not have a library. During the study, students spent a lot of time amongst the various classrooms depending on their topics, type of project, and resources they needed to access. The school environment allows for the students to move easily between rooms, and connect with the various school staff.

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<sup>3</sup> ArtStarts in schools "is a charitable organization that expands the role of art education to activate learning and nurture creativity in British Columbia's young people." Further information on the grant program can be found at <https://artstarts.com/home>



*Figure 4.* The humanities classroom resource corner located in one of the three classrooms at the ICP.

I had previously worked with the project coordinator and students in the ICP as a research assistant on a graphic novel project in 2015 (see Brown & Begoray, 2017). During my time as a research assistant I was able to build relationships with the staff and students in the program. The relationships I developed enabled my acceptance into their learning environment and afforded me the opportunity to have many discussions around the structure of the program, and ways in which the staff were working to meet the needs of their students.

An ongoing concern for the program coordinator, and those involved in the ICP, is the lack of electives available for the students. The ICP offers all the core subject area courses, and some humanities and science electives, but few electives are available for their students. As the ICP is located within an old elementary school building, the school does not have science or home economics labs, trade shops, a band room, or a theatre room – rooms typically available in

the public high-schools in the district. The program coordinator and staff work with community members and outside agencies to help create opportunities for elective course credits by getting the students out of the building. Many of the outside activities are primarily used to increase Indigenous pedagogy and enhance courses already being offered, and do not provide students with additional credit towards graduation.

In order to start to address the issue of limited electives, the program coordinator approached me during the spring of 2016 to help them create a Board Authority Approved (BAA) course that students could take as an elective. Based on the students' interests shown in the graphic novel project, we designed the CML course. The BAA committee and schoolboard trustees approved the CML course in June 2016. The CML course is specifically designed to enhance critical literacies practices through the use of media. The course objectives/Big Ideas include having students examine issues related to power, control and equity of information; engage in authentic and collaborative learning; and enact social change through the creation of a multimodal project of their choice (see Appendix A).

Since the students work primarily on an individual self-paced framework for their academic courses, the program coordinator uses a theme-based model to underpin the program design for each year in order to create unity, purpose, and a sense of belonging within the group. The theme for the year, selected by the program coordinator based on students' interests from the previous year, influences the delivery of certain courses such as Art, Social Studies, and English, as well as the selection of field trips and cultural activities. For example, inspired by the creation of the CML course and positive feedback to the graphic novel projects, the theme during this research was "Finding and Sharing Your Voice." The CML course (described in further detail below) was taught and facilitated in a cross-curricular manner with elements of it being included

in their Art, Social Studies, and English curriculum. As well, the final projects and presentations of learning for the CML course were designed to provide an authentic place for students to share their voice with others.

To prepare for the course, the program coordinator generated a general outline using inquiry and project-based learning as the design framework (see Appendix B). The CML course offered some initial whole-class instruction, and two workshops, which I helped to facilitate. The course included multiple assignments such as completing a questionnaire on personal media usage, journaling, analyzing news sources, and writing a proposal in order to scaffold students' learning on concepts related to critical literacies, and to help students organize their ideas around topics for their projects. Through the support of the program coordinator, artist-in-residence, and other staff and community members, students then embarked on a five-month journey in creating, organizing, and sharing their projects with the public.

### ***Research Participants***

The participants of the study were the students who were enrolled in the CML course, the program coordinator/teacher of the CML course, and community members working with the students during the CML course, who included the AEW, a local artist-in-residence, and an Elder. I was an observer-participant within the study. Each of the research participant groups are discussed below.

The students who were enrolled in the CML courses were in Grades 10-12 and ranged in age from 15-18. Of the 23 students who were enrolled and completed the CML course, 6 male and 10 female students agreed to be part of the study. At the time of the study, 5 participants were in Grade 10, 5 were in Grade 11, and 6 were in Grade 12. The students are all primarily urban residents and live with their families. However, some students came from various interior

reserves or out of province, and lived with extended family or in boarding homes (see Table 1 for an overview of the student participants). The students' previous exposure to their own culture, history, and language, ranged from self-identified "traditional" with daily exposure to culture and language, to a complete absence of previous connections with their culture.

Table 1

*Student Participant Chart including their CML project topics and project types.*

Student*	Age	Nation	Community	Project Topic	Project Type
Brian	17	Secwepemc	Canim Lake, BC	White Privilege	Tree Collage
Sarah	16	St'át'imc	D'Arcy, BC	Talking Stick	Experiential Learning and Teaching
Autumn	16	Sioux, Assiniboine, Cree	White Bear, SK		Photographs of Talking Stick workshop and Talking Sticks
Alexa	15	Secwepemc	Canim Lake, BC	Intergenerational Impact of Residential schools	Photography Series
Jules	15	Nuxalk	Bella Coola, BC	Indigenous Youth Suicide	Painting
Kalvin	15	Secwepemc	Tk'emlúps, BC	Graffiti is Art	Graffiti Installation
Danny	17	Tsáá? Ché Ne Dane	Doig River, BC	Anxiety & Depression	Short Story
William	18	Secwepemc Ulkatcho	Tk'emlúps BC	Importance of Ceremony	Digital Video Archive
Nicole	16	Anishinaabe	Blood Vein, MB	Importance of Education	Video Letter
Emma	18	Secwepemc	Tk'emlúps, BC	Buddy Project	Information Video
Liz	17	Nakota Inuit	Pheasant Rump, SK	Homelessness	Slide Show
Mitch	17	Ulkatcho	Anaheim Lake, BC		
Brendan	18	Cree Nakota	Regina, SK	Youth Incarceration	News Article

(Thunderchild First Nation)					
Casey	17	St'át'imc	Seton Lake, BC	Residential Schools	Painting
Terry	18	Carrier	Lake Babine, BC	Impact of Residential Schools	News Article
Shawn	18	Nuxalk	Bella Coola, BC	Importance of Storytelling for Children	Digital Videos of Stories

\*All participant names are pseudonyms

The program coordinator, Camille, was the classroom teacher for the CML course, and is referred to as the classroom teacher from this point forward. The classroom teacher is non-Indigenous. At the time of the study the classroom teacher had been working with the ICP for six years, and in the role of the program coordinator for three years. Her teaching background is in the humanities, and she has spent most of her teaching career in an alternative school setting. She also has a Master of Education degree in counselling.

The AEW, Shirley, had been with the program for four years at the time of the study. She identifies as Cree-Métis. Her role involves supporting students through connecting with their families, providing contacts for cultural supports in the community, and working with the students in the classroom. She also organizes an Elders' group to act as advisors and guides for the program, and assists students towards graduation and in applying for post-secondary institutions, grants and scholarships. The AEW recommended an Elder to me to approach for supporting the CML course. She also assisted students with locating community resources for the projects.

The Elder, Bonnie, connected to the CML course, had been a member of the Elders' advisory group for the previous two years. Before retirement she was an educator and an Aboriginal District Principal. She identifies as Inuit and is a residential school survivor. She was

approached by myself and invited to participate as a consultant in the CML course and the research. As a consultant in the CML course, the Elder's roles included meeting with the teacher to discuss the various projects that students were working on, and then providing guidance on supporting the students. During the course, the Elder provided students with cultural support around Indigenous knowledges and ways of learning. She also taught a few students traditional ways to make talking sticks so that the students could pass on the knowledge to younger students as part of their CML project. As a consultant to the research, the Elder met with me on days where lunch time followed the CML class. We talked and debriefed over lunch (made daily on-site for all staff and students in the ICP) about the types of work she was doing with the students in the CML course, her experiences in education in general, as well as having continual conversations about my research purpose and my role as a researcher and educator. Our meetings allowed us to build a relationship that assisted me in ensuring I was staying accountable to myself, the research, and the community (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009).

The local artist-in-residence, Curtis, was hired externally through grant money received by the ICP. The artist-in-residence had worked with the program before on previous arts projects. He was hired to specifically mentor and facilitate students enrolled in the CML course. He identifies as Nlaka'pamux and Secwepemc, and has been an advocate for youth and the arts for over 15 years. He has a diverse range of artistic skills, and his experiences include being commissioned across Canada to do street art installations, writing and publishing books on poetry, playing the guitar, and creating YouTube videos for film festivals. At the start of the CML course the artist-in-resident led a workshop on modes of expression and art as acts of resistance. During the CML course he assisted students 2-3 times a week on the development of their projects.

My role as an observer-participant was to assist the classroom teacher in some of the initial lessons around critical literacies; to support, talk with, and observe the students during class time in the CML course from January-May 2017; and to talk with and observe the Elder, AEW, and artist-in-resident during the CML course. As previously mentioned, I had worked with some of the students and staff in this program on a research project during the 2015-2016 school year. Furthermore, as a former classroom teacher, some of the students knew me as a teacher who periodically worked on-call in their program; I had a working relationship with both the AEW (we worked together in another school within the district in 2012-2013) and the artist-in-residence (we worked together on a public mural project for a BCFN class I taught in 2015).

### ***Recruitment Procedures***

I began the recruitment for my project upon approval from the University of Victoria Human Ethics Review Board to conduct research (see Appendix C). I first sought permission from the Superintendent of School District #73 and the District Principal of Aboriginal Education (see Appendix D). The letter outlined the intended research and asked permission to approach the principal of the alternative high-school and classroom teacher for the CML course.

With permission from the Superintendent and District Principal of Aboriginal Education, I sent letters of information to the alternate school principal, asking permission to approach the classroom teacher (see Appendix E). Once permission was granted from the principal, I approached the classroom teacher to be part of the research. The teacher was provided with a letter detailing the study and a consent form (see Appendix F). Once the classroom teacher consented to be part of the study, I met face-to-face with her to discuss approaching the students and any additional staff that would be working with the students during the CML course.

With the support of the classroom teacher, students were presented with information about the research through recruitment letters and consent forms (see Appendix G). The letters and consent forms were reviewed during class time that was agreed upon by the teacher, and students were given opportunities to ask questions or to ask for clarification. Students were also given letters to take home to their families, and encouraged to share with them the information about the research study (see Appendix H).

Through consultation with the classroom teacher, I also approached staff and community members who would be working directly with the students during the CML course. The members I approached included the AEW, artist-in-residence, and an Elder. The AEW and artist-in-residence were provided with a letter and consent form (see Appendix I) for their consideration. I met face-to-face with each member individually to go over the research and provide them with the opportunity to ask any questions or receive clarification. With the guidance and recommendation of the AEW, and to ensure appropriate protocols were followed (Smith, 2012), I approached one of the Elders attached to the school. As I did not have a prior relationship with the Elder, and in discussion with the AEW, she told me that she would set-up the meeting between the Elder and myself. We had talked about whether I should go to the Elder's home to visit and make my request. However, the Elder was already attached to the school through the Elders group, and she indicated she was comfortable meeting me at the school the next time she was there to assist with the weekly Girls Group. I met face-to-face with the Elder to invite her to act as a consultant during the study and to participate in the research. I also provided the Elder with the same letter and consent form as shown in Appendix I. My previous relationship with the AEW, along with the Elder's close relationship with the AEW, was significant in establishing the Elder's initial trust in me as a researcher.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

For my study I gathered multiple sources of data in order to address my research questions, access a broader and more holistic understanding of the phenomenon, and to ensure credibility (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Merriam, 1985, 1998; Stake, 1999; Yin, 2014). The data I collected included observation notes, semi-structured interviews with all research participants, classroom artefacts and student produced projects (including photo images I took of projects that could not be photocopied or shared with me digitally). Below I discuss the collection of each data source in detail and describe how each data source helped to address my research questions (see Table 2 for a general overview).

Table 2

#### *Overview of Data Collection*

Data Type	Nature of Collection	Timeline
Observation Notes (including Reflections)	To achieve a greater understanding of the case or phenomenon under study, and to allow for an in-depth understanding of the context (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014).	January 25 – May 23, 2017
Semi-Structured Interviews	To provide information about the context the researcher cannot solely observe, and enable the researcher to gain insight into individual participant's background and experiences (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014); and to develop an understanding of the phenomenon under study and allow for clarification of meaning (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995)	May 11 – June 15, 2017
Classroom Artefacts and Student Projects	To provide insight into personal experience, process, and meaning-making (Merriam, 1998; Pink, 2001).	January 25 – June 15, 2017

**Observation Notes.** The intent of recording observation notes was to achieve a greater understanding of the case or phenomenon under study, and to allow for an in-depth understanding of the context (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Observation notes include action in

real-time within real-world settings, and can help to provide the researcher with their own interpretive understanding of interpersonal motives and behaviours of participants (Kovach, 2009; Yin, 2014). My observation notes followed a protocol structure (see Appendix J) to help with building a timeline, to focus on critical literacies instructional practices and strategies, and to provide opportunities for rich descriptions of the context. After each visit to the classroom, whether I was helping to facilitate lessons or strictly observing, I filled out an Observation Protocol form to ensure the observations written were fresh in my mind (Merriam, 1998). I also included a section at the end of my observation notes entitled “Reflections” that was intended to act as a journal so that I could record my own experiences, ideas, questions, or concerns (Kovach, 2009; Merriam, 1998).

***Critical Media Literacies (CML) Course.*** I collected observation notes for the entire duration of the CML course (January 25 – May 23, 2017). The course started with an introduction to media and critical literacies concepts through the following inquiry questions posed by the classroom teacher: *How does media shape, as well as represent, privilege? How can media contribute to social change?* I helped facilitate the whole-class brainstorming session around the concepts of “media” “shape” “privilege” and “social change” (see Figure 4) as outlined in the CML course objectives in Appendix A.

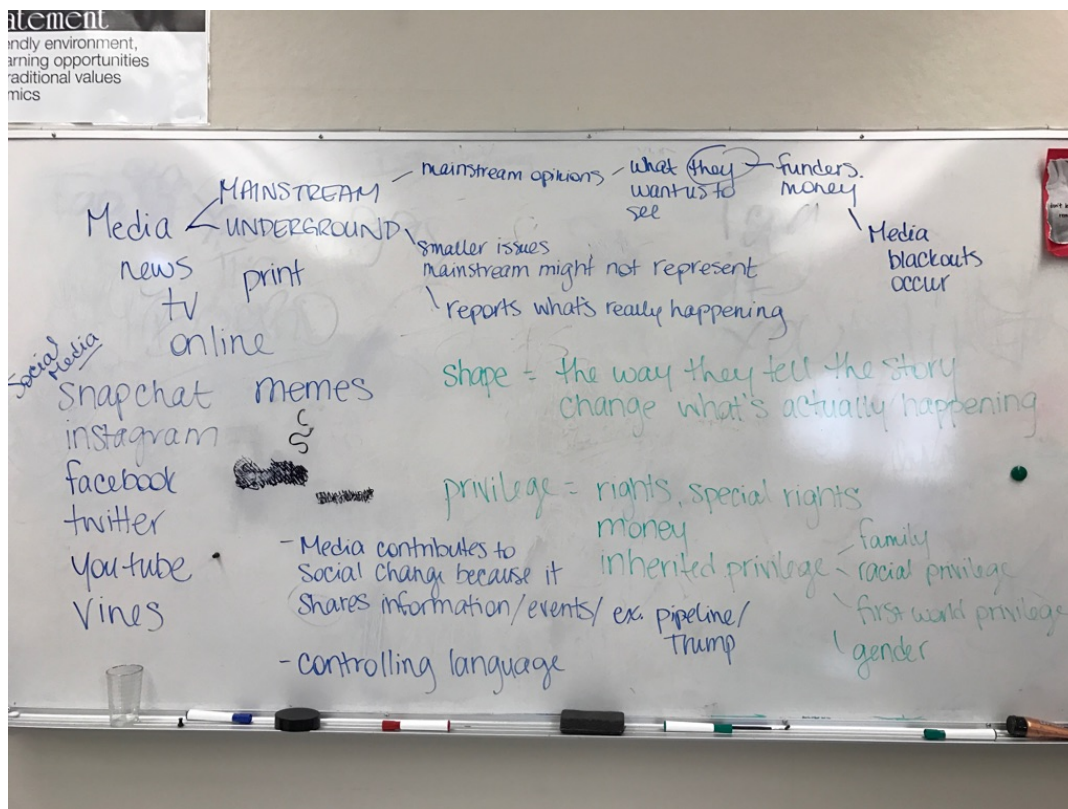


Figure 5. Whole-class brainstorming session from the introductory class to the CML course. Students were sharing their understanding around concepts of “media”, “shape”, “privilege” and “social change”.

The following week the students, classroom teacher, AEW and myself attended a full-day workshop in Vancouver. The goal of the workshop was to further engage the students in the CML course and introduce them to Indigenous leaders doing CML work. The students participated in a half-day workshop with an Indigenous journalist and then another half-day workshop with the producers of CiTR’s *Indigenous Collective/Unceded Airwaves* radio show.

Upon returning from Vancouver, the students attended a second full-day workshop in their school district, held in the district’s resource center. The second workshop was led by two local Indigenous community members, who are engaged in multiple types of community activism. The first community member, also an instructor at the local university, presented the

type of activist work they do, and led a brainstorming session with the goal of students generating ideas for their CML projects that would address the inquiry questions set out for the course (see Figure 5). The second community member was the artist-in-residence participant in the study. The artist-in-residence focused on how different art forms can act as modes of “cultural resistance” and empowerment. He showed the students the different types of art he does (including street art, published poetry, and making YouTube videos) and challenged the students to consider the medium of expression they would like to use for their projects.

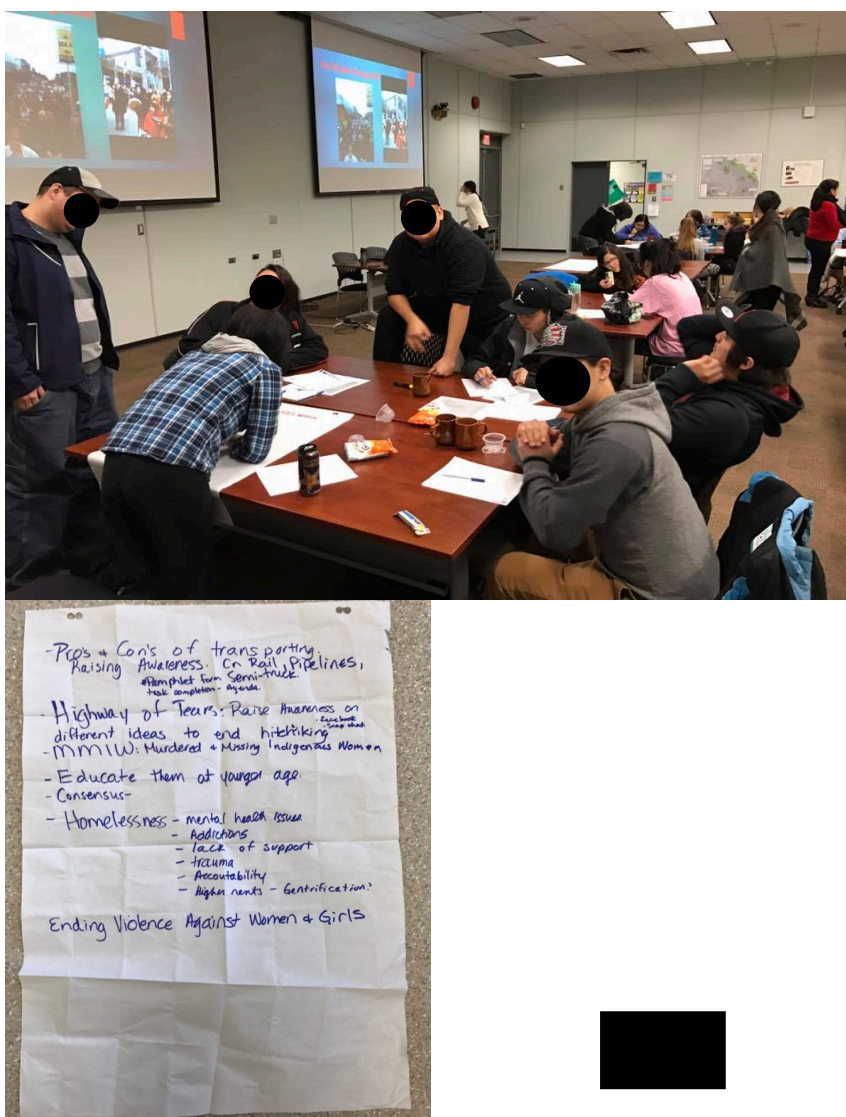


Figure 6. Workshops at the district resource center

After the initial introductory class and the two workshops, the CML course was offered twice a week for a half-day until it finished with the celebration of students' projects to the public on May 25. During the days of the course, students worked individually or in partners (it was the students' choice) on small in-class assignments or on their final project. The in-class assignments were designed to help build critical literacies skills such as analyzing sources for power structures and bias, creating project proposals to connect their individual interests with social action, and reflecting on their learning and experiences through journals (see "Scaffold of Activities" in Appendix B). When working on their final project, students could utilize the teacher, artist-in-residence, AEW, the Elder, or myself if they had particular requests to support their project. Examples of student requests included assistance with finding individuals to interview, being driven to other facilities (such as the local prison to conduct interviews, another high school to use a green screen room, an elementary school to teach a lesson); assistance in editing video footage; and support with appropriate protocols when obtaining sacred information and working with community members in a school setting. I attended all the classes, including driving students to other facilities and the student celebration. Overall, I completed 20 Observation Protocols.

**Semi-Structured Interviews.** All research participants engaged in semi-structured individual interviews with me. Semi-structured interviews help provide further information about the context the researcher cannot solely observe, and enable the researcher to gain insight into individual participant's background and experiences (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Furthermore, information from interviews can help to develop understanding of the phenomenon under study and allow for clarification of meaning (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995).

A set of semi-structured questions were used to guide the interviews in order to target the research questions and allow for further exploration and clarification if needed (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). In particular, the interview questions were designed to understand intersections among Indigenous knowledges, Western knowledge, adolescent knowledge and concepts of critical literacies. Table 3 features the interview questions I asked and the connections of each to the research questions.

The interviews took place during the months of May and June during school hours and at the convenience of the students, community members, and the classroom teacher. All individual interviews were conducted face-to-face in the cultural classroom when it was not in use, and recorded using an audio device. All participants consented to their interviews being audio recorded. Some students reported feeling nervous and were given the option of me taking notes instead or recording, but declined and said the audio recording was fine. Students were also given the list of interview questions to look at during the interview, as well as have their final project in front of them for reference. The student interviews ranged from 15 – 25 minutes, and the staff and community member's interviews ranged from 30 – 50 minutes.

In respecting local protocols, and as advised by the District Principal of Aboriginal Education and ICP program staff as an act of reciprocity, all the interview participants were gifted with gift cards. I also gave tobacco to the Elder, AEW, and artist-in-resident. Kovach (2009), in her research, discusses that from a traditional Cree perspective the gifting of tobacco to the person you are seeking knowledge from, and the acceptance of the tobacco, is a sacred commitment to truth-telling (Kovach, 2009). Shirley, the AEW, had informed me of the practice of gifting tobacco as well, and had guided me in this process. As I had previously worked with the students and staff in a research capacity, I was aware of the local protocols prior the start of

the research, and as such made them explicit to the University of Victoria Human Ethics Review Board (see Appendix C) as part of doing ethical research with Indigenous youth and community members.

Table 3

*Interview Questions with Connections to Research Questions*

Participants	Research Questions	Interview Questions
Students	<p>Building context</p> <p>How do Indigenous knowledges and adolescent knowledges intersect in a <i>Critical Media Literacies</i> course? What are the influences of critical literacies instruction on this intersection?</p> <p>What characterizes trans-systemic spaces for Indigenous adolescents in a high-school classroom? How can Indigenous adolescents, teachers and other community members create trans-systemic spaces?</p> <p>What are the benefits and challenges of trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education for Indigenous adolescents?</p>	<p>How old are you and what grade are you in? How long have you been in this school/program? Why did you choose to register for this school/program?</p> <p>I understand that you are taking a course on Critical Media Literacies. Can you describe some ideas that you have been discussing in class? Can you describe to me what your project is about? How did you decide on your topic for your project? What resources did you use in order to make your project?</p> <p>Which parts of your project are the most important, or meaningful, to you as an Indigenous adolescent? Why? Describe how and where you got some of your information from about (student's chosen topic) that you are showing in your project? Why did you choose those sources of information? What questions or thoughts came to mind as you thought about how to develop your project? How did this project help you develop critical literacies skills? Your project is meant for other people to hear what you have to say about issues that are important to you. What parts of your project do you think are the most effective (or that you think other people will care about)? Why? What parts of your project do you think are not as effective? Why? What questions or thoughts came to mind as you thought about how to develop your project? Your project is meant for other people to hear what you have to say about issues that are important to you. What parts of your project do you think are the most effective (or that you think other people will care about)? Why? What parts of your project do you think are not as effective? Why?</p> <p>Can you describe any challenges you faced in the CML course and/or creating the project? How did you overcome some of those challenges? Now that you have created this project and done this course, what are some ways or ideas you could come up</p>

		with that are helpful for supporting other teachers and students if they want to do a project like this?
	Open to building context or any question	Do you have any other comments about the project?
Teacher	Building context	How many years have you been teaching? Could you describe why you got involved with this program? What do you find rewarding about working with Indigenous adolescents? What do you find challenging?
	How do Indigenous knowledges and adolescent knowledges intersect in a <i>Critical Media Literacies</i> course? What characterizes trans-systemic spaces for Indigenous adolescents in a high-school classroom? How can Indigenous adolescents, teachers and other community members create trans-systemic spaces?	Can you describe the Critical Media Literacies (CML) course and its purpose within your program? Who was involved in supporting the students during the course? What were their roles?
	What is the influence of critical literacies instruction on this intersection?	Describe your understanding of critical literacies, and the way you approached this topic with your class. During the CML course your students created media projects aimed at developing critical literacies skills while addressing topics important to them. Describe how you used the development of their projects throughout the CML course. For example: Was the project used as an introduction, mid-unit or at the end of the unit concept? Why? How effective was your placement of the project? Describe ways that you used the development of their projects to increase students' awareness of critical literacies.
	What are the benefits and challenges of trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education for Indigenous adolescents?	The media projects were designed to provide a multimodal approach for students to demonstrate their understanding of key critical literacies concepts. What aspects of the projects did you see as effective in achieving those key understandings? Why? What aspects of the projects did you see as ineffective in achieving those key understandings? Why? Another component to the projects was to provide a voice and platform for students to stimulate discussions on issues that were important to them. What resources did students use to demonstrate their learning, knowledge, and understanding of the issues they selected?
	Open to building context or any questions	Do you have any other comments regarding the course, the process, the experiences, or the project?

AEW, Artist-in-residence, Elder	Building context	Briefly describe who you are, your role in this program, and how you got involved? How long have you been with the program?
	How do Indigenous knowledges and adolescent knowledges intersect in a <i>Critical Media Literacies</i> course?	When looking at the student projects from the CML course (projects will be in front of interviewee), can you describe the kinds of traditional or Indigenous knowledges or ways of learning that you see the students using?
	What characterizes trans-systemic spaces for Indigenous adolescents in a high-school classroom? How can Indigenous adolescents, teachers and other community members create trans-systemic spaces?	What do you find rewarding about working with Indigenous adolescents? What do you find challenging? The students you have been working with are currently enrolled in a critical media literacies class. They have created projects to showcase their understanding of topics important to them. Describe what your role has been during the course and creation of the student projects.
	What are the benefits and challenges of trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education for Indigenous adolescents?	What are the most important aspects of your role that you focus on when working with the students? The media projects were designed to provide a multimodal approach for students to demonstrate their understanding of key concepts and important issues. What aspects of the projects did you see as effective in achieving those key understandings? Why? What aspects of the projects did you see as ineffective in achieving those key understandings? Why?
	Open to building context or any question	Do you have any other comments about the project?

**Classroom Artefacts and Student Projects.** Physical artefacts such as classroom documents or student created artwork, multimodal projects, or assignments, can help to provide insight into personal experience, process, and meaning-making (Merriam, 1998; Pink, 2001). The use of visual images can be transformative in understanding “modern thought, culture and society, self-identity, and memory” (Pink, 2001, p. 13). In the study, I collected classroom artefacts such as students’ course assignments (questionnaire on personal media usage, journal entries, analysis of news sources, and their final project proposal) and their multimodal projects (see Table 1 for project topics and types).

Course assignments from students who consented to be part of the research were photocopied and collected to help with examining the influence of critical literacies instruction

over a period of time (Yin, 2014). The students' final multimodal projects were either photographed or shared with me through online video links. The physical presence of the student projects during the interviews were particularly useful as a discussion and reference point for participants to express their conceptions of critical literacies, as well as discuss their experiences within the CML course (Pink, 2001).

### ***Data Analysis Procedures***

I used NVivo as a qualitative software storage system in order to organize and store my research data (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, NVivo as a software system, included functions to assist in the streamlining of the analysis process such as creating annotation notes (memos), colour coding categories and themes, linking literature to memos, retrieving particular data quickly, and viewing relationships between the themes and categories in visual matrices (using the coding matrix). All interviews, observation notes, images, and classroom documents were uploaded and placed in labelled folders (i.e., Classroom Documents, Images, Interviews, Observations) in NVivo, and further classified by pseudonyms, dates, or both. Student-produced artefacts such as in-class assignments that were not digitally produced (i.e., journals, project proposals, reflections) were photocopied and stored in physical file folders that were labelled with the assignment title and date. It was important for the data to be organized in an easily retrievable fashion for later analysis as large amounts of data were being collected over a period of six months (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2013). I transcribed the interviews, and the transcriptions were also uploaded into NVivo alongside the audio recordings. I reviewed the transcripts against the audio recordings, observation notes, classroom documents and student projects in order to correct any initial errors and/or seek clarification on what was discussed. I also listened to audio recordings of the interviews while analyzing the data to ensure I understood the meaning being expressed by

particular discourse, which was helpful when I felt uncertain or unclear when solely reading the transcript. The interviews occurred over three to four weeks, and the transcribing of the interviews took an additional four weeks after the last interview was complete.

As interviews were transcribed and uploaded to NVivo, I began the first stages of my analysis by reading through the interviews and identifying relevant data in order to “isolate the initially most striking, if not ultimately most important, aspects of the data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 181). The initial coding of the data was informed by the purpose of this study, along with my theoretical orientations, and the “meanings made explicit by the participants themselves” (Merriam, 1998, p. 179). As such, I coded for emergent themes, concepts, or ideas, using a combination of terms I believed described the data segment, or terms the participants used during the interview (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 1998). With each coded segment I added an annotation note to expand on the initial code used to in order to connect ideas back to the literature, ask further questions, and keep track of additional thoughts or comments (Merriam, 1998; see Table 4).

Table 4

*Example of initial coding of an interview data segment into a category, memo, and then subsumed under a **Benefits and Challenges** theme*

Data Segment	Initial Code	Annotation	Category	Theme
S: [00:05:16] I think it's just, like, the fact that it's teaching younger kids about like, patience, and self-will and stuff. I don't know. I think it's important for like, younger kids to be exposed to their normal culture I guess, or like, wherever they come from at a young age, so that they don't grow up wondering where they do come from I guess?	<i>Importance of knowing and sharing where you come from</i>	Concepts of, <i>empowerment and developing cultural competencies</i> emerge in this section as a potential of the influence of CL instruction - particularly because she suggests that it is important to know where you come from "so that they don't grow up wondering" or getting "misled" -	<i>Opportunity for cultural connections</i>	<i>Growth &amp; Development of Cultural Competencies</i>
I: [00:05:37] Mhmm.				

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S: [00:05:37] And get confused, or whatever, like, misled?	but also in feeling like she was able to share something very meaningful to her
I: [00:05:41] Is that important to you to know where you come from?	with others – to <i>express herself</i> via the talking stick and show others how to do the same
S: [00:05:45] Yeah. Yeah.	

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After the initial coding, I began using a constant-comparison method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to further categorize the data segments into topics/concepts that appeared to fit together (Merriam, 1998). The second-level coding served the purpose of refining, grouping, and reducing the data in order to generate themes that were sensitizing and congruent (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 1998; See Appendix K for example of subsumed categories under a theme). I went back and forth between the two levels of coding over a time period of seven months in order to ensure all relevant data were placed into a category (Merriam, 1998). The categories and themes evolved as I went back and forth between the coding and the literature. During the seven months, I presented the initial findings to the participants and stakeholders (see Credibility section below for information on participant feedback), reviewed the literature to seek out further understanding of the initial codes and categories, and had discussions with my committee in order to ensure the themes presented in the findings reflected the purpose of the study and answered the research questions (Merriam, 1998). Finally, in order to clearly present my Findings for the readers, I went back into the data to look at the relationship between the categories subsumed under each theme. As a result, subthemes, drawn from the categories, were developed as a way to present and discuss each theme. For example, the theme “Family and Community” included the following categories: brave, trust, collaboration, and importance of relationships (see Appendix K). The two categories of “brave” and “trust” are discussed in the

subtheme of “Gaining Mental and Emotional Support” and the two categories of “collaboration” and “importance of relationships” are discussed in the subtheme of “Thinking Critically about Who They Are and Positioning Themselves in The World” (see Chapter 4 Findings).

**Interviews as Storywork.** As a researcher analyzing data that includes the experiences of the participants, it is significant for me to acknowledge that I have a responsibility to ensure I am ethically showing voice and representation (Kovach, 2009). When conducting interviews, narratives emerge as a way to identify and share personal experiences (Creswell, 2013). Within the context of Indigenous research, I take narrative to mean stories that concern “a particular aspect of an individual’s experience that pertains to the research topic at hand” (Kovach, 2009, p. 96). To have the privilege to learn from and share participants’ stories requires an ethical framework that Jo-Anne Archibald (2008) terms *Storywork*. Although storywork was not the methodology being used in this research, I intended to engage in aspects of storywork as guided by the principles of respect, relevance, responsibility, holism, interrelatedness, synergy, and reciprocity (Archibald, 2008). Specifically, I wanted to respect and honour the stories shared by my research participants, and thus it was significant that the words they spoke, and the meanings attributed to those words, were not lost because they have been too condensed. It was also important that, to the best of my ability, I attempted to capture the nuances that are often lost when oral narratives are written (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009). A significant piece of learning from shared stories comes from “story listening” (Archibald, 2008, p. 76). Archibald (2008) discusses that story listening is a type of analysis as it is a way of “linking how we feel to what we know” (p. 76). In order to have the narratives present as they were shared with me, I minimally condensed only some of them so as to provide space for the reader to also act as a

story-listener. This process resulted in the inclusion of quotations that may be somewhat longer than those featured in a Western approach to qualitative analysis.

### **Credibility**

Credibility in qualitative research requires the establishment of the trustworthiness of the study (Kovach, 2009; Shenton, 2004). To ensure the interpretations of the data were credible and trustworthy, I used a combination of suggested measures as appropriate for qualitative case study research **within Indigenous education contexts** such as: making explicit the researcher's bias; revealing the investigator's position in relation to the study's participants; gathering data over an extended period of time; creating an audit trail of how data were collected and analyzed; participating in relational research; and consulting through member checking and peer examination (Anfara et al., 2002; Archibald, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Johnston, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014).

**Kovach (2009) explains that validity in Indigenous research contexts is “where truth is found in the subjective, and validity is in the nature of the relationship with culture” (pg. 149). More specifically, validity lies within a relational research approach with the community (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009). I consider key aspects of relational research, such as the gifting of gift cards to the student-participants and the tobacco to AEW, the Elder, and the artist-in-residence, as each person's commitment to truth and integrity through the sharing their stories.**

For the member-checking specifically, I also contacted research participants through the school to set-up informal meetings in order to ask for their feedback on the findings, and to ensure I was not misrepresenting their thoughts and experiences (Kovach, 2009; Johnston, 2013). Of particular importance, I engaged with the student-participants of the study by sharing my initial findings over a lunch period at the school in June 2018. After sharing the initial findings, I

held an open discussion in which I asked for their thoughts, feedback, and recommendations for changes or additions. I recorded their suggestions in the form of written notes. The student-participants who attended the lunch provided positive feedback in that they felt the findings were a fair representation of their experiences. The student-participants requested I focus on the significance of relationship building, self-acceptance, and pride (which are discussed further in the Findings chapter).

I also presented initial findings in various contexts such as to the stakeholders of the ICP (including the principal and vice-principal of the ICP, the District Principal of Aboriginal Education, and district coordinators) and at education conferences. Again, feedback from the various stakeholders indicated the findings fairly represented the participants' experiences, reflected the essence of the program, and characterized the work being done to create a trans-systemic space. In addition, I received peer feedback from my committee members as experts in the field (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, Johnston, 2013).

Finally, in order to ensure the findings were trustworthy and believable to the reader, I used both *rich descriptions* and *typicality or model category* (Merriam, 1998) in describing the context (ICP) and the course (CML); as well as provided *documentational tables* and *code mapping* (Anfara et al., 2002) to “make analytical events open to public inspection” (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 31). By providing rich descriptions of the CML course and the participants, as well as a typicality or model category through description of the ICP, the reader can determine the extent the findings match their own understandings, as well as whether the findings can be transferrable to another setting (Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, by providing data information tables such as Table 3 (Interview Questions with Connections to Research Questions) and Table 4 (Example of initial coding of an interview data segment into a category, memo, and then

subsumed under a theme), and a coding map sample (Appendix K), I am publicly disclosing the processes regarding data collection and analysis so that the reader may judge whether this study's findings are trustworthy and believable (Anfara et al, 2002).

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I detailed how qualitative research methodologies in general, and case study methodology in particular, were consistent with the purposes of the study. I discussed the rationale and philosophical assumptions of qualitative research methodologies, my position as a researcher, and the use of case study as a qualitative research methodology in relation to my research questions and the limitations to case study research design. In order to answer the questions posed, I presented my research design which included descriptions of the context and setting, and procedures for recruitment of participants, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, I discussed the credibility of the research design.

In the following chapter I present the findings from the study, exploring the research questions posed in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

The findings from the study, as presented in this chapter, are in the form of themes as they emerged through the data analysis. These findings are organized into two sections that address the research questions:

3. How do Indigenous knowledges, Western knowledge, and adolescent knowledge intersect in a *Critical Media Literacies* course?
  - a. What are the influences of critical literacies instruction on this intersection?
4. What might characterize trans-systemic spaces for Indigenous adolescents in a high-school classroom?
  - a. How can Indigenous adolescents, Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and other community members create trans-systemic spaces?
  - b. What are the benefits and challenges of trans-systemic spaces for Indigenous adolescents?

The first section of the chapter is focused on the intersection of different knowledges and the characterization of CLE in trans-systemic spaces, in which three main themes emerged: storytelling; family and community; and multimodal expression. All three themes are connected; they build upon each other, and emerged from the stories the students told through their projects. As such, the overlap of particular data segments within each theme demonstrates the connections built between them (see Appendix K).

The second section of the chapter is organized into two parts, and is focused on the benefits and challenges of CLE in trans-systemic spaces. In the first part of this section, I discuss the challenges of CLE in terms of the following themes: emotional labour; navigation of cultural protocols; and re-traumatization. In the second part of this section, I discuss the benefits of CLE

with a focus on the following emergent themes: pride in self, family and community; growth and development of cultural competencies; and self-growth and healing.

The findings are illustrated with quotations from the semi-structured interviews, contextual information from the observation notes, and images from student produced projects. Although pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, in order to create agency for the youth, the participants will be introduced in relation to their home community, with their self-identified nation in brackets following their name (see Student Participant Chart in Chapter 3). Discussion of themes in relation to the research literature is addressed in Chapter 5.

### **Characterization of Critical Literacies Education in Trans-Systemic Spaces**

In order to understand what would characterize CLE in trans-systemic spaces, that is, a space in which culturally responsive education (CRE) for Indigenous learners was centered within a broader Western context, I was interested in learning about the intersection of different types of knowledge. More specifically, I wanted to explore how IK (as a framework for CRE for Indigenous students) was drawn upon by the students and staff within the CML course to inform learning and extend understanding of critical literacies practices. The intersections of different knowledges (IK, WK, and adolescent knowledge) utilized by Indigenous adolescents are significant to understanding how trans-systemic spaces can be transformative to education generally (Battise, 2013), and to critical literacies specifically (Kee & Carr-Chellman, 2019; McCarty & Lee, 2014)

As discussed in Chapter 3, the students enrolled in the CML course were provided with two inquiry questions: *How does media shape, as well as represent, privilege? How can media contribute to social change?* The inquiry questions were designed by the classroom teacher in order to engage students in conversations around critical literacies concepts as outlined in the Big

Ideas of the CML course (see Appendix A). All student-produced projects were in response to the CML course inquiry questions, conversations, and workshops. The students' projects served as their way of taking social action.

Storytelling, family and community, and multimodal expression are discussed below as emergent themes that characterized CLE in trans-systemic spaces. The themes are interconnected and illustrate how students engaged with, understood, and took up critical literacies within an Indigenous education framework.

### ***Storytelling: Repositioning Discourses of Power***

Storytelling emerged as a main theme from the data analysis. The students drew upon the stories and personal experiences of themselves, family members, and community members as the foundation for their CML projects. Within the theme of storytelling, two sub-themes emerged whereby storytelling was used to gather information, and to connect back to their family, culture and/or land. The discussions of the two emergent sub-themes below demonstrate ways in which the students repositioned discourses of power through storytelling.

**“Tell me your story”:** **Gathering Information.** Both CLE (Janks, 2014; Luke 2012; Riley, 2015) and CRE (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014) include tenets of making explicit, critiquing, and examining power relationships found within dominant discourses [see Figure 6]. The students, through their projects, identified and made explicit topics and issues relevant to Indigenous peoples in Canada. The selected topics and issues were ones the students identified as often misrepresented or silenced in Canada's Western society. Storytelling emerged as significant to the process of examining misrepresentation, silence, and power found in discourse. Through storytelling, the students repositioned their own personal stories and experiences, and those of community members, at the centre of their learning.

During the semi-structured interviews (see Table 3 in Chapter 3) the students were asked why they chose the topic (i.e., Importance of Ceremony or the Intergenerational Impact of Residential Schools) for their project (see Table 1 in Chapter 3 for the complete list of student topics). The students' responses included wanting to "shine a light on what's happening", "get the truth out there", "help out the people", and "bring it to people's attention." The responses demonstrated student awareness that topics and issues relevant to them are often not discussed, or are misinformed, by Canadian mainstream media. As such, the students shared their own personal experiences as significant for gathering information for their projects. For example, when Brendan (Cree/Nakota), 18, from Regina, whose project was on Youth Incarceration, was asked how he decided on the topic for his project he responded:

I decided I was going to be the topic for my project when we went to Vancouver. We met with like the different media outlets there. And like I kind of got an understanding and I kind of got the feeling like, just the memories of myself being through that, like incarceration. Also, I wanted to like, do that just because I know that a lot of kids out there that were going through the same thing I was, don't have a voice and stuff and ... they have a lot of issues that they face that most people don't care about, so I wanted to just shed some light on that.

Brendan's response indicated he was going to be the subject of his project. He wanted to tell his story, and use his experiences to "shed some light" on his chosen topic. Brendan also referred to the first workshop the students attended during the CML course, which featured an Indigenous journalist explaining how she reports on Indigenous experiences and stories in the news. The journalist's presentation highlighted the value of drawing on personal experiences and telling the stories of the communities in accurate and truthful ways (observation notes, February 2, 2017).

Brendan demonstrated he understood his experiences are knowledge – “I kind of got an understanding” – and that he can give voice to an issue that is often missing in public discourse.

The importance the students placed on drawing from personal experiences and telling the stories of communities was also evident when the classroom teacher, Camille, observed that “the messaging that they [the students] received from [the journalist] that was really powerful was that they are the experts already, they have that knowledge already, and that there is so much value in it.” Camille’s observation emphasized the value students placed on personal experiences and stories – that experiences and stories reflect expertise and knowledge.

Many of the students not only used their own personal experiences, but also sought out information through the stories and experiences of family and/or community members. For example, Liz (Nakota/Inuit), 17, and Mitch (Ulkatcho), 17, who partnered on their project about Homelessness, and completed the semi-structured interview together, when responding to the question, “What resources did you use to make your project?” said that, “Well we learned from her father, like he experienced homelessness for a while. So the first thought that came to mind is to interview him and learn about how his past, how he suffered, what he experienced, what was the best moments”. Another student, Autumn (Sioux/Assiniboine/Cree), 16, who partnered with Sarah (St’át’imc), 16, to do a project on Talking Sticks, responded to the question explaining, “We chose Bonnie [an Elder] because she's actually a reliable resource to know information from especially if it's like, coming from, like things that she's lived through, or the things that she's experienced and stuff”. A fourth student, Alexa (Secwepemc), 15, whose project was on the Intergenerational Impact of Residential Schools, responded by saying, “My papa tells me a lot of stuff about the Residential School, and my mom because they know a lot about residential schools, as in my papa went there, and my mom's parents”. Furthermore, Elder Bonnie,

articulating the significance for her in being approached by multiple students to share her stories and support their learning, conveyed the following:

I've worked with these students. I see a different side; they joke, they laugh, they are always hungry, they always need something. And then all of a sudden, I seen this new people that were coming to me and saying, "tell me your story." And that really left a humbling to me, I became very humbling and that's not often I do that! I think that...that was a big thing, you know, just saying the students um... I'm answering their questions, you know? And I never ever thought of me doing that.

The students' requests to learn from Bonnie's stories further demonstrated the significance students placed on the value of learning and gathering knowledge through storytelling, and the lived experiences of family and community members.

Lastly, multiple students indicated that the most effective and important part of their projects were the stories that were shared. William (Secwepemc/Ulkatcho), 18, from Tk'emlúps, who interviewed five family and community members for his project, Importance of Ceremony, stated the most effective aspect of his project was "probably about the Elders talking, or some of the people actually speak in their language. I think every single person I interviewed was good." Terry (Carrier), 18, from Lake Babine, who also interviewed four community members for his project on the Impact of Residential Schools, responded that the most effective part of his project was "the stories of all the people I interviewed." Thus, both William and Terry centered the stories and experiences of the community as the most powerful and valuable source of information.

Indeed, all 16 students in the study positioned the stories and experiences of themselves, family, and community members as reliable and truthful information gathering: 15 students

selected a topic in which they drew on personal experiences; 13 students referenced getting their primary information from family and/or community members; 16 students referenced speaking with a family and/or community member for information. The students centred the stories as a way to bring their experiences into the forefront of the dialogue around privilege and power in media (see Appendix B for CML course framework).

**“[T]he people actually speak in their language”:** **Connecting to Family, Culture, and Land.** The students further utilized listening and learning from the stories of their families and communities to keep themselves connected and grounded during the project. According to artist-in-residence, Curtis, the students used storytelling as a way to connect to their families, land, and language. During his interview, I asked Curtis about the types of knowledges or ways of learning the students used to create their projects. Curtis’s response, which is presented below with a discussion after each of his examples, was detailed with multiple layers of insight. He began by saying:

I think storytelling was a big one. You know, storytelling and family, cultural things were important that the kids would talk about. You know, with [Nicole], because she's so far from home. She missed home, you know, her reserve is in [another province]. So I guess sort of looking at the images and hearing her grandmother's voice and, you know, it brought her back to the reserve to the fun times and the good times that she had and the stories she learned, and that was really important and something I noticed with her project.

Above, Curtis provided an example of how one student, Nicole (Anishinaabe), 16, from Blood Vein, used storytelling as a way to connect back to her family and her home. Nicole’s project was focused on limited access to educational resources for northern reserve schools. Hearing her

grandmother's voice, and thinking about her family and friends from the reserve, made her feel connected to her home while reminding her of why her project topic was important.

Curtis then talked about another student, Shawn (Nuxalk), 18, from Bella Coola, whose project was on the Importance of Storytelling for Children. "You know, his was his grandmother and his mother telling...talking about stories and culture; and listening to them talk. Every time he listened, he smiled, you know. It made him feel good and happy, and he misses home." In the case of Shawn, both his grandmother and mother shared stories in their territorial language, which made him feel connected to his culture and to the land. With both Nicole and Shawn, Curtis suggested that listening to the stories from home made the students feel good and happy. However, Curtis also explained that both students had feelings of missing home. Curtis provided further insight and another layer of understanding about the significance of storytelling:

And this is another dilemma of Aboriginal people that is many of us don't live at home, in our territories. You know, I'm also Nlaka'pamux and Secwepemc so, sort of two different nations so I grew up here, but I also grew up in Merritt and also grew up in Spences Bridge and also grew up on our land. And that's what makes me happy too, is when I'm on the land. So I think there's that sort of an underlying theme too, with some of the kids is they miss home, and they miss the land, and they miss the stories. And they miss the language, hearing their language.

Speaking to a larger systemic issue of Indigenous youth not living on their traditional territories, Curtis highlighted how many Indigenous youth leave their communities in order to access education. It is not a coincidence that Curtis referred to Nicole as an example, as her project addressed the challenges she was experiencing by choosing to leave her reserve in pursuit of a high school education. Therefore, storytelling not only acted as a source of knowledge for most

students, but also for some students it was a way to stay grounded and connected to their home (Archibald, 2008).

**Summary.** The significance placed on gathering information and connecting to community, culture, and land through storytelling was strongly voiced by the students and further affirmed by Curtis, Bonnie, and Camille. Storytelling was central to the process of engaging in critical literacies work as it represented how students repositioned power in discourse. As a theme, storytelling is connected to, and cannot be separated from, family and community. Stories are embedded in the land, language and community (Archibald, 2008). As the students discussed the use of stories, storytelling, and personal experiences for their projects, they also discussed whose stories they were telling, why they were telling them, how they were telling them, and what they had learned from them. The next theme, family and community, focuses on how students, family and community came together, and through stories and storytelling, created a collaborative learning environment where students felt supported mentally and emotionally.

### ***Family and Community: Collaborative Learning***

Family and community emerged, another main theme to the characterization of trans-systemic spaces, was comprised of two sub-themes: gaining mental and emotional support; and thinking critically about who they are and how they position themselves in the world. The students took up collaborating with family and community members as a way to support and reclaim their growth as individuals and as learners. Both sub-themes related to family and community are discussed below.

**“I just sort of had to you know, help facilitate them to be fearless”:** **Gaining Mental and Emotional Support.** The students had the opportunity to collaborate with each other, as

well as with family and community, for their inquiry projects. Data analysis revealed how the students created their own community of learners (Brown & Campione, 1990; Cazden, 2001) beyond the school walls. Students not only included family and community members as knowledge-holders, but also as emotional support systems, and co-learners, demonstrating the value placed on collaborative learning through family and community. According to the teacher, Camille, one skill demonstrated by the students that she did not anticipate, but reflected on as a strength, was that students finding “their own resource people. So whether that was family members, friends of family that they knew had either experience in the topic that they were interested in, or might participate in it like conversation, or planning.” Calvin (Secwepemc), 15, from Tk’emlúps, for example, who explored the significance of graffiti art by creating his own large graffiti art installation (and filmed the process of creating his art), explained how he approached other people for help in order

to be more open to things. To actually learn, ask for help from people. That’s why I kinda asked, like [Curtis] and the two people that I knew that came in (...) they helped me a lot with my graffiti. And they taught me a lot of things, like how to hold the can, and how to like, come up with things to draw and make your own style.

Calvin’s comments suggested he felt encouraged and willing to learn “to be more open to things” through the support of the people he approached to assist with his project.

Other students also conveyed that talking to family and community members was significant to their understanding of their topics and feeling supported in their ideas. For example, Brendan (Cree/Nakota) shared that

the resources I had were teachers, staff, and, facilitators. I got the opportunity to meet with a probation officer, a parole officer and ...er, a police officer, and two corrections

officers. So those are some big key resources because they work first hand in the field. So I'd be able to get a, more of like what their standpoint is like. And what their opinion was about like, see if they were kind of the same. See if it like they aligned with mine I guess, and it kind of did. So those were huge resources having like, the ability for staff to get me set up like that. That was awesome.

By having access to different people in the community for his project, Brendan not only felt supported by the staff in the school for his ideas, but also felt that his own experiences and understanding (standpoint) was supported through his interviews with the community members. Brendan's final statement – "So those were huge resources having like, the ability for staff to get me set up like that. That was awesome" – demonstrated his happiness that both his cognitive needs (support in his learning) and emotional needs (support in his experiences) were met during the development of his project.

Similarly, Nicole (Anishinaabe), stated that:

I spoke to people just to get their opinion about, you know, Reserve education and I chose to speak out because, you know, I can't get all the information for myself, 'cause, you know I'm only 16 and I don't know a lot about you know, um, growing up and graduating just yet. So I thought you know adults would know these type of things, to get their wiseness on it.

Nicole sought information from community members in order to gain mental and emotional support for a topic she was personally experiencing, but not yet able to fully reflect on as something of the past. Nicole also demonstrated humility in her acknowledgement – "adults would know these type of things, to get their wiseness on it" – that she had something to learn from the adults in her community, thus demonstrating how she engaged in collaborative learning.

Kalvin, Brendan, and Nicole articulated how the family and community support systems created a space where they felt encouraged to learn and willing to take risks. They also conveyed the value they placed on collaborative learning with community members. During the interview with artist-in-residence, Curtis, I asked how he viewed his role in helping students create their projects. He responded:

I just sort of had to you know, help facilitate them to be fearless. You know, cause sometimes when you're young and you're unsure of the world and everything, you're afraid to actually use your voice. And I think they were sort of like at that stage where they, and I, were like "don't be afraid. This is a safe environment for you to express yourself." You know. "Tell it how it is. And if it's painful and it hurts, well then, that's fine," you know, "you need to take time, take your time." But, you know. "Believe in yourself." Just trying to get them to believe in themselves more and believe that they can do it.

Curtis reiterated the idea that community members, such as him, view their role as creating a safe learning space for the students. In particular, he highlighted how he wanted the students to take risks by helping "facilitate them to be fearless." Furthermore, he wanted them to know that they would receive both mental support – "take your time" – and emotional support – "believe in yourself" – to work through their learning.

Elder Bonnie also discussed her role in supporting students, highlighting aspects of co-learning and collaboration, as well as adding that taking risks in learning requires trust. Bonnie provided the following example:

I had two young students who came to me to ask for my support on helping them to put together a program that would open doors to communicating, having students learn how

to communicate and they wanted to do it under the idea of having something cultural involved (...). And so we did a lot of hands-on, we did a lot of decision-making, and not just me making the decisions, it was me asking the questions and asking her how would she do it and giving her that space to think about it on her own for a while. A couple of times I just moved away from her and say, “You know, just think about what you were planning on telling me, and let me know what you’re going... where are you coming from after this.” That was really important because I think that was building trust between the three of us ... and there was no pressure, whereas I wasn’t standing there and saying, “Well we have to do this today or tomorrow,” or “I need to know this now.”

Bonnie discussed how she created a safe space, built on trust, for students to learn. She also provided an example of how learning together took the form of doing hands-on activities, in particular the making of the talking sticks. While Bonnie and the two students were creating their own talking sticks, Bonnie told them stories and asked them questions; as well, she listened to their concerns and their stories, and answered their questions. Similar to Curtis, Bonnie also signaled to the students that she was there to provide them with mental and emotional support through guidance, decision making, and providing time and space for reflection.

**“I kind of learned more about myself”: Thinking Critically about Who They Are and Positioning Themselves in The World.** Along with building trust through the development of the relationship, personal growth and critical reflection also emerged as something gained through collaboration with family and community. According to Bonnie, in order to learn:

we all need somebody to have that faith and trust in us that we can accomplish what we’re trying to accomplish. But most of all we need somebody to understand where we’re coming from. And sometimes we need to look at the very same things that maybe we

have experienced at a different time, or different level of the situation, and if we can go back [and reflect] on those things, then, we've achieved a way of learning about others and about ourselves.

Bonnie shared her understanding of learning in which family and community were not only valued as knowledge-holders and emotional supports, but also as facilitators for students' personal growth and reflection on their own positions in the world.

Echoing Bonnie's understanding that learning through others helps people learn about themselves, Brendan (Cree/Nakota) shared how he went through the process of critically examining and reflecting on his own experiences as an incarcerated youth:

When I was developing my project, um, it kind of started off like one way, like I kind of felt like an anger kind of like just resentment about the whole thing. And really like, I had like one point of view, and usually I always try to see all points of view, but like I had more of like, um, more of like a backing between my own opinion than other people's so that every time I interviewed the next person, starting from the first guy, like ever since then, I kind of learned more about myself, like, I've never really had the chance to like sit down with somebody else that's on the other side. Like it's like somebody that's an inmate usually doesn't ever get to have that chance of [asking how] a corrections officer sees and feels about them [incarnated youth] and they don't get the chance to like [hear] the truth (...). How they feel about them being led into that life. So them being understanding of it [my project] helped a lot. So just learning that I kind of like had a better understanding of my article, and like just the project as like a whole I liked better. It like turned to...like kind of did a 180 but it still kept the same foundation of how it was

supposed to go, but it just got better over the course of having different interviews with people.

Brendan's response revealed how he started his project with one point of view, determined to tell a very specific story, but as he listened to others tell their stories about working with incarcerated youth, he began to shift his position – to enter into a dialogue and open up understandings that challenged his values and assumptions (Battiste, 2013). Brendan acknowledged how new learning arose through each interview, which provided depth and nuance to his own understanding of himself, his experiences, and the larger system. Furthermore, he discussed working through his initial emotions of anger and resentment, to feeling more comfortable in his understanding of his own experiences.

Another student, William (Secwepemc/Ulkatcho), also shared similar reflections of the personal growth and learning that occurred through interviewing family and community members, stating that the stories shared with him were inspiring.

Like (it) really inspired me hearing how I'm an impact on my sister's life..., but yeah... when I interviewed her, and also just inspiring to hear every... everybody talk about it [the importance of ceremony]. It was just all so motivating because at the... near the ending of my interviews with them. I asked, like, "You think the culture will be here in 10 years?" They would just say, "Of course." And that's really motivating, and just to know that; we will be here no matter what. And it was also helpful, like, hearing what my dad said, and hearing what everybody said, especially with some of the hard times they've been through. Just hearing it. Just know that you, you're not the only one who's ever been through something like that.

William conveyed the value he placed on his family and community members to support his learning and understanding of the importance of ceremony to culture. Furthermore, William described what he learned through others' experiences as helpful and motivating in supporting his own understanding on how learning through ceremony supports personal growth and healing.

Finally, Shirley (AEW) reflected on how she saw students grow and learn through their connection to family and community. She stated that:

We're all teachers, and that's one thing that they [the students] didn't realize; "Well I'm just young, I don't know a lot." "Well you're learning right here at the table; we're all learning together and supporting one another and helping you through that journey." And it was really neat to see when they came back how excited they were that, "We did it, we did it. It was easy... well not really easy, but it was OK we could do it. We accomplished what we set out to do with that goal. Yeah we met that goal." And they were very proud of themselves...they did take that risk, and it was very beneficial to everybody in the long run...they didn't know that until they actually took a look at themselves and were saying, "This is where my journey went, and this is where I am now." So it was quite interesting.

Shirley's articulation that "we're all learning together and supporting one another and helping you through that journey" communicated the significance of and value placed on collaboration with family and other members within the community. She also acknowledged how the emotional support of family and community provided a place for students to take risks with their learning; and that through the process of collaborating with family and community, the students reflected on and identified growth in their own personal learning journeys.

**Summary.** Collaboration with family and community members afforded students with mental and emotional support, including support for ways to think critically about who they are

and how they position themselves in the world. By seeking out the stories and experiences of family and community members, the students demonstrated ways they utilized Indigenous pedagogies in the collaboration process in order to foster and reclaim their own growth as individuals and as learners. In the next section, the students' learning through their collaboration with family and community, and their reflections on and representation of the stories, are connected to the final emergent theme: multimodal expression.

***Multimodal Expression: Reclamation and Social Action***

Within multimodal expression, the final main theme in the characterization of trans-systemic spaces, two sub-themes emerged: students took-up multimodal expression as acts of personalized expression and cultural expression. Data analysis revealed how the students demonstrated identity and cultural expression by drawing on adolescent knowledges and IK and ways of learning when selecting appropriate and meaningful platforms for their stories, and that highlighted their strengths, skills, and depth of knowledge as learners. The sub-themes – personalized expression and cultural expression – are connected to the main theme of multimodal expression as students engaged in these various forms of expression as a means of reclamation and social action. Each sub-theme is discussed below.

**“[P]hotography is one of my better skills”:** **Personalized Expression.** Multimodal expression as a way of reclamation of identity and culture played a significant role in the inquiry projects. One of the Big Ideas in the CML course was to have students engage in forms of social action. The workshops presented by the journalist in Vancouver, the artist-in-residence Curtis, and the professor from the local university, provided different ways for students to consider how to tell their own stories and to share their voice. Students were encouraged not only to draw on various Discourses (Gee, 2015), knowledge sources, and personal experiences for their selected

topics, but also to present their learning in any format that they felt provided a platform for their voice (observation notes, February 8, 2017). Students presented their learnings through various forms and formats such as interviews, journal articles, photography, demonstrations/modelling, paintings, and videos.

During the interviews, I asked all participants to discuss how they decided on their project design, as well to explain what their project was about and the resources they had used and/or consulted. Many students mentioned how they had selected a presentation mode they identified as part of who they are, how they like to express themselves, or what they like to do. For example, Danny (Tsáá? Ché Ne Dane), 17, from Doig River, who wrote a short fictional story that blended symbols and motifs from oral stories in her community (e.g., landscape, rock, and Mother Earth) with poetry to write an “inside interpretation” of the struggles of people she knows who are suffering from anxiety and depression, said, “Well, I do like to read so, and there’s like poems, so... and I have an app on my iPad, and I usually like to read, and like I kind of just get ideas from.” Danny wanted to find a way to weave together different structures, such as poetry and oral storytelling, to create a written short story because in her words, “it helped me develop a way of representing the truth [of anxiety and depression].”

Another student, Alexa (Secwepemc), 15, from Tk’emlúps, whose project was a photography series on the intergenerational impact of residential school, stated, “Photography is one of my better skills and it would probably be harder to do it any other way, in like, a painting or something.” Alexa’s photos showed the resilience of her family and culture, despite the impact of residential schools. She stated that, “it’s like, the domino effect, on like the third generation and more to come. How it affected the people that went there and their children and their grandchildren and stuff.” Alexa, who identified herself as third generation, approached her

Papa (grandfather; a residential school survivor), step-mother, and cousin, for permission to do her photography series. All three family members are accomplished Powwow dancers, and immersed in the traditional cultural practices of their community. As such, Alexa had her family members pose in front of the residential school her Papa attended in their Powwow regalia (see Figure 7). Alexa, who identified her favourite image in the photography series as the largest one (see Figure 7), explained that,

I guess the bigger image with like, the three people standing together with the residential school, like, really hurt my papa and stuff. It doesn't shape who he is today... well I guess, kind of... he doesn't, like, let it bother him and stuff (...). He's like, bigger than the school.

Significant to Alexa's statement is the central message that her Papa is "bigger than the school." Alexa's choice of photography to represent the strength and resilience of her family and culture, set against the backdrop of the local residential school, is a powerful testament to her knowing that "photography is one of my better skills" and thus was an effective way to express the stories she wanted to tell.



*Figure 7.* Alexa's Photography series: The Intergenerational Impacts of Residential School

Similarly, Nicole (Anishinaabe), whose project focused on the lack of educational resources on her northern reserve, also spoke about the use of photo images as personal expression for her project. Nicole explained,

I thought well, photos do have, you know, it doesn't have words, but it also has something that will pop. So I thought well, I can use my voice and put it into a video and have pictures that will show you what I'm talking about, and hopefully to help you understand and see that what I'm talking about really matters.

Nicole moved from her home reserve to attend high school at the ICP because there is no high school to attend in her home community. Selecting images of her home community, family members, and the landscape of where she is from, was significant to her articulating who she is,

revealing her deep connections between the physical landscape, family, and the importance of education.

Curtis also expressed how the use of photographs and images by some students in their projects helped to convey a deeper sense of learning that connected to their identity.

It tied them to their home, and it tied them to the land. ... Shawn and I were working on finding images of home, [he] needed some suggestions. He wasn't sure what to look for, and he was just pulling up pictures of the community and like, "Yeah, that's cool." You know, find stuff that you remember that you would go to on the land." And then that changed it for him. Then he was like, "Yeah, ok." And so he would find rivers and find the petroglyph place. You know, it really got him thinking differently, more, basically about being home.

In this quotation, Curtis talked about Shawn (Nuxalk), 18, from Bella Coola, who was doing his project on the Importance of Story to Children in his community (student CML proposal, February 28, 2017). Shawn had asked permission from his mother and grandmother to record them telling traditional children's stories that he had heard growing up. Similar to Nicole, Shawn wanted to use photographs to show the connections between the stories, his community, and his identity. Curtis, using Shawn as an example, discussed how he helped students to think about ways of selecting and using specific photos of landscapes as a means of reflecting home and identity.

**"I just wanted to show people that our culture's still there, our traditions are still there": Cultural Expression.** While some students made meaningful associations between images and story, others made references and connections between various traditional knowledges and their presentations of learning. The connections were expressed when I asked

students about the aspects of their project that were most meaningful to them as an Indigenous adolescent. For example, William (Secwepemc/Ulkatcho), who did a series of video interviews, explained why he chose his project topic:

It's just the importance of ceremonies, it's like our society is slowly losing our ways with our traditions and our culture. And they're blinded by social media, they're blinded by their addictions they struggle day-to-day with, and also, like, they're hurting, they just think it's... yeah... I just wanted to show people that our culture's still there, our traditions are still there.

William's project, similarly to Alexa's (Secwepemc), focused on the resilience of his cultural traditions and teachings. For William, the most important part of doing his project as a series of video interviews was that:

I kind of wanted to get my dad in there, because he's getting...my dad and Shirley because they're kind of getting old and just...having it on tape, like what they've...the stuff they've learned, and so they can, like, pass it down and...even for when I'm not even here anymore (...) just so people can...if they want to know more about Ceremony they can just go on, and, like, click on it, and just listen to it.

According to William, he wanted to use a digital archive to hold the information so that he, as well as others, could continue to learn from it. William's interpretation of social action for his project was finding ways to reclaim and share important cultural knowledge.

Project partners, Sarah (St'át'imc), 16, from D'Arcy, and Autumn (Sioux/Assiniboine/Cree), 16, from White Bear, whose topic was "about the talking stick and spreading awareness of our culture" (see Figure 9), also identified the significance of the reclamation of cultural knowledge. Sarah explained that:

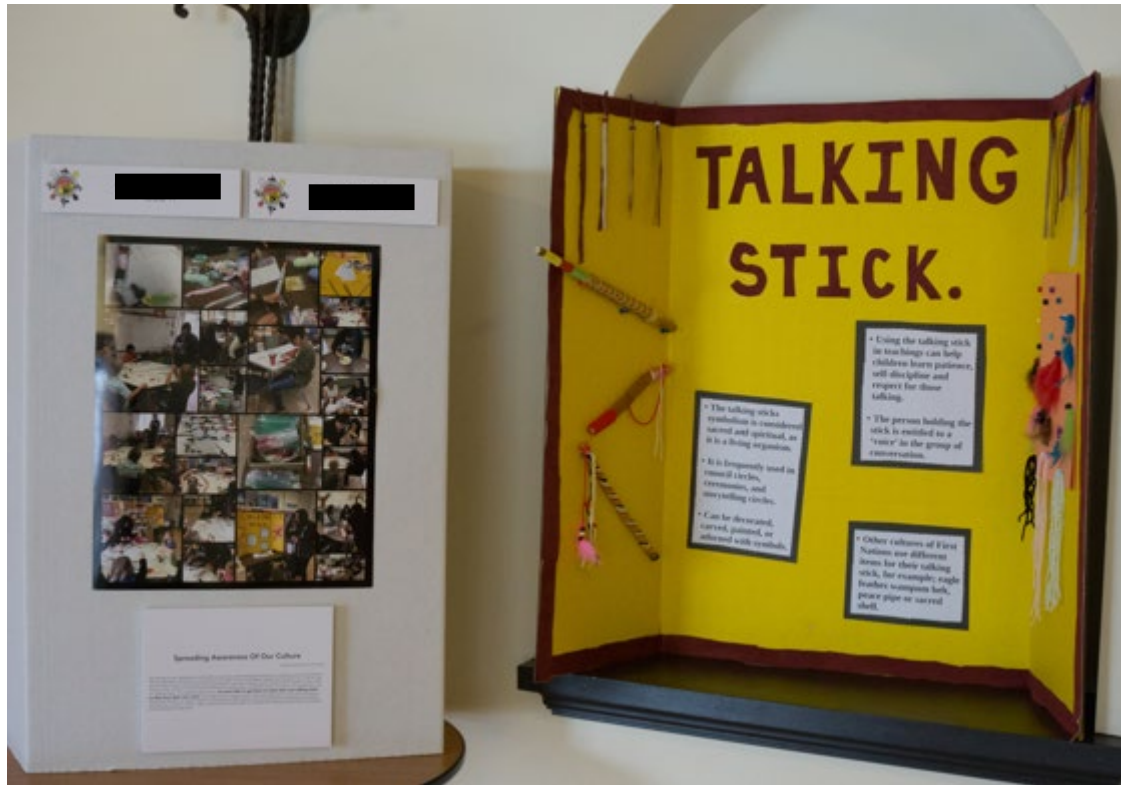
we thought we'd use the talking stick for a topic because it's pretty big in my Band like, Band meetings [...]. We made a poster board and we went to a Grade 3 and 4 class to present to them. And they were able to make their own talking sticks so that they can talk freely.

When I asked what part of the project was most meaningful to her, Sarah replied, "I'd have to say making the talking stick because it's like a piece of...not evidence...but is something they'll have with them, like, if they don't feel like they're being heard, they can bring out the talking stick and use it." Autumn, in a separate interview from Sarah, also identified the most meaningful part as "making the [talking] sticks...'cause like everyone likes to have something, I guess, and it's nice to just like, take it home at it and be like, 'yeah, this is mine'." Elder Bonnie further shared a moment of learning with Autumn and Sarah, while she was teaching them about the traditional role of the talking stick. She described how

[Autumn] looked at me, and she said, "Oh my God you gave those kids a voice." And I looked at her and I said, "What?" She said, "You were giving them a voice!" So. Then she didn't even look at the talking sticks as much in a cultural way, she looked at it as, "This is my voice; when I use that stick, it's my voice." And I was telling her how a lot of the traditional ways of the Elders, and I didn't even tell her that the Elders believe that is their voice. And when you speak when holding the talking stick, you hold it next to your heart. When you finish you bring it up to your lips because it comes... the heart speaks and out, eh? ... And to have young people connect like that, you just think "Wow!"

Both Sarah and Autumn attributed the physical representation of the talking stick as meaningful because the act of making and owning a talking stick holds multiple layers of significance: cultural awareness; the role of an individual within a community; and recognition of one's voice.

Each of these layers contributed to how Sarah and Autumn, through learning about, creating, and sharing knowledge of the talking stick, took up social action as a form of identity and cultural reclamation.



*Figure 8.* Autumn and Sarah's Talking Stick Presentation

Shirley provided further insight into the ways students understood and took up social action. She stated,

I take a look at that, the ways of learning, the ways of learning is using your culture and your traditions bringing that into your media project. Talking to your Elders is part of that too. Making that connection with your land and your community (...). Those ways of knowing are part of you. It's in your nature. Right? And you're bringing that forward. So you can see that if you took a look at various projects the way that they brought it forth

and interpreted it for you in their media projects whichever way, whether it was on the video, whether it was pictures, whether it was a combination of both, or whether it was hands on passing down knowledge, like or girls that were doing the teaching, so our oral traditions there were passed down as well as that that understanding of ceremony and the talking stick and what it was all about, and that connection to Mother Earth and your sense of spirituality. So, if you take a look at that, that's all encompassing of that Indigenous ways of learning Indigenous knowledge.

As Shirley conveyed, the students engaged in various forms of Indigenous ways of learning and knowing. Most information was gathered through oral pedagogies or experiential learning and then students expressed those learnings through their projects (such as those who used video or photography) or as the project itself (such as the talking stick).

### ***Summary***

Storytelling, family and community, and multimodal expression were themes that characterized CLE in trans-systemic spaces. The first two themes of storytelling and family and community are connected to each other, and form the groundwork for the stories the students told through their projects. Storytelling emerged as a theme with regards to ways the students gathered information and re-positioned discourses of power. Family and community emerged as a second theme as students actively collaborated with family and community members in order to gain mental and emotional support, as well as to keep them grounded culturally. Multimodal expression emerged as a third theme in which students engaged in personal and cultural modes of expression. Through personal and cultural expression, the students demonstrated acts of reclamation of identity and culture, in which they drew on adolescent knowledges and IK and ways of learning, in order to select platforms that were appropriate and meaningful for their

stories. As such, the students also engaged in social action by highlighting their strengths, skills, and depth of knowledge as learners.

### **Benefits and Challenges**

In this section, I focus on findings that addressed the research question: What are the benefits and challenges of trans-systemic spaces for Indigenous adolescents?

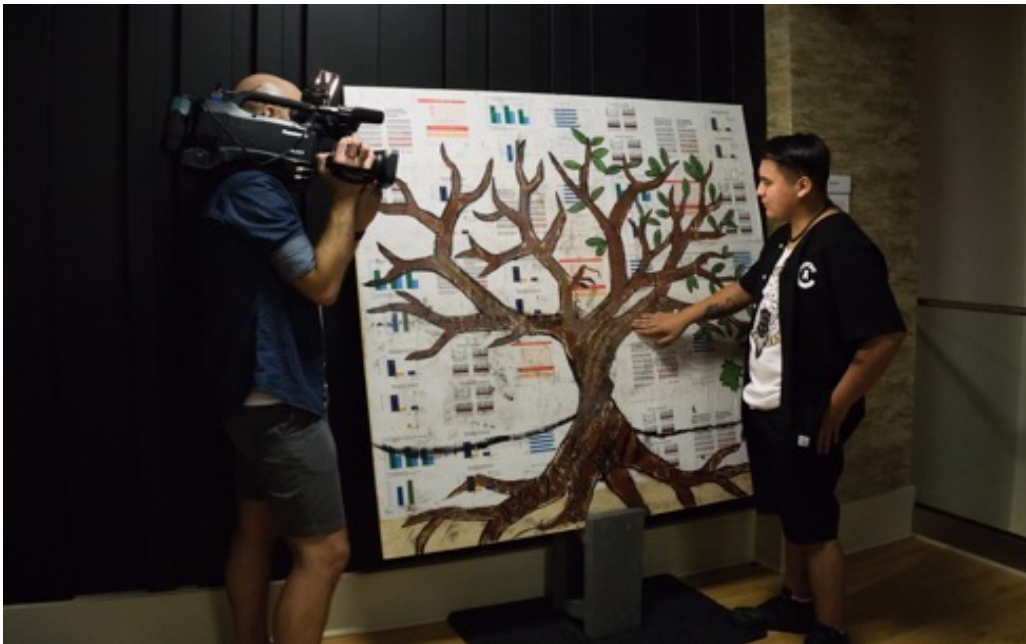
The benefits and challenges of critical literacies that work within Indigenous education contexts were revealed during the interviews with the students, teacher, AEW, and artist-in-resident, as well as through my observations and discussions with participants throughout the CML course. In the first part of this section, I discuss the themes that emerged from the data analysis regarding the challenges of doing CLE work, as those were generally at the forefront of participants' experiences during the data collection, and disclosed first by the participants within the interviews. In the second part of this section, I discuss the themes associated with the benefits of doing CLE work, which were revealed as the participants discussed how they navigated the various challenges.

### ***Challenges***

During the interviews, I asked the participants to describe any challenges they faced during the course and/or in receiving support during the researching, creating, and presenting, of their projects (see Table 3 in Chapter 3 for Interview Questions with Connections to Research Questions). Data analysis revealed the majority of students' responses addressed three themes: emotional labour, navigation of cultural protocols in a school setting, and re-traumatization.

**“I just felt like, kind of just sad”:** Emotional Labour. The biggest challenge identified by the majority of students was the emotional labour required to engage in CLE. Although student responses varied in terms of their previous knowledge on a chosen topic, many conveyed

how doing the research or gathering information was emotionally difficult. For instance, the revealing of power structures was not necessarily new information to many students, as it is part of their lived experiences. Brian (Secwepemc), 17, from Canim Lake, whose project was on the impact of white privilege, researched policies such as the *Indian Act*, Potlach Ban, 60's Scoop, and legal court cases, which resulted in the growth of white society and oppression of Indigenous peoples (personal communication, May 11, 2017). He wanted to show the impact of such policies by collaging statistical information behind a tree whose roots represent various policies (see Figure 9).



*Figure 9.* Brian being interviewed for a local television station about his project on the impacts of white privilege

Brian explained throughout his interview the emotional implications of doing CLE. He shared, Well, mostly I just felt like, kind of just sad. That's all, that I was doing it all...to just look at it all. Just have everything in one big picture, that's all. It wasn't the greatest feeling (...). It's not like I didn't already know, it's pretty easy to see, about how media portrays

everything, that's all ... I just felt disappointed because, like, we had to resort to doing this just to get people to notice it.

Brian's feelings of sadness and disappointment come from a long history of understanding and knowing how systemic racism persists in policies that directly impact him. He stated in the interview that he chose the topic because "I see it every day still. I live it and experience it still, today."

Another component of CLE is to enact or engage in social action or social change (Janks, 2014). Brian also articulated his disappointment about having to speak publicly and educate others about systemic racism through assimilation policies, revealing another layer of the impacts of white privilege.

While Brian felt disheartened that such work was necessary, other students said that speaking publicly about topics they had selected brought up fears around vulnerability. Danny (Tsáá? Ché Ne Dane), who wrote a short story about someone who struggles with anxiety and depression, described the most challenging part of the project as follows:

Simply writing it [because it] was kind of a dark story. So simply just you know, getting your feelings out there and everything, and emotions and like that's kind of what goes on in my mind all the time [and] I guess I would say, like [being] transparent... because (...) I did write in my mind on a piece of paper and it's very... everyone can see it and anyone can come over and read it (...). So there's really no hiding, or anything.

Danny's concerns around sharing her thoughts and ideas in such a public setting demonstrated the vulnerability, fear, and uncertainty that can occur from participating in critical literacies work (Sanders et al., 2016). Danny identified the emotional implications once her work was available for others to consider, take-up, or respond to.

The emotional labour the students experienced while engaging in critical literacies work ranged from sadness and disappointment, to fear and uncertainty. Significantly, the emotional labour experienced by the participants is also connected to healing and reclamation, which is discussed below in the Benefits section. The second theme that emerged as a challenge was another type of uncertainty for some students: navigation of cultural protocols within a school setting.

**“I was kinda, like, nervous to ask my dad those questions because he's pretty traditional”:** **Navigation of Cultural Protocols.** For some of the students and one of the staff members, a significant challenge during the CML course was making decisions about how to write or present their topics in ways that would be respectful and appropriate to their families and community. William (Secwepemc/Ulkatcho), who conducted a series of interviews with family and community members on the importance of ceremony, explained that:

the only thing I was really feeling, was like...cause I was kinda, like, nervous to ask my dad those questions because he's pretty traditional and everything, and I didn't want to upset him or anybody else with the questions I asked...So I had to be, like, careful. But then, I told my dad, I said, “You know what?” I was like, “I'm going to be asking you questions, you can't get mad, or mad at me about... well, at least not on tape.”

Earlier in his interview, William explained that with respect to ceremonial knowledge, some information is not to be shared in a public format for anyone to see. William wanted to make sure he was not asking inappropriate questions that would upset those who agreed to be interviewed by him. He had to negotiate this tension because he also wanted to create a video for sharing cultural knowledge.

Like William, Alexa (Secwepemc) also expressed concerns of not harming anyone through her project. When Alexa discussed the most challenging parts of the project, she acknowledged concerns about whether “I’m like doing [the photographs] and writing [artist statements] about the residential schools properly and not offending anyone. I let my Papa read it, and he said it was pretty good, so I think that’s good.” In Alexa’s case, she was working on developing both cultural competencies in traditional protocols within her family, while connecting those cultural competencies to the development of her photography and writing skills needed to complete her project. Alexa expressed the risk she took in doing a photography series that included her family in traditional Powwow regalia against the residential school (see Figure 7), but her Papa’s support ensured that what she was doing was not going to be harmful.

The students’ concerns around the appropriateness of how to write or present their topics in ways that would be respectful to their families and community within a school setting, required them to consider how to navigate conversations with their family members without creating offense or unintended harm. A final theme that emerged in consideration of the impacts of engaging in critical literacies education was re-traumatization.

**“I cannot put Elders back in that position”:** Re-traumatization. A final challenge in doing CLE work was the potential for re-traumatization. As previously mentioned, many students selected project topics based on personal experiences or the experiences of those close to them. Some of the topics such as suicide awareness, incarceration rates, and residential schools were topics the students felt were important to shed light on. However, these topics also brought up memories and emotions that had the potential to have harmful consequences. For example, Brendan (Cree/Nakota), whose project was on youth incarceration and based on his own experience as an incarcerated youth, stated that during the project, “I went through all types

of like, of like, a whole roller coaster of emotions and a whole roller coaster of thoughts and stuff and like, just brought back memories and experiences.” Another student, Casey (St’át’imc), 17, from Seton Lake, who created a painting about residential schools, explained that:

Well [Curtis] warned me, [he] told me that it was going to be presented in public, that we would have a little art show at the [rec] center. So within that I was like, “OK I can’t do my idea.” Like, my idea for this painting is going to be that I thought, “No I won’t be able to do it.” I was like, “I cannot put Elders back in that position. Where the memories will resurface because of my painting.” So I did not want that to happen.

Casey, who in her interview talked about her Grandmother being a survivor of residential school, recognized the potentially harmful impacts of such public displays of information.

Both Bonnie, a residential school survivor, and Shirley, a day school survivor, discussed their experiences while being interviewed by some of the students for their projects. Bonnie, speaking of her interview with one student, conveyed the following:

He asked me questions and saying... do you...like one of the question, “Do you ever hate anybody over this?” And I said, “You know, I never thought of it.” I said, “I hurt when I think of some of the things,” and he brought out things that I had really never thought of, you know. And it was it was difficult to answer because all of a sudden he’s dealing... and he’s dealing with something that you haven’t thought of, and nobody’s touched on. And after that, I told him that “You took me by surprise,” and he said, “Well you know I just... I wanted to know what was...what made the difference.” And I thought, “Ooh, that’s smart,” because he was trying to find what made me different from not being angry, or not hating or, you know, why are you the way you are, and yet in nine years

never seen my family. You know, and here was a kid asking me, and I felt like throwing something at him when he did, but also on the other hand, he had a good reason.

Bonnie discussed how, even in this situation where she agreed to speak with a student about her experience, she was taken off guard by a question that brought up a lot of emotions for her.

Similarly, Shirley, who also shared her experiences during the interviews with students said:

the role of um, about residential school; it brought me back as a student and it brought back to that hurting place, in that place where it wasn't comfortable, but being able to share that experience and putting that hat on, and showing that you can make it through these things [was important].

Students and staff both articulated the emotional labour and potential for re-traumatization in CLE when addressing significant Indigenous histories and realities with family and community members, an outcome that Camille said she knew would require the appropriate supports. Camille explained:

We did we push them, and if we hadn't had the relationships with them, the prior relationship, that wouldn't have been possible, and it could even have been detrimental, depending on the situation. And if they hadn't had the level of support in terms of social emotional resources in Shirley, in [name] the First Nations Family counselor that was available to them all the time, because these things were triggering... there's trauma associated with them. And so it's... it's not to be taken lightly. And it is, it's important to be cautious and to be aware of what you're asking, to the best of your ability and it... and I can't say that I knew that at the beginning. Knowing [the students] and knowing what they're capable of, I'm not surprised in terms of the topics that they chose. But I was still blown away by their willingness to push way outside of where they would be comfortable

to engage their families, to ask their families to take that risk... as well, for them, for the course, for the school. And that's also about my learning about the layers, everything all the time because it was a bigger...we were asking more of them than I knew we were asking when we started.

Camille's opinions and reflections on the CML course demonstrated her understanding that the topics selected could be triggering for students and their families. Camille also showed recognition of the other two previously discussed challenges that can occur with doing critical literacies work such as the emotional labour ("to be cautious and to be aware of what you're asking") and the navigation of cultural protocols ("to engage their families, to ask their families to take that risk"). Camille stated that even though she was aware of the potential challenges, there were more layers than she even anticipated with the students engaging in critical literacies work.

The challenges of CLE articulated by the students, staff, and Elder included three emergent themes: emotional labour; navigation of cultural protocols in a school setting; and re-traumatization. Of importance is that even though the term "challenges" was used in this section as a way to have the students discuss the process of creating their CML projects, the themes more broadly are representative of the complexities of engaging in critical literacies work. These challenges, or complexities, are significant to also understanding the ways in which the students, staff and Elder positioned the benefits of engaging in CLE, which are discussed in the next section.

### ***Benefits***

Overall, by the end of the CML course, the experiences articulated by the students, staff, and community members were overwhelmingly positive. Camille tasked the students with a final



(see Table 3 in Chapter 3 for Interview Questions with Connections to Research Questions). The participants often described their positive experiences by discussing the ways in which they overcame the challenges they experienced. As such, the following three themes emerged as benefits of participating in CLE: students and staff discussed feelings of pride and acceptance in themselves, family, and community; growth and development of cultural competencies; and self-growth and healing.

**“And then at the end, I was actually like, really proud of it”: Pride and Acceptance in Self, Family, and Community.** The word most frequently used by the students to describe their experience or feelings in their final reflections, and during the interviews, was proud. For example, Autumn (Sioux/Assiniboine/Cree) explained that,

I didn't actually think that, like, starting off this project, I didn't think that it would be like as big as it was, and I didn't think that it would take as much time as it did, and this much effort, and like, yeah, it did... and it came together really nicely and I'm really happy that it did, and I'm really proud of myself.

Autumn's feelings of pride stemmed from the realization that the project was much bigger – took more time and effort to do – and had more impact on her learning than she initially anticipated.

Unlike Autumn, Calvin (Secwepemc) thought that when he took on his project it was going to be a big task and questioned whether it would come together. Calvin, in describing the entire process, said that,

[a]nd then at the end, I was actually like, really proud of it. Like, I did mess up on it but I know where I can fix my problem, like where it could fix it, where to put the lines now, it's fun now.

Although both Autumn and Kalvin had different expectations when starting their projects, they both identified challenges they overcame to end up with the same feelings of pride in their efforts, learning, and finished product.

Bonnie also recognized the students' feelings of pride:

I was looking at students that felt really, really proud of themselves, and not just proud of themselves, but proud of the fact that they can produce something that other people could be really interested in. I was really, you know, I mean, I grew up always being on the other side of the fence thinking, "Well you know if I said that, would people really... I don't have anything good to say or anything that needed to be heard." And here was these students that were standing out there and standing in front of their project and saying, "I did this, and I know how good I am at doing it, and I'm pleased with what I've done."

And that was a really good surprise. I really felt that.

A key point in Bonnie's explanation was that students felt "that they can produce something that other people could be interested in." The feelings of empowerment were often expressed by students when they explained their reasons for feeling proud. One student, Brian (Secwepemc), who was vocal about the emotional challenges of his project, also indicated that overall, he felt empowered. Brian said,

I just felt empowered because, like, I get to show people, hopefully show people about [white] privilege and then about, like, what happened and everything; hopefully get them to notice that it's not that easy to just... try to keep moving forward and whatnot.

Bonnie further added to this understanding:

All their projects, I think was so outstanding. It was a surprise that these students that you know, every day, that do silly things, that act crazy in the hallways, eat all your bannock

when you bring some to them; all of a sudden turned into such serious people. That wanted to bring a voice to the issues that were not heard, you know?

Bonnie described how the students took their projects seriously, and how they believed that what they had to say mattered not only to them, but also to the general public. The students' demonstration of the seriousness they placed on their projects indicated, as Brian expressed, empowerment and pride by being able to use their voices to "show people" the stories, experiences, and information on topics of relevance to their lives.

The students' feelings of pride also extended to their families and communities. For example, Liz (Nakota/Inuit) said that, "I actually enjoyed learning a lot more about my father's past and actually putting that into a project where other people can learn from it." Although Liz did not explicitly say she was proud, her personal enjoyment of learning from her father, and being able to share those learnings publicly conveyed the pride she feels for her father. Casey (St'át'imc) also discussed feelings of pride for Elders in her community who survived residential schools. Casey expressed that,

I also was proud of our people that survived, that still made it to this day and held strong. They may not be able to speak their full language yet, but they're learning. I'm just happy [schools] actually let us learn our own language again.

Both Liz and Casey positioned their pride for their family and community in relation to the emotionally challenging aspects of learning about individuals' experiences (e.g., homelessness or residential schools) by acknowledging the resiliency of those individuals and what everyone can learn from those acts of resiliency.

Feelings of pride in self, family, and community, which were directly related to the emotional labour aspect of the projects, were identified by the majority of participants. A second

theme that emerged in relation to an identified challenge – navigation of cultural protocols in a school setting – was the growth and development of cultural competencies.

**“You'd have to know about your culture in order to spread awareness about it”:**  
**Growth and Development of Cultural Competencies.** Foundational to the feelings of pride and empowerment was the support and learning experienced by students through their family and community relationships. It was also through the support of family and community that students were able to grow and develop cultural competencies. For example, Autumn (Sioux/Assiniboine/Cree) and Sarah (St'át'imc), when initially brainstorming for their project, identified their interest to present something about how to spread cultural awareness (see Figure 5 in Chapter 3 for their brainstorming from one of the CML course workshops). One of the main ideas they listed was wanting “more opportunity for re-connection for those who lack cultural activities.” Both students acknowledged the limited nature of their cultural connections, but they wanted an opportunity to learn more about their culture, and in turn, teach others. Bonnie, who supported the students through their project, said that part of the learning was that,

they also had to make their own talking stick and they had to learn about how they had to collect the sticks. They went to, you know, the forest and giving thanks to the Creator, giving thanks to the plant. For having the, um... being able to take away a limb.

Autumn, when describing learning about the talking stick stated:

I am really kind of thinking, “Wow,” like this is the kind of like... we treasure this? It's like... You know I think it's important to our culture (...). And so like, that was kind of like a big thing for me, to like, experience, and to see and see it be treated like it really is such an important thing to her, and I was like, “Wow, that's really cool.”

Sarah also acknowledged the positive benefits she personally gained from learning about the talking stick as well as being able to share her learnings with others. When she reflected on the words to describe her experience she said:

“Courage.” I don’t like presenting in front of people and it just took a lot of courage for me to do that, because I wanted to spread awareness of my culture. “Persistence” because it would be like... you’d have to... find the time and kind of be on it, like, you gotta get on the working part. I also got “knowledge” because you’d have to know about your culture in order to spread awareness about it. You wouldn’t want to spread awareness if you don’t know much about it. I did “creativity” too because you just have to be, like, creative to make a talking stick and be able to open up your creative side.

Sarah’s word choices communicated her feelings of accomplishment, particularly in the growth of her own cultural competencies, as someone who has taken the time to learn the knowledge being shared with her. She recognized the patience it took for her to understand the significance of the talking stick, the creativity in making a talking stick an individual reflection of herself, and the courage to pass that knowledge onto others.

Although Autumn’s and Sarah’s experience is directly linked to learning traditional knowledge, many of the students learned other cultural protocols. As previously discussed, the students relied on interviews with family and community members for information. Students were taught by Shirley how to approach members of the community in appropriate ways. For example, Shirley helped Autumn, Sarah, Terry and Brendan approach community members by having them present small satchels of tobacco. The tobacco satchels were made by the students at the school for the specific purpose of presenting to community members when making a request of them.

Other students such as William (Secwepemc/Ulkatcho) and Alexa (Secwepemc), who were already immersed in traditional protocols, gained awareness of how to appropriately share cultural knowledge. For example, William explained how his project was

to help out people who don't really understand the culture, because at one point in time I knew nothing (...). One of the reasons why I did this is just to show that our culture is never going to fade away, and it'll never leave us (...) I thought, and it was just like a reflection of myself I wanted to do it for.

William wanted to continue his commitment and growth to understanding ceremony by figuring out ways to appropriately share his learnings about culture and ceremony publicly and respectfully. Similarly, Alexa, who previously stated she had approached her Papa for approval on her write-up, said: "It was pretty, um, hard writing about it, but it was more important to get the information out there, so it was worth it." Alexa's statement demonstrated her learning in how to share information through writing in an appropriate way. For both William and Alexa, there was a connection between the challenge of navigating cultural protocols within a school setting and their growth and development of cultural competencies.

Growth and development of cultural competencies was identified by many of the students, whether directly through learning traditional knowledge, or in learning appropriate protocols. The final theme, self-growth and healing, was connected to all of the identified challenges as well as supported by feelings of pride and growth in cultural competencies.

**"The bubbles. Cause I feel like people don't know that it's represented as water...healing": Self-Growth and Healing.** Another benefit expressed by some students focused on aspects of healing and self-growth. In the transcript excerpt below, Jules (Nuxalk), 15, from Bella Coola, whose project was a large painting dedicated to suicide awareness for her

home community in northern B.C. (see Figure 11), explained following the most meaningful part of her project:

Jules: The bubbles.

Alexis: The bubbles? OK why do you say that specifically?

Jules: 'Cause I feel like people don't know that it's represented as water.

Alexis: And the water means?

Jules: Healing.



*Figure 11.* Jules' painting about Suicide Awareness

Jules discussed during her interview, and in the artist statement for her painting, the loss of her best friend, and the struggles her community has experienced with loss of life through suicide. Despite the emotional challenges Jules faced during the project, discussing the water bubbles as most meaningful to her as an act of healing was profound.

Brendan (Cree/Nakota), who also discussed the emotional challenges of his project, said that,

it felt better at the end because I got some stuff off my chest, I got to talk to certain people so... I guess challenging, overwhelming and then after I was happy and I felt, like, successful after being able to do those things.

As with Jules, Brendan indicated that even though he found the project emotionally challenging, he also felt he was able to let go of some of his negative feelings, which contributed to positive feelings of healing and self-growth.

Shirley, further contributing to the understanding of students' self-growth through CLE, offered the following:

To have a project, whatever that would look like, and be able to use that multimedia in with it, so whether they're telling a story through their pictures, or they're telling the story through animation, or whichever way music, poetry, whatever; in that way they can build on their sense of understanding self and bring it forth in a way that's engaging and relevant for them. And they can shine so they can have that self-awareness and that self-esteem, and it just it snowballs into better things.

Thus, Shirley suggested that key benefits of students engaging in CLE were the opportunities to build a stronger sense of who they are, to increase their self-awareness, and to build their self-esteem, all of which are connected to personal growth.

### ***Summary***

The findings from this section revealed the benefits of doing CLE work through the ways in which students, community members, and families had to overcome and negotiate the challenges of doing CLE work. The research participants identified emotional labour, navigation

of cultural protocols in a school setting, and re-traumatization, as challenges to engaging in CLE within Indigenous education contexts. However, the research participants also conveyed the benefits of doing CLE work: pride and acceptance in themselves, family, and community; growth and development of cultural competencies; and self-growth and healing.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter was divided into two sections, and in each section I presented the findings as themes in response to the research questions. The themes identified in the first section were storytelling, family and community, and multimodal expression. The second section included the challenges – emotional labour; navigation of cultural protocols; and re-traumatization – and the benefits – pride in self, family and community; growth and development of cultural competencies; and self-growth and healing – of engaging in CLE work in trans-systemic spaces.

The findings from this chapter are discussed in relation to the literature in Chapter 5. Chapter 5 also features implications for future research and practice.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

The study of critical literacies education (CLE) with Indigenous adolescents is significant to working towards a more culturally responsive curriculum (CRC) that supports Indigenous learners within a broader Western context. As discussed in Chapter 2, and further discussed later in this chapter, a focus on creating CRC within culturally relevant education (CRE) for Indigenous adolescents should also foster culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy ([CSRP], McCarty & Lee, 2014) that works towards reconciliation (TRC, 2015). Significant to the development of authentic CRC for Indigenous learners is the need for an interchange of Western Knowledge (WK) and Indigenous Knowledges (IK) in order to find a balanced center-point – a trans-systemic space – between IK and WK (Battiste, 2013). Using the theoretical framework of sociocultural theory, Gee’s concepts of d/Discourse, and Indigenous ways of learning and knowing, the purpose of this case study was to explore how a trans-systemic space in CLE can be created for Indigenous adolescents. The findings from this study highlight characteristics of CLE in a trans-systemic space, along with the benefits and challenges of engaging in CLE with Indigenous adolescents. In this chapter I discuss the significance of the findings, identify delimitations and limitations of the research, and offer implications for pedagogical practice, methodology, and research.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

In Chapter 4, I described how the Indigenous adolescents in the study took up and responded to CLE within a culturally responsive framework. The analysis of the participants’ data led me to focus on their personal experiences, stories, and reflections about engaging in critical literacies during a Critical Media Literacies (CML) course. As such, this section is organized into two parts that address the significance of the findings in relation to previous

research literature. In the first part of this section, I discuss the significance of storytelling, family and community, and multimodal expression as characterizing trans-systemic spaces in CLE with Indigenous adolescents. In the second part of this section, I discuss the significance of the benefits (i.e., pride and acceptance in self, family and community; growth and development of cultural competencies; and self-growth and healing) and the challenges (i.e., emotional labour; navigation of cultural protocols; and re-traumatization) of engaging in CLE with Indigenous adolescents.

### *Characterizing Trans-Systemic Spaces*

The characterization of trans-systemic spaces in CLE for Indigenous adolescents within the context of CRE in this research includes three emergent themes: storytelling; family and community; and multimodal expression. These emerging themes are connected to the research literature on CRE and CLE, and form a model for both theoretical and pedagogical approaches to CSRP in CLE with Indigenous adolescents. Each of the themes is discussed below in relation to the research literature as presented in Chapter 2. The discussion highlights the interchanges of knowledges drawn from CLE and CRE in order to inform CRSP for CLE with Indigenous adolescents.

**Storytelling.** Storytelling, within the context of CLE, was the primary method students utilized to gather information for their CML projects. The students relied on specific aspects of storytelling, such as learning from personal experiences, as a way to position the experiences of themselves, their families, and their community members at the centre of their projects. Storytelling emerged as a characterization of a trans-systemic space through the interchange of knowledges (IK, WK and adolescent knowledges) which students drew upon to respond to the critical literacies practice of examining social, political, and historical understandings of power

and control of information (Janks, 2014; Luke 2012; Riley 2015; see Big Ideas in Appendix A), and to demonstrate culturally-responsive approaches to critiquing discourses of power (Aronson & Laughner, 2016).

Students' use of storytelling is consistent with previous research findings on IK and pedagogies generally (Archibald, 2008; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009), and critical literacies practices within Indigenous contexts specifically (Stanton et al., 2020; Stanton & Sutton, 2012). Oral IK pedagogical practices such as storytelling is a specific IK meaning-making practice (Hare, 2011); and stories as ways of knowing include stories specific to teaching, entertainment, praying, personal expression, history and power (Battiste, 2002). As such, the stories listened to and created by the participants included examples of stories for the purpose of teaching, personal expression, history and power.

Findings from previous research with Indigenous adolescents utilizing storytelling pedagogies has indicated that stories and experiences shared from community members and Elders offer the possibility for students to engage in meaningful critical literacy work (Stanton et al., 2020; Stanton & Sutton, 2012). As discussed in Chapter 2, in a research project conducted by Stanton and Sutton (2012) to engage Indigenous adolescents in culturally-responsive writing processes, the researchers utilized a place-based framework to connect school and community literacy practices. The students participated in a Photovoice Project which highlighted important issues in the local community and an Elders Interview Project intended to teach critical story-listening. Stanton and Sutton found that both student projects facilitated starting points for discussions on language and power, as well as discussions on the value placed on school (in particular written literacy) and community literacy practices. Furthermore, Stanton and Sutton (2012) found that culturally responsive literacy practices in Indigenous contexts included

emphasizing the importance of oral traditions, stories, and experiences of the students and their community in order “to bring home and school literacy together in powerful ways” and “re-define and re-envision the writing process with and for our students” (p. 83).

Expanding the work of Stanton and Sutton (2012) in order to focus on critical literacies specifically, the students in my study utilized stories of themselves, family, and community members, to not only discuss language and power, but also to express, disrupt, and reposition discourses of power. For example, all the study participants centered their personal stories (included in eight projects), family stories (included in six projects), and community members stories (included in six projects) in order to “get the truth out there” (Casey, Interview, June 8, 2017). Truth is strongly connected to the traditional “reverence” of storytelling (Archibald, 2008, p. 19), and significant to understanding key aspects of language and power by considering whose knowledge matters (Cardinal, 2015). Cree/Métis scholar, Trudy Cardinal (2015), reflects that when one considers what literacy is in Indigenous contexts – which includes telling and hearing stories – that it is “important to think about the ways we know and the ways we share this knowing and the kinds of knowledge we might validate or disregard” (p. 2).

Indeed, the students, through taking up storytelling, demonstrated that the knowledge embedded in the stories of themselves, families, and community members was about centering their knowledge, experiences, and voices as the kind of knowledge they wanted to privilege and validate. For example, Terry (Carrier), 18, from Lake Babine, who wrote a news article on the Impact of Residential Schools, interviewed five community members for his CML project. Terry’s news article was intended to shed light on a topic that “not many people know about” in a format that often leaves out the perspectives of the people most impacted (Interview, June 8, 2017). In the introduction to his news article, Terry wrote

This article is part of my contribution to truth and reconciliation in this country. The people that were interviewed each have their own powerful stories of their experiences with residential schools and how it [ha]s affected their lives and still affects them to this day. Each one of them have found their own personal healing journeys and each are in different stages of those journeys. However, as Canadians and a country we need to learn about and recognize the impacts of residential schools for us to begin our collective healing journey.

Terry's introduction to his news article masterfully shows how the stories, experiences, and perspectives of the individual community members are significant to understanding "our collective healing journey." Furthermore, through the use of storytelling, and in the format of a written news article, Terry's use of the metaphor "healing journey," as both personal and collective, also demonstrated ways that sustaining pluralism (Paris & Alim, 2014) between multiple Discourses (Gee, 2015), and culturally revitalizing pedagogy (McCarthy & Lee, 2014) are enacted by Indigenous adolescents. Paris and Alim (2014) state that "cultural and linguistic flexibility [...] is about the skills, knowledges, and ways of being needed for success in the present and future" (p. 89). Gee (2003, 2015) further contributes to understanding how cultural linguistic flexibility supports student success through arguing that being able to transfer between Discourses of knowledge (such as IK and WK) helps students become critical learners. As such, Terry's act of seeking-out and utilizing storytelling is demonstrative of culturally revitalizing critical literacies practices.

In addition to students utilizing storytelling to express, disrupt, and reposition discourses of power, the use of storytelling also contributed to high student engagement and was demonstrative of CSRP for Indigenous learners. Storytelling was enabled by student autonomy

and agency through choice of project topics and information gathering methods; both of which engaged students in the practice of examining power and control of information in the media. However, in previous research such as Pirbhai-Illich's (2010) study with Indigenous adolescents engaging in critical literacy practices, Pirbhai-Illich questioned the appropriateness of a critical literacies orientation to engage Indigenous learners. Pirbhai-Illich suggested that initial attempts by a non-Indigenous teacher to deconstruct dominant discourse and Indigenous representation in the media resulted in resistance from the students. However, Pirbhai-Illich also found that once the teacher shifted to discussing topics that validated the students' lived experiences, and once an Elder was invited into the classroom to teach about traditional oral storytelling structures, the students re-engaged in the project. These experiences led to Pirbhai-Illich (2010) stating that in order for Indigenous adolescents to engage in culturally appropriate discussions about race, oppression, and privilege, schools and teachers need to reconsider "strict rules about the nature of topics considered appropriate for school" (p. 264) and have projects that acknowledge "the validity of [the students] lived experiences" (p. 264).

The findings from my study enhance those of Pirbhai-Illich (2010) and begin to address ways that a critical literacies orientation can be appropriate for Indigenous learners. For example, the four workshops that started the CML course were all facilitated by Indigenous experts who placed storytelling, and the lived experiences of community members, as integral to doing critical literacies work. The workshop facilitators demonstrated how storytelling was a central lens for examining and critiquing discourses of power. The students demonstrated their understanding of power and control of information, acknowledging how their stories and experiences are often not heard ("help out the people"), not represented ("shine a light on what's happening"/ "bring it to people's attention"), or misrepresented ("get the truth out there"). The

students' understanding of power and control of information was similar to findings from a previous study in which I was a co-researcher (Brown & Begoray, 2017) as the participants also expressed the importance of sharing personal and community experiences in order to “re-present” (Madden et al., 2013) their cultural identities. Some of the participants in the previous study were also involved in this research. As such, when CLE was approached with storytelling and lived experiences as central to examining and critiquing discourses of power, students engaged from the beginning of the CML course, and responded in meaningful ways.

The students centered storytelling as their primary method to gather information and to reposition discourses of power. The students' personal stories, as well as those of the community members they chose to interview, became the focal point for their CML projects. In this research, the students' re-centering of knowledge was an action demonstrative of being critical of discourse and Discourses of power (Gee, 2015). As such, the use of storytelling in this study also advances a more holistic understanding of how trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education can be created (Stanton et al., 2020).

**Family and Community.** Family and community, within the context of CLE, emerged as a characterization of a trans-systemic space as it was how the students took-up and interpreted collaboration and collaborative learning. Students drew upon through the interchange of knowledges (IK, WK, and adolescent knowledges) to respond to the critical literacies practice of learning occurs in collaboration with others (Alvermann, 2009; Cazden, 2001; Vasquez et al. 2019; see Big Ideas in Appendix A). Indeed, they not only approached family and community for their stories, but also for mental and emotional support. Furthermore, the support of family and community members lent itself to students thinking critically about how they position themselves in the world. Thus, the students also engaged in multiple CRE practices such as

facilitating and developing cultural competencies and pride in one's culture, and engaging in acts of reclamation and critical reflection about their own lives (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Aroson & Laughner, 2016).

As noted in Chapter 2, successful critical literacies practices with adolescents include using collaboration in the process of learning. Findings from previous research have indicated that collaboration provides learners with opportunities to foster common knowledge (Cazden, 2001), create space for questions (Riley, 2015), and to challenge the assumptions, views, or perspectives held by others (Park, 2012). However, research on collaboration in a Western education context is often focused on working with peers within the classroom (Brown & Campione, 1990; Cazden, 2001; Park, 2012). Yet for Indigenous learners, collaboration as a means of developing knowledge, learning, and identity has been strongly supported in the research literature to include family and community (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Kanu, 2011; Mills et al., 2016; Patrick et al., 2013; Stanton et al., 2020).

For example, as described in the literature review, Hare and Pidgeon (2011) invited Indigenous youth to talk about their lived experiences as Indigenous students in both public school and reserve school contexts, and to consider ways in which they respond to educational challenges. Hare and Pidgeon found that these youth drew strength from families and community as sources of agency, resilience, knowledge systems, and cultural integrity. In another study with Indigenous learners, by Mills et al. (2016) found that family and community were at the center of Indigenous knowledge and literacy learning experiences as knowledge was considered to be transgenerational (passed down from generation to generation), place-based (through stories connected to land), and collective (everyone in the community is connected through the past).

The findings from my study contribute to the research literature on the importance of family and community support for Indigenous learners generally, and extend understanding of collaborative learning as a critical literacies practice with Indigenous learners specifically. Although the study participants were presented with the option to collaborate with their peers and/or community members, collaboration was not required. Significantly, all 16 participants chose to collaborate with family and/or community members, while four of those students also chose to work with a peer (two groups of two; see Student Participant Chart in Chapter 3).

The students' efforts to collaborate with their family and community reflect the findings of both Hare and Pidgeon (2011) and Mills et al. (2016) who documented how students' self-identity and learning were drawn from community and family resources, and that when community resources were utilized students demonstrated more comfort, authority, and agency in their learning. For example, Kalvin (Secwepemc), 15, Brendan (Cree/Nakota), 18, and Nicole (Anishinaabe), 16, communicated how the family and community support systems they reached out to helped to create a space where they felt encouraged to learn and willing to take risks (see Chapter 4). The notion of feeling encouraged to learn and take risks was further supported when artist-in-residence, Curtis (Nlaka'pamux/Secwepemc), and Elder Bonnie (Inuit), both expressed how they viewed their role as community members to help create a space for guidance, decision making, and reflection.

Furthermore, the emotional support received by the students from family and community, lent itself to ways in which students could then think critically about who they are and how they position themselves in the world. For example, Brendan (Cree/Nakota), 18, achieved a deeper understanding of his experience as a previously incarcerated youth through interviewing different community members: "Every time I interviewed the next person, starting from the first

guy, like ever since then, I kind of learned more about myself.” This finding aligns with research conducted on story listening and learning by Stó:lō scholar Joanne Archibald (2008). In writing about the value of sharing personal experiences through stories, she states

I believe that understandings and insights also result from lived experiences and critical reflections on those experiences. Many Aboriginal people have said that to understand ourselves and our situation today, we must know where we come from and know what has influenced us. (Archibald, 2008, p. 42)

Reflecting Joanne Archibald’s emphasis on lived experiences, and as discussed in Chapter 4, Elder Bonnie stated that in order to learn

sometimes we need to look at the very same things that maybe we have experienced at a different time, or different level of the situation, and if we can go back [and reflect] on those things, then, we’ve achieved a way of learning about others and about ourselves.

Similarly, William (Secwepemc/Ulkatcho), 18, made a notable reference to how his role as a story listener helped him to reflect on his learning and understanding of himself and his topic. He remarked, “[j]ust hearing it. Just knowing that you’re not the only one who’s ever been through something like that.” His statement further demonstrates the significance of collaborative learning with family and community as a means for guiding knowledge, wellbeing, and resiliency (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Mills et al., 2016).

As such, the students’ decisions to collaborate with their family and community members for their CML projects demonstrated a crucial aspect of how a trans-systemic space in CLE is facilitated – a holistic type of learning that fostered their mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical selves – a way that helped to nourish their learning spirit (Battiste, 2013) and

demonstrated ways that youth are reclaiming ways of knowing and learning (McCarty & Lee, 2014).

**Multimodal Expression.** The final theme to emerge as a characterization of CLE in a trans-systemic space was the importance of multimodal expression. More specifically, the students utilized multimodal forms of personal and cultural expression as ways to demonstrate social action and reclamation. These findings are consistent with previous research results on CLE and adolescent literacies in that the students drew upon personal knowledge, skills, and expertise, as mediators to learning (Alvermann, 2009; Janks, 2014); and utilized their knowledge, skills, and expertise to express and position themselves in the world (Luke 2012; Riley 2015; Smetana, 2011). Of significance in this study were the findings about how students engaged with personal and cultural forms of expression through a CRE orientation which resulted in them engaging in reflections about their own lives, building bridges between cultural references and academic skills, and enhancing cultural competencies by developing pride in their culture (Aronson & Laughner, 2016).

First, through personal and cultural multimodal expression students such as William (Secwepemc/Ulkatcho), Brendan (Cree/Nakota), Autumn (Sioux/Assiniboine/Cree), and Danny (Tsáá? Ché Ne Dane) engaged in critical reflections about their own lives. For example, Danny, 17, who wove together different knowledge structures, such as poetry and traditional oral storytelling, created a written short story that featured a combination of personal experiences with research statistics on anxiety and depression. In the study by Mills et al. (2016), the researchers found that multimodal literacies practices, such as creating videos and writing, which also included IK and ways of learning, such as storytelling, art, or dance, “developed the students’ sense of cultural identity” (p. 18). Paris and Alim (2014) argued that when considering

cultural identities as pluralist, it is vital to “understand the ways young people are enacting race, ethnicity, language, literacy and cultural practices in both traditional and evolving ways” (p. 90). As such, Danny’s weaving together of different types of writing such as fiction and poetry, and traditional symbols and motifs from oral stories in her community, illustrated the notion of pluralist cultural identities. Danny wanted to show her main character as someone who is multifaceted, and does not adhere to stereotypes that are often placed on her by society, someone like herself and her sister (Interview, June 1, 2017). Danny’s positioning of, and critical reflection about her identity continued when she discussed the traditional symbols and motifs (e.g., landscape, rock, Mother Earth) from certain stories in her community to represent “courage and strength and bravery.” By having her main character use traditional symbols and motifs to draw strength from, Danny communicated the value she places on community as sources of agency, resiliency, healing and cultural integrity (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Mills et al., 2016). Danny’s story was an act of critical reflection and a positioning of self in the world, through both personal and cultural expression, that demonstrated another example of sustained pluralism (Paris & Alim, 2014) within a trans-systemic space.

Second, multimodal personal and cultural expression helped to build bridges between cultural references and academic skills. Interestingly, most of the literature on CRE focuses on the use of cultural references to connect to academic learning as unidirectional (Aronson & Laughner, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014). This position often assumes that students are of one particular cultural group, or embedded in particular cultural practices, and that those practices are to be used to gain access to school literacies. The students in this study were not from the same language group or territory (see Student Participant Chart in Chapter 3), and they represented a range in their connections to their heritage or traditional culture. Often not

addressed in the findings of studies, but of significance in this research, was the students' explicit expression of wanting to learn more about traditional cultural references and protocols, and build cultural competencies. For example, Autumn (Sioux/Assiniboine/Cree) and Sarah (St'át'imc), specifically wanted to focus their CML project on how Indigenous youth can connect to their traditional culture, and then find ways to share their knowledge with others who may also feel disconnected. Bonnie, the Elder, was brought in to facilitate and support Autumn and Sarah through their project. As a group, they decided to focus their project on the significance of the talking stick, as an example of an object used to facilitate traditional talking circles by different Indigenous groups. Bonnie, who was also a retired school teacher and principal, worked with Autumn and Sarah first on school literacies, such as having them do some online research about the history and tradition of the talking stick with various Indigenous groups, and then on Autumn and Sarah's knowledge of traditional cultural competencies and protocols (see Chapter 4 Findings). By working with Bonnie in this way, Autumn and Sarah engaged in transgenerational knowledge, multimodal forms of knowledge, place and territorial knowledge, and collective knowledge (Mills et al., 2016) in order to engage in cultural pluralism (Paris & Alim, 2014). Significantly, and consistent with Paris and Alim's (2014) call to push-back against unidirectional asset pedagogies, Bonnie, Autumn and Sarah demonstrated how a trans-systemic space was created through the flow of knowledge between cultural references and academic literacies as fluid, moving in both directions, reflective of the evolving heritage and community practices in which they were engaging.

Finally, multimodal personal and cultural expression facilitated students' cultural competencies by developing pride in their culture and understanding of others. Many of the students selected forms of representation such as photography, film, and digital media. These

choices reflected previous research findings that suggested adolescents place value on collective knowledge sharing, and knowledge remixing, remodeling and remaking through digital forms (Alvermann, 2009; Rogers et al., 2015; Smith, 2019). Additionally, the students' utilization of digital forms of expression contribute to the growing literature on ways Indigenous youth are appropriating digital literacies for cultural reclamation (Mills et al. 2016; Stanton et al., 2020). For example, the photography series on the intergenerational impact of residential schools by Alexa (Secwepemc), 16, and the digital video archive on the importance of ceremonies by William (Secwepemc/Ulkatcho), 18, conveyed how their actions taken to gather and share information enhanced cultural competencies and pride in one's culture. Both Alexa and William worked with their families to ensure that appropriate traditional cultural protocols were met while gathering and sharing information. As well, Alexa and William, through the photographic images and interviews with family members, told stories of a thriving and resilient culture, despite the tragic legacy of residential schools and policies created to stop cultural practices, gatherings, and ceremonies such as Powwows. In many ways Alexa's photography series (see Figure 7 in Chapter 4) can be juxtaposed to the well-documented colonial images of Thomas Moore Keesick – photographs originally circulated by residential schools to demonstrate their successful assimilation practices (Brady & Hiltz, 2017) – whereby Alexa captured the joy and pride on her family member's faces in their Powwow regalia outside the old residential school. William's digital video archive showcased his family, and a few community members, who shared the meaning of ceremony to them as individuals, and to their community as a whole. Alexa's and William's responses to CLE went beyond examining power or taking social action, to one that was also celebratory of cultural expression and knowledge (McCarthy & Lee, 2014).

The students in the study demonstrated how multimodal personal and cultural expressions of learning became intertwined, requiring nuanced levels of different knowledges, protocols and competencies. Furthermore, the students' engagement in authentic multimodal learning, which included both personal and cultural forms of expression, enhanced traditional and evolving ways of community practices (Paris & Alim, 2014) while "advancing social justice within their own communities" (Stanton & Sutton, 2012, p. 83).

**Summary.** The study's findings extend current understandings of how Indigenous adolescents take up CLE in order to create a trans-systemic space that lends itself to voice who they are as individuals, and to create their own ways for cultural reclamation. As such, storytelling, family and community, and multimodal (personal and cultural) expression can form a model for culturally responsive critical literacies curriculum for Indigenous adolescents. McCarty and Lee (2014) argue that CRE within Indigenous education contexts should include CSRP which address three components: 1) educational sovereignty; 2) reclamation and revitalization of language and culture; and 3) community-based accountability. Below, the implications from the study are summarized in ways that CSRP curriculum development in the area of CLE can be approached in consideration of the aforementioned themes.

Within the context of urban Indigenous populations, educational sovereignty is complex as learners come from various territories with their own histories and connections to their community and cultures. However, designing CLE that centers the lived experiences of individuals by honoring storytelling as a method for gathering information and learning, works towards educational sovereignty through a student-led process in which the students create those connections to families and community.

In turn, the involvement of families and community also begin to address reclamation and revitalization of culture and language, as well as community-based accountability. During this study the support of family and community offered students opportunities to connect to their land and language through the storytelling process. Students learned both traditional and community knowledges, as well as developed traditional cultural competencies through increased knowledge of cultural protocols, while simultaneously continuing to remake, remodel, and reshape who they are and how they want to be seen and heard (Alvermann, 2009; Mills et al., 2016; Stanton et al., 2020).

Finally, the students' use of personal and cultural expression through authentic multimodal forms of learning resulted in CML projects that were designed with family and community as their target audience. As such, community-accountability and giving voice to significant issues to their communities were focal points of their presentations. Community-accountability was further seen as project topics were not only relevant to the students' everyday lives, but also celebratory of themselves, their families and their communities (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Patrick et al., 2013; Stanton & Sutton, 2012).

### ***Benefits & Challenges***

The benefits and challenges that emerged during the study are intimately intertwined, and when discussed together, provide a more holistic understanding of creating trans-systemic spaces in CLE for Indigenous adolescents. The participants often described their positive experiences (attributed to the benefits of CLE) by discussing the ways in which they overcame the challenges they experienced. Below I present how students communicated the benefits of doing CLE in relationship to the challenges of doing CLE.

### **Emotional Labour and Pride, and Acceptance in Self, Family and Community.**

Participants' experience of emotional labour was expressed through the sadness of having to validate their lived experiences to others, the disappointment that they need to educate others of systemic policies and structures that impact their lived experiences, and the fear and uncertainty as to how those lived experiences would be interpreted by others. In essence, the emotional impact of CLE on students placed them in a vulnerable position (Sanders et al. 2016). Findings from previous research that involved adolescents enacting and engaging in CLE indicated that both students and teachers struggled with how to manage social action taken in public forums that connected to work being done in schools, largely due to the potential of unintended harmful consequences for students (Sanders et al., 2016).

However, other research findings on CLE with adolescents also indicated that authentic production and creation of texts that engaged students in existing issues within their communities resulted in students being more invested in their work, as well as contributing to the learning being more transformative (Alvermann, 2008, 2012; Janks, 2014; Stanton & Sutton, 2012; Vasquez et al. 2019). Vasquez et al. (2019) argue that "it is not sufficient to simply create texts for the sake of 'practicing a skill' [but rather it is] about reconstructing and redesigning texts, images and practices [...] that have real-life effects and real-world impact" (p. 307). Nonetheless, it was initially emotionally challenging for many students to educate and share information about themselves, families, communities and/or culture in a public sphere.

Significantly, how the students navigated the emotional challenges was revealed through their expressions of pride and acceptance of themselves, family and culture. A previous publication I co-authored about a study where I served as a co-researcher (Begoray & Brown, 2018) included findings that Indigenous adolescents felt empowered when engaging in CLE

because these authentic opportunities to present their learning gave them a real voice. Similarly, in their study with Indigenous adolescents engaging in CLE, Stanton and Sutton (2012) found that students felt empowered and advocated for issues that were important to the local community because of the collaboration and connections fostered with members within the community.

Adding to the research literature, my findings illuminate the integral role family and community members play in supporting both students' navigation of emotional labour, and the growth of feelings of empowerment and pride. The students' confidence to present their learnings in a public format was made safe because family and community were consulted, and students collaborated with them on the information. As such, the CML projects reflected social action and reclamation by the students to support and engage with their local communities. Furthermore, the Indigenous adolescents in this study communicated that although committing to social action has emotional risks, those risks can be appropriately supported through collaboration with family and community, and through presentations that celebrate self, family and community.

For adolescents in general, authentic learning opportunities matter, particularly when engaging in CLE. However, the findings of my study extend current understandings of culturally relevant CLE for Indigenous adolescents because engagement and collaboration with community and family not only provided the youth with mental and emotional support, but also empowered students towards social change. Social change within the context of Indigenous education was modelled as reclamation and action for local communities, as well as celebration of self, family, and community.

### **Navigation of Cultural Protocols & Growth and Development of Cultural**

**Competencies.** The students expressed concerns around the appropriateness of how to write or present their topics in ways that would be respectful to their families and community within a school setting, which required them to consider how to navigate conversations with their family members without creating offense or unintended harm. Kee and Carr-Chellman (2019) warned that if critical literacies work with Indigenous learners is not approached in culturally appropriate ways, then tensions in ways of knowing and learning can arise that continue to privilege Western knowledge systems and destructive narratives of cultural oppression.

Scholars who have engaged in research on Indigenous storywork (Archibald, 2008) and learning from ceremony (Davidson & Davidson, 2018) have acknowledged that it is not always appropriate to share ceremonial knowledge in school settings. Respecting cultural protocols around knowledge sharing must be done to ensure harm will not come from the action. During her interview, Shirley (Métis/Cree), the AEW at the school, described how part of her role is to assist students in approaching community members appropriately, and navigating how to share information in respectful ways. As such, Shirley worked closely with many of the student participants to ensure unintended harm would not come from their projects. Navigating cultural protocols in a school setting reveals the complexity of creating trans-systemic spaces because it simultaneously creates opportunities for dialogue and risks associated with exposing families and communities.

Conversely, Patrick et al. (2013) found that when a literacy program in Ottawa engaged Inuit families to come together to make literacy decisions with their children, the children and program staff engaged in culturally relevant literacy practices more broadly. Similarly, in my research, Alexa and William demonstrated how they determined culturally appropriate critical

literacies practices as they worked with their families for their photography and digital story archive projects respectively, ensuring that members were not compromised while also developing cultural competencies. This finding also supports the results from research by Stanton et al. (2020) who found digital storywork advanced Indigenous experiences, including enhancing critical thinking and IK and ways of learning, and promoted responsibility and reverence through civic engagement.

Students such as Autumn and Sarah also discussed learning cultural protocols and growing their cultural competencies after they expressed interest in wanting to learn and share more cultural knowledge within an educational setting. The two students initially asked Shirley for support, and she guided them with how to approach Elder Bonnie – just one of the many moments cultural competencies were being developed and fostered. Furthermore, Autumn and Sarah were introduced to traditional knowledge through experiential learning, as expressed by Bonnie when she described the process of making the talking sticks: “they had to learn about how they had to collect the sticks. They went to, you know, the forest and giving thanks to the Creator, giving thanks to the plant.” The result of Bonnie’s guidance and teachings with Autumn and Sarah are best described by Autumn when she shared, “You know I think [the talking sticks are] important to our culture (...) that was kind of like a big thing for me, to like, experience, and to see.”

Although some of the students expressed initial challenges with navigating cultural protocols in school, the close support and collaboration with family and community members, including the school Elder and AEW, provided opportunities for students to grow and develop their cultural competences – to tell stories and share cultural knowledge “in a good way” (Stanton et al., 2020, p. 57).

**Re-traumatization and Self-Growth and Healing.** Multiple participants expressed concerns regarding re-traumatization based on the topic's covered in the CML projects. Although students could choose any topic, previous research findings have indicated that adolescents find more meaning when they are able to draw on previous experiences (Dunkerly-Bean et al. 2014; Gee 2002; 2015); and within Indigenous contexts, when students can connect with family and community members for information and support (Kanu, 2011; Mills et al., 2016; Pirbhai-Illich, 2010). The reduced risk of re-traumatization due to the highly personal nature of the topics selected by students is informed by two key aspects found in the research literature, and which also contribute to CLE practices with Indigenous adolescents: the power of *interrelational* learning (Archibald, 2008); and the importance of culturally competent teachers in trans-systemic spaces (Battiste, 2013; Gay, 2002).

Previous researchers have described how Indigenous youth draw on support from their family and community members to connect to learning (Kanu, 2011; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011), and family and community members respond by doing the same – an *interrelational* experience (Archibald, 2008; Mills et al., 2016; Stanton et al., 2020). Joanne Archibald (2008) described interrelational interaction between storytelling and story listening as “synergistic story power” (p. 100) that has “emotional, healing, and spiritual aspects” (p. 100). The theme of self-growth and healing is informed by Archibald’s (2008) synergistic story power of interrelational learning. This finding was demonstrated most clearly when William and Brendan each shared their healing journey’s through listening to the stories of those they interviewed. For example, when William shared that the process of interviewing, he said it

was also helpful, like, hearing what my dad said, and hearing what everybody said, especially with some of the hard times they’ve been through. Just hearing it. Just know

that you, you're not the only one who's ever been through something like that.

Brendan echoed similar sentiments to William; by listening to the stories of each person he interviewed he found the interviews helped him on his entire learning journey. Brendan said that each interviewee gave him an “a better understanding of my article, and like just the project as like a whole I liked better” which lead him to feeling “better at the end because I got some stuff off my chest.”

Supporting the synergistic story power of interrelational learning, both Shirley and Bonnie, who participated in multiple student interviews, discussed their own learnings through sharing their stories with students. For example, when Shirley stated that “being able to share that experience and putting that hat on, and showing that you can make it through these things” was important to her as she reflected on how everyone is both a student and a teacher. Similarly, Bonnie shared how in one interview a student “brought out things that I had really never thought of,” and discussed how she was also learning from her own experiences, as she was sharing those same experiences to teach others.

Significantly, spaces where such synergistic story power can emerge are spaces where trust, respect, reverence, responsibility and reciprocity for the storytellers, and the knowledge of the community, are centered and valued (Archibald, 2008; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Kee & Carr-Chellman, 2019; Paris & Alim, 2014; Stanton et al., 2020). In a Western education context, a space in which students feel safe to learn, develop, and grow their cultural competencies should be nurtured by culturally competent teachers and staff who understand their student population and their community (Battiste, 2013; Gay, 2002; Sanders et al., 2016). Accordingly, the school space in this study, created by the teachers and staff, provided students and their families with a safe space. During her semi-structured interview, Camille discussed the long-standing

relationships she and her staff have with the families whose children were in the program by stating that “if we hadn’t had the relationships with them, the prior relationship, [the CLE projects] wouldn’t have been possible, and it could even have been detrimental, depending on the situation.” The students in the study had been with the ICP program from two to four years, and had therefore worked closely with the five staff running the ICP program for that period of time. Additionally, the program staff work diligently to include students’ families in seasonal family dinners at the school, Powwows, lahal tournaments, and outdoor adventure activities. They also attend off-site cultural gatherings within the local community. All of these actions convey how the program staff are culturally competent and immersed in local community and cultural practices.

**Summary.** The benefits and challenges of creating trans-systemic spaces in CLE for Indigenous adolescents were facilitated, supported, and nurtured by the family and community members of the students. The theme of family and community became the connecting thread between the other themes. Local context matters, and understanding how to support Indigenous learners is understanding that educators, researchers, and policy makers need to work with and for Indigenous learners and their communities. In particular, understanding more about building a community for urban Indigenous adolescents in the absence of their direct community is significant to understanding the various ways Indigenous adolescents engage in critical literacies practices in meaningful and culturally responsive ways.

### **Delimitations and Limitations of the Study**

The delimitations of this case study consist of a focus solely on urban-living Indigenous adolescents participating in a Critical Media Literacies course. Consideration of such boundaries is necessary when doing case study in order to create a bounded case (Merriam, 1998; Yin,

2014). As such, the delimitations of this study include impacts on the context; and the limitations include an inability to attract all the students in the class; and being a novice and non-Indigenous researcher in an Indigenous context.

First, delimitations of this study included the unique setting and context of the Indigenous Cultural Program (ICP) in general, and CML course in particular, as it was an exemplar case study research site (Merriam, 1985; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). The CML course, which focused on critical literacies instruction, was structured to provide an elective credit course for students in the ICP. Additionally, the classroom teacher received multiple sources of funding (including a \$5,000 ArtStarts Grant and a \$10,000 Creativity and Innovation Grant from the district) to help run workshops, hire an artist-in-residence, provide materials to students such as iPads and digital cameras, and ensure community members were fairly compensated for their contributions and mentorship of the students throughout the course. The external funding received to support the CML course helped to foster an exemplar case study environment (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). As such, some of the implications for pedagogical practice drawn from the findings may be partially impacted by the resources made available through the funding.

Second, a limitation of this study was that I was unable to recruit all the students in the CML course to participate in the research. My previous relationship with the students in the ICP lent itself to the majority of the students (16 of 23) enrolled in the CML course agreeing to participate in the research. I had a positive relationship with many of the students as they had previous experience working with me on a research project, and participating in an interview with me. Thus, those students who participated in the study came into the project with an understanding of the research purpose, and a trust in my relationship with them (Kovach, 2008; Smith, 2012). However, the seven students who did not participate were students who were

overtly resistant to my presence (one individual openly told me that they did not trust white people), or students who did not attend frequently enough to be comfortable with me and my presence in the program. Although I believe having all the students participate in the interview about their projects would not have changed the nature of the overall findings (Yin, 2014), I do believe that if all course participants had agreed to be interviewed, the findings may have also included possible tensions or disruptions to the literature.

Another limitation is that I am a novice and non-Indigenous researcher, conducting a study within an Indigenous context. Consideration must be given to how I, as a non-Indigenous researcher, approach case study methodology generally, and the analysis and interpretation of data specifically with Indigenous participants. Case study as a research methodology relies on the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1985). Although I immersed myself in the research literature for doing ethical research with Indigenous communities (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Johnston, 2013; Smith, 2012), and I had established a positive relationship with the school, employees, and community members attached to this project, I am not immune to all the ways in which cognitive imperialism exists (Battiste, 2013). I lack the knowledge of having lived experiences of an Indigenous person, and will always be an outsider to the community. Any mistakes made during the data collection, analysis, and interpretation are mine to own as I continue towards the path of “unsettling the settler within” (Regan, 2010, p. 17).

## **Implications**

The findings from this study have immediate applications for CRSP in CLE with Indigenous adolescents. The findings from the first section discussed above, characterization of trans-systemic spaces (storytelling, family and community, and multimodal expression) are

relevant to any literacy educator and high school teacher working with Indigenous adolescents, and in particular advocating for CRSP in critical literacies practices within the classroom. The findings from the second section, benefits and challenges, are relevant to in-service and pre-service teachers, administrators, program developers, educators, and researchers seeking to support CSRP through the development of culturally responsive teachers and schools. Below, I discuss the implications for pedagogical practices, research methodology, and future research.

### *Pedagogical Practices*

Engaging adolescents in meaningful and authentic critical literacies education can prove challenging and create tensions if adolescent learning and identity development are overlooked. Echoing adolescent learning and literacies practices more broadly (Alvermann, 2009; Blakemore, 2012; Smith, 2019), in this study it was crucial that student autonomy and agency were supported through the selection of topics and expression of learning, and that adolescent knowledge and expertise were valued in order to create multidirectional pathways to academic and school literacies, as well as cultural and community literacies.

Most significantly, family and community members were integral to the entire process of the CML course and development of the students' CML projects. Community members, who included leaders, activists and educators, were invited to present workshops and create activities for the students. These workshops provided space for students to have discussions on power structures evident in media and mainstream discourse, along with learning about critical literacies work being done by experts in the field who also share their cultural references. It was important that Camille, a non-Indigenous educator, bring in experts from the Indigenous community to facilitate the workshops for the start of the CML course, as having community members' experiences and knowledge at the centre of learning reflected, as well as

demonstrated, the value placed in the knowledge of the community (Archibald, 2008; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste, 2002; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009).

Additionally, the students took up collaborative learning by creating their own community of learners beyond the school walls. The students invited members of their families and their communities to be resources, and these support systems created a space where students felt a sense of courage and willingness to be vulnerable and take risks, while simultaneously fostering cultural and academic competencies. As many of the students were not living on their traditional territory, reaching out to family and community included video calling, texting, phoning, and emailing to gather information. More specifically, the students engaged in storytelling as a means to gather information and share personal experiences, which were fostered through those family and community connections. Storytelling as a method to gather and share knowledge was not only validated and encouraged during the CML course, but also it was pivotal to the students' response to doing critical literacies work (Mills et al., 2016; Stanton et al., 2020; Stanton & Sutton, 2012).

The above implications indicate that more attention needs to be focused on ways that educators, schools, and school districts are authentically bridging community and family systems in order to support collaborative learning and storywork (Archibald, 2008) practices in response to their student population. The majority of teachers are not like the teacher in my study (Camille, a non-Indigenous educator), whose own pre-service training was within an Indigenous education cohort facilitated by a larger institution, but conducted in the local community, and whose teaching experiences have been primarily within Indigenous education contexts. Pre-service and in-service educators are often underprepared, and share their discomfort, in engaging in culturally responsive pedagogical practices for Indigenous adolescents (Deer, 2013; McCarty

& Lee, 2014). Without appropriate knowledge and support, educators and school staff often continue to practice “racial silence” (Ladson-Billings, 2003, p. 8), which leads to concern around the potential for harmful consequences in CLE for Indigenous learners (Kee & Charr-Chellman, 2019). Further attention needs to be devoted to professional development around fostering community connections, and transforming the role of teacher to that of a co-learner (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Stanton et al., 2020), whereby teacher learning is generated through student-led expertise and connections to community members.

### ***Research Methodology***

When I embarked on my journey into academia, I had limited experience in conducting research having completed a project-based Master of Education. But my desire to live as a life-long learner has always guided me to be both authentic and flexible in my approach to education. It was my hope that this same principle would similarly guide me in my approach to research.

As a non-Indigenous educator, working primarily with and for Indigenous students, and now in the role of a researcher, I needed to navigate how I was going to enter into this new relationship. Through the guidance of my committee, the Elder involved in this project, and the relationships I built with my participants, I realized I was learning the lessons of ethical research as I went through the experience. Each step I took during the research process was in careful consideration of what respectful and reciprocal actions were being taken (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). These steps included the following:

- a) ensuring that when I approached participants to invite them into the study, I was aware of the local protocols;
- b) making myself available to build relationships with the participants not only during the CML course, but also during lunch and break times;

- c) ensuring the participants received gifts as appropriate for sharing their time and learnings with me during the semi-structured interviews;
- d) including participants in the review of their interview transcripts to confirm meaning;
- e) inviting participants to provide feedback on the initial findings; and
- f) presenting the participants' voices and experiences, particularly the youth, as central to my findings.

Lastly, it was not until I finished my data collection that I realized I was also specifically learning how to be a story-listener (Archibald, 2008). Story-listening required me to build upon the relationships I had first, and then reflect on those relationships as I listened over and over again to the interviews. Story-listening led me to consider how my initial understandings of a case study aligned with Westernized approaches to qualitative data analysis and interpretation, and guided me to shift my approach so that it was more congruent with my intended research. The result was my decision to place less emphasis on my interpretation of data fragments, and instead present the stories and experiences of the participants as they were presented to me. Ideally, this learning can assist future researchers in consideration of ways Western and Indigenous methodologies can be combined to show strength, respect, and authenticity in the research process.

### ***Future Research***

CRSP means that an individual's culture and knowledge are valued and reflected in schools (McCarthy & Lee, 2014). For Indigenous learners specifically, their experiences and voices need to not only be valued and reflected, but also amplified and heard. Engagement in CLE has the potential to reflect and amplify the experiences of Indigenous learners and their

communities within a school context. However, more work needs to be done with and for Indigenous adolescents to understand who they are as a group, and as individual learners. Research on Indigenous adolescent literacy practices appear to be limited as I struggled to locate relevant Canadian research for the literature review, and even more so within the context of CLE. Indigenous adolescent identity is significant to understanding CRSP in literacies education in general, and CLE in particular, because identity and language and literacies practices are impossible to separate (Gee, 2015). As such, further exploration should include: How does Indigenous adolescent identity emerge at the intersection of CLE, adolescent literacies, and Indigenous knowledges?

In addition, the theme of family and community became the connecting thread between the other themes, as well as my guide post throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting of this study. More attention is needed in developing educational policy, curriculum, and research on connecting critical literacies learning to family and community. This focus is especially important for Indigenous adolescents who identify strongly with community, and draw on community as a means of support in their growth and learning (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Kanu, 2011; Mills et al., 2016; Stanton & Sutton, 2012). Unique political, economic and cultural contexts mediate how CLE is taken up by curriculum developers, teachers, and students, and for urban Indigenous youth in particular, additional considerations about how community and family are being connected to schools are significant to being able to appropriately engage in CLE (Kee & Carr-Chellman, 2019). Accordingly, researchers should explore how schools can strengthen family and community collaborations to support urban Indigenous learners and youth who are not living on their traditional territories.

## Summary

The findings from this case study bring attention to ways CRSP in CLE for Indigenous adolescents can be developed, as well as the need for educators, researchers, and policy makers to continue their commitment to the TRC's (2015) *Calls to Action*. As discussed in Chapter 2, CLE has the potential to empower individuals towards social change, but for Indigenous adolescents in particular, CLE needs to be situated within CRSP practices. This study highlights characterizations of trans-systemic spaces in CLE for Indigenous adolescents within a particular context that also provides insights into the complexities of CLE with urban Indigenous youth.

The frameworks guiding this study, sociocultural theory, d/Discourse framework, and Indigenous ways of knowing and learning, inform ways in which Indigenous adolescents take up culturally revitalizing and sustaining critical literacies' practices. The themes of storytelling, family and community, and multimodal expression, are informed by sociocultural theory in that they are all ways to engage in and express thinking and learning (Smagorinsky, 2013; Vygotsky, 1986). The students' engagement with storytelling, family and community, and multimodal expression, are also informed by Gee's (2015) Discourse framework in that what students know and value in their primary Discourses assist in building connections for learning through curriculum development and pedagogical practices. The students in this study revealed that family and community are significant to their social identities as expressed by what they know and value (Gee, 2015). As such, storytelling and family and community in particular, are specific-meaning making Indigenous pedagogical practices that offer educational advantages and opportunities (Hare, 2011) for extending and enhancing ways educators and researchers think about, and support, student learning. Lastly, students' engagement with storytelling and family and community, demonstrated ways that the students reclaimed literacies practices and provided

insight into how CLE can be culturally revitalizing and sustaining, which is integral to creating CRE specifically for Indigenous learners (Battiste, 2013; McCarty & Lee, 2014).

It is significant that data analysis revealed the strength of the students' connection to family and community within the context of CLE. Knowing that CLE is meant to engage learners in discussions about power and oppression, it is clear that CLE can be a suitable approach as long as appropriate supports are in place, and that IK is at the center of the learning process and outcomes. Importantly, if equitable education for democratic participation in society is at the heart of CLE, then continued work with Indigenous adolescents is needed to inform best practices.

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## Appendix A – Critical Media Literacies (Board/Authority Authorised) Course

Area of Learning: CITIZENSHIP/CIVIC ACTIVITIES – Critical Media Literacies

Grade 11/12

### BIG IDEAS

and equity of information.

perspectives to make meaning.

### LEARNING STANDARDS

Curricular Competencies	Content
<p><i>Students are expected to be able to do the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Inquire, define, and question what constitutes as media</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assess and compare media types (e.g. social media, print media, advertising, fashion, digital media)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Examine language and visuals used in media texts, including author-audience relationships and power structures</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Determine and assess the roles, as well as short-term and long-term and effects of media on self, community, and world</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Recognize and explain how media constructs and reinforces <i>dominant culture</i> (e.g. maintains stereotypes, who is included and who is excluded)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Examine, reflect, and analyze local and global <i>cultures of resistance</i></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify, and compare and contrast <i>Community of Discourses</i> within media (e.g. out-of-school discourse vs. in-school discourse; Indigenous Principals of Learning)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Engage with community members and resources</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Construct knowledge through discussion, reflection, and experience</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Recognize the impact of individual and collective voice for empowerment of self and others through media</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Create a multi-modal media text for political, social, economic action</li> </ul>	<p><i>Students are expected to know the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Various frameworks, interpretations, and concepts of critical media literacies (ie. what is critical? media? literacies?)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Understand power relationships found in discourse, language, imagery etc.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Connections between self, local, and world critical media literacies</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Understand issues around media, ethics, and legal responsibilities</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Connections between <i>dominant culture</i>, self and community</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Roles of <i>cultures of resistance</i> (e.g. art, music, dress etc.)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Roles the media plays in <i>dominant culture</i> and <i>cultures of resistance</i></li> </ul>

## Appendix B – CML Course Framework

### Critical Media Literacies 11/12

#### Essential Questions:

*How does media shape, as well as represent, privilege?  
How can media contribute to social change?*

**Frontloading Activity:** Scenarios, Opinionaire, and Autobiographical writing prompt

#### Scaffold of Activities:

Activities	Connection to Knowledge	Assessments
Frontloading Introduction	Concepts of critical, media, literacies; define and inquire what constitutes as media; compare media types	Questionnaire/ Autobiographical writing
Angela Sterritt Workshop/Unceded Workshop	Stereotyping/analyzing media for bias/bias confirmation and stereotyping (reconstructing dominant culture)/media ethics and responsibilities/power relationships in media	Journaling/Output from Unceded
TRU Workshop with Jeff & Chris	Cultures of Resistance	Journaling/Proposal
Debunking Articles/Analyzing sources	Connecting media analysis to their individual project areas	Analyzing sources worksheets
Final Project & Presentation	Personal Connection	Completion of project / presentation and supporting documentation ie. artist statement

**Culminating Project:** Student's choice of topic/issue and mode of presentation

## Appendix C – Certificate of Approval from Ethics



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 Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	Alexis Brown	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER	16-418
UVic STATUS:	Ph.D. Student	Minimal Risk Review - Delegated	
UVic DEPARTMENT:	EDCI	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE:	19-Dec-16
SUPERVISOR:	Dr. Deborah Begoray	APPROVED ON:	19-Dec-16
		APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE:	18-Dec-17
PROJECT TITLE: Creating trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education for indigenous adolescents			
RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER None			

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: None

#### 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.

Dr. Rachael Scarth  
 Associate Vice-President Research Operations

Certificate Issued On: 19-Dec-16



## Appendix D – Letter of Permission: District Principal of Aboriginal Education

January 17, 2017



Attention: District Principal of Aboriginal Education

Re: Creating trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education with Indigenous adolescents

Dear District Principal of Aboriginal Education,

I am a PhD. candidate with the University of Victoria looking to collaborate on research that investigates Indigenous adolescents engaging in critical literacies practices and how the students use, draw from, and represent the many different types of knowledge they have. I am specifically asking the following questions:

1. How do Indigenous knowledges and adolescent knowledge intersect in a *Critical Media Literacies* course?
  - a. What is the influence of critical literacies instruction on this intersection?
  - b. In what ways does Indigenous adolescent identity emerge during this intersection?
2. What characterizes *trans-systemic spaces* (spaces that include Indigenous knowledge, adolescent knowledge, and Western knowledge) for Indigenous adolescents in a high-school classroom?
  - a. How can Indigenous adolescents, teachers and other community members create trans-systemic spaces?
  - b. What are the benefits and challenges of trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education for Indigenous adolescents?

I would like permission to approach Jordan Smith, Program Director of Four Directions at Twin Rivers Education Centre, to collaborate on this research project. Ms. Smith will be running a Board Authority Authorized course, Critical Media Literacies (CML), specifically designed to facilitate critical literacies practices through media. Ms. Smith and I would collaborate in order to facilitate students in their production of media projects that address issues that are important to them.

As the CML course is expected to run during the second semester of the school year, the development and design of the students' media projects are proposed to take place between January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and May 31<sup>th</sup>, 2017 as part of regular classroom activities. I would like to observe Ms. Smith's classroom, as she promotes critical literacies through the CML course. During the lesson observations I am noting the following: the types of activities that are used to introduce or initiate conversation around critical literacies; the types of follow-up student activities used; and the time spent on each activity. Information will not be recorded electronically, but I will take hand-written notes describing observations. The observation protocol is attached to this letter. In addition I will collect copies of work from participating students. The topics being covered in class and the time being used for the design and development of the projects will be at the convenience of the teacher involved.

Immediately following the development and design of the students' media projects, I propose to conduct interviews with the participating teacher, the participating students (with permission of the teacher and the students themselves), and participating Elders, community members, and/or support staff who worked with the students during the development of their media projects. The interviews will explore how students represented critical literacies through their projects; and how different knowledges are represented in their projects. The 20-30 minute interviews for the students will take place during school hours. The 30-45 minute interviews for the teacher, Elders, community members and/or support staff will take place outside of instructional time.

This research will be useful for understanding how critical literacies concepts and practices may be used in classrooms with Indigenous adolescents in order to develop more culturally appropriate curricula, as called for in the *Truth Reconciliation Commission: Calls for Action* (2015), that would empower students to walk in multiple worlds.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; and participants may discontinue their involvement at any time with no repercussions. The participants will have the opportunity to view/change the information provided in their interviews when the transcriptions are shared with them. I will endeavor to protect the identity of the participants and will assign pseudonyms to all participants in the transcriptions. However, students may choose to be identified by their real names as the publisher of their projects, and may also chose to have their project available to the public. Also, because the interviews will take place during regular school time, it is possible that the classmates of the student participants will know who participated in the interviews. I will assign, via a letter that is delivered through the teacher, an interview time so students can leave and return to class with greater privacy. The teacher of the participants will also know who participated as they will need to give permission to students to leave class for the interview; and for safety reasons school personnel must know the location of the students at all times.

Pseudonyms will also be used on the audiotapes and in all uses made of the data. The audio and transcribed data will be saved on a USB stick and stored in a locked filing cabinet, as well as a password protected computer. If the participant withdraws from the study he or she will have the choice of having previously gathered data destroyed or of having it used. Data will be kept for five years, and then destroyed. The data gathered for this research project will be used for educational and research purposes only such as conference presentations, journal articles, in university classes for pre and in-service teachers and at educational meetings. Actual quotations made by interviewees (with anonymity protected) will be used in dissemination.

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics board at the University of Victoria (Protocol number 16 – 418). I have attached the Student Consent and Letter to the Parents which contain the permission slips to be signed by the student participants and to inform their parents or guardians, as well as a letter of explanation and consent form for the teacher participant.

If you have any questions about this research you can contact me, or alternatively you can contact my supervisor, Dr. Deborah Begoray. You may also contact the Human Research Ethics Office, University of Victoria (250) 472-4545 [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca).

Thank you for your support and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Alexis Brown

## Appendix E – Letter of Permission: School Principal

January 17, 2017

Attention: Principal



Re: Creating trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education with Indigenous adolescents

Dear Principal,

Thank you for your consideration in collaborating with the University of Victoria on research that investigates Indigenous adolescents engaging in critical literacies practices and how the students use, draw from, and represent the many different types of knowledge they have. I am specifically asking the following questions:

3. How do Indigenous knowledges and adolescent knowledge intersect in a *Critical Media Literacies* course?
  - a. What is the influence of critical literacies instruction on this intersection?
  - b. In what ways does Indigenous adolescent identity emerge during this intersection?
  
4. What characterizes *trans-systemic spaces* (spaces that include Indigenous knowledge, adolescent knowledge, and Western knowledge) for Indigenous adolescents in a high-school classroom?
  - a. How can Indigenous adolescents, teachers and other community members create trans-systemic spaces?
  - b. What are the benefits and challenges of trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education for Indigenous adolescents?

I would like permission to approach Jordan Smith, Program Director of Four Directions at Twin Rivers Education Centre, to collaborate on this research project. Ms. Smith will be running a Board Authority Authorized course, Critical Media Literacies (CML), specifically designed to facilitate critical literacies practices through media. Ms. Smith and I would collaborate in order to facilitate students in their production of media projects that address issues that are important to them.

As the CML course is expected to run during the second semester of the school year, the development and design of the students' media projects are proposed to take place between January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017 as part of regular classroom activities. I would like to observe Ms. Smith's classroom, as she promotes critical literacies through the CML course. During the lesson observations I am noting the following: the types of activities that are used to introduce or initiate conversation around critical literacies; the types of follow-up student activities used; and the time spent on each activity. Information will not be recorded electronically, but I will take hand-written notes describing observations. The observation protocol is attached to this letter. In addition I will collect copies of work from participating students. The topics being covered in class and the time being used for the design and development of the projects will be at the convenience of the teacher involved.

Immediately following the development and design of the students' media projects, I propose to conduct interviews with the participating teacher, the participating students (with permission of the teacher and the students themselves), and participating Elders, community members, and/or support staff who worked with the students during the development of their media projects. The interviews will explore how students represented critical literacies through their projects; and how different knowledges are represented in their projects. The 20-30 minute interviews for the students will take place during school hours. The 30-45 minute interviews for the teacher, Elders, community members and/or support staff will take place outside of instructional time.

This research will be useful for understanding how critical literacies concepts and practices may be used in classrooms with Indigenous adolescents in order to develop more culturally appropriate curricula, as called for in the *Truth Reconciliation Commission: Calls for Action* (2015), that would empower students to walk in multiple worlds.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; and participants may discontinue their involvement at any time with no repercussions. The participants will have the opportunity to view/change the information provided in their interviews when the transcriptions are shared with them. I will endeavor to protect the identity of the participants and will assign pseudonyms to all participants in the transcriptions. However, students may choose to be identified by their real names as the publisher of their projects, and may also chose to have their project available to the public. Also, because the interviews will take place during regular school time, it is possible that the classmates of the student participants will know who participated in the interviews. We will assign, via a letter that is delivered through the teacher, an interview time so students can leave and return to class with greater privacy. The teacher of the participants will also know who participated as they will need to give permission to students to leave class for the interview; and for safety reasons school personnel must know the location of the students at all times.

Pseudonyms will be used on the audiotapes, on the transcriptions and in all uses made of the data. The audio and transcribed data will be saved on a USB stick and stored in a locked filing cabinet, as well as a password protected computer. If the participant withdraws from the study he or she will have the choice of having previously gathered data destroyed or of having it used. Data will be kept for five years, and then destroyed. The data gathered for this research project will be used for educational and research purposes only such as conference presentations, journal articles, in university classes for pre and in-service teachers and at educational meetings. Actual quotations made by interviewees (with anonymity protected) will be used in dissemination.

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics board at the University of Victoria (Protocol number 16 – 418). I have attached the Student Consent forms and Letters to the Parents which contain the permission slips to be signed by the student participants and to inform their parents or guardians, as well as a letter of explanation and consent form for the teacher participant.

If you have any questions about this research you can contact me, or alternatively you can contact my supervisor, Dr. Deborah Begoray. You may also contact the Human Research Ethics Office, University of Victoria (250) 472-4545 [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca).

Thank you for your support and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Alexis Brown

## Appendix F – Letter of Recruitment and Consent: Classroom Teacher

January 18, 2017

Attention: Program Coordinator



Re: Creating trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education with Indigenous adolescents

Dear Program Coordinator,

Thank you for your consideration in collaborating with the University of Victoria on research that investigates Indigenous adolescents engaging in critical literacies practices and how the students use, draw from, and represent the many different types of knowledge they have. I am specifically asking the following questions:

5. How do Indigenous knowledges and adolescent knowledge intersect in a *Critical Media Literacies* course?
  - a. What is the influence of critical literacies instruction on this intersection?
  - b. In what ways does Indigenous adolescent identity emerge during this intersection?
  
6. What characterizes *trans-systemic spaces* (spaces that include Indigenous knowledge, adolescent knowledge, and Western knowledge) for Indigenous adolescents in a high-school classroom?
  - a. How can Indigenous adolescents, teachers and other community members create trans-systemic spaces?
  - b. What are the benefits and challenges of trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education for Indigenous adolescents?

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project as you instruct the Critical Media Literacies (CML) course specifically designed to facilitate critical literacies practices through media. The research observing and facilitating the development and design of the students' media projects are proposed to take place between January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and May 31<sup>th</sup>, 2017 as part of your regular classroom activities; but the exact timeframe will be determined by your timetable and term expectations.

I would like to observe your classroom, as you promote critical literacies through the CML course. During the lesson observations I am noting the following: the types of activities that are used to introduce or initiate conversation around critical literacies; the types of follow-up student activities used; and the time spent on each activity. Information will not be recorded electronically, but I will take hand-written notes describing observations. The observation protocol is attached to this letter. In addition I would like to collect copies of work from participating students. The topics being covered in class and the time being used for the design and development of the projects will be at your convenience.

Immediately following the development and design of the students' media projects, I propose to conduct interviews with you and the participating students (with permission of the students themselves), as well as participating Elders, community members, and/or support staff who worked with the students during the development of their media projects. The interviews will explore how students represented critical literacies through their projects; and how different knowledges are represented in their projects. The 20-30 minute interviews for the students will take place during school hours. The 30-45 minute interviews for yourself, Elders, community members and/or support staff will take place outside of instructional time.

This research will be useful for understanding how critical literacies concepts and practices may be used in classrooms with Indigenous adolescents in order to develop more culturally appropriate curricula, as called for in the *Truth Reconciliation Commission: Calls for Action* (2015), that would empower students to walk in multiple worlds.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; and participants may discontinue their involvement at any time with no repercussions. You, as well as the other participants, will have the opportunity to view/change the

information provided in your interviews when the transcriptions are shared. I will endeavor to protect the identity of the participants and will assign pseudonyms to all participants in the transcriptions. However, because the interviews will take place during regular school time, it is possible that the classmates of the student participants will know who participated in the interviews. I will assign, via a letter that is delivered through you, an interview time so students can leave and return to class with greater privacy. Pseudonyms will also be used on the audiotapes and in all uses made of the data. The audio and transcribed data will be saved on a USB stick and stored in a locked filing cabinet, as well as a password protected computer. If the participant withdraws from the study he or she will have the choice of having previously gathered data destroyed or of having it used. Data will be kept for five years, and then destroyed.

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics board at the University of Victoria (Protocol number 16 – 418). I have attached the Student Consent forms and Letter to the Parents which contain the letters and permission slips to be signed by the student participants and to inform their parents or guardians, as well as a consent form for your participation.

If you have any questions about this research you can contact me, or alternatively you can contact my supervisor, Dr. Deborah Begoray. You may also contact the Human Research Ethics Office, University of Victoria (250) 472-4545 [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca).

Thank you for your support and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Alexis Brown



*Teacher Participant Consent Form*

### **Creating trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education with Indigenous adolescents**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Creating trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education with Indigenous adolescents* that is being conducted by Alexis Brown.

Alexis Brown is a graduate student in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a PhD. degree in Language and Literacy. My research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Begoray. You may contact my supervisor.

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this research project is to explore the different types of knowledge Indigenous adolescents use when engaging in critical literacies practices. Further, I want to know how classrooms focused on critical literacies practices can support Indigenous adolescents.

#### **Importance of this Research**

Research of this type is important because it is useful for understanding how Indigenous adolescents practice critical literacies concepts in order to develop more culturally appropriate curriculum focused on empowering students.

**Participants Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have the skills to instruct, collaborate, and discuss with Indigenous adolescents about important critical literacies practices and topics.

**What is involved?**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include working with your students to decide critical literacies topics, lead discussions and provide assignments to assist on the understanding and development of a critical literacies project through media, and participate in an interview approximately 30-45 minutes long. The interview will be audio recorded and take place at a time convenient for you outside of instructional hours. The questions that will be asked will allow you to reflect critically on critical literacies and the topics that will be covered in class. Further, the researcher will be making observations during the lessons that will be recorded. The observations recorded will be on the topics and activities used in the classroom, not on the content of your comments.

**Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including having students leave the class for interviews, and participating in an interview outside of instructional hours.

**Risks**

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

**Benefits**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include that students will engage in authentic critical literacies learning through creating their own critical literacies media projects. The projects are intended for a wider audience and to act as a platform for students' voices to be heard regarding issues that are important to them. The research will investigate real world, in class development, of media projects to disseminate important societal understandings on critical literacies and Indigenous youth.

**Compensation**

As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be provided with a celebratory lunch. If you consent to participate in this study, this form of compensation must not be coercive. It is unethical to provide undue compensation or inducements to research participants. If you would not participate if the compensation were not offered, then you should decline.

**Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. All identifiers from data collected in a group setting will be removed. If you do withdraw from the study, it is logistically impossible to remove only your data because it was part of group discussions. Therefore, I will use your contributions by summarizing what you said and remove all identifying information.

**On-going Consent**

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, we will remind you that you can withdraw from the research portion of the project at any time. If you do withdraw you can continue to be involved in the creating of the media projects.

**Anonymity**

In terms of protecting your anonymity we will use pseudonyms on the audiotapes and transcriptions of the data.

**Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing all data on a USB stick which will be stored and locked in a filing cabinet. Additionally the data will stored on a password-protected computer.

**Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others through newsletters, reports, published journal articles or books, research conferences, presentations at scholarly meetings, newspapers, radio, television, and the internet.

**Disposal of Data**

Data from this study will be kept for five years and then destroyed. Any paper copies will be shredded and all electronic files will be deleted.

**Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Alexis Brown or Dr. Deborah Begoray.

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](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

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*

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

## Appendix G - Letter of Recruitment and Consent: Students

### Letter (Script) for Introduction to Research in Whole Class Meeting

I am a University of Victoria researcher interested in how Indigenous adolescents develop and design media projects about important issues to you during your Critical Media Literacies course. Every day all of us use media for a multitude of reasons such as research for school, job information, entertainment, and the news. We know that media influences our thoughts and behaviours in both positive and negative ways. Last year some of you worked on a graphic novel project aimed at discussing how media can affect us in positive and negative ways.

This year, during your Critical Media Literacies course your teacher will be working with you to construct and design a media project where you will be able to discuss a topic that is important or interesting to you, and that you would want other people to know about. Your media project may include Indigenous culture, issues, or topics (e.g. important symbols or stereotypes).

The media project will be completely designed and created by you. The hope is that your projects will stimulate discussion around media and how you, as Indigenous adolescents, can use it to voice your messages. Whether or not you are in the research study you will be involved in this work as part of your regular classroom activities. I will accommodate all students who wish to be part of the study. If you agree to be part of the research, after you have developed your media project, I would like to interview you. I would like to know how you developed and designed your projects, and to have you reflect on the critical literacies topics and practices you learned in class. If you participate you will be involved in one individual interview approximately 20-30 minutes long. These interviews will be audio recorded and take place at your school during instructional hours.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary AND THERE WILL BE NO ACADEMIC PENALTY BY THE TEACHER OR SCHOOL IF YOU DO NOT JOIN THE STUDY; and you may discontinue your involvement at any time with no repercussions. You will be allowed to continue working on your media project. If you decide to withdraw from the study you will have the choice of having previously collected data destroyed or used. I will endeavor to protect your identity. Pseudonyms will be used on the audiotapes, on the transcriptions, and in all uses made of the data. However, because the interviews will take place during class it is possible that your classmates will know that you participated in the interviews. Your teacher will know that you participated also, as we will require permission for you to miss school and for safety reasons school personnel need to be aware of a student's location at all times. I will assign, via a letter that is delivered through your teacher, an interview time so you can leave and return to class with greater privacy. The audio and transcribed data will be saved on a USB stick and stored in a locked filing cabinet. Additionally the data will be stored on a password-protected computer. Data will be kept for five years, and then destroyed.

You will receive a package that describes the study for your parents or guardians and for you. Please sign the form in the package stating that you either do or do not want to be interviewed. Return the signed form to your teacher in the envelope in the package.

Thank you.



*Student Participant Consent Form*

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### Creating trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education for Indigenous adolescents

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Creating trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education with Indigenous adolescents* that is being conducted by Alexis Brown.

Alexis Brown is a graduate student in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a PhD. degree in Language and Literacy. My research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Begoray. You may contact my supervisor.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this research project is to explore the different types of knowledge Indigenous adolescents use when engaging in critical literacies practices. Further, I want to know how classrooms focused on critical literacies practices can support Indigenous adolescents.

### **Importance of this Research**

Research of this type is important because it is useful for understanding how Indigenous adolescents practice critical literacies concepts in order to develop more culturally appropriate curriculum focused on empowering students.

### **Participant Selection**

You are being asked to volunteer to be in this study. Everyone in the classroom will participate in the project as part of the school curriculum, however only those who volunteer will be in the study.

### **What is involved?**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include one individual interview approximately 20-30 minutes long. These interviews will be audio recorded and take place in your school during school hours. The questions that will be asked will allow you to reflect on the critical literacies topics and practices that will be covered in class, as well as discuss the development and design of your media project. Further, the researcher will be making observations during the lessons that will be recorded. The observations recorded will only be on the topic of the lessons and types of activities being used in the classroom, not on the content of your comments. Finally, I will be collecting some of your work during the creative process such as whole class notes, individual notes or work during writing, sample art, as well as the final media project to help understand the process you went through to create your media project.

### **Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you such as leaving the classroom during class time for the interview.

### **Risks**

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

### **Benefits**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include that you will engage in authentic critical literacies learning through creating your own critical literacies media projects. The projects are intended for a wider audience and to act as a platform for your voices to be heard regarding issues that are important to you. The research will investigate real world, in class development, of media projects to share important societal understandings on critical literacies and Indigenous youth.

### **Compensation**

**As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be provided with lunch and given a gift card for Subway. It is unethical to participate in this study if you are only doing it for the lunch and gift card. Do not volunteer if you would not do it if lunch and a gift card were not provided.**

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. All identifiers from data collected in a group setting will be removed. If you do withdraw from the study, it is logistically impossible to remove only your data because it was part of group discussions. Therefore, I will use your contributions by summarizing what you said and remove all identifying information. If you withdraw from the individual interview after completing the interview, please let me

know if I can use your interview data or to destroy it. If you withdraw from the study prior to the interview you will receive lunch, but you will not be able to receive the gift card at the completion of the study.

### **On-going Consent**

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, we will remind you that you can withdraw from the research portion of the project at any time. If you do withdraw you will continue to be involved in the creating of your media project.

### **Anonymity**

In terms of protecting your anonymity we will use pseudonyms on the audiotapes and transcriptions of the data. However, because the interviews will take place during class time it is possible that your classmates will know that you participated in the interviews. Your teacher will know that you participated as well because we will require permission for you to miss school. For safety reasons your teacher needs to be aware of your location at all times. We will assign, through a letter that is delivered to your teacher, an interview time so you can leave and return to class with greater privacy.

### **Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing all data on a USB stick which will be stored and locked in a filing cabinet. Additionally the data will be stored on a password-protected computer.

### **Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others through newsletters, reports, published journal articles or books, research conferences, presentations at scholarly meetings, newspapers, radio, television, and the internet.

### **Disposal of Data**

Data from this study will be kept for five years and then destroyed. Any paper copies will be shredded and all electronic files will be deleted.

### **Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Deborah Begoray or Alexis Brown.

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](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

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*

*A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.*

## Appendix H - Letter of Information: Parents/Guardians

January 18, 2017



Dear Parents and Guardians,

The Program Coordinator has been approached by the University of Victoria to help facilitate a new research project through the *Critical Media Literacies* (CML) course that your child is enrolled in. The newly created *Critical Media Literacies* (CML) course provides a platform and opportunity for students to engage in important issues in both local and global contexts. The CML course is designed to empower students through the examination of power structures created in society and perpetuated by the media. In this course students will consider the role of media in their lives, and how that shapes their self-identity, and their connections to local and global contexts. Further, students will be encouraged to find their own voice and place within various contexts, by acknowledging, recognizing, and acting upon their learnings in order demonstrate how they can influence change through media.

The research will follow the development and design of the student produced media projects, and will take place between January 25<sup>th</sup> and May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017 during regular classroom hours. I will be making observations and participating in some of the classroom activities during the lessons, as well as consulting with an Elder, the teacher, and other staff members throughout the process. Immediately following the design of the student media projects, I will conduct interviews with the teacher and participating students (with permission of the students themselves) to explore how students decided on their topics, and how they used different types of knowledge to develop their projects. These interviews will be audio recorded and take place during school hours at the school. The data will be used for educational and research purposes only (e.g. curriculum design; education conferences; journals; teacher workshops). This research project will be useful for understanding how Indigenous adolescents engage in critical literacies concepts and practices in order develop more culturally appropriate curricula (*Truth Reconciliation Commission*, 2015) that would empower students to walk in multiple worlds.

Participating students will be involved in one individual interview of approximately 20-30 minutes to be conducted during regular school hours. The interview questions asked will allow students to reflect on critical literacies topics and practices covered in the classroom and in their projects. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; and your child may discontinue his or her involvement at any time with no repercussions. If your child withdraws from the study he or she will have the choice to have existing data destroyed or for it to be kept as part of the study. I will endeavor to protect the identity of all the participants. Pseudonyms will be used on the audiotapes, on the transcriptions, and in all uses made of the data. However, because the interviews will take place during regular school time it is possible that the classmates of the student volunteers will know who participated in the interviews. The teacher of the participants will also know who participated as we will require permission for students to miss a portion of class time; and for safety reasons school personnel need to be aware of a student's location at all times. I will assign each participant an interview time so participants can leave and return to class with greater privacy. The interview time will be delivered via letter through your child's teacher. The audio and transcribed data will be saved on a USB stick and stored in a locked filing cabinet, as well as a password protected computer. Data will be kept for five years, and then destroyed.

Permission has been granted by the University of Victoria Human Ethics in Research Board (Protocol number 16 – 418).

I look forward to working with your child!

Sincerely,

Alexis Brown

## Appendix I - Letter of Recruitment and Consent: School Staff/Community Members

February 9, 2017



Attention: Artist-in-Residence

Re: Creating trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education with Indigenous adolescents

Dear Artist,

Thank you for your consideration in collaborating with the University of Victoria on research that investigates Indigenous adolescents engaging in critical literacies practices and how the students use, draw from, and represent the many different types of knowledge they have. I am specifically asking the following questions:

7. How do Indigenous knowledges and adolescent knowledge intersect in a *Critical Media Literacies* course?
  - a. What is the influence of critical literacies instruction on this intersection?
  - b. In what ways does Indigenous adolescent identity emerge during this intersection?
  
8. What characterizes *trans-systemic spaces* (spaces that include Indigenous knowledge, adolescent knowledge, and Western knowledge) for Indigenous adolescents in a high-school classroom?
  - a. How can Indigenous adolescents, teachers and other community members create trans-systemic spaces?
  - b. What are the benefits and challenges of trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education for Indigenous adolescents?

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project as you work and support the students, as well as myself and the classroom teacher, involved in the Critical Media Literacies (CML) course offered through Four Directions. The development and design of the students' media projects are proposed to take place between January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and May 31<sup>th</sup>, 2017 as part of their regular classroom activities. I would like to observe how you work with and support the students during the CML course. During the lesson observations I am noting the following: the types of activities that are used to introduce or initiate conversation around critical literacies topics; the types of follow-up student activities used; and the time spent on each activity. Information will not be recorded electronically, but I will take hand-written notes describing observations. The observation protocol is attached to this letter.

Immediately following the development and design of the students' media projects, I propose to conduct an interview with you. The interview questions will discuss how students represented important critical literacies concepts and topics through their projects; and how Indigenous knowledges are represented in their projects. The 30-45 minute interview will take place outside of instructional time and at your convenience.

This research will be useful for understanding how critical literacies concepts and practices may be used in classrooms with Indigenous adolescents in order to develop more culturally appropriate curricula, as called for in the *Truth Reconciliation Commission: Calls for Action* (2015), that would empower students to walk in multiple worlds.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; and participants may discontinue their involvement at any time with no repercussions. You, as well as the other participants, will have the opportunity to view/change the information provided in your interviews when the transcriptions are shared. I will endeavor to protect the identity of the participants and will assign pseudonyms to all participants in the transcriptions. Pseudonyms will also be used on the audiotapes and in all uses made of the data. The audio and transcribed data will be saved on a USB stick and stored in a locked filing cabinet, as well as a password protected computer. If the participant withdraws from the study he or she will have the choice of having previously gathered data destroyed or of having it used. Data will be kept for five years, and then destroyed.

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics board at the University of Victoria (Protocol number 16 – 418). I have attached a consent form for your participation.

If you have any questions about this research you can contact me, or alternatively you can contact my supervisor, Dr. Deborah Begoray. You may also contact the Human Research Ethics Office, University of Victoria (250) 472-4545 [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca).

Thank you for your support and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Alexis Brown



*Community Member Participant Consent Form*

### **Creating trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education with Indigenous adolescents**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Creating trans-systemic spaces in critical literacies education for Indigenous adolescents* that is being conducted by Alexis Brown.

Alexis Brown is a graduate student in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a PhD. degree in Language and Literacy. My research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Begoray. You may contact my supervisor.

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this research project is to explore the different types of knowledge Indigenous adolescents use when engaging in critical literacies practices. Further, I want to know how classrooms focused on critical literacies practices can support Indigenous adolescents.

#### **Importance of this Research**

Research of this type is important because it is useful for understanding how Indigenous adolescents practice critical literacies concepts in order to develop more culturally appropriate curriculum focused on empowering students.

#### **Participants Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have the knowledge to discuss the practices that Indigenous adolescents are engaging in during their Critical Media Literacies course and media project development.

#### **What is involved?**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include working with the students, staff, and researcher to participate in discussions to assist on the understanding and development of a critical literacies project through media, and participate in an interview approximately 30-45 minutes long. The interview will be audio recorded and take place at a time convenient for you outside of instructional hours. The questions that

will be asked will allow you to discuss how students represented important critical literacies concepts and topics through their projects; and how different knowledges are represented in their projects. Further, the researcher will be making observations during the lessons that will be recorded. The observations recorded will be on the topics and activities used in the classroom, not on the content of your comments.

### **Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, as you will be participating in an interview outside of instructional hours.

### **Risks**

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

### **Benefits**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include that students will engage in authentic critical literacies learning through creating their own critical literacies media projects. The projects are intended for a wider audience and to act as a platform for students' voices to be heard regarding issues that are important to them. The research will investigate real world, in class development, of media projects to disseminate important societal understandings on critical literacies and Indigenous youth.

### **Compensation**

As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be provided with a celebratory lunch. If you consent to participate in this study, this form of compensation must not be coercive. It is unethical to provide undue compensation or inducements to research participants. If you would not participate if the compensation were not offered, then you should decline.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. All identifiers from data collected in a group setting will be removed. If you do withdraw from the study, it is logistically impossible to remove only your data because it was part of group discussions. Therefore, I will use your contributions by summarizing what you said and remove all identifying information.

### **On-going Consent**

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, we will remind you that you can withdraw from the research portion of the project at any time. If you do withdraw you can continue to be involved in the creating of the media projects.

### **Anonymity**

In terms of protecting your anonymity we will use pseudonyms on the audiotapes and transcriptions of the data.

### **Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing all data on a USB stick which will be stored and locked in a filing cabinet. Additionally the data will be stored on a password-protected computer.

### **Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others through newsletters, reports, published journal articles or books, research conferences, presentations at scholarly meetings, newspapers, radio, television, and the internet.

### **Disposal of Data**

Data from this study will be kept for five years and then destroyed. Any paper copies will be shredded and all electronic files will be deleted.

### **Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Alexis Brown or Dr. Deborah Begoray.

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).

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.

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*Name of Participant*

---

*Signature*

---

*Date*

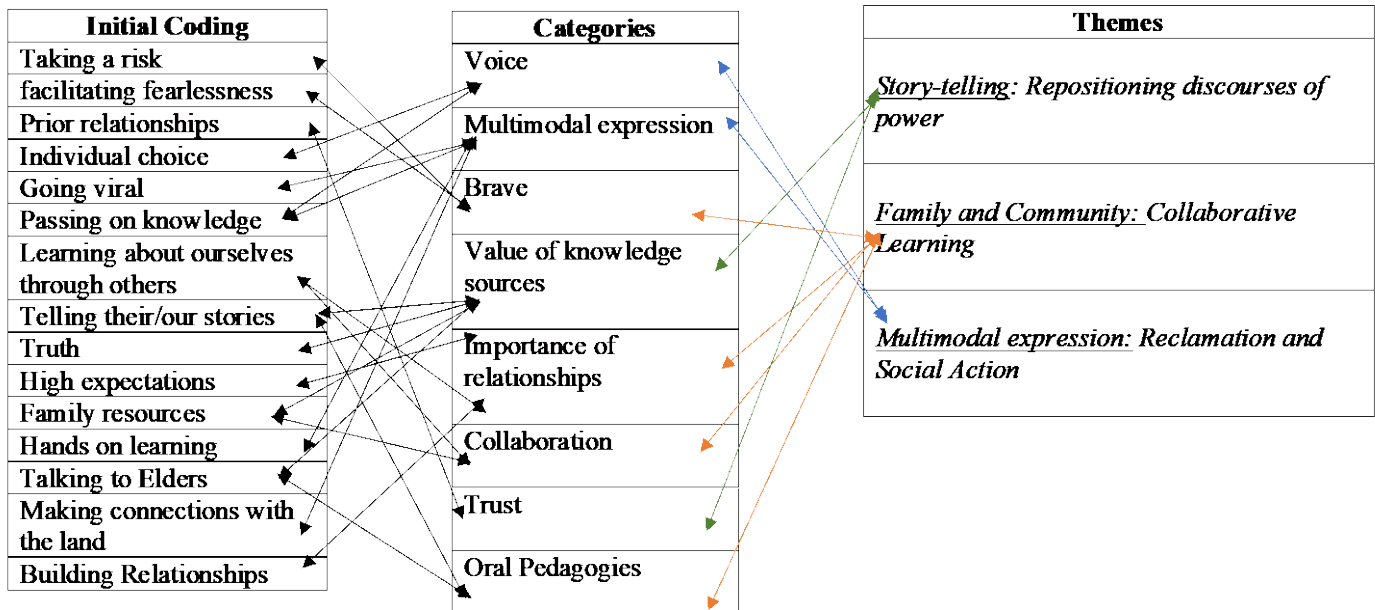
***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

### Appendix J – Observation Protocols

DATE:	OBSERVER:	
TIME:	LESSON PLAN FOCUS:	<p>FOCUS WILL BE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING FOUR KEY CRITICAL LITERACIES CONCEPTS:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. CRITICAL LITERACIES EXAMINES SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF POWER AND CONTROL OF INFORMATION.</li> <li>2. CRITICAL LITERACIES INCLUDES AUTHENTIC LEARNING UNDERPINNED BY MULTILITERACIES.</li> <li>3. CRITICAL LITEARCIES LEARNING OCCURS IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHERS.</li> <li>4. CRITICAL LITEARCIES ENACTS, ENAGES, AND EMPOWERS INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS TOWARDS SOCIAL CHANGE.</li> </ol>
LOCATION:	TEACHING STRATEGIES:	
<p>STUDENT PARTICIPANTS</p> <p>#REGISTERED IN CLASS:</p> <p>#ATTENDING TODAY:</p> <p>MALE:</p> <p>FEMALE:</p>	ACTIVITIES STUDENTS ARE ENGAGED:	

COMMUNITY MEMBERS (SUPPORT WORKER; ELDER; YOUTH LEADER)	ACTIVIES IN THE CLASSROOM OR INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENTS	
	ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS	REFLECTIONS

## Appendix K – Codes, Categories & Themes for the Characterization of Trans-systemic Spaces in Critical Literacies Education



The above diagram represents the coding as a reiterative process (Merriam, 1998).

Important to address is that the coding was not linear, and that the themes are an approximation of the work. There are many instances where the codes and categories overlap. For example, the code “Talking to Elders” is connected to the categories “Value of Knowledge Sources” and “Oral Pedagogies,” and both of those categories are connected the themes of Story-telling and Family and Community. As such, the themes are intertwined and do not exist separately from each other (see Findings and Discussion for further explanation).