

How To Assess and Mitigate Risk from a Mi'kmaq Perspective

by

Mary MacEachern

SSW, First Nation Technical Institute, 2013

BSW, Dalhousie University, 2013

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

in the School of Social Work

© Mary MacEachern, 2022 University of Victoria

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

We acknowledge with respect the ləkʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

How to Assess and Mitigate Risk from a Mi'kmaq Perspective

by

Mary MacEachern

SSW, First Nation Technical Institute, 2013

BSW, Dalhousie University 2013

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Robina Thomas (School of Social Work) Supervisor

Dr. Jeannine Carriere (School of Social Work) Department Member

ABSTRACT

Within the journey of self-determination, Indigenous Peoples are creating various systems that reflect their ways of knowing and being. Mi'kmaq Family & Children Services is such an agency, however, it is mandated to use provincial legislation, guidelines and policies that are deeply rooted in western ways of knowing. This thesis explores how to assess and mitigate risk from a Mi'kmaq perspective. Mi'kmaq social workers, who have experience assessing risk and developing plans to mitigate it, were interviewed regarding their perspectives on what needs to be considered when creating a model of assessment for Mi'kmaq families. Storytelling methodology was used for interviewees to share broadly what they felt as necessary aspects to incorporate into the assessment and mitigation processes. As the researcher I analyzed the interviews for themes and ideologies that would be necessary to consider when assessing risk and creating tools that assist with this process. Four open ended questions were provided to interviewees as a guideline for this exploration. They are:

- What do you believe the concerns, challenges and/or strengths of the current risk assessment model are when you are assessing the risk of Mi'kmaq children and youth?
- From your knowledge of Mi'kmaq ways of knowing and being what do you think a Mi'kmaq risk assessment would/could/should look like?
- Is risk assessment the right term for this work, or are there other words that best describe the work that we do from your knowledge of Mi'kmaq ways of knowing and being?
- What are the opportunities a Mi'kmaq risk assessment could offer Mi'kmaq communities?

Due to Covid 19 restrictions the interviews had to occur by phone. They averaged one hour in duration. Interviewees agreed to be recorded, and following the interviews I transcribed the interviews. The transcription was given to each participant to review, edit and revise. The tran-

scription was then formatted into a narrative format and each participant was given a name from the Seven Directions, with a pronoun being used to maintain anonymity. This narrative was given to each interviewee to review, edit and revise.

The research found the following themes: ongoing cultural competence training is needed; the effects of residential school and other assimilation/oppressive tactics, not only affected Mi'kmaq lives in the past but continues to affect them currently; due to this, trauma informed and strength based practice, that is collaborative, is essential. Interviewees stressed the importance of using tools, such as risk assessments, that are more reflective of, and uphold a collaborative process, which holds up Indigenous epistemology, ontology, and axiology. This includes practices such as, the Medicine Wheel, Seven Sacred Teachings, reciprocity, reflection, circular thinking, use of Medicines and various Spiritual practices.

Table of Contents

Supervisor Committee.....	.ii
Abstract.....	.iii
Table of Contents.....	.v
Acknowledgements.....	.vii
Dedication.....	.viii
Chapter One	
Introduction.....	1
Historical Background.....	3
Personal Location.....	5
Chapter Two	
Literature Review - Historical Background.....	9
Literature Review - Indigenous Child Welfare Practices.....	17
Literature Review - Assessments.....	26
Literature Review - Analysis.....	41
Chapter Three	
Ethics.....	55
Methodology.....	61
Methods.....	65
Analysis.....	70
Self care.....	73
Challenges.....	74
Chapter Four	
Introduction.....	78
Interviewee # 1 - East.....	81
Interviewee #2 - South.....	88
Interviewee #3 - West.....	92
Interviewee #4 - North.....	96
Interviewee #5 - Sky.....	99
Interviewee #6 - Earth.....	106
Chapter Five	
Heart - Analysis.....	114
Conclusion	126
Considerations.....	130
Restorative Social Work.....	132

Chapter Six	
References.....	134
Appendix A - Letter from Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch.....	146
Appendix B - Letter from Maw-Kleyu'kik Knijannaq Initiative.....	147
Appendix C - Email from MFCS Executive Director, Arlene Johnson.....	148
Appendix D - MEW & UVic Consent Form.....	149

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge with respect the Mi'kmaq peoples on whose unceded Traditional territory this research took place, and whose historical relationship with the land continues to this day.

I wish to acknowledge the Mi'kmaq children, families and members of Paq'tnekek First Nation who have worked alongside and with me, who have challenged and supported my thinking and practice to go deeper within my own growth and understanding, and who have shown me the beauty, strength, and wisdom within their personal journeys toward healing and wellness.

I acknowledge the heartfelt and profound progressions I have witnessed within Mi'kmaq Family and Children Services. The organization consistently moves toward a deeper understanding and creation of practices that reflect Mi'kmaq ways of knowing and being. It is inspiring and humbling, as a settler, to be witness to and a part of the decolonization process within Mi'kmaq Family and Children Services.

I acknowledge the guidance, feedback and patience from Dr. Robina Thomas and Dr. Jeannine Carriere. Their work on national and international levels is motivating, inspiring and reflective of their walking the talk.

I acknowledge my parents who have been present for the journeys of healing and transformation. I acknowledge and thank Alberto Perez, whose grounded presence, deep love and inspiration in supporting and encouraging the continuation of this work. I acknowledge and thank my three children, Moses, Ben, Anna and two grandchildren, Scarlett and Barrett, whose love and support is a constant inspiration and gift. For them I took up this deep healing journey!!!

Finally, I wish to acknowledge Kerry Prosper, Doreen Prosper and Dale Sylliboy, who welcomed me into the Tiospie and their homes, who guided me along my healing journey with their wisdom, patience, support, humility and senses of humour. My family and I are forever grateful!!!

Dedication Prayer

I pray for the children who are being found buried on the grounds of residential institutions (prisons/concentration camps). I give thanks that they have finally been found. I pray their families find peace within their heart/soul and the pain that they have lived eases. I give thanks and prayers for all the Ceremonies that are happening for these children and their families. I pray that non-Indigenous Peoples feel into the pain of this with their entire Being. I pray this so that no one ever forgets these criminal situations that are the kanadian history. I pray you rest in peace little ones!!

Msit No'kmaq

Mitakuye Oyas'in

All My Relations

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

**If you come here to help me, then you are wasting your time. But if you come here because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let us work together.
(Lilla Watson, 1985).**

This research explored assessing and mitigating risk within the child welfare system from a Mi'kmaq perspective. Looking at how to mitigate risk from a Mi'kmaq worldview is a stepping-stone, or part of, the broader project of creating Mi'kmaq Child & Family Service legislation, policies, and guidelines under the umbrella of Mi'kmaq traditional laws. This research is an initial step to gather knowledge from Mi'kmaq social workers regarding assessing risk.

To narrow the focus of the research I met with a member of the Maw-Kleyu'kik Knijannaq Initiative (keeping our children together) to discuss what questions and/or activities they would be interested in having researched. I was given their action plan with the encouragement to conduct research addressing any of the building blocks they identified as steps toward the creation of a Mi'kmaq Child Welfare Act. When I met with the Maw-Kleyu'kik Knijannaq member, the initiative had just completed the plan and were looking to formulate small working groups to research each area and create a Mi'kmaq Child Welfare Act with policies and guidelines within five years. Upon reviewing the documents, I choose to research the topic of assessing and mitigating risk through Mi'kmaq epistemology. Assessing and mitigating risk begins when a child welfare agency gets involved with a family, from the first call to termination of involvement. (See Appendix A for Maw-Kleyu'kik Knijannaq research approval)

Although the child welfare system has progressed in Canada to the point where community based Indigenous child welfare agencies exist, they are predominantly mandated under the provincial child welfare acts and guidelines. 'One legacy of the European viewpoint is that it has shaped the way child welfare itself has been conceptualized and how child welfare systems have developed' (Brown & Petrowski, 2012, p. 2). The objective for this study included gathering knowledge from Mi'kmaq social workers to help inform and develop an understanding of assessing and mitigating risk through a Mi'kmaq and/or Indigenous lens. This gathering of knowledge happened through interviews and conversations, which from an Indigenous methodology, is story gathering. 'Indigenous Peoples engage oral traditions, historical/ancestral knowledges, and cultural resources to examine current events and Indigenous understandings in ways consistent with traditional worldview and cosmologies' (Iseke & BMJK, 2013, p. 259).

Within this thesis I use the term Indigenous to represent First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples. This choice is due to a consciousness, discomfort, and solidarity by not using the term Aboriginal, which is largely a colonial term. The prefix 'ab' means to move away from or against, which I believe to be counter-intuitive to the word 'original' when speaking of First Peoples on a land.

There will be places within this thesis where you will see capitalization that appears against the western models of grammar. These words are capitalized to denote the Sacredness that I feel they possess and/or represent within my healing and Spiritual journey. For me some of these words encompass a living energy of a Sacred Being. These words include: Canada, Sacred, western, Spirit, eurocentric, Ceremony, Prayer, Elders, neo-liberal, Turtle Island, etc.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Child welfare practices are a dominant tool used within colonization which was historically exemplified within the creation of residential schools. Currently child welfare continues to be a hidden and controlling tool of neo-liberal political and social oppression to maintain the status quo. This hidden tool is not a practice of the past. Overt racist schools and scooping of children, remains, and there continues to be inadequate and unequal funding, eurocentric practices that focus on protection rather than prevention and the continual removal of children from their extended families/communities.

The rising of Indigenous movements to reclaim, rebuild and heal from the trauma of colonialism is causing discussions to occur and a shifting discourse to reflect change and action. Even though it may be slow, this change is filtering into education and a rising consciousness around the truthful history of Canada with its relationship to the First Peoples of Turtle Island. Community based child welfare and educational systems are examples of how this raised consciousness is manifesting into a movement toward the state recognizing it cannot continue to cover up and deny the truths of a colonial systematic racist child welfare system.

The ground is now fertile for propulsion into the next phases of self-determination or the honouring of the Two Row Wampum (Baskin, 2011). The Two Row Wampum Treaty Belt was created by the Haudenosaunee First Nation, using different coloured shells to represent the two paths, or rows, representing the settlers and First Peoples. It was offered as a Treaty to settlers to reflect that each Nation traveled down the river in their own boat, each with their own unique laws, ways, and customs and would not interfere with those of the other (p. 15). Today the Two Row Wampum is seen as a symbol of accurate history and of resistance to the west's view of

Indigenous rights (p. 15). The Two Row Wampum represents and reinforces that there are two nations on Turtle Island [settlers and Indigenous] and represents self-government. Self-government honours that two nations can co-exist together, as was the original Indigenous intent of the Treaties. With the establishment of community-based systems that continue to follow federal or provincial legislation, such as the *Children and Family Services Act, 1990* (SNS 1990, c 5), *Health Act, R.S.*, (c. 195, s. 1.), or the *Education Act, 1995-96*, (SNS, c 1), colonial practices are perpetuated, and neo-liberal power structures remain in place. Currently these toxic practices can hide behind the veil of proclaiming culturally appropriate and sensitive methodologies (Wilson, 2001). This research explores and emphasizes the authentic honouring of Indigenous values and beliefs, which shape its epistemology and potential ways for these to create Indigenous risk assessment tools and ways of mitigating risk. The creation of community-based systems, reclaims and rebuilds what the Two Row Wampum represented at contact.

PERSONAL LOCATION

Within an Indigenous methodology framework self-locating cultivates the practices of transparency, reciprocity, and relationship (Kovach, 2009). Self-locating gives the reader an idea of who the researcher/author is. Our locations and life experiences influence our perspectives and worldview, which circles around to influencing what is important to us. In this case it provides glimpses into who I am, where I came from and why participating in Indigenous research, particularly within child welfare, is important to me.

My paternal ancestry is from Scotland and maternal ancestry is from Ireland/Scotland/Trinidad. I grew up and continue to live on Mi'kmaq Territory in Northeastern Mi'kma'ki. My family carried many dysfunctional qualities such as substance abuse, mental/emotional abuse, domestic violence, and sexual abuse. As a child I withdrew inside myself and created a rather rich life full of imaginative characters and a living environment that I mutually engaged with - I engaged with this environment and the environment engaged with me. On the outside I learned what was needed to get by and to remain invisible to those around me. I was a very sensitive little person who did not fit into the narrow criteria of what is valued from a western point of view.

When my inner and outer worlds collided, I attempted to take my life. My consciousness awakened and a lifelong healing journey began. What has become part of this healing journey is deconstructing the concept of not 'fitting in' and realizing this was predominantly from western ways of knowing and doing. I explored and practiced therapies and a lifestyle that created integration and healing of my physical, mental, emotional, and Spiritual self.

Within deep critical reflection I believe my resonance with Indigenous ontology, axiology, epistemology, and methodology grew out of this connection to a living holistic healing journey from a dysfunctional upbringing. There are several areas within my life where this seeking of healing and balance manifested into life choices to break cycles of violence and disconnected patterns of relationship to self, other and all living Beings. A couple of examples of these lifestyle choices are in homeschooling my children and others in a holistic manner; living in deep relationship with the land to grow our food; and in being a foster parent for ten years. It is also reflected in my deep commitment to Spiritual practices from a Traditional Indigenous epistemology.

Within this journey of healing there arose a time when my consciousness knew the deepest healing would unfold within Spiritual practices and in releasing trauma from my body. Over twenty years ago I was blessed by an invitation to participate in a Traditional Sioux Sweat Lodge Ceremony. This began the commitment of Haŋblečeya, Sun Dancing, Praying for health and healing at a profoundly deep level. Twelve years ago, in a Sacred Hunkapi Ceremony, my Spirit Helper was revealed and her name guides and inspires me.

I continue with these Spiritual practices and Ceremonies, am blessed with guidance/support/challenges from my Elders, which I believe, enables me to walk and practice within communities having awareness for culturally safe and competent social work practices (ACTION, 2009).

This circles around to why this research topic of an Indigenous child welfare act and guidelines interests me. Several years ago, during a Haŋblečeya Ceremony I laid tobacco on the Alter to pray for understanding and guidance on how I could give back to Indigenous Peoples for all the healing I was offered, and obtained by participating in their Sacred Ceremonies. Shortly after

this 'Fast' I began working as a long-term protection worker for Mi'kmaq Family and Children Services (MFCS).

Years ago, as a foster parent, I learned of MFCS and learned that only Indigenous people were accepted as foster parents. I felt hope that the independence and move away from provincial child welfare had integrated Indigenous epistemology into practice. Over the time in working at MFCS I have witnessed the overlaying of Indigenous practices onto eurocentric epistemologies (Wilson, 2001). I agree with Wilson (2008) that this is not an authentic approach and can lead to many difficulties, including expropriation and re-traumatization. MFCS is mandated to follow the provincial Child Welfare Act, guidelines and the policies created from provincial legislation. Currently, what began as an overlaying of Indigenous practices, revealed their strength where they are now integrated, and mandated, into practice. A few examples of where this can be seen is with the development of kinship and customary placements, and the development of the Circle program, etc.

Colonial tools of genocide were used to exalt the eurocentric worldview and sought to eliminate Indigenous epistemology and practice. Indigenous epistemology has been made invisible by colonization (Absolon, 2011). Although there was tremendous oppression, abuse and trauma caused by the genocidal tools of residential schools, 60s scoop and the white paper, the attempts at elimination failed (Stevenson, 2020). Indigenous peoples are resilient, and they have been influencing actions and behaviours of rising to create resistance and movements such as Idle No More, Truth and Reconciliation, Standing Rock, economic developments within community, Wellness Court and Land Codes, to name a few. There are other personal or subtle acts of resistance and connection with inner resilience seen in the increase of individuals, families and com-

munities reclaiming Spiritual practices and ways of knowing. It is the hope that part of the outcome of this research project will be to make visible the truth that there are many pathways to knowledge, specifically, how to assess risk and practises that mitigate risk (Absolon, 2011) from a Mi'kmaq perspective.

My healing journey allowed me to move from feeling and living on the edges of mainstream society and moving to an empowered and privileged place of choosing to stand on these edges. This journey has informed my practice. My positionality and lived experiences have led me to wanting to explore what qualities or actions to change I could contribute. The challenges within my personal healing journey intersects with my experiences as a long-term protection worker for an Indigenous agency along with my lived experiences of living in close interrelationship with the land/nature and my adoption of Traditional Spirituality. This positionality potential allows me to contribute and integrate life's struggles and understandings from lived experiences in a positive constructive way to influence social change and justice (Daley, 2010).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Some of the literature that is available regarding Indigenous child welfare looks at unpacking the reasons there are more Indigenous children in out of home care now than during the residential school period. Trocmé, Knoke and Blackstock (2004), Jensen (2014), Galley (2010), Hedges (2018), Feir (2016), Kreutzer and Lafrance (2010), and King et al (2021) write about the present-day child welfare system. They state the child welfare system is the current neo-liberal tool of assimilation and annihilation being used by the Canadian government. These authors highlight their concern regarding this fact, and they note that the little understanding by non-Indigenous peoples is why this exists. Statistics also show that Indigenous families are more likely to be investigated and have these allegations substantiated than white families (Schmid & Morgenshtern, 2022; Trocmé, Knoke & Blackstock, 2004; Feir, 2016; Galley 2010; Hedges, 2018; King et al, 2021).

In Canada, 52.2% of children in foster care are Indigenous, but account for only 7.7% of the child population according to Census 2016. This means 14,970 out of 28,665 foster children in private homes under the age of 15 are Indigenous.

Results from the 2011 National Household Survey also show that 38% of Indigenous children in Canada live in poverty, compared to 7% for non-Indigenous children (Indigenous Children In Foster Care, 2016).

Higher rates of calls to child welfare with concerns regarding neglect are often due to structural challenges because of colonialism, such as poor housing, poverty, substance misuse, and incarceration (Blackstock, 2011; Cowie, 2010; Pourghassemi & Anandarajah, 2020; King et

al, 2021; Sinha et al., 2013). The Indian Act was created to ‘manage’ Indigenous peoples and this included determining if parents were ‘fit’ to parent. The guidelines for what is fit was deeply rooted in an agenda to ‘rid the Indian in the child’. One of the deepest impacts of colonization is the construction of values that uphold the belief that there are certain ‘correct’ ways of being and knowing. These ‘correct ways’ include fallacies about how people should live, what type of education they should have, how children should behave, what is considered valuable work, etc. With the rigidity, and linear focus of eurocentric values and beliefs, anything that falls outside of these can be considered wrong, dangerous, neglectful, and/or inadequate. From the beginnings of the child welfare system, social workers, who were predominantly white, had no understanding and/or knowledge regarding Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing and doing, their social and political systems, and their Spiritual understandings and practices. Blackstock (2011) noted from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (2002) that, ‘Social Workers who had little or no knowledge about colonization and residential schools often mistook symptoms of systemic discrimination as parental failure’ (Blackstock, 2011, p. 188).

Community based agencies have a range of control over services and interventions, which can be determined by a jurisdiction issue based on provincial/territorial and federal government, and whether the family is on or off reserve. Within some community-based agencies their mandate is limited to prevention, so when issues are deemed more serious, and needing more intrusive actions, such as random drug testing or removal from caregivers, the provincial child welfare system gets involved. This is because some community-based organizations are delegated to provide specific level of service, and some do not have court related delegation. Like MFCS, many

community-based organizations do not provide service to people who live off reserve, thus they are involved with mainstream child welfare organizations. MFCS has incorporated the legislation that when children need to leave their caregivers because there are care concerns, they must reside with Mi'kmaq families. However, agencies that do not have full court privileges, cannot determine where the children go so these children are often placed in non-Indigenous homes, group homes or other institutions (Trocmé, Knoke and Blackstock, 2004; Simard, 2009; Pourghassemi & Anandarajah, 2020).

Jensen's (2014) study highlights how out of home placements are more damaging than during the residential school and 60s scoop period because children are staying in care for longer periods of time, and they do not have contact with family, culture and community. Simard's (2009) research examines how children being placed out of home, family, and/or community are not engaged with Indigenous worldview that focus on rebuilding the family system. She speaks of Locust's work (2000) where 'a consequence to the lack of culturally distinct practices are First Nation children becoming "split feathers", a term used to describe the deep loss effects of children displaced from their ancestral roots' (Simard, 2009, p. 44). This isolation and disconnection from other Indigenous Peoples and their communities can contribute to, and perpetuate, various complex traumas and the coping skills that come from it.

Gosek (2017), Trocmé, Knoke and Blackstock (2004), Blackstock (2011), Jensen (2014), Galley (2010), and Kreutzer and Lafrance (2010) speak of the various social issues that were created due to the residential school system. Children were removed from their homes and residential school staff exhibited brutal parenting rooted in control. After being ripped from their families

and community, their clothes were taken, their Sacred hair was shorn, they were separated from siblings/family members, they were given numbers and white/catholic names, they were forbidden to speak their language and beaten and severally punished if they did. The children had little food and often it was moldy and spoiled. The children were forced to do excessive menial labor. The children were physically, sexually, mentally and Spiritually abused. The nuns and priests created hierarchies amongst the children, which created lateral violence amongst students (Knockwood, 2015).

When residential school students returned home as young adults they were disconnected and traumatized, and resorted to various coping strategies and behaviours, such as the use of substances, criminal and abusive behaviours. The physically, emotionally, mentally and Spiritually abusive parenting skills of the residential school staff were sometimes mirrored within the student's parenting skills, as it was all that they experienced and knew. These authors also discuss funding conflicts between the federal and provincial governments which left little resources flowing into communities creating poverty, poor housing, and poor medical services. Sinha et al. (2013) state, 'child removal policies may have prevented transmission of healthy parenting skills, instilled doubts about traditional parenting or resulted in negative behaviours acquired in abusive, neglectful or culturally inappropriate settings' (Horejsi, Craig, & Pablo, 1992 in Sinha, 2013, p. 2083).

Galley (2010), Gosek (2017), and Trocmé, Knoke and Blackstock (2004) question why racist misrepresentation of Indigenous children in child welfare continues. The authors note that compared to non-Indigenous investigations there are higher rates of poverty, substance abuse, young age of parents, reliance on social assistance, moving frequently and parents having past child

welfare involvement. Their studies question if reports are biased due to misperceptions regarding Indigenous families and what kinds of interventions would be most effective for them.

Jensen (2014) suggests that the government keeps Indigenous peoples in states of poverty which makes them more vulnerable to child protection interventions. She states, 'until we ask genuinely what we can do to fix what we have created our chances for reconciliation remain a distant dream' (p.4).

Galley (2010) asks are people, Nations, government willing to actively engage in transforming the system which is failing Indigenous families and children? Galley (2010) writes: 'instead of talking about 'our children are our future', the challenge we face lies in confronting the enormity and complexity of this issue along with a transformed approach to addressing child welfare-specific issues along with poverty, housing, substance misuse and any others which research may illuminate' (p. 5). Galley (2010) notes the over representation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system is due to Canadian policy such as the residential school policies beginning in 1879. Prior to contact Indigenous peoples were autonomous, self-governing and enjoyed distinct forms of governance, languages, cultures, education and family systems, which included raising children. Neglect has been determined as a primary reason for overrepresentation. Neglect is now understood as a byproduct of poverty, poor housing, and parental substance abuse. Galley (2010) talks of the studies done by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society that indicate if person/people have experienced colonization and the resulting poverty, social and community disorganization they will have misrepresentation within child welfare, regardless of race. The study indicates that if poverty, poor housing and substance misuse and equitable funding are addressed then over representation will be mitigated.

Sinha et al. (2013) looks at the substantiation process and states there is not a single substantiation of allegation(s) process, however there are four categories that are recognized as maltreatment. These are 1) physical abuse, 2) sexual abuse 3) neglect and 4) emotional maltreatment. Sinha et al. (2013) note that in Canada threat of exposure to intimate partner violence is also a form of maltreatment (p. 2081). The determination of substantiating maltreatment includes interviews, face to face contact with the child and medical exams and the information gathered regarding demonstrable harm or significant risk of harm. Sinha et al (2013) write about the likelihood that social workers may take different factors into consideration with the different types of maltreatment. They note there is diverse perceptions and beliefs regarding substantiating maltreatment or not. Some argue (Cross & Casanueva, 2009; Kohl, Jonson-Reid, & Drake, 2008; Fluke, Harden, & Jenkins 2010) substantiation of maltreatment does not impact the determination of services while others (Dettlaff et al., 2011; Trocme, Knoke, Fallo & MacLaurin, 2009) state substantiation is important as it confirms allegations to be true and can address what is needed for the family/child. Sinha et al. (2013) state in Canada the threshold of risk of harm is enough to substantiate concerns to offer intervention and services. Information that leads social worker's teams to substantiate based on there being a potential risk of future harm contrasts with substantiation based on conclusive evidence that the child experienced harm. This practice of substantiation considers a person/family history of abuse/neglect.

Sinha (2013) (in Sinha et al. 2013) notes that 79% of substantiated cases in Ontario that remained open for services were based on 'neglect as the failure to comply with normative standards of parenting behaviours (Combs-Orme, Wilson, Cain, Page & Kirby, 2003 in Sinha et al., 2013) and that 'normative parenting behaviours were unclear and often grounded in culturally

based understandings of parenting, which may not be shared by all families' (p. 2083). Statistics show Indigenous children are six times higher to be investigated than non-Indigenous children and substantiation rates were eight times higher (Sinha, 2011, p. 2083). The risk factors within these substantiations included caregiver substance abuse, housing problems and low incomes. Sinha et al. (2013) notes these issues are greatly impacted by colonial practices and federal/provincial/territorial policies and practices that 'disposed people from traditional lands, disrupted functioning economic system, suppressed First Nations culture and languages and separated generations of children from their parents' (Frideres, 1988; Milloy, 1999; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996 in Sinha et al., 2013, p. 2083).

Dr. Loppie and Dr. Carriere (Kent et al., 2017) developed the Indigenous Equity Framework of Relational Environments (IEFRE) to understand the social determinants of health. West Coast Leaf (2019) integrates this framework into understanding why there is an overrepresentation of Indigenous children within the child welfare system. The framework is laid out within a metaphor of a tree. What each limb represents not only can be used to understand why there is overrepresentation but also as a map to follow in understanding the impacts of colonization, the wounds, and traumas and how to navigate supports and services to mitigate any concerns due to colonial impacts on ill-health - used as a roadmap to wellness.

The three environments identified within the tree metaphor are:

- root environment (roots of the tree) - systemic determinants that shape health equity. They include the historical reasons why particular health issues are present, which for Indigenous peoples is colonization, including residential schools, 60s scoop, and the current child welfare system.

- core environment (trunk of the tree) - health factors related to engagement with people's communities, institutions, and systems. Indigenous peoples face disparities in the core environment of health related to barriers to accessing supports, cultural continuity, and relationship with land. The core environment mirrors a theme identified in our community consultation which we refer to as gaps in services and supports. This includes cultural continuity and relationship to land.
- stem environment - one's physical and social context, which influence health in the most obvious and direct ways. Indigenous peoples face intersecting disparities in their stem environment of health, such as poverty, violence, and disability, including substance use. Parents who participated were very aware of the facts that directly contributed to their increased likelihood of engagement with the child welfare system. The stem environment mirrors a theme identified in our community consultation which we refer to as factors of exposure. Includes poverty and neglect, gender-based violence, Indigenous fathers, disability, substance use, history in care, parenting and incarceration, and sex work (p. 19).

Although there has been a lot of research and work to bring more exposure, consciousness, and understanding regarding the over misrepresentation of Indigenous children/families involved in child welfare a lot more needs to be done. Steps, such as recognizing the underfunding received by Indigenous children through child welfare and details around what can be considered neglect, are occurring. However, studies show the root of the issues continue to occur due to overlaying Indigenous worldview onto a system riddled with policies and legislation that continue to uphold neo-liberal values and beliefs. The solution is in the creation of Indigenous legislation that operates while upholding Indigenous worldview, values and beliefs.

Literature Review - Indigenous Child Welfare Practices

Qwul'sih'yah'maht [Robina Thomas] and Kundoqk [Jacquie Green] (2015) believe that to practice in a different way, one has to live differently. Anti-Oppressive practices must be internalized so that these practices become 'a way of life' (p. 17). The importance of their work for this research is that they have practice suggestions, such as using the Medicine Wheel or other Indigenous models, when doing assessments and/or working with Indigenous families to heal. The Medicine Wheel allows the person to look within themselves to see what their experiences and influences are. It is learning that comes from inside the person due to their lived experiences, rather than someone on the outside placing expectations upon the person who is trying to heal. The Wheel is never ending; thus one moves around it over and over, each time gaining new or deeper understandings and insights. The Medicine Wheel is a very effective tool when wanting to see, create and sustain change. The Medicine Wheel inherently guides one through the ongoing process of healing. Its' circular nature could be a reminder that healing and change do not have a time line and it offers opportunities to celebrate healing while moving around the wheel seeing how wounds, patterns and trauma(s) have transformed. Relationship and self-reflection are key tools if helpers thought critically everyday about these tools within this practice. They state, 'if helpers thought critically everyday about these ways of living, then we would be a step closer toward committing to anti-oppressive living and a step closer to keeping our children in our communities and out of the child welfare system' (p. 34). Within this approach they challenge workers to reflect on the use of their head and heart when we engage with practice assessment, build relationships, and all aspects of social work practice. They state, 'when we practise

from our heart, we feel all the pain and hurt the children and families we work with have felt. We then engage from the place of love and responsibility to protect these children and families' (p. 38). They stress the importance of shifting our perspective to where we see that communication is a Sacred practice. The case notes of social workers need to see people/families not as cases but as humans - with a history, place in community/society and with their own journey (p. 39).

Kreutzer and Lafrance (2010) note the importance of taking a collaborative approach between Indigenous families and child welfare agencies. Like Trocmé, Knoke and Blackstock (2004) there is the acknowledgement that a shift is needed in offering services from an Indigenous perspective, however, their study continues the practice of validation only if Indigenous worldview is overlaid with western theories, practices, and worldview. Their research question was how to discover new ways of providing child and family services that combine Traditional worldview and western theories within practice for Indigenous families. What I found interesting, and what I question regarding this study, is that the Indigenous participants dropped out halfway through the study. I question if this was due to the apparent focus remaining colonial and the overlay of western theory and ideology, which continues to maintain, and further construct, the western belief that an Indigenous system or approach cannot exist without western influence. Kreutzer and Lafrance (2010) state:

too often while they [organizations] are Indigenous run and focused on serving the Indigenous population, operate from a Western set of values and ways of organizing, giving into dominant norms and values. By recognizing the colonized systems that are present in our communities and seeking ways to work differently, organization can

contribute to decolonizing the attitudes and ways within our communities (p. 36).

Blackstock's (2011a) Breath Of Life Theory has great relevance in displaying how Indigenous epistemology can be integrated within the creation of legislation, policy and practice guidelines. Blackstock (2011a) talks about the Breath of Life Theory as a solution to dealing with the consequences of colonization that impacted First Nation's children and their families. She notes it is important to create an 'ethical space' (p. 1) where western and First Nation solutions can be developed. She goes on to state that western theories, such as anti-oppressive, ecological and structural do not fully consider the structural impacts nor offer solutions regarding colonization on Indigenous Peoples. Blackstock (2011a) notes the fundamental differences between Indigenous and western beliefs around time, interconnectivity and views around realities or dimensions. The aspects of Breath of Life Theory that are important to consider for this research is that 'the structural risks affecting children's safety and well-being are alleviated when the relational worldview principles are in balance with the context and culture of the community' (p. 2). Blackstock (2011a) explains that the relational worldview model (Cross, 2007) has been influenced by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Model and seeks to balance the following four aspects of the personal and collective in order for wellness to be obtained. These aspects are cognitive, physical, Spiritual and emotional.

Blackstock (2011a) takes Maslow's aspects deeper by weaving them with the holistic model of wellness. She notes that when the four aspects are in balance the result is optimal safety and well-being for the community and their children. Breath of Life Theory goes deeper in looking at the influences of spiritual balancing with Indigenous Peoples. This is due to 'the knowledge that when cultural identity has been eroded and spiritual connection severed, as in the results of

colonization on Indigenous Peoples, there are known links that this leads to a heightening risk of stress related disorders and substance abuse (p. 6). Breath of Life Theory also takes into consideration the importance of context, time, culture, and dimensions of reality. Blackstock (2011a) does caution about becoming 'pan-Indigenous' in treating all Nations the same. She notes that Indigenous Nations are unique in their epistemological views that influence the use of tools, such as the Medicine Wheel.

Within her Theory she stresses the following to be considered when creating models, such as legislations, that will affect Indigenous Peoples:

- 1) Culture & Context shape the creation of principles. Differing child rearing practices, self-determination, context factors such as colonization, social exclusion, geographic location, and service access
- 2) Model is situated regarding time and upholding the seven generation concepts. Seven generation concept upholds where past, present and the future are mutually reinforcing each other. Actions are informed by previous seven generations at the the consequences of actions influence the future seven generations
- 3) Multiple realities are acknowledged and utilized in understanding worldview and how to create/restore balance amongst the four elements of cognitive, physical, spiritual, and emotional. The western world looks at one life cycle and what is seen, felt, and heard in that one lifetime. First Nation's views are multidimensional and Blackstock notes credible First Nation Traditional knowledge holders must be consulted here
- 4) Individuals are viewed within the context of their relationships to the world and others. Humans interact and interconnect with all life which not only includes other people but also the natural world. Blackstock's (2011a) example of how this may apply is that for a child to feel secure they may need to strengthen their relationship with the community, and natural world of their ancestors (p. 12)

The Breath of Life Theory is crucial in that it depicts how Indigenous ontology and epistemology can inform how we (researchers/social workers) look at assessing risk of a child and how to mitigate that risk. Blackstock, (2011a) suggests child welfare interventions focus on restoring balance among the relationship worldview principles, instead of over-focusing on treating the way that the imbalance manifests at the level of individual children and families. She suggests

the Breath of Life Theory could also be useful in developing assessment tools aimed at identifying sources of structural risk and redressing its impacts (p. 13).

Wa Cheew Wapaguunew Iskew (2015) writes about her experiences as a front-line social worker and supervisor within her community. She writes about funding challenges within Indigenous child welfare and about the federal/provincial/territorial governments consistent non-recognition of Indigenous people's abilities to create and enact their own laws just continues to 'promote the assimilation of First Nations children' (p. 290). She talks about Indigenous peoples moving into a proactive role as opposed to a reactive one when it comes to their children's welfare. Wapaguunew Iskew shares Thomas and Green (2007) words that need to change practices and ways of working that strengthen and maintain families, extended families, and communities. If this new way is created it also 'helps families to help themselves, as well as helping children to reconnect with their identities' (Thomas & Green, 2007 in Wa Cheew Wapaguunew Iskew, 2015, p. 290). She writes about the impact practicing in new ways has on Spiritual healing and that this is seen in the collective grief experienced by Indigenous peoples due to separation.

Wa Cheew Wapaguunew Iskew (2015) notes, 'solutions will not come from continuing to separate children from their families, from their community and from their lands, traditions and spiritual practice' (p. 290). She stresses these changes will come when Indigenous people use their own community-based models and re-connect to 'traditional models of childcare, kinship, custom adoption, parenting and other alternative approaches, such as circles of care' (p. 290).

Wa Cheew Wapaguunew Iskew talks about the Signs of Safety (SOS) model of assessment and family work, which was developed by Turnell and Edwards in 1999. She describes SOS as working with families in the current situation and looking at what that reality looks like. Map-

ping is incorporated within SOS model which allows social workers to see who all the family supports are, their strengths, a realistic look at the issues and a collaborative approach to discovering and supporting the caregiver to address the identified issues.

Wa Cheew Wapaguunew Iskew (2015) notes the importance of incorporating an anti-colonial practice and moving back toward ‘upholding Indigenous values and paying attention to traditional protocols and ethics and remember that these guided us from time immemorial’ (p. 293). She stresses the importance of working collaboratively and to especially involve Elders to facilitate a deeper understanding of issues, Traditional responses to issues and how to go forward. She notes incorporating Family Group Conferencing is a vital tool within collaboration and in keeping children connected to family and community. Wa Cheew Wapaguunew Iskew (2015) has detailed outlines regarding important considerations when incorporating theoretical model, anti-oppressive principles, and personal model within practice. An important point Wa Cheew Wapaguunew Iskew (2015) shares is around putting children in homes that do not reflect the realities of their parent’s homes. For example, in an affluent home with many material perks, but little motherly love.

It is crucial when developing Indigenous legislation and policy to maintain the core or underlying principles of an Indigenous worldview. Overlaying western theory and principles onto Indigenous legislation and policies does not offer a forward movement toward decolonization and reconciliation, which is necessary for the healing of Canadian history. On a micro level overlaying western theory continues patriarchal practice and continues to jeopardize children’s well-being.

West Coast Leaf (2019) worked with 64 parents who have had child welfare experience in BC and developed prevention approaches and practices in child welfare. The research found ongo-

ing gaps between policy and practice when striving to create preventative models. Researchers found three underlying factors that prevented congruency and development of wholistic preventative child welfare agencies. They are:

- Ongoing cyclical colonialism: Core beliefs from residential school and 60s scoop era continue in the current child welfare system. This is due to the inability of the current system to deal with intergenerational trauma, systemic racism and marginalization, disparities in the social determinants of health.
- Gaps in supports and services: Despite prevention efforts participants felt there were gaps in the types of services, and those that were available had systemic and individual barriers to access them.
- A lack of accountability: Participants expressed frustration over social workers lack of accountability which led to contradictions in practice and undermined prevention-based efforts. This lack of accountability creates a top-down approach where social workers dictate to parent, rather than a relationship-centred approach which creates trust and collaboration (p. 5).

West Coast Leaf (2019) research sought to find insights into how to transform society by ‘accessing healthcare, access to justice; economic security; freedom from gender-based violence; justice for those who are criminalized; and the right to parent’. Through their research, West Coast Leaf (2019) wanted to determine if the Ministry of Child and Family Development was meeting section 2(c) of the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) in providing the necessary supports to families to ensure they can exercise their right to parent and to ensure they were upholding the child’s best interest. Section 2(c) of CFCSA states, ‘if, with available support services, a family can provide a safe and nurturing environment for a child, support services should be provided’ (p. 6). West Coast Leaf (2019) not only interviewed parents with child welfare experience, they gathered information from Indigenous leaders, Elders, and child welfare specialists. West Coast Leaf (2019) found the following three themes underlying the approaches they looked at that have preventative and transformative practices for child welfare. They are:

- Indigenous approaches to child welfare: Indigenous nations had a long rich child-raising practices and currently many communities work to revitalize and restore this knowledge. Participants stated the most effective prevention-based programs had roots in Indigenous child-raising knowledge.
- Community-based supports: Localized, integrated, and wrap-around community-based programs and services were seen as the most effective. Also, the local community was the best place to understand the family's needs, mobilize resources, and develop creative, out-of-the-box solutions.
- Self-determination: Participants felt preventative child welfare systems must be rooted in self-determination. They felt Indigenous Nations and communities should have full authority over all decision that impact their children (p. 5).

There is no pan-Indigenous worldview but there are core principles which the participants identified as:

- Decolonization - need an understanding of history and how colonial and structural violence impacted and continues to impact Indigenous people, including how the relationship with land was interrupted. Upholds commitment to ongoing work to tear down colonial structural and to achieve justice, self-determination, and sovereignty.
- Wholism - a process to acknowledge and engage with all aspects of a person and family. Can be the use of the Medicine Wheel. Achieving a state of well-being, not just treating/managing illness. A move from helping children survive to helping families thrive.
- Trauma Informed practice - There are four aspects to trauma informed practice. They are trauma awareness; an emphasis on safety and trustworthiness; opportunities for choice, collaboration and connection; skill building and being strength-based.
- Family centred practice - Important to work in a family centred way involving collaboration with parenting and all caregivers. The family is the expert in all that impacts them, and value is placed on supporting the family to maintain a sense of dignity and hope and seeing the unique circumstances of each family, including the impacts and complexities of substance use, poverty and family violence. The concept of family and kinship is rooted in Indigenous perspective and beliefs of what they are, not western view.
- Relationship centred approach - Building relationships between all those involved - family, community, social workers, professionals - is vital and will improve child welfare outcomes.
- Cultural safety - A knowing that historical, economic, social contexts, along with structural and interpersonal power imbalances, shape people's outcomes and experiences. Need to name and recognize the past and present. Those who hold power need to reflect and challenge the 'largely unconscious and unspoken, assumptions of power held in their roles, including the policies and culture of their institutions and systems.
- Harm reduction - Uphold the principles of recognizing the harms people are experiencing, facilitate opportunities to meet people where they are, and work within a container of dignity and compassion for all people. Harm reduction can reduce the harms of colonization and can weave together Indigenous models of police -making, programming and practices that are

holistic, inclusive, innovative and evidence based. In child welfare, harm reduction seeks to look at diverse options on how to reduce harm to families and includes looking at the potential harms caused by the proposed intervention itself, such as removing a child from their parents and community.

- Self-determination - recognition of the efforts and approaches aimed at fully returning authority over child welfare to Indigenous communities and Nations... Rooted in position that Indigenous peoples are the best to make decisions that impact their children, youth, families, and communities. They would be the leaders in development child welfare laws, policies, research, and practice for their communities. That they would have the final decision-making authority over all decisions impacting their children (pp 14-17).

The authors in this literature review section speak of the subtle internal practices that social workers need to develop to practice in a way that is culturally informed and safe. Their points highlight and challenge the need to be self-reflective to be constantly aware of how one's behaviours, attitudes and worldview have been affected by colonization. Ingrained western beliefs need to shift, especially when working with Indigenous Peoples, so that colonial beliefs and practices are not perpetuated. As seen in the results of West Coast Leaf (2019) research it is time for the foundation of legislation, policy, and practice guidelines, for Indigenous Peoples, upholds Indigenous worldview, epistemology and ontology. Also, this is not to devalue the knowledge, wisdom, applicable attributes of western epistemology/ontology, especially when practicing Two-Eyed Seeing, however, these would overlay onto the Indigenous foundation. Anything that did not 'serve' the Indigenous ontology would be discarded, what was applicable and resonated would be integrated.

LITERATURE REVIEW - ASSESSMENTS

Following an intake call, discussions begin regarding the risk to the child(ren) and decisions are made if an investigation will be carried out. Within the protection unit assessing risk and how to mitigate it is an ongoing practice. Throughout the investigation, assessments are made regarding what occurred and what the responses will be. If a file is opened to protection, ongoing assessments are made regarding what the risks are, what will be requested of the caregivers to mitigate the risks and how the caregivers are progressing on this continuum. Cuccaro-Alamin et al. (2017) note that ‘every day through a series of decisions often made by multiple individuals, children and families are referred to CPS [child protective services] and then triaged’ (p. 291).

King et al (2021) look at the ongoing changes within child welfare including the types of assessments that are used to determine risk. Risk can be seen as an immediate concern or as a likelihood. Societies’ understanding around maltreatment, neglect and trauma has evolved over the years. Now physical and emotional abuse encompass exposure to substance abuse, domestic violence, parent/child conflicts and caregiver’s mental health. These classifications and determinants of risk dictate the direction of the investigation. The agency will either close the file or move to a longer involvement with the family to address the identified concerns - be they substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, etc. Continuing involvement from the investigation through to the protection stage is in the hopes of preventing future maltreatment by working with the family (King et al., 2021, p, 2). The factors that are looked at for potential involvement to protection are: child characteristics, caregivers characteristics including past concerns, relationships, living situations, supports, and education/work. King et al., question, ‘whether child

welfare services are the appropriate mechanism for effectively addressing circumstances that may put children at risk, particularly when the structure and delivery of services have been designed to intervene when children have already been harmed' (p. 1). They note the power assessment tools holds and how aspects, such as socioeconomics, race, housing situation, relationship status etc, can influence long term involvement with a family (King et al. 2021).

de Tomasso & de Finney (2015), Richardson & Carrière (2017), and Neckoway, Brownlee and Castellan (2007) talk about how Indigenous Peoples view children and their care. Each acknowledges the differing worldviews of various Nations regarding this; however, they note there are foundational beliefs threading through that they all share. Children are viewed as Spiritual gifts from Creator, thus there is a strong thread of Spiritual wisdom when viewing, parenting, and caring for children. de Tomasso & deFinney, (2015) note that eurocentric concepts cannot capture the powerful Spirit, deep relationality and inherent diversity of Indigenous caretaking values and practices. Children are treated as essential elements of individual, family, and community life. Due to this, the nature of caring for children is not just the responsibility of one person and/or one family unit.

Relations within Indigenous communities are not based on bloodlines. Family can extend beyond to non-blood connections, and clans (Neckoway, Brownlee & Castellan, 2007). Children's care could be viewed through various lens, these include political, economic, mourning, permanent, and temporary views. This means that if a large family could not care for a child(ren) they would go reside with another family that had few children; if a family could not have children a family may send one of their children to this family; if an individual/family had no children residing in the home due to being older, child may be sent to live with them; if there

was a death and a child reminded grievers of their lost one that child may go live with this family (de Tomasso & deFinney, 2015). ‘There is a fluidity within homes where children would go amongst family members to serve a mutually beneficial arrangements’ (de Tomasso & de Finney, 2015, p. 23).

The diversity of relationships within Indigenous communities regarding relations impacts how children view their connections. It impacts how community members respond to children in that they are welcomed into homes, fed, disciplined, offered care and comfort by those other than their parents and family. The authors note, the practices ensure that culture offers a web of connections that ensures the safety for children.

Indigenous worldview has been impacted by western adoption and child welfare practices. There is no word in Indigenous languages for adoption. Due to the multiple layers of caregivers for children it is challenging when parenting courses are mandated by agencies. de Tomasso & de Finney (2015) offer the following as examples of various parenting/child rearing practices common amongst Indigenous Peoples:

- Influences of Spiritually creates belief that everything will work out and that struggles are temporary and/or lessons in life to be learned.
- Due to this, caregivers have a long-term view of children which includes their destiny.
- Due to this the caregiver’s role is not to shape or create behaviours but to provide contest for expression.
- Children are taught through non-verbal styles which include observations rather than interventions.
- Children are allowed to make many decisions because they are viewed as a person free to explore their environment.
- From a western view caregiving style could be interpreted as passive, permissive and lacking control of children’s behaviours.
- Due to multiple caregivers, parents can afford to be less vigilant and have an expectation that someone will be watching out for them (Neckoway, Brownlee and Castellán, 2007).

de Tomasso & de Finney, 2015 offer the following aspects when considering the best interest of children:

- Children need homes as much as homes need children.
- Children are sacred and are to be treated with kindness and love.
- The protection and nurturing of children are a community responsibility.
- Children are not property.
- Children go within the community and parents are whatever adults are around the child (p. 24)

Davidson-Arad and Benbenishty (2014), Cuccaro-Alamin et al. (2017), and Hardistry et al. (n.d.) speak of needing to redefine and talk about assessing and mitigating risk from a strength-based and culturally informed perspective. Davidson-Arad & Benbenishty (2014) note the importance of seeking what is in the best interest of the child, however, there is no universal definition of what best interest of the child is (p. 189). They also bring awareness to the influences of worker's beliefs and values, and that often, within a eurocentric lens/practice, there is an attitude to see information that confirms personal or systematic attitudes (p. 188). To see what we want to see, to see what resonates with or goes against our values and beliefs - our default ways of taken for granted thinking. Deconstructing this human practice will provide a deeper understanding of what the risks are and how to mitigate them within a culturally safe and informed lens.

Douglas & Walsh's (2013) work is important to this research because it talks about the importance of having a strength-based and family centred approach when working with Indigenous children and families - including assessing, and case planning to mitigate risk. This approach would look at the best interest of the family as the roots for the best interest of children. They talk of a holistic approach to children's wellbeing and there has been enduring international policy trends toward family preservation in the context of Indigenous child welfare (p. 70). Their work showed that workers need to be aware of history and have extensive cultural

competency training. Their research challenges social workers to be creative in understanding and developing culturally safe practices, supports, and services that reflect each Nations' values and beliefs.

Krista Maxwell (2017) raises a very good point that would be vital to consider when evaluating and shifting perspectives around how to assess risk. She calls her discourse 'settler humanitarianism' and asks if helpers within systems, such as child welfare, are tapping into personal humanitarianism through focusing on past colonial practices, such as residential schools, to explain current social issues within communities. While there is truth in how trauma effects behaviours, there is a bypassing in settler humanitarianism, that the structural and systemic impacts in creating and maintaining trauma is overlooked and/or minimized. She discusses the importance of not only considering the effects of residential schools and 60s scoop as traumatic. When just considering these as traumas, the impact of physical and sexual abuse is examined and treated, however, the impacts 'linked to kinship, language and territory' were not, and they are still, 'pushed to the margins of public discourse' (p. 989). Within humanitarianism there is comfort and bypassing in 'doing' something to help others to alleviate the impacts of traumatic experiences. However, by focusing on physical and sexual abuses only, the cultural traumas of losing links and relationships with family/community, loosing language and land are not considered. Settlers get to stay in their comfort zone when only focusing on the physical and sexual abuses of colonization.

Settler humanitarianism is present when developing plans to mitigate the risks present. Maxwell (2017) claims her research results shine light on the colonial choices made within child welfare organizations when creating family plans. These plans maintain colonial beliefs and

values that continue, and reinforce, that neo-liberal epistemology is the only valid way of seeing and knowing (p. 981). Understanding the impacts of maintaining neo-liberal epistemology is very important when developing practice guidelines.

Fairbairn and Strega (2015) discuss the importance of context when assessing risk, particularly when using an anti-oppressive approach. The importance of completing the assessment is critical when considering context. They state, 'the worker is looking for a movie rather than a snapshot of the child's and family's life' (p. 167). Their discussions stress looking at the child(ren) within different environments (home, school, activities, other family member's homes etc.) and speaking to the children. In conducting assessments in this way, it becomes an organic necessity to establish relationships. People do not open up and/or relax into the mundane of their lives if the stranger present has not taken the time to establish a relationship. Another important structural issue that Fairbairn and Strega (2015) talk about is how those who are involved in the child welfare system are also more often involved in other systems, so they become more visible. The result of this visibility is that more calls are made on these families, which result in more intrusions, assessments, and interventions. They challenge workers, who are doing assessments and working with families, to consider structural challenges (p. 162).

Included in their challenge to look at constructed concepts such as attachment and child development ideologies, which can be a problem, because they do not represent universal truths and yet they are often incorporated into policy and standards (p. 162). This chapter is helpful in that it not only discusses and deconstructs what is currently occurring in child welfare assessments, but they also offer suggestions on how to improve practice. Some of these suggestions include building relationship from the moment of first contact, to remember to

not only ask for information about people/families but to also share informations about yourself/ family (p. 163).

ACTION for Child Protection (2009) challenges practitioners to be culturally competent but not at the expense of protecting children from inhumane treatment. Frontline practice needs to include culturally sensitive assessment, different first languages, appropriate use of power and authority, self-awareness, and the ability to evaluate the relevance of interventions when applied to diverse cultures and ethnicities (ACTION, 2009, p. 4). When unpacking inhumane treatment, ACTION notes the law guards against severe harm and the threat of severe harm and notes that culture is not a criterion when considering either (ACTION, 2009, p. 7). There are times this gets voiced as a reason to not use culturally appropriate practices. The concern that by focusing on culture and reconciling the effects of history for Indigenous peoples within child welfare, we are overlooking or minimizing abuses. By looking through a cultural lens social workers can see a broader picture that does encompass colonial impacts, develop plans that uphold cultural values and beliefs, which will penetrate the person's heart and soul more deeply. Indigenous ways are driven from the heart rather than the head. When a person is approached in this way following incidents of child abuse/mistreatment they potentially are more motivated to make the necessary changes in a holistic and sustainable way.

Turnell & Edwards (1999) created the Signs of Safety (SOS) model which is rooted in strength-based collaboration with families. Within a western paradigm and approach the value of having control, using an expert model and professionalism are default modes ingrained in patriarchy (p. 48). They acknowledge that social workers need tools, or as they say, 'a map' to guide them.

Assessing risk carries immense challenges, responsibilities, and tensions because we are talking about child maltreatment and no one wants to make a mistake regarding this, which harms the child(ren). During investigations information needs to be gathered regarding abuse, neglect, vulnerability of child(ren), chronicity of issues, family dynamics and environments. However, Turnell & Edwards (1999) note social workers need to balance this with discovering the families' resiliencies, competencies, safety plans and strengths (p. 49). Within the Signs of Safety Map there are 6 practice principles which Turnell & Edwards (1999) believe balance the dangers and safety within a family to reach a comprehensive risk assessment. The six practice principles are:

1. Understanding the position of each family member: understand values, beliefs and meaning each family member possesses. This aids the social worker in understanding and responding to the uniqueness of each family/case to create plans a family can carry out.
2. Find exceptions to the maltreatment: In finding exception where the problem does not always exist, gives hope to the family and social worker. It also has the potential of offering insights into what worked in the past to alleviate issue. If there are no exceptions, it also may highlight the issue is more severe than thought.
3. Discover family strengths and resources: highlight the family's strengths which prevents social workers and families from being overwhelmed and discouraged.
4. Focus on goals: discover and try to implement the family goals. Do a comparison of what the family's goals are with those of the agency. If the family cannot present goals it could be an indication of the dangers the child is facing.
5. Scale safety and progress: identifying the family's sense of safety and progress throughout agency involvement which can lead to clarity.
6. Assess willingness, confidence, and capacity: discover the family's willingness and ability to carry out plans before plans are implemented. This leads to greater success (p. 51).

Turnell & Edwards (1999) believe social workers need to take the time to listen to the story from family members and explore the perspectives in which it is given. They stress throughout Signs of Safety that maltreatment never gets overlooked and/or minimized. They claim that through relationship, respect, and commitment the concerning actions of the parent can be ad-

dressed, and the social worker can go deeper with the parent/caregiver regarding their feelings/ thoughts around the maltreatment. In this way the parent/caregiver can recognize their own struggles and failings and move to a different perspective, and because of this create different actions on how to deal with situations. In this way real, long lasting changes in behaviours can occur (p. 55). They stress that when creating a case plan the past successful actions of the parents must be incorporated into the plan because this will increase the potential for engagement and success in mitigating risk(s) to the child(ren) (p. 79).

Hebditch (2015) describes the SOS model as being rooted in relationship building. Rooted in relationships, the social worker can develop a clear understanding and picture of what is going on. With a strong, or developing relationship approach, the social worker and family can see the risks and dangers clearly and can also see the strengths and supports that can be utilized to deal with the concerns. The SOS model focuses on collaborating with family, community, and professionals to create small, possible goals to create change in the family instead of going from a concern to a solution that could have had several other, smaller, solutions first. She notes the Signs of Safety model is not about ticky boxes but developing relationships, thoughtful questions, keen listening, and critical thinking skills (p. 31). Hebditch (2015) believes the Signs of Safety model 'considers both the problems and the solutions in work with families' (Scerra, 2011, p.33), which is a strength-based perspective. The practices within SOS look at past actions, current situations, and future solutions all in collaboration with the family, community and professionals. This offers a level of transparency, planning and solutions to minimize potential future harm to children.

Within her research paper Hebditch (2015) shares how the social workers she was supervising and who were using Signs of Safety reported being happier in the work and stated that there was real and sustainable change amongst the families they worked with. Hebditch (2015) reports ‘there was less conflict, more cooperation, more buy-in with the safety plans and perhaps more importantly, greater family and community involvement’ (p. 74).

Hebditch (2015) found, through her years of experiences using the BC risk assessment tool, and she questions this regarding all assessment tools, social workers become reliant on the checklist. She believes the ‘checklist’ creates an assessment that is methodical and practice that doesn’t see a wider picture, which decreases critical thinking. This check box formula doesn’t see the families’ strengths, safety, danger and harm. Hebditch (2015) writes, ‘it becomes then, a work focused on what’s best for the worker rather than what’s best for the child’ (p. 21). This approach can overburden front line workers and can get in the way of genuine connections and professional judgements. Hebditch (2015) believes the Signs of Safety model (SOS) forces workers to think critically about the child(ren)’s safety and ‘to consider all possible categories of assessment; harm, danger, complicating factors, existing strength, existing safety, future safety, and next immediate steps (Turnell & Edwards, 1999 in Hebditch, 2015, p. 22). Hebditch (2015) states that the SOS creators, Turnell & Edwards (1999), felt their ‘ticky box’ assessment ‘convert whole people into problems, reducing the potential of hope, the possibility of respect and finally the capacity of workers to think their way into and through cases’ (p. 22).

There are many whom Hebditch (2015) quotes who feel there are many drawbacks with human decision making due to having small amounts of evidence, ignoring significant information known to other workers, favouring evidence based on whether it was the first or last information

received, or whether it aroused emotion' (Crea, 2010 as cited in Hebditch, 2015, p. 27). She shares Reder, Duncan, and Grey's (1993) work of 'information regarding thirty-five cases of child death inquiries where a lack of collaboration and communication among professionals became a fatal error for these children' (in Hebditch, 2015, p. 26). The ideal formula for decision making is in building relationship with families, community, and professionals. Other management options that Hebditch (2015) shares include structured decision-making (SDM), multi-disciplinary team (MDT), team decision-making (TDM) and family group conferencing (FGC), stating that some organizations will use a combination of one or more of these.

Hebditch (2015) questions if using prescribed procedures and the various organizational expectations, that the real work with families is lost and thus there is no ability for the social worker to determine true safety. She notes child protection work is then about paperwork, personal liability and what is best for workers or state/organization and not what is best for the child/family. She notes that checklists and practice manuals give a false sense of security. She goes on to write even when a child welfare agency (such as Indigenous agencies) is seeking to practice holistically, family focused and in anti-oppressive manner, that the overlaying of governmental legislations and policies prevent progressive and thorough and protective practice. She notes parent(s) are the experts of their family and they need to be given the respect and dignity of such. Parent(s), in a family-centred approach take back control, initiate changes to ensure the children's safety and well-being, which creates continued energies and efforts to have sustained change over time' (p. 38). Hebditch (2015) stresses that to create different, progressive ways of practice in child welfare not only front-line social workers but supervisors and other management employees have to engage in ongoing learning and work toward continued upholding and

implementing alternate models of practice guidelines into everyday practice and decision making activities. Hebditch (2015) shares that within her work with various Indigenous Nations in Canada she has been told by various community members (social workers, community leaders) that ‘this model represents the most traditional way to problem solving; it is how our ancestors practiced conflict resolution and we used it because it worked’ (p. 45).

Hebditch (2015) notes that many child protection social workers ‘fear that an approach that focuses on strength and safety will direct workers away from the potential risks and thereby put children in danger of being harmed’ (p. 50). Turnell & Edwards (1999) state that building relationships, and critical thinking leads to ‘thorough, rigorous, solution-focused questions with families making them the experts of their own situations’ (cited in Hebditch, 2015, p. 50) which is how to transform child welfare. Reder, Duncan, & Gray, (1993) believe: ‘implementation of these requirements would require constant and clear communication; the creation of a learning organization through continuous training and in house coaching’ (cited in Hebditch, 2015, p. 51). Turnell & Edwards, (1999) know this will include support from the top that would include alignment of policies, procedures, and management systems; engagement with community partners; and the purposeful action of managers, supervisor and leaders.

Hebditch (2015) shares how the social workers she was supervising and who were using Signs of Safety reported being happier in the work and that there was real and sustainable change amongst the families they worked with. Hebditch (2015) reports ‘there was less conflict, more cooperation, more buy-in with the safety plans and perhaps more importantly, greater family and community involvement’ (p. 74).

Hebditch's (2015) research concludes that changes to child welfare will need a commitment to restructuring, not only legislation and policies, but also the structure/system itself. The conclusions formulated regarding her research question of how to successfully implement change on a large scale are:

- supervisor and manager support for front-line staff
- policy and legislative change to support the theoretical shift
- structural change to address the workload shifts
- collaboration and education for community partners
- patience and training for staff learning to re-think their understanding of the work
- increase awareness of the systemic racism that negatively impacts child protection on reserve
- equity funding, resources and training made available to address and improve ability to provide the best service possible (p. 138)

Richardson and Wade's (2010) Islands of Safety Model was developed to assess and create tools to ensure children and adults were safe within a home at risk for violence. It was developed with the goal of making it possible to create plans in dealing with identified issues of concern (ie: violent behaviours, substance abuse) while supporting individuals and families in staying together throughout the process. A core belief within Islands of Safety Model is that individuals and families do resist violence and do have plans in addressing safety concerns. To accomplish this, a foundation of positive and cooperative relationships was established with RCMP, the justice system, child welfare and professionals. It moved in a direction of upholding the dignity of individuals involved and away from a western pathologized models/behaviors. The Islands of

Safety Model relies on Traditional and Indigenous practices to establish and maintain reciprocal relationships, communication, and wellness.

Islands of Safety seeks to establish positive social responses which uphold dignity and self-determination. This can be seen in the practice of holding individuals, be it the 'client' or the service providers, as active players for what has happened, what their responses and plans are, what has worked in the past, who are the supports and what is experienced/created through broader systemic levels. Richardson and Wade (2010) define dignity as a practice of treating others with respect as defined by Traditional teachings.... including space for people to pursue their highest and most ordinary aspirations (p. 138).

The format of Islands of Safety Model is like Family Group Conferencing. All those involved and their support people, community supports, and service people are present. There are four rounds, which address the following:

Round 1: Family history - roles, traditions, family interactions, views and beliefs

Round 2: Family history with professionals

Round 3: Family responses to violence and threats

Round 4: Social responses to family members and the circumstances they are experiencing

There is time allowed for family time with the following questions being considered:

- What is the family doing to increase safety
- Who, what, where, why and how often
- Plan and trial run period
- Present plan to facilitators
- Present plan to child protection workers (p. 142)

Richardson and Wade (2010) talk about one of the most violent experiences for Indigenous Peoples is colonization. They talk about colonization as rooted in humiliation and lack of dignity, which spread a blanket of loss and grief over Indigenous Peoples. For this thesis addressing and discussing colonial violence is necessary when seeking to create and reclaim legislation

(self-determination), and practice protocols and tools. It is necessary to examine and dissect colonial violence on Indigenous Peoples in order to recreate an Indigenous system that upholds dignity, social justice, wellness and safety. They note ‘constant attention to dignity creates a sense of social safety which in turn fosters a climate in which child safety concerns can be placed in the centre and addressed directly’ (p. 138).

I am reminded when reading the literature that it will be crucial as a researcher, especially as a settler researcher, to constantly reflect and practice critical reflexivity to ensure I am not overlaying my eurocentric values and beliefs onto Indigenous epistemology and practice. An integrated practice to maintain and support this reflexivity is connections with Spiritual Elders and Prayers within Ceremony.

LITERATURE REVIEW - ANALYSIS

When it came to analyzing the data gathered, I was challenged because I wanted to push back on western ways of knowing, and in this case, analyzing. This felt like a roadblock because I wanted to keep analysis within an Indigenous perspective, but the reality is, as a white person, that is not possible.

What arose in dismantling this roadblock are that science and modern research have finally caught up to the inherent wisdom of Indigenous ways of knowing and doing and that, of course, I am going to bring in non-Indigenous materials because I am non-Indigenous. Within child welfare, many of the front-line protection workers are non-Indigenous, and things need to be explained to these social workers in a way so that they can be understood. There are many in the wellness profession that talk about meeting people where they are at and bringing them along on the journey. In this case, bringing front-line social workers along the journey to see that moving to a more Indigenous, wholistic, worldview/practice is not only possible, but cultivates the deepest healing and health for individuals - and more importantly, for children and their families. The best interest of the child is really having a well family (di Tomasso & de Finney, 2015). This is applicable to the legislative and policy system that MFCS currently operates under, as it is a western system. Thus, moving to change can be stirred up, accomplished, and integrated through explanations/research that indicates what is truly needed for personal healing and transformation to occur. Arising from this blockage is a deeper understanding of the Two Eyed Seeing approach to wellness.

Two eyed seeing is when epistemology from both Indigenous and mainstream understandings are engaged with to understand and create solutions regarding a topic and/or

issue. It became clear, and a challenge in breaking down my own assumptions, that the goal is to honour Indigenous knowledge/ways of knowing equally as valid as others, not to replace or rebuild a different hierarchical system, which is inherent to western systems. Elder Albert Marshall (in Bartlett et al., 2012) notes, we 'need to learn to weave back and forth between our knowledges because in a particular set of circumstances, it may be that one has more applicable strengths than the other, yet with changing circumstances this can easily switch' (p. 335).

The predominant themes that arose from the interviews included the need to view and practice from a trauma informed lens; having more ongoing and in-depth cultural sensitivity and competence training; using a collaborative approach; and incorporating Indigenous ways of healing. A trauma informed lens considers understanding the brain, and how the brain develops after a traumatic experience. It looks at attachment and the long-term effects of trauma and/or adverse experiences on our nervous system, which is managed by the brain, and impacts our behaviours.

In some circles the belief is that attachment, development, impacts/responses to trauma occurs in the heart/soul. Interviewees spoke of the intergenerational effects of trauma and also the trauma experienced or lived via DNA memory or epigenetic. They talked about how the wounds experienced in the heart of individuals, families, and nations are deeper and can then be passed on through generations. The generational wounds show up in different generations providing the opportunity for that familial wound to be healed - then it will not be passed on again in the DNA memory. This parallels Indigenous teachings of the need to consider seven generations into the future when making decision and making plans for the present. When making child protection decisions and planning to uphold Indigenous worldview considering the impacts of colonization,

directly and indirectly, on the seven generations prior to the person we are working with. The decisions and planning need to consider the impacts on the holistic wellbeing of the next seven generations. This in no way means to minimize protection issues, it means shifting social workers perspectives to be very aware of decisions made and their influences and impacts regarding seven generations.

Views on adoption and attachment theory are currently rooted in western values and beliefs, which are not the same as Indigenous Peoples' views on these. When working with developing legislation, policy and practice, guidelines need to look deeply at the essence of what attachment is and how it is viewed within Indigenous communities.

Carriere & Richardson (2009) examined the concept of attachment and saw that the key was connectedness. Carriere (2009) defines connectedness as 'a feeling of belonging, of being an important and integral part of the world' (p. 52). Connectedness encompasses the Spiritual dimensions of a person and when it is not present, grief and loss can be present. Carriere's (2007) research regarding connectedness shines light on how adoptees who have come into nurturing and healthy homes/lifestyles can still feel a sense of loss (p. 53). This loss of connectedness can show up as 'experiencing loneliness, anxiety, jealousy, anger, depression, low self-esteem, and a host of other negative emotions' (Lee, Lee, Draper, 2001, p. 311 in Carriere & Richardson, 2009, p. 53).

In their work regarding adoption, Carriere & Richardson (2009) state the loss of connection to birth family/community can cause physiological activity where a person creates a more positive family in their mind than what they are living with. This practice can create feelings of depres-

sion, anxiety, somatic illness, backaches and stomach aches (Boss, 1999, in Carriere & Richardson, 2009, p. 54).

From an Indigenous worldview kinship is a web of connections. These connections encompass blood relations, non-blood relations, community, and the natural world (Carriere & Richardson, 2009, p. 55). Within these connections (there is a knowing, belief, understanding and practice) that children will be cared for, taught responsibility, accountability and a connection to others that is supportive and healthy. The Indigenous view for family and kinship is deeper and more expansive than the western view of nuclear family (Richardson & Carriere, 2017). From an Indigenous kinship model, adoption strengthens connections between family and community members.

Honouring connection is a form of preventive work that also upholds social justice for Indigenous peoples. Long term this heals the wounds of colonial western child welfare practices and returns communities to a balanced state of wellness. ‘To foster a sense of balance, social workers must assist children to know their family history...children may then go on to recognize their place and responsibility in the larger universe, gained through cultural teachings.... retaining kinship ties is part of overall community health and strength’ (Richardson & Carriere, 2017, p. 57). Kinship highlights the importance of relationship broader than those of the immediate family.

Van der Kolk (2014), Levine (1997), Dana (2018), and Siegal (2020) all discuss the biological science regarding the impacts of trauma. Trauma is defined as any adverse experience that makes a person feel unsafe; be it physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. These authors talk about how traumatic experiences can get stored in the body. They note that healing from

trauma is influenced by the amount of support the individual has around them. If the person has strong support systems to connect with following the traumatic experience, and when they begin their healing process, this process can be deeper and faster. The reverse is also true. Without strong support systems healing is slow and/or not considered. When not feeling safe, the body, and entire system creates ways to feel safe, such as dissociation, insecure attachments, avoidance, aggression, disconnection, and even self-sabotaging behaviours, etc. They talk of storing trauma in the body and how a person's reactions and responses to the outside world becomes automatic and unconscious ways of living and responding. In some instances what is experienced within the traumatic experience is perpetuated by the victim, causing the individual to repeat circles of violence.

Weinhold and Weinhold (2018) believe that when a relationship is severed, attachment or developmental trauma can occur. They say 'interpersonal conflicts in adult relationships are often anchored invisible and unhealed developmental shocks, traumas, or stresses' (p.41). These unconscious stressors within the body, that affect the entire system, including increasing hormone release, leave a person in an escalated state, and when triggered their system moves into a dysregulated state. Adverse childhood experiences disconnect children from their caregivers which has a deeper, long-term impact of disconnecting them from themselves. Weinhold and Weinhold (2018), Van de Kolk (2014), and Levine (1997) talk about the way back to regulating the system is to reconnect, be that to yourself and/or within relationships with others. This does not mean needing to reconnect with an abusive relationship but through relationships that are real, loving and /or support human evolution. Developing relationships not only with human but also with the natural world can ignite and transform healing.

Gonzalez (2018) states that traumatic experiences that occur over an extended period can leave a person feeling in a state of learned helplessness and hopelessness (p. 100). She writes about how the small daily experiences a child feels from caregiver(s) can convey they are worthy of love, they are acceptable, and which helps to create a child's self-image and self-esteem (p. 54). Gonzalez (2018) talks about human beings as social animals who live in networks of connected relationships. She discusses how humans need caregivers for many years and these relationships, with healthy connection(s) or not, influence our relationship(s) with ourselves and others. Relationships help us get in touch with emotions. Gonzalez (2018) states, emotions guide us in understanding ourselves and the world; letting us know what we need and how to get it. Emotions tend to flow and are intertwined. What we tell ourselves about emotions impacts what we do with them. We need to give ourselves permission to feel our emotions; and emotions do not compete or fight with each other (p. 21). Gonzalez (2018) notes that if we go against these guides in a negative or disconnected way the result is often emotional dysregulation.

Anabel Gonzalez (2018) talks about learning skills consciously and unconsciously that help us to survive in our current environment. For children who attended residential school, or are/were involved in the 60s scoop, were taken out of their families, homes, community and sometimes country, had to learn to survive within the residential school community or a new family. In survival our autonomic system assesses the environment to determine if it is safe or not. Children in residential school or from the 60s scoop experienced a lot of chronic stresses and tensions from living and witnessing abuses and humiliations. These experiences required their bodily systems to be constantly alert, scanning their environment and to become acutely aware, and tuned in to those around them, and what was happening. The stress and tension of these experi-

ences lead to potential over stressed immune systems, which perceived an environment where they could never or rarely relax. This led to developing survival behaviours that show up as PTSD, disassociation, hierarchies amongst students, lateral violence, and a disconnection from what one is experiencing on the inside with what one is experiencing in the environment.

Gonzalez (2018) talks about the effects survival has on attachment and how the experiences cause disassociation and complex trauma. Gonzalez also talks about the impact of experiences depending on where a person is developmentally. She notes, 'our [human] way of coping with what happens to us has much to do with relationships' (p. 4). It is widely known that children attach [connect] to their caregivers, and who this attachment [connection] is built with is the ground for all future relationships, including the relationship with ourselves. Gonzalez (2018) states, 'the way on which we look at ourselves on the inside and our perspective on what we feel, and think is modelled on how the most important figures in our lives looked at us' (p. 55).

Within the western paradigm or worldview, formal education is viewed with the utmost respect and significance, thus teachers are one of the most important figures within a child's life. The importance and/or influence gets amplified when the child is in a residential school because children are separated from parents/family/community who can counterbalance any negativity experienced at school. In another way the teacher/school becomes the parent/community, giving it that much more influence/power over the child. Daily experiences that leave a person feeling judged, unworthy, battered, and bruised creates confusion regarding who they are, disconnects them from those they love and causes chronic traumatic experiences leading to internalized hopelessness and trauma (PTSD).

Often the families that social workers see have internalized hopelessness. Sometimes during

risk assessment meetings families get frustrated because they are questioned about why they are seen over and over. Learned hopelessness and helplessness can lead to situations that when a person is offered an alternative way out of the negative, they do not take it. The options that are offered could alleviate the sufferings of substance abuse, physical/mental/emotional harms and having child welfare involvement in their life are not taken up. Probably this is due to them not knowing how to use these options to their advantage, due to a deeply engrained sense of hopelessness (Gonzalez, 2018, p. 100). This hopelessness began with colonization, and colonial impacts are still present. If individuals and families do not feel genuine support, including from child protection social workers, the potential to feel hopeless and helpless increases. Lack of compassion and empathy within risk assessments and child welfare practices keep the cycles of violence and intergenerational trauma spinning.

Daniel Siegal & Tina Payne Bryson (2020) talk about attachment and what children need to form secure attachments. What is applicable in their book for this thesis research is that they speak of insecure and chaotic attachment, which are the results of residential schooling. Their work helps to clarify the impacts of generational trauma. How those who have experienced trauma have gaps within their attachment and this can be passed on to their children and grandchildren and so on for generations. It is within attachment that children learn to co-regulate themselves so that when they experience hardship, they know how to respond instead of reacting.

Children seek to have their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs met. They have behaviours that cue the caregiver in what they need. Along the developmental continuum these four quadrant needs are interrelated and interconnected. How a parent connects with a child and tunes into their cues is influenced by their attachment history. Siegal & Bryson (2020) state,

‘researchers find that the securely attached children are the ones whose parents, in home-visit observations, are sensitive and responsive to the baby’s bid for connection, and whose parents can read their children’s cues and consistency meet their needs’ (p. 32).

Wolynn (2017) writes about trauma being stored in the body and brings forward the theory that this is how trauma gets passed down through generations. We are the blood and bones of our ancestors. Wolynn (2017) shares research from the Biological Research (2016) at Haifa University that found a stress gene within mothers that got passed down to offspring. This research noted that this stress was automatically transferred intergenerationally within eggs (p. 38). This stress changes the DNA, which then gets passed along to offspring (p. 38). It is referred to as epigenetics. It was first found in Bruce Lipton’s work on cellular memory and the discovery that a small percentage of our DNA codes our physical traits. Scientists used to refer to the rest of the DNA as junk DNA, however, research is now discovering that within the rest of the DNA our behavioural, emotional, and personality traits get inherited (p. 29).

By reflecting on ourselves we begin to unravel our traumas. Dr. Doidge believes the trauma(s) we have experienced can go from haunting us to simply being a part of our past (in Wolynn 2017, p. 49). Wolynn (2017) suggests the way to heal or transform our trauma(s) is with ‘self-awareness, the ability to self sooth, and having powerful healing experiences’ (p. 48). Self-awareness is where the integration of Indigenous healing practices carries a person to ‘powerful healing experiences.’ Wolynn (2017) writes ‘we perceive our mother as our world. A separation from her is felt as a separation from life. Experiences of emptiness and disconnection, feelings of hopelessness and despair, a belief that something is terribly wrong with us or with life itself - all these can be generated by an early separation’ (p. 74). If these occur when we are very young

they get remembered in the body (unconscious), and not necessarily the mind (conscious).

Wolynn (2017) believes we can change gene structures through visualization. This parallels some aspects of Indigenous Spiritual practices.

Wolynn's (2017) perspectives on attachment and the impacts of discomfort, breaks or rips on attachment [connection] offers hope in that he talks about this space where the discomfort lies, or the place of being with, and moving through the discomfort as being an opportunity or ground from where growth and healing can occur. He notes the pain and the disruptions within relationships, but they can also be seen as a gift offered for healing within the repair process. 'When our early experience with our mother [or connected figures] is disrupted by a significant break in the bond, shards of pain and emptiness can shred out well-being and disconnect us from the fundamental flow of life' (Wolynn, 2017, p. 177).

It would be unrealistic to expect a caregiver to be perfectly attuned to the child 100% of the time. Disruptions in attunement are bound to happen. When they do, the repair process can be a positive growth experience, giving both caregiver and child an opportunity to learn how to handle brief moments of distress and then reach out for each other to reconnect again.

Repeatedly repairing a relationship builds a sense of trust and helps to create a secure attachment between caregiver and child (Wolynn, 2017, p. 178). In some instances, there is no repair in the relationship between individuals, however, disruptions in attachment affect a person internally. Within the healing process it may not include the other individual, but it can include healing within the self.

Baskin (2011), Wilson (2008), Anderson (2011) Strega & Brown (2015), Hedges (2018) and Alfred (2008) all discuss transparency, reciprocal relationship, critical reflection, self-reflexion,

Spiritual ceremony, accountability, and connection as the ground for Indigenous epistemology. They note each Nation has unique customs and values with their peoples, however as Wilson (2008) and Blackstock (2011) note, each Nation has their own ontology that influences and shapes their specific policies and programs. As mentioned above there are growing movements amongst Indigenous Peoples and Allies to raise awareness regarding rightful Nation-to-Nation relationships upon Turtle Island, as set down within the Treaties. With this comes the movement of establishing Indigenous worldviews and practices as 'taken for granted'. Wilson (2008) talks about how education raises up epistemologies and breaks down oppression.

Ross (2014) writes about the fundamentals of connection and relationship within the Indigenous worldview. He notes it is very challenging to try and understand another's worldview because it requires us to reflect and put aside our own worldview. This is especially challenging for non-Indigenous peoples, as the western worldview has been upheld, enforced, engrained within our social/political systems as the only one. Ross (2014) shares seven principles for healing. They are:

1. **Spirit Centered:** Culture is understood as the outward expression of spirit, and revitalization of spirit is central to promoting health and well-being among First Nations people. System-wide recognition that ceremony, language and reconnecting people with themselves, the past, family, community and land
2. **Connected:** strong connections are the basis for holistic and integrated services and supports. Healthy family, community and systems are build on strong and lasting relationships. These connections exist between Indigenous people, the land, and their culture, as well as relationships between various sectors and jurisdictions responsible for care delivery
3. **Holistic supports:** services and supports that are holistic consider all potential factors contributing to well-being (e.g., physical, spiritual, mental, cultural, emotional, and social) over the lifespan, and seek to achieve balance within and across these areas
4. **Community-Focused:** adopting a community focused lens will help to both ensure that diversity within and across communities is respected, and enhance overall system responsiveness to factors that make each community unique

5. Balances: inclusion of both Indigenous and Western forms of evidence and approaches to all aspects of care (e.g., service delivery, administration, planning and evaluation) demonstrates respect and balance. It is also important to maintain awareness that each is informed by unique assumptions about health and well-being and unique worldview
6. Culturally Competent: cultural competence requires that service provider both on and off reserve are aware of their own worldview and attitudes towards cultural differences; and include both knowledge of, and openness to, the cultural realities and environments of the clients they see. To achieve this, it is also necessary for Indigenous knowledge to be translated into current realities to meaningfully inform and guide direction and delivery of health services and supports on an ongoing basis
7. Culturally Safe: cultural safety extends beyond cultural awareness and sensitivity within services and includes reflecting upon cultural, historical, and structural differences and power relationship within the care that is provided. It involves a process of ongoing self-reflection and organization both for service providers and the system as a whole to respond effectively to First nations people (p. 205/206).

Qwul'sih'yah'maht and Kundoqk (2015) talk about anti-oppressive practice within child welfare which makes one gaze at the structures that surround and impact child welfare. In this way it moves the focus away from individual 'failings' or challenges and moves one to look at the broader societal and historical impacts that cause and/or influence individual/familial challenges. These structures include poverty, criminal justice and the various aspects within systems created with a western worldview that carry power over professionalism, linear approaches/thinking and analysis. They encourage a practice that is in line with Indigenous worldview which requires engaging the heart.

Qwul'sih'ya'maht and Kundoqk (2015) propose creating policies that hold the spirit of past, pre-contact, and social/political structures that insure children are protected. They suggest doing this we have to look at creating systems/legislation/practices that holds value and strength for the next seven generations (p. 39). Within their chapter they address problems when assessing risk from a white, ableist, middle class perspective, and suggest the following aspects should be included when creating policy/legislation that is more reflective of Indigenous worldview:

- ability to establish and maintain an empathic connection with parent(s), children, and extended family members
- ability to manage your internal process, ie, emotional reactivity to clients, especially blame and shame directed at mothers
- ability to convey information in a non-threatening way
- ability to validate client perspectives
- willingness to validate client skepticism about agency and worker' knowledge of cultural, class and other biases held by the worker and the agency (p167).

The Interviewees in this thesis brought forward many points, which are supported in research and literature, that are vital to incorporate into child welfare legislation, policy, and practice.

When assessing risk, the systemic, cultural and personal traumas of individuals needs to be seen, discussed, and explored as to how they affect individuals' behaviours. Assessing risk or the situation is something social workers do, as individuals and as a team, from the beginning to end of involvement. What has arisen within the interviews, which is supported within literature, is that social workers must have a mind shift or shifting perspective to encompass Indigenous values and beliefs to understand what connections, strengths, residency and traumas families have experienced and how this shows up within their life. These experiences will be different than the social worker's, especially if they are a white social worker. With this knowledge the risk of re-traumatizing people and families is mitigated. The more social workers can focus on understanding individuals and supporting their healing in a transparent, collaborative, and Indigenous focused way, the deeper healing experienced can transform traumas into gifts, resilience, and behaviours that mitigate risk. This transformation offers a living example to children, community members and all humanity of the possibilities one can achieve. It cultivates hopefulness that despite traumatic experiences one can transcend to well-being. Within an Indigenous model of

practice this transformation is circular and reciprocal, with the social worker obtaining wellness also.

CHAPTER THREE ETHICS

Ethics is vital within all aspects of walking a path that is mindful to mitigating harm to others or self. Ethics could be viewed as very personal with roots in a person's worldview, beliefs, and values. It is due to this that within certain practices, organizations, or people coming together that ethics are discussed and written into practice guidelines. Ethics is a way to ensure anti-oppressive practice is upheld. When working with vulnerable people, ethics mitigates further harms being done. Due to ethics reflecting and affecting the 'group' it is crucial the ethical guidelines are created by those they will affect.

In 1999 the Mi'kmaq Grand Council created an ethics committee called the Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch (MEW); this committee is committed to protecting cultural knowledge and integrity. They created principles and protocols that guarantee community ownership of research and studies, the guidelines and principles incorporate Mi'kmaq epistemologies into practice. These include: 1) that communities are made aware of the benefits and challenges of the proposed research, funding sources and cost of the research; 2) that participants are treated fairly and as equals to the researcher; and 3) that research is reviewed by the participants and the Ethics Watch before being accepted (Mi'kmaq Ethics, 2017).

The Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch grew out of the colonial history that Indigenous Peoples are one of the most studied peoples on the planet (Kovach, 2009). Research was predominantly carried out by non-Indigenous people, and often misrepresented community values and beliefs. Much of the research collected was used as colonial tools to assimilate and annihilate First Peoples of Turtle Island by creating oppressive policy, laws, and systems from false analysis of research data

(Absolon and Willett, 2004). Baskin (2005) believes that historically research on Indigenous peoples was out of context and focused on problems seen by outside eyes that were looking through a colonizing, eurocentric lens. She claims the strengths within community could not be seen through this lens. Baskin (2005) states that past research ‘describes an approach which assumes that western ideas about the most fundamental things are the only rational ideas, and the only ideas which can make sense of the world, of reality, of social life and of human beings’ (p. 56, in Baskin, 2005, p. 173).

I was required to complete the Mi’kmaq Ethics Watch (MEW) extensive application to ensure my research followed their guidelines. Following the first round of considerations the MEW asked me to obtain a support letter from Maw-Kleyu’kik Knijannaq Initiative. (See Appendix B for their support letter). They also wanted to know if my project was funded and how the data will be used in the future. MEW wanted me to clarify the role of the Mi’kmaq community and if a community invited the research. MEW wondered how I would address language and cultural barriers because I do not speak Mi’kmaq. I was asked to clarify how I would address the confidentiality of workers, but also the families. Lastly, MEW suggested that participants not only read transcripts but have input related to the results to ensure confidentiality. (See Appendix A for Mi’kmaw Ethics Watch approval).

Following the MEW approval I completed, submitted, and received approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics to conduct my research. In order to recruit the participants, I wrote an email to the Executives of MFCS explaining my research, sharing the flyer, and asking for approval to send emails to staff in search of participants. The Executive Director, Ms. Johnson, emailed back their approval. (See Appendix C for Agency approval.)

The participants were made aware of the goal of the research, their role, the Thanksgiving Ceremony, how the material will get used and distributed. I explained the informed consent to ensure they understood the process. For example, I told them how they could provide feedback, asked if they wanted to remain anonymous and asked if I had permission to record our interviews. I also explained that I would provide the transcriptions to them to review, add, delete and/or edit.

Participants were given the informed consent forms, which were signed by both the participant and me. (See Appendix D for informed consent) Initially all the participants wanted to use their names, however, due to some unforeseen events, several participants expressed the desire to remain anonymous. Following discussions with the participants, the decision was made for all participants to be anonymous. The participants were also given the option to choose a pseudonym, or if they preferred, I would assign pseudonyms. The alias names were left up to me. I chose to use the six directions - west, south, east, north, sky, earth. I used the seventh direction, heart, to discuss and share the analysis. The directions were applied to participants in the order in which the interviews took place.

Recruiting participants for this research was done via word of mouth and email. I sought participants who are social workers with experiences in assessing risk and who have been part of the decision-making process regarding what actions will be requested of people in order to mitigate the risk. I sent out a general email to all Mi'kmaq social workers within MFCS. Emails were also sent to several social workers who work outside of MFCS. As people participated, I asked them to pass the word onto others.

Interviewing six individuals was manageable, especially during the pandemic. There was no direct or monetary compensation for participation. Following the research, I will do a Thanksgiving Ceremony with/without participants present. In alignment with Indigenous values/beliefs the Thanksgiving would reflect Give Away practices. I hired a stained-glass artist to make a feather in each colour for the participants. I took sheep's wool to a processing mill for throw blankets. I will gift items that are used within various ceremonies, such as tobacco, fabric, shawls etc. As mentioned above, within the research process I continually offered tobacco to the earth and alter in Thanks Giving in asking for guidance, information and participation.

If a participant(s) decided to withdraw from the research it would have been their choice to have their data included in my research or not. Participant(s) who withdraw would have been recognized at the Thanksgiving Ceremony, however no one withdrew from this research.

Allan (2017) refers to researchers as gatherers of knowledge. For me this encompasses many of the Indigenous ethical protocols. When I hear the word gatherer, I think of someone in relationship with what is being picked up, carried and used. From an Indigenous worldview, to be in relationship means to have reciprocity, transparency, and accountability. It encompasses ongoing critical reflexivity and self-reflection so, in this sense, ethical practice is a living Being that is constantly in relationship with the research process. My belief is that with this aliveness ethics will always be moving to deeper, more meaningful and connected levels so that the potential of engaging in unethical research is decreased or eliminated.

Reflexivity in action (Daley, 2010) speaks of recognizing power relationships throughout the process. The practice of reflexivity threaded through all that I read, did and wrote within this research. I paid attention to the experiences that I found difficult and challenging and

deconstructed them for their meaning in regard to my personal healing and in understanding power dynamics. Indigenous research acknowledges, the subjectivity of the researcher and the spaces or gaps between the research and participants is flexible and continually changing. Engaging in reflexivity for this research caused me to go deeper with 'walking the talk' of seeking to be an ally.

As a white settler-ally researcher, within an Indigenous community, there are deep ethical considerations. Engaging with and obtaining approval from the Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch (MEW) was vital for my research process. Seeking and obtaining approval from MEW was quite stressful. It deeply revealed the realities that I am seeking to complete this research to obtain my MSW degree. I am benefiting from this research. This took reflexion and reflection to a place of feeling. Feelings of what would happen if the MEW rejected my application, which I was informed by several this is not uncommon. Due to the experience mingling with my emotions I was taken to a deeper level of understanding, empathy, and humility regarding why it is so important within the research process to continually be reflective, transparent and reflexive. Especially if a non-Indigenous researcher.

Also, having conversations with my Spiritual supports, who help me deconstruct, understand, and shift my westernized perspectives, as part of the process was critically important. I also engaged in many conversations with my supervisor, who was also completing her Masters. The process included continually engaging in a reflective practice, consulting with Elders and Prayers within the Sweat Lodge ensured that ethically I am on a good path. Along the way I laid down tobacco and made Prayer Ties as a constant reminder of my commitment to ethical research. At

the end of my research, I will make an offering to participate in a Give Away Ceremony to acknowledge my gratitude for this journey and all that it has taught me.

METHODOLOGY

Indigenous methodology holds up the wisdom and validity of Indigenous epistemology, ontology, and axiology without overlaying Indigenous worldview and values onto western ways of knowing and doing. It is rooted in building relationships, hearing the story of the interviewee, and working collaboratively, with those the research will affect, to reveal, explore and create what is important for them. Wilson (2001) talks about how, within Indigenous methodologies, relationship is the most important aspect of reality. To name a few, Indigenous relationship is to all life - human, animal, earth, and elements, etc. Gosek (2017) talks of five principles within Indigenous methodology. They are: 1. the need to be political; 2. the importance of relational bonds which work to benefit communities; 3. the acknowledgement of the Spiritual; 4. the importance of language; and 5. the use of storytelling as being integral to the process (p. 82). As a researcher, the final outcomes is not more important than the relationships with the interviewees, the research subject, information gathered and explored. The researchers' relationship with the entire process and how it has impacted themselves and others is core to Indigenous methodology.

Indigenous methodology encompasses community-engagement and permissions to discuss what is needed for the community and its members. The information and analysis gathered from this research will affect the Mi'kmaq communities of Mi'kma'ki. It is also research for the child welfare systems of Nova Scotia. This includes Mi'kmaq Family & Children Services (MFCS) and the Department of Community Services (DCS). Currently in Mi'kma'ki, MFCS is mandated to work only with Mi'kmaq peoples who reside on reserve. Those who reside off-reserve receive child welfare services by DCS. The voices of the interviewees offer important aspects to value,

and consider when working with all Indigenous peoples and for communities that are visioning and working toward creating their own child welfare system.

My initial step in exploring what Mi'kmaq communities seek for child welfare reform was to meet with a member of the Maw-Kleyu'kik Knijannaq Initiate to discuss what questions and/or activities they would have interest in being researched. I was given their action plan with the encouragement that whatever I chose to research within that plan would be helpful. They had just completed their action plan and were looking to formulate small working groups to research each area to create a Mi'kmaq Child Welfare Act, including policies and guidelines, within five years. After reviewing the document, I choose to research assessing and mitigating risk. When a child welfare agency gets involved with a family, from the first call to termination of involvement, assessing and mitigating risk is a continual practice.

There is no hypothesis regarding assessing and mitigating risk within this study. I used open ended questions, and at times, when necessary, I used prompting questions. Indigenous methodology allows for subjective perspectives to be present, which for this research, showed the interviewee's social location, their values and beliefs. Conducting the interviews using an Indigenous methodology helped me to gain insights into what the interviewees believe is taken for granted, what influences, and contributes to assessing risk. This methodology, with open ended questions, revealed what each interviewee deemed as appropriate action steps needed in mitigating the risk(s). Open ended questions supported this research because the complexities involved when trying to articulate how to assess risk from a Mi'kmaq perspective. The opinions or agenda of the researcher is minimized, and the openness allows for what is needed to be shared to

happen. Indigenous methodology also honours the practices of resistance to eurocentric approaches with the heart of 'holding up' other ways of knowing and practicing (Wilson, 2001).

The discussions and sharing that unfolded from this research focused on asking participants their perspectives and experiences regarding what they see within current risk assessment, how might it look from a Mi'kmaq perspective and what are benefits to community for having a Mi'kmaq informed risk assessment.

Wilson (2008) speaks of relational accountability being part of Indigenous methodology. The research analysis and outcome were not placed above the process of developing relationships. Wilson (2008) speaks of relationship being the foundation of Indigenous epistemology. He goes on to describe that through an accountable relationship the eurocentric qualities of what is valued, worthy, useful, and even ethical become insignificant. Through an accountable relationship that is reciprocal, ethical practices are holistically engrained within it. The research is for the community and what they deem necessary, thus value and worthiness naturally arise. Again, the micro community is the Mi'kmaq peoples of Mi'kma'ki and the macro community is the two child welfare agencies within this Territory - MFCS and DCS. Through Indigenous research methodology, research becomes a living Being; like the breath, which is life giving and a process of giving and receiving.

As a non-Indigenous researcher, I constantly drew on what Rowe et al. (2015) call multidimensional reflexivity. The authors challenge and remind non-Indigenous researchers to reflect on their experiences while conducting research so that eurocentric concepts and agendas do not overlay Indigenous research. Multidimensional reflexivity spoke to me about asking questions regarding my relationship to personal, performative, epistemic and textual contexts

(p. 304). This involved asking myself questions such as what is the relationship of my personal power, privilege, and whiteness on the relationship? How do my emotional responses impact the production of knowledge? Am I unconsciously perpetuating epistemological racism by privileging a critical lens over an Indigenous lens? And does the knowledge produced seek to perpetuate or challenge the dominant knowledge/power relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people? (Rowe et al. 2015, p. 304).

Regan (2006) stresses the 'non-negotiable' fact that if real reconciliation is to occur and if a white person strives to be a genuine ally, they must look at how white Canada, with colonial systems, have been, and continue to be, 'perpetrators of violence' (p. 274). There will be an internal struggle when reflecting on being a settler. Regan (2006) writes settlers need to be unsettled in mind, body, emotions, and spirit so that we can actively build a new relationship as ally and stop tolerating systems that perpetuate violence. She notes settlers have benefited from these injustices and 'our willingness to negotiate is mediated by our willful ignorance - our selective denial of those aspects of our relationship that truly threaten our privilege and power - the colonial status quo' (p. 31).

METHODS

The method within this research is storytelling. Storytelling allows participants to share their experiences in an open and flowing way, that can also carry a deep wisdom beyond a sharing of one's experiences. Storytelling traditionally was, and still is, a teaching tool. As such, the stories that are told in research will be teaching tools too (Thomas, 2015). Stories bring the emotional, Spiritual, and physical realms to the relationship. They can 'work' on a person's healing and understanding long after the story has been told. Storytelling has the potential to fill in gaps in history (Thomas, 2015). Stories can help us to understand events, understand what has been constructed, and help us to organize events and chaos. Telling stories, our experiences, especially in relationship with another, can help to transform the story and potentially heal from wounding experiences (Mehl-Madrona, 2005). Gosek (2017) notes,

we are also empowered by the natural power in stories with their ability to disrupt the colonial dialogue and connect us to the wisdom of our ancestors and to our Spirituality. Understanding that our epistemology and cosmology is contained in the stories, it follows that our methodologies and research methods must reflect this knowledge (p. 81).

Turtle Island history is very skewed by eurocentric and colonial propaganda. The basis of what is truth is difficult to discern and storytelling can fill in historical gaps. Thomas (2015) states "as stories continue to be told we continue to build the strength and capacity to continue our resistance to colonization and assimilation" (p. 253). These counter stories will present a

different story when assessing and mitigating risk from a Mi'kmaq perspective. Using story gathering as a method heightened the necessity for the researcher to listen deeply and with an open heart and open mind. Melh-Madrona (2005) believes 'listening resembles praying, with similar brain states accompanying each' (p. 20). In this way valuable information was gathered regarding Mi'kmaq perspective on assessing and mitigating risk and at the same time provided space for resistance and counter ways of knowing and doing to unfold.

Baskin (2005) talks about moving away from western models of research by embracing and taking control of the research process using tools such as story gathering that reflect Indigenous values and beliefs. She writes that Indigenous research, which involves storytelling, needs to contribute to decolonization and self-determination. Storytelling or Indigenous research must also include community participation, reciprocal relationship and include the possibility of learning and healing (p. 174). Baskin (2005) notes that storytelling, particularly the storytelling circle, offers a space for creativity which allows for the opportunity for several possible outcomes or solutions to be explored. Storytelling has been part of Indigenous culture for millennia, involving both speaker and listener. Baskin (2005) notes, 'without storytellers and listeners there would be no culture...oral culture is not fiction these are not made up stories...they are the primary tools for teaching culture, values, and spirituality...which become the collective memory of a community' (p. 181).

I used open ended question to collect my storytelling data. Following a review of the whys and hows of this research, I asked participants to share their experiences, thoughts, feelings, critiques, and suggestions. They were asked the following: [from your perspective, as a social worker who has been mandated to follow provincial risk assessment processes]:

- What do you believe the concerns, challenges and/or strengths of the current risk assessment are when you are assessing the risk of Mi'kmaq children and youth?
- From your knowledge of Mi'kmaq ways of knowing and being, what do you think Mi'kmaq risk assessment would/could/should look like?
- Is risk assessment the right term for this work or are there other words that best describe the work that we do from your knowledge of Mi'kmaq ways of knowing and being?
- What are the opportunities a Mi'kmaq risk assessment could offer Mi'kmaq communities?

Initially I imagined the interviews to be two hours long. However, prior to beginning the interviews Covid 19 lock downs occurred. Participants wanted to proceed so we moved to phone interviews. This was not as ideal as in person, however, it flowed smoothly. As a researcher I practiced grounding and deep listening during the interviews, and I strove to make my questioning minimal and allow an organic flow - what naturally arises. The goal was to let go of any agenda and/or expectations and to just let what comes unfold. Thomas (2015) states this ensures the researcher's agenda does not drive the research and the researcher is open to what the outcome or results will be. I didn't want to insert my thoughts and/or perspectives into the conversations. I feel this goal was accomplished; however, I was aware of the moments when I wanted to jump in with my own thoughts and feelings on the topic. There were points within several of the interviews where it felt more like a conversation than an interview.

Prior to the interviews I was quite nervous. I love connecting to others in person and feeling into the energies that are created from the interactions. This was challenged by having the interviews over the phone. I believe that due to knowing each of the interviewees, it did not take long

to feel comfortable, and the interview began to unfold. I became acutely aware that I am passionate and committed to unpacking the impacts of colonization on the construction of systems and how this has led to the false beliefs that there is only one way of knowing and doing. It was challenging to not insert my thoughts and beliefs. It was at these times the interviews felt more like a conversation. Thankfully, I quickly recognized this and moved back into listening and interviewing. This really brought to the forefront how white people, me, can speak freely about concerns, issues, progressions and possibilities that affect Indigenous Peoples. It is crucial that white people step back and make space for Indigenous people (or people of colour and marginalized people) to build and create systems, policies, and practices for themselves. The role of a white person is to listen, support and take guidance from the people who will be affected by the topic, project, creation of laws/legislations. And, to know that Indigenous people know what they need.

Indigenous methodology is reflective of western qualitative research. There is a lot written regarding qualitative research as a theory, however, it is still an unfolding understanding of how to analyze qualitative research (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), with several options arising. One analytical practice is a thematic approach, which I used in analyzing the information gathered from this research. This is an overlay of western analytic practice with Indigenous methodology. Indigenous methodology is becoming more widely used within academia and I have no doubt that Indigenous scholars will be developing culturally appropriate and sensitive approaches to analysis. Kovach (2009) notes that 'if a researcher chooses to use an Indigenous methodological framework, the methods chosen should make sense from an Indigenous knowledges perspective' (p. 125).

Due to Covid 19 restrictions, and the move to phone interviews, the consent forms were emailed to participants. These were reviewed together at the beginning of the interview, with copies being left in their work mailbox in a sealed envelope. After the interviewees signed the consent form, they left it in a sealed envelope in my work mailbox. Following discussions and participants being informed that the recording was to assist me in getting their words correct while transcribing, each agreed to be recorded. Some, when first being asked to be recorded, were hesitant, until learning the only purpose of the recording was to help my memory in the transcribing process. The interviews were transcribed, which was a long and interesting process. It is amazing to hear speech patterns and thought processes. The transcribed interviews were emailed to each participant. It was explained again they had full control over what is included and/or excluded from the research. They were offered a 30-day timeframe to respond. They were encouraged to reach out if they had questions, to chat and/or clarify anything. Some did respond and others did not. No-one asked for the interview information to be changed or deleted.

ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is often seen with narrative data collection which is like storytelling. The focus of thematic analysis is on what is being said instead of how it is said, to whom and for what purpose (Riessman, 2007). Thematic analysis looks for identifying patterns of what is said and puts these into groupings. This research engaged with Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6 phase framework for thematic analysis. These include 1) become familiar with the data; 2) generate initial codes; 3) search for themes; 4) review themes; 5) define themes; 6) write up (in Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 334). These phases organize the researcher to read and reread the transcripts multiple times, recording initial impressions into small chunks, looking for shared themes between participants and noting what seems significant, interesting, and unique.

Analyzing the information gathered involved transcribing the taped interviews and looking for key themes. The themes were found with repeated words and concepts, unique ideas, surprises, and things the participants emphasized. The themes were divided and organized into groups that reflect information regarding the current approach, a Mi'kmaq informed approach, and the benefits of Mi'kmaq assessment. The initial idea was that due to the questions being theme based the analysis (stories) might naturally fall into those themes. I looked for relationships and connections between the information gathered under each question and explored what is working, not working and what can be added. The goal of this research was to discover new information and ideas on assessing and mitigating risk through a Mi'kmaq lens.

Once I completed the interviews and the transcripts were reviewed by the participants, each interview was organized by themes and then I looked for the common themes amongst them. To find the themes I took each transcription and highlighted what seemed to be the important points

for each interviewee. Then I made lists in bullet form, under each interviewee, of what the themes were. I then looked at, and reflected on, each list and pulled out the common threads within words and ideas. I looked for what was unique within the interviews and what the interviewees emphasized. Then I took a clean page and made a list of the themes/threads that were seen in each interviewee's responses. At this point I stopped identifying the material with the interviewee. The final list was the predominate themes from the interviews. It was like having a basket of ideas. It amazed me that each interview was very different in how interviewees took up the questions, reflected on them, and asked questions about them, however, the diversity of what they saw as core aspects to consider when assessing risk from a Mi'kmaq perspective were very similar. When asked about language North stated 'the family may not have the ability to do something, where as a worker walking in may be thinking you should have had the ability to do that. It is easy to walk in having a full-time job, making money, the ability to run to the grocery store whenever I can, ummmm, some families might not have transportation, those abilities.' When South was asked about language she said 'to look in a positive way we are looking at your home, your children, you, your family supports, your community resources, ummmmm, so something to do with well-being'. Considering the amount of experience of the interviewees, this speaks to the overdue need for child welfare to consider looking through a lens that is more in tune, appropriate, and holds respect for the people involved with the child welfare system.

Recognizing the power of the interviewee's words, I paraphrased the interviews around the identified themes. This was a challenge because I wanted to keep them anonymous, including gender identity, have a flow for the reader, and yet not dilute the power of what they said. The paraphrased document was emailed to the participants for their feedback. Again, it was

suggested they return them within 30 days, with some replying and others not. Again, no changes or deletions were requested.

SELF-CARE

Whether it is in our work, education, recreational activities etc., it is extremely important to remember self-care. Within our busy lives it is easy to forget to stop and consider how we are doing, how what we are doing is impacting us, and how can we make space for ourselves. Within our experiences there are waves of calm and stress, and it is important to explore and do what creates places of peace within.

Being mindful of my self-care was integrated into the research process. Hearing other's wounds, joys, sorrows and celebrations can trigger researchers' wounds, ethics and ways of knowing and doing (Thomas, 2015). The research topic stirred up in interviewees how Indigenous peoples have been invisible, judged, managed, and silenced in the child welfare system, not only in the past but also currently. Completing a master's program is very intense and the topic and context stirred a lot within myself.

I gave space to my processing during the research by doing a lot of reflecting, critical reflexing and talking with Spiritual Elders and mentors. My personal challenges included the reality of my being white and the history of white people working with Indigenous peoples within child welfare. In viewing life as a healing journey, the process also stirred up wounds of being silenced, judged and invisible. I am deeply grateful for being able to live on a farm in rural Mi'kma'ki. The elements, nature, wild animals, domestic and farm animals are very present, which kept me grounded, connected, and when feeling a spiral to disconnection showed me what is real - relationship and connection to all of life.

CHALLENGES

I felt the research questions were a challenge. It became clear that the topic of how to assess and mitigate risk from a Mi'kmaq perspective has more to it before an assessment tool can be created. The need to develop different assessment skills is rooted in going deeper to understand cultural diversity, cultural competency and honouring what the Mi'kmaq would like identified as their Mi'kmaq lens. As several of the interviewees pointed out the current tool itself is not too bad. Looking at the children involved, considering their ages, gifts, and challenges; looking at the concerns and how chronic they are; looking at the strengths and challenges of the parents/caregivers; considering what the environment is like and what the families supports are; are very valid points to consider. What became apparent was the roots of assessing risk from an Indigenous perspective needs to reflect Indigenous knowledge, values, and beliefs. At times within the interviews, it was a challenge to express what this means, how to determine what subtle aspects need to be considered and practiced in the risk assessment process. It became clear it is not in the forefront to create a tool to use but to first uphold Indigenous worldview, beliefs, and values that are informed by understanding history and how it has violated these beliefs and values.

As Earth shared, 'their people were doing fine before colonizers arrived. Life was connected and interconnected to all Beings'. The violations and genocide of Indigenous Peoples shook and disrupted intrinsic beliefs and values. The literature review reviewed how trauma can sever ties with oneself and all living Beings. Social Workers need to understand the impacts of colonization, genocide, systemic racism, the subtleness of oppressive language/action from the past and how they still are present today. This will take them to a deeper understanding, a place of compassion, and empathy so that when looking at the safety of a child(ren) and what action steps are

needed by their caregivers to ensure safety, a circular understanding is used. This impacts decision making in that it creates a broader, more connected, less egocentric/personal ground for seeing a bigger picture and accepting that what we are seeing may not align with what we've experienced — and that is ok. Achieving a broader/deeper understanding, when looking through an Indigenous lens, social workers can see the challenges and solutions differently. The issues are seen in a broader manner with solutions that uphold connection, reciprocity, reflection, transparency, with the goal of supporting people and families to heal and obtain wellness. Going deeper can open the consciousness to see solutions. By looking at what was working prior to contact is a guide to current practice. This does not mean being non-progressive. It means looking at the essence of political, judicial, familial, community, cultural and personal practise and having that thread through the present of those. As Sky says it is Prayer - Spiritual. Sky shared,

my adopted grandfather, would say if christ were alive right here he would be Sweating with us. He would be in our Lodge. Because he would recognize it is a wonderful place to pray. Plain and simple. Plain and simple. And that is what it was in childrearing, the Sweat, Fasting, the Rain-dances and Dances just a pure and simple way. At the end of the day that is what it is all about --- prayer. You know, I think we need to recognize that. Let's start talking about it openly. Let's just talk about it. And that is where our interactions come with one another. It is through the dignity of communication. And then make this full circle round and then maybe we could have a proper risk assessment.

Spirit is not a separate thing, practice, or philosophy. It threads through everything and inspires and creates connection, transparency, interconnection, reciprocity, and humility. When recognizing and honouring Spirit, people can potentially heal and transform wounds that have negatively impacted their lives. Healing leads to never having future child welfare involvement.

Experiencing a block was a huge challenge. In hindsight, I should have applied to take a leave from the program. The research process really heightened my fears of being seen and

heard as authentic because I am white and writing about Indigenous issues. I want to be an ally but feared being judged. But I also did not want to be defensive. This resulted in me needing an extension to complete the program. I needed to allow myself the space to process, to rebalance myself and to deeply reflect on the personal challenges as well as being a white researcher within an Indigenous community. While homeschooling I used a curriculum that strove to education the whole child and was laid out so that curriculum was taught to balance the mind, body, emotions and Spirit. I learned that feeding each of these aspects within myself lead to feeling well, energized, grounded and at peace. The intensity of the academic process largely engages the mind, and this imbalance was felt deeply. The commitment to the journey of learning, going deeper, and personal wellness, that can radiate outward to support others, has made me realize the extended time and the unbalanced feelings gave space, time, and opportunity to ensure I was creating and participating in this research/thesis in a good way.

The second part of this research information gathering could be a practice in reclaiming. Reclaiming and honouring diversity within the population yet seeking to identify and reclaim the undercurrent of how Mi'kmaq Peoples want to define risk and mitigate that risk. An honouring of their journey within colonization, its effects on them and what has arisen from an empowered way from this journey. The information collected may provide insights into what could be the practical steppingstones in creating Mi'kmaq legislation, influenced by Mi'kmaq epistemology and experiences, and providing the roots for Mi'kmaq practice within child welfare.

Indigenous methodology includes using reflexivity to help mitigate subjective influences. This will be important for myself to practice. There are some suggestions in the literature that participants should also practice reflexivity in seeing how their values, beliefs, experiences, and

perspectives influence their responses (Baskin, 2004, Wilson, 2008). I believe for this research, due to it being the beginnings of further research in creating an Indigenous Child Welfare Act, it is beneficial to hear, record and make links between the participants lived experiences and views regarding assessing risk and what to consider when assessing through an Indigenous lens (Lester, 1999, p. 4).

CHAPTER FOUR

INTERVIEWS

Developing the interview questions for my thesis was quite challenging. This was because assessing risk from a Mi'kmaq perspective is very specific but also abstract and layered. It is layered because creating systems that are Indigenous and hold up decolonizing methods is a living practice. Across the country creating a new approach to risk assessment is a new phenomenon. This work entails creating, reclaiming, and transforming the current processes. Despite what I perceived as a challenge, the Interviewees reflected deeply on the overall essence of the thesis title and provided valuable data to consider when assessing risk. Initially I had thought of interviewing Indigenous, non-Indigenous social workers and Elders. In consultation with my advisor, Dr. Robina Thomas, I realized this was too many interviews for a Master's thesis. I realized that focusing on one group at a time could obtain deeper and clearer information. It also made the entire thesis stay within the scope of the research and research questions, be manageable, and be within reasonable timelines for completion. I chose Mi'kmaq social workers as the starting point due to their 'inside' knowledge and experiences as Mi'kmaq people and as social workers. In reflecting on this question, it arose that if I started with non-Indigneou social workers the valid criticisms would be that non-Indigenous social worker's voices are being held up first. If I started with Elders the criticisms could be that they may not have the specific experience with assessing risk within a child protection organizational context.

For this research I chose to interview six Mi'kmaq social workers who had experience in child welfare. Five of them work within MFCS and one within the community. An invitation flyer was emailed to all Mi'kmaq social workers that I knew had worked in a protection unit of

child welfare at some point in their career. Those who responded with interest were sent the summary of what the research was about. The average age of the interviewees is 47 years. The average years of experience as a social worker for the interviewees is 19 years. As mentioned above, the interviews occurred via phone due to covid 19 restrictions and were on average one hour in length.

As mentioned above, the interviewees wanted to be anonymous and wanted me to provide pseudonyms for each of them. After much reflection I realized that the six interviews and analysis coincide with the seven directions. The Sioux Nation has teachings about the seven directions which represent: East, South, West, North, Sky, Earth, and Spirit (Heart - self). I decided to use the six of the seven directions as pseudonyms for the interviewees in the order they were interviewed. I feel having analysis represented by Heart is very synchronistic. The goal of analysis is to obtain a better understanding of the research so that any subsequent actions can reflect the data collected and provide a more conscious understanding for what was heard. The Spirit allows one to look inward and reflect on how the ancestors would develop, transform, and improve on creating a new process for risk assessment. For me it marks the importance of how the political is personal and the personal is political. The system will change when the individuals within it evolve/change. Individuals will change when they become conscious of the negative impacts of systems on people(s). It is necessary for white people to recognize the inherent privilege within colonial systems and work toward personally letting go of the power this privilege gives and collectively collaborating to shift to not tolerating any systems that are not equitable. Regan (2006) states, 'unsettling the settler within requires non-Indigenous people to take a more critical, self-reflective, anti-oppressive, anti-racist approach to decolonization, by trans-

forming relationships to address violence, not simply resolving disputes within existing colonial structure' (p. 4).

EAST

East thinks the social worker's culture does not matter as anyone in the field of social work has the best interest of the people they are working with. But they do feel there needs to be more valid cultural sensitivity training. They stated that training needs to educate non-Indigenous workers on why there is so much mistrust in non-Indigenous people, as social workers and with MFCS, and to let them know it is not necessarily a personal thing. They shared, 'it doesn't matter if you are Aboriginal or not, you are the face of MFCS, they are the face of mistrust. Non-Indigenous people need to understand where that mistrust comes from and really take a hold of what really happened'. They stress it is vital that social workers take hold of the historical background and gives an example from Sipekne'katik. They note few people speak Mi'kmaq within the community because Sipekne'katik was the closest community to the residential school and the church also had a day school. They expand by sharing when kids tried to run away, they were not far from home and were found/returned to school quicker. Whereas kids from Eskasoni 'who escaped could take them days to get them back, maybe even weeks. All this history is so important to know.

East believes assessments won't work unless they are built by Mi'kmaq people. She said families know what works for themselves, so assessments should be created by those who have used them, been involved with them, and who knows what works. Social workers are not the experts on a family. The family knows who they are, what they need, what works for them and what supports they have, and need. They shared, 'we [agency social workers] say at Family Group Conferencing (FGC) all the time we are not the experts on your family, you are, you know

what you need, you know what help you need, you know what kind of support you need and we don't have the answers as social workers or as an agency'.

East notes that in social work school we are taught to not take gifts, however, in a Mi'kmaq home you may be offered food or drink and it is impolite not to take it. They explain this offering is not a gift, it is a cultural practice. Offering food is so important that families will share their last piece of bread or milk or tea. They shared, 'if you have a Mi'kmaq person offering something like that in their house and you are a social worker, especially if you are not Indigenous, and if you accept it, you are in. It is going to break down so many walls.' By 'not accepting the offering, walls can go up' and the family questions if the social worker thinks they are 'too good' for the offering.

East stresses it is important to know the families and how chaotic they can be. This can be due to 4-5 generations of people living in one house. They said people in community know who always has food and people will stop in that home for soup and/or luski. East shared 'it is normal for us and it is normal if you go into someone's house and there is someone sleeping on the couch, someone on the floor with a blanket and a pillow, or a few in one bed'. They said this is not 'unnatural' for people in community. East has known workers who react to seeing clothes all over the floor because there is no dresser and East questions, does not having a dresser have anything to do with protection issues. They share in many homes it is a choice between buying the dresser for the clothes to go in it or buying food. They suggest that social workers, with middle/upper class western beliefs on how a family home should be, to 'check those beliefs at the door'. East stated, 'does that [clothes on the floor] have anything to do with protection issues? No, who

cares, right, now they are imposing their own values and beliefs onto how the family should be living. How a Mi'kmaq person should be raising their kids'.

East talks about many kids, especially not long ago, having to leave community because family and friends couldn't take them in because they had a criminal record. They explained that families are faced with having to kick the person with the criminal record out or not being able to take the kids. They advised that for Mi'kmaq families this is huge - to have to choose between family members - 'you got to either kick that person out or you got to bring the kids in or vice versa. And for a Mi'kmaq family this decision is huge. You are making them choose between family'. Many homes have a family member with a conviction, partially due to systemic racism, and the over representation of Indigenous peoples in the criminal justice system. Many families do not see it as a huge issue because they see the huge picture around the act, which could speak to someone robbing to put food on the table and/or roof over heads. East stresses that these beliefs or questionings of the system are not linked to misunderstanding or judgements of leaving children at risk. She believes there are some things, some situations that we can set aside, by looking at the big picture with understanding and compassion. They note it does not get done due to falling into the eurocentric way of doing things - just because it has always been done that way. They note that in protection the rules seem more strict and rigid than in other departments. For example, children get placed back home or in family homes once they move into the permanent care of the agency. East questions if this has anything to do with their being an Indigenous supervisor upstairs [permanent care unit] and not one downstairs [protection unit]. They state we are working with a system that does not understand our Mi'kmaq ways of knowing. They shared,

right from the get go it was told you guys are doing it wrong this is how you are supposed to do it...this is how you're supposed to raise your kids...right from first contact it was no this is not how things are supposed to be and it has been pretty much the mainstream the whole time.

East is excited and hopeful for the new Mi'kmaq legislation that is being worked on. It will be our 'own Mi'kmaq law for our kids'. Presently no one asks the family or parents how they grew up, what are their beliefs, what did they do in the past? From what East has seen, ideas that come from families or from the typical decisions are struck down, as no this isn't happening and this is the way you are going to do it. East talks about asking Grandmothers and shares that Mi'kmaq culture is surrounded by women. East expands to share that Mi'kmaq structures are matriarchal, but grandmothers are not consulted in child protection decisions. They comment that their people are following a law that nobody even asked if it would work for us. East finds this disheartening because no one asked what would work for the Mi'kmaq people, they were just told this is what is going to happen, this is what is right for you, and you are going to do it. East notes that one of their past supervisors said the worse thing we can create is 'garbage bag' kids. Kids who have their belongings in garbage bags and move from home to home, but then when they turn 18, they go back home or to the street. East notes the kids have been taken from their family so they don't understand or believe what the issues are and have their parents on a bit of a pedestal, but then return home and the same issues are present.

East is hopeful that there are changes coming with the increased number of kinship homes being used. They feel family groups also help in spreading the power around because everyone is sitting in the circle facing each other. It gives the family a voice in their plan which is totally

needed since this is the plan for them, not for us. Realistically, East says there are things that are needed due to court but to be very open and upfront with people around these expectations and to make sure the parents understand why the orders are in place. It is a challenge in family groups when families are clear on what they need/want/what works but then the social workers say they have to take it back to a risk meeting. East dislikes the word risk because it makes it sound like families have put their kids at risk. They believe social workers have to trust families more and worry less about liability. East questions why the agency puts so much on fears of liability that they lose the focus on what we are actually there for, which can result in making decisions that are not the best for kids. East has concerns for social workers and supervisors being narrow minded or less open when making decisions due to a family being rude to them. East stresses that as social workers we need to realize that families will get upset and angry because we are talking about their children.

Another aspect of change needs to be the reliance on assessments and/or professional opinions. These assessors spend very little time with people, often regurgitating what is written from MFCS notes and documents and charge a lot of money. East feels including those who work closely with the family in the decision-making process, such as youth works, access workers, and family support workers, is important. They believe these workers are doing the real work with the families. East questions clumping peoples' histories together when we are assessing risk. They suggest looking at times when MFCS were not involved and seeing what they were doing and what was working for them and what their supports were. East fears peoples' negative histories are clumped together, and this makes them look bad. The information is coming from what has been documented so social workers may want to ask families what has been happening when

the agency was not involved. Another gap East identifies is putting more value on professional opinions and those with certain credentials or who are on Policy 75. There are a lot of services within the community but maybe the person doesn't have the correct credentials such as a PhD or Master's or are not on policy 75. [Current legislation supports clinicians who are registered on Policy 75. This policy ensures particular credentials, and that the clinician is registered/responsible to a governing body, such as Social Work Association or Counselling Therapist Association]. This limits people because of poverty. If the clinician's office is off reserve, the agency provides transportation to the appointments. But, when the agency is no longer involved with the person/family, they have to obtain their own transportation to appointments, which can create barriers in accessing the service. East believes this can set people up for failure because they are judged when they can't attend services, however, the agency doesn't acknowledge when they make the mistake of setting services up out of the community. East feels there are too many times when families get judged instead of looking at the bigger picture, which often reflects inequities, systemic issues and poverty.

East expresses that they like Circles (Wikimanej Kikmanaq/FGC) because they have an inherent accountability for everyone present within them. East notes that they find Mi'kmaq people like things to be 'straight up' and that they will have more respect for you as a social worker if you do this. East said just telling them what is going on, what they need to do, how things are going, etc will result in families having more respect for you. East notes this doesn't mean they will like you or what you are saying but they will respect you. East suggests using simple english and notes often people say they understand what is being said, however they don't understand at all. Again, East stresses the need to talk in a straightforward way that is not condescend-

ing or belittling, which can be heard within a person's tone. East shared most social workers would say they are not condescending, etc but they do not realize their tone of voice and/or body language is 'talking down' to the person. East stresses that the Circle is a very Indigenous method of communication and should be integrated more within assessment and social work practice. They stress 'we need to have workers and supervisors who support Mi'kmaq ways of knowing and doing; like having circles, understanding poverty and its impacts on what people have in their homes and the choices they have to make because of it, for example deciding to buy a dresser or food'. East suggests that during risk meetings to have only those present who know and work with the family. They question when people come in and only hear bits and pieces that they are not getting the whole story of what has been going on and what people have been doing, and this leads to the risk of preconceived or subjective views that affect decisions. East talks about Family Circles and how this offers a chance for supervisors to see, hear and get to know the family beyond what is put on paper or ICM. In creating new assessment tools and practices East stresses the vital need for input from Elders, foster kids, foster parents, parents, grandparents, community members, and grassroots people; instead of relying on the opinions of doctors and people with a PhD who are non-Indigenous. (Interviewed on April 14, 2020.)

SOUTH

South has concerns about the wording used within risk assessment. They feel the words are too long and when hearing risk assessment it arises the person's preconceived notions. South went on to say that if the person hearing the words is a social worker their mind has already determined there is a risk present. If the person hearing the words is a family member, they think the parents have done something wrong and are putting their children at risk. South states that language is a predictor of how we interpret meaning. South questioned who wrote the phrase risk assessment and wonders if that person(s) 'have knowledge or take into consideration our trauma, past history and way of life?' They feel the way risk assessment is currently written is not helpful to Mi'kmaq families. They go on to share that one misinterpreted word could cause misinterpretation of the entire tool and create a whole different meaning of what is happening. South questions if the person had no knowledge of residential school, or the whole story behind it, such as centralization and relocation for Mi'kmaq Peoples, and then they try to apply a provincial risk assessment process, the assessors wouldn't know the impact of centralization/relocation (which are only two impacts of residential schools) on people's parenting and ways of living and knowing. South states, 'of course there would be red flags all over the place because you are looking through the lens of maybe a more privileged or different dynamics, so it is going to hit in a different way'. South notes that when developing an Indigenous assessment tool, we need to be careful because different Nations have specific ways of knowing that are different than each other, ie: Mi'kmaq ways of knowing are different than that of the Anishnabe Nation.

South said to answer the question regarding a more accurate name we need to question or

reflect on what information we are trying to gather and how it is going to be interpreted. They note there needs to be a starting point, and the current assessment tool works because it tells us the ages of the children, chronicity of issues, characteristics of the family, and the situation. They wonder how things like different aspects of the parent, the influences of residential school experiences could be more culturally relevant and reflected within the tool. South believes it is not the tool itself that is the issue but the values and guiding principles that influence the interpretation, such as taking a holistic approach or a western one. South suggests cultural adaptation within the tool to assist in identifying the family, and what they need, and what their strengths are. They note that relationship and connectedness are very important Mi'kmaq values and principles, which are reflected in the phrase Msit'No'kmaq. This would include seeing the family, their immediate relations, and the whole community. They talked about using the two eyed seeing model within risk assessment. They shared, the work of Marshall & Marshall (Bartlett, 2012) see it both ways, see it different ways that focus not just on their immediate relationship and environment, but the whole community. How do we incorporate that into a whole cultural adaptation of the risk assessment tool?

South wondered if within the current risk meetings, the whole picture of the family and their immediate relationship is presented, or if the decision is already made? South talked about how there are facts involved within a situation, and there are grey areas (that portray where the family is at, and what they really need, and, the actual level of risk). South links this spectrum to individual perspectives. For example, they shared one worker can go into a home and determine there are no protection concerns, but then another worker may go in and see dust bunnies everywhere, clutter etc, and this social worker would have grave protection concerns. South felt in-

corporating the Medicine Wheel teachings into the risk assessment would be beneficial. They share, 'the wheel strives to support people to find balance within a 'house' and when balance is off the Wheel provides steps to rebalance that part; be it physical, mental, emotional or Spiritual imbalance. South talks about cultural diversity within a family and that it is not only a 'broad racial arena but is also a micro of each family within the culture'. Due to this South states it is very important to look at a situation and/or family with compassion and honesty of not only what their deficits are but to also recognize the family's strengths. To do this South shares it is very important to remain humble, take the time to build relationships and trust with the family so that the work reflects an holistic approach of interconnection between causes and consequences, which will come through when developing solutions. They share that parts of the Gladue report could be helpful but cautions that 'gathering all the information could be used against a person or family'. The Gladue report offer workers a useful tool to gather family information in a comprehensive way that looks at the history of the family as well as their current situation. It allows workers to see how the family's past experiences are potentially influencing the present, and what solutions can be offered that encircle Indigenous values and beliefs (McCaffrey, 2010).

South concludes by saying we need a total shift in mindset because we have been doing the same things over and over again for centuries. They believe a real shake up is needed and Covid may be that shake up. They are hopeful that Mi'kmaq law, that is written by and for Mi'kmaq Peoples, will make sense for our families. They believe the national legislative changes that came into effect January 1/20 are opening doors to work with our families differently such as with honesty, respectfulness, and humbleness - the Seven Sacred Teachings. South stresses in this way we are not practicing in the old way but in a way that is more meaningful and honours

building relationships and interconnectedness. South notes this assures families they are not walking alone. (Interviewed on April 20, 2020)

WEST

West identified language as a challenging barrier for workers and families. They talked about there being different dialects within the Mi'kmaq language and within different communities. West also talked about there being different perceptions of what words mean that are not the same as in English. They said slang gets used that may not be understood by a worker. West gave the example of 'real or so deadly, which could mean something is really nice or that something is dangerous or rude.'

West talked about workers not feeling protected when they go into people's home but if the practice was taking an Elder along that could be helpful. They believe having an Elder present would also help the family because both sides [worker and family] wouldn't have their guard up as much. West explained that due to everything that Mi'kmaq Peoples went through with inter-generational trauma, residential schools, centralization and such, has created mistrust for social workers and MFCS.

West believes the current risk assessment is ok because it asks about characteristics, chronicity of identified issue, parent/child relationship, the environment, etc., however it needs to include and reflect more around the cultural strengths that a family has or the strengths within their supports. They said these supports could be from the immediate family and friends, but also the support could be from chief and counsel. West believes that when it comes to assessing environmental risks the band counsel should be approached to see what kind of supports they can offer. West suggests that Elders are present for the risk meeting so they can talk about the community and what resources are available within the community. These community supports could come from the health centre, through educational opportunities, community fisheries etc. West

talked further about environment challenges when assessing risk they said some people don't have phones or internet, but then they are judged and penalized when the social worker or service provider can't reach them. West felt that social workers can help families obtain these things or help them by applying for a house extension. These supportive steps would help to mitigate the risk of overcrowding.

West felt the name needs to be changed from risk assessment to something more positive, such as wellness or wellbeing. They talked about the word risk assessment creating ideas or attitudes of threat, danger or fear. They felt that families would respond better if the social worker was asking about their wellbeing. They gave examples of how the family could be asked about, 'what aspects of home, children, supports, themselves, and/or community resources that support their wellbeing'. Another suggestion was using words like 'opportunities to learn'. They noted that the social worker and the family are going to be learning from each other. They talked about cultural opportunities to learn being reflected in Mawiomni (powwow) where the community gives all people the opportunity to come and learn about their culture and community. West believes this kind of environment or engagement helps put peoples' guards come down a little, so they don't see the social worker as such a threat.

West stresses the vital importance of being open and honest about the questions being asked and why they are being asked. They suggest integrating the Seven Sacred Teachings into the assessment so that the process won't be as intrusive. West believes that if a social worker can be honest with themselves, then they can be honest with the family. West expanded this idea by saying that when a social worker can feel this honesty within themselves than they can show honesty and have a heart when dealing with families. To have a heart in dealing with families

helps having an understanding where families are coming from, and it prevents the social worker from using harsh language. West reflected that the Seven Sacred Teachings could become the agency's code of ethics, which would create good relationships, trust, openness and enable the social worker, and the family members to hear each other better.

West believes in empowering people by enabling them to choose their own therapist. They discuss how the the current system limits peoples' choices due to policy 75 and/or particularly the educational criteria. West states, a person has to want to do the work and feel comfortable with whom they are with, or they will not open up. They stress that allowing people to have some responsibility within the process, while being open and honest with them, is crucial to building relationships.

West comments that new social workers who are straight out of school and often non-Indigenous, regularly become front line protection workers. They believe it is so important for social workers to know that every household is different. West states, 'tell the worker [new social worker] you know you are in a Mi'kmaq community, you are going to see resistance because of everything that happened to Indigenous people. Ask them if they know about residential schools, ask them if they know about the 60s scoop, ask them if they know about the abuse in Indian day school and the abuse that took place and how it is generationally impacted family - even today'. They stated if it is a new front line social worker, they need to know about the many other systemic oppressive practices that were inflicted on Indigenous Peoples. West said social workers are going to see beds in the living room, no dressers, there could be beer cans around, and maybe food security issues, overcrowding and unfinished homes. They stress the importance of looking for the positives, and that despite the mess and chaos, the children are fed, clothed and happy.

They suggested finding out what the family is doing, such as using coupons, using services at the health centre, that they are willing to learn, or they set limits on themselves if they gamble. West feels there is not enough cultural sensitive training for protection social workers. They feel this could be dealt with by having non-Indigenous workers talk to Mi'kmaq workers to learn about culture and community life. They said it is important to talk with non-Indigenous workers about looking for strengths and not just weaknesses, and to see the whole picture of a family. They said see the positive big picture, maybe the kids help with the cooking, learn how humour is used in a community, not to take things personally, get to know the family and children, and hold back personal judgement if the worker sees things that are different than how the worker was brought up. (Interviewed on May 15, 2020)

NORTH

When assessing risk, North believes that sitting with families and hearing about them, their community dynamics, their losses, challenges, what they value and what they celebrate is very important. They expand by saying social workers go into a family's life, gather information, assess it, and then go in for more information, assess that, and this cycle goes on and on. North said this circling around to gather information doesn't allow for social workers to sit with families and have conversations. They said another way to get to know the community is to spend time there when they are not working. They suggested that as an agency we could offer a community meal, because this would help with how workers are perceived. North said often workers are only in the community during difficult times and stressed that 'if the relationships are not formed then very little information will be shared or cooperation occur'. By being in the community people will see social workers as a resource and start to open up and make suggestions on who needs supports.

North stressed the need for children to stay connected to their families even if they are in permanent care. They noted the differences in practices amongst workers. 'Some will stay until the last minute to figure out family solutions while others will take kids into care and look for family solutions at the 5-day hearing'. They note that because there are so few foster homes that sometimes children are placed out of their community, and this is a big adjustment for them. North states that each community is very different so even though the children are going to another Mi'kmaq community this is still more change and more adjustment, because all communities are different. North questions the extensive details gathered about a family within the safe

assessments. North stated that if someone has a police record they cannot be foster parents so people assume they can't foster so they do not even come forward. North acknowledges things are slowly changing regarding criminal records. They noted now people with criminal records are being looked at case by case, and now there is change in being more flexibly around minor crimes. They note the desperate need for foster homes and discussed how the process can take 6 months to a year, which North believes is too long.

North also discussed how social workers are talking to families more, hearing the bigger picture and their struggles, which results in better plans for the family. North sees supervisors meeting families and individuals so that they 'are more than that person on paper and this connection helps in making a different, wholistic decision'.

North feels that having the right people at the risk meeting is very important. This includes the case worker, temporary care worker, family support worker and youth support worker. North feels people at the risk meeting should have experience with the family and what has been going on. They feel that at a risk meeting there should be only one person present who does not know the family. They suggest having the risk meeting as a Talking Circle which would be very helpful so that everyone's voice is heard and valued equally.

North suggests having Culture Core Training because it would benefit workers and families. They believe it is not necessary for workers to be Indigenous, but that they have characteristics that enhance their ability to form working relationships with families. The valued qualities include not having an attitude when going into homes, being down to earth, and not behaving as if better than the family. A core element would be workers who are committed to make connections and maintaining them. North shared that in order to do this, social workers need to under-

stand the different way of life for people living in poverty. Social workers may go into a home and see the complete opposite of what they were raised with. They give an example of how social and systemic issues can arise and clash with child welfare when talking about people living in band owed homes. The family may have been asking to have home repairs done for months but those do not happen until the band gets to it. They shared the family may have been trying to get the electric wires repaired for months but all the social worker sees is wires that are not repaired. The social worker does not seem to see the powerlessness of the person trying to get the band to fix the wires. North states social workers can take for granted their own secure income and assume families can just run to the grocery store when needed or do home repairs when they want. North stresses workers need to be very mindful of the parent's past experiences. For example, they said maybe the mom/dad are not overly affectionate with their children because they went to residential school or were part of the 60s scoop. We need to look at the resourcefulness when assessing families and gave an example of the family may be very good at using coupons, which allows their funds to go further, or maybe they have a garden. North cautions to look at the bigger picture because if you look and see the family not getting to medical appointments it could be a situation of accessibility and not the assumed apathy. North feels 'it is crucial when making a new assessment tool to bring in mothers and Elders to see what they consider important to consider when assessing risk'. (Interviewed on June 3, 2020.)

SKY

Sky talked about challenges when doing risk assessment due to gaps in knowledge, the sharing of knowledge and/or the relevance of information. These gaps affect being able to identify the true red flags. To bridge these gaps social workers are reliant on family, community members, including health centre staff, to share information. Sky said sometimes there are red flags but there is not enough information to cause involvement, but then down the road something bigger happens, and everyone begins pointing fingers at what failed and why it failed. They noted 'then people are quick to blame child welfare, but the reality is the whole system has failed'. Sky said, 'from a Traditional culture perspective community members would look out for each other and if someone appeared to be struggling, people would come together and help them out'. This can exist [today] within families where people look out for one another, but on a community level there have been the impacts of colonization. 'Colonization has beaten people down and there is a lack of resources, lack of education, lack of everything that leads people to moving into a more isolated way of being'. Sky noted social workers are trained to see things and the bigger picture but in today's world there is a line where they are seen to be meddling in someone's life. This too needs to be respected. Sky talked about risk assessment being so important because worker/supervisor are screening calls are in and out peoples' lives. They said peoples' lives are on the line and if we react too quickly it could impact a good family negatively. Their neighbours may not trust or work with them in the future. Sky questioned whether we can appropriately address situations and respect people's privacy at the same time? They said that on reserves everyone knows everyone's' business, which affects how much people cooperate with a social worker. They said there is inherent trust issues within communities. These issues have

been engrained due to family and individuals being ‘shafted year after year after year’.

Sky notes the legislation for Indigenous agencies is so similar to provincial legislation that we do the same things, which does not make a difference in the long run. They talked about a community in British Columbia that has not had an apprehension outside of their community in 21 years. They believe, when questioning what they are doing to have such success, that the answer circles around to relying on community and having strong ties within the community. They believe this is connected to the importance of the approach social workers take when meeting and talking with people. Treating everyone with dignity is at the heart of this connection according to Sky’s beliefs. They shared a situation when looking for a mom. When they arrived at the home a big guy holding a metal pipe answered the door. Instead of focusing on the pipe and getting adversarial and demanding he put the pipe down, Sky just talked to the guy. The result was at the end of the conversation the guy told them where the mom was. Sky notes that using people skills to work with people within a risk assessment is the difference between escalation or cooperation. They note that in risk assessment there can be an immediate level of risk in front of you, but then by taking a different route to deal with it you can see what is really going on. Taking a different approach allows you to see the underlying story with people. Sky shared another story about a youth who would slam doors often. One day Sky asked the youth if they were ok. This stopped the youth’s behaviours because they didn’t expect the worker to care. It was not the behaviour the youth usually got from people (staff). On another occasion Sky was working with a father who could go from 0-1000 at the snap of fingers. This father would be in your face, yelling in a high-pitched voice and slamming his fists on the table. But then this father would have a great visit with his kids. Sky shared that each time he would have his moment of being

upset and then move on. They noted that when dealing with people in child protection we are dealing with so much, such as body language, tone of voice and our words. In these cases, Sky stresses if the focus was on putting the pipe down, or calming down before talking, or going on a visit, then nothing would be accomplished. It would be a power struggle. When we stick tightly to protocols sometimes it can cause going backwards within the relationship. Relationship is the key to cooperation, moving forward, and as a factor in mitigating any risks for a child(ren).

Body language is a very important part of communication and helping to understand risks. This is why meeting people is vital because what is seen on paper does not represent the whole story, the whole picture. Sky notes 'you can just see so much more happening and you can draw so much information out of that and that is where I think so much of it lies, drawing out the information' of the situation.

In talking about how one gets this training Sky shared it comes mostly, for them, through participation in Traditional Ceremonies where you learn to treat people with dignity. One does not learn this from a textbook or a manual. Sky shared that core cultural sensitivity training is important, however it is not enough. There are social workers who have varying years of experience but are unaware of what happened with Indigenous Peoples. When they hear the experiences, especially if firsthand from survivors of residential schools, they are shaken up. They display shock, compassion, and a desire to do things differently. Sky feels we are conditioned to fall back on our general ways of seeing and doing so the impact of hearing the stories, and that compassion and desire to do things differently does not stick. When asked, social workers feel the way to change this is through teaching correct history throughout all grades in school. They said in Germany children are taught correct history throughout all the school years. Sky stated

the history they received in school regarding Indigenous Peoples was about a picture of a long-haired guy with a bear and it talked of how Indigenous Peoples could talk with animals and how the Indigenous people had great respect for animals. The rest was all about the French and English and how the Iroquois were on one side or another and each getting conscripted to scalp or do something to each other. Sky felt there needs to be a systemic overhaul and compares this to a puzzle that has one piece missing. This one piece makes the whole thing incomplete, but all people see is the missing piece, so there is no moving forward. Sky feels this is a slow process and requires people to understand they have a responsibility to have a higher consciousness. They believe this is why things need to be taught in school to develop sensitivity about recognizing the dignity of people - 'recognizing the dignity of Indigenous Peoples'. Sky comments that there are a lot of mistruths about Indigenous Peoples such as not paying taxes, get everything for free, get free homes. However, they stress that this becomes ignorance when it is matched with knowledge. When the knowledge is there but the person chooses to stay ignorant, education is vital. They said talking and listening to all sides and exploring ideas is education. They talk about hearing someone describe how, when countries go to war, they try to take out each other's greatest resources, be it a communication tower or fuel supply and then they move forward. Sky believes this is what happened with colonization. They said settlers came and saw Indigenous Peoples' greatest resource, which is the children, and so they went after the children. Sky noted that we had astounding ways to parent, we had the clan system, and we marked special events such as a woman's Moon Time or spending time with grandparents. When colonizers wanted to crush the nations, they went after children and it had/has devastating consequences where some people are so far gone, due to trauma, they will never heal. They believe others are so far gone

in the religious direction away from inherent rights and Tradition. They note this is a very sensitive issue, and not many people talking about it, because in positions of power there are often people who are practicing anglicans or catholics and 'they sometimes don't make the best judgement for their people considering culture or Tradition, which is an issue'. Sky talks about the importance of prayer and that walking in life as if it is almost like a prayer. They suggest that within risk assessment, like a prayer, to slow down, be present, ground into the moment where one can see much more and understand more. This prayerful care will help in dealing with situations and coming up with the best plan(s). Sky circles back to the man with the pipe and staying present in the moment and connecting as a human, which helps in not only gathering the needed information (where the mom is) but also an ally is gathered because in the future this person will most likely help again. Sky believes what is needed within assessment and practice - is going back to the ways of helping each other out and realizing, accepting and honouring that everyone has the same goal - healthy and well families for children. Sky notes again, they believe it comes to education and cultivating sensitivity and empathy. They share that so often one hears 'why don't they just get over it' and feels this is people disconnecting from what has happened. Children were taken, people came in and had the power to take kids, and they did. Sky shares an experience of being in a sensitivity training where people were paired and got to know each other, and then someone came in and took one of the partners away. Through this exercise people's compassion, loss, and empathy was cultivated. They note that in teaching to ask those who say 'just get over it', if they would be ok if someone came now and just took their children because something was seen in their home that the person with power didn't like. Would they just get over it? Sky believes that people need to be reminded, they need to feel how hurtful tragedies

are, and through these deep feelings of pain, empathy can develop. There has to be a point where the pattern has to stop and we just have to have empathy and say no, say healing is not a straight line, it is not to say you are over it now. Sky said once we understand the whole picture, it makes a difference in how we approach a situation, a risk, people, talking with people, making plans, and safety plans, etc. They believe once we understand we can get 'it'. Sky feels we will get there due to there being many people who are talking about things, reading, watching videos, going to workshops, listening to podcasts and tuning in from all Peoples who are questioning the systems and the ways we have been doing things that have proven not to work. They talked about once you know something it is hard to not know it. Once you open the door it isn't going to change, it may take a long time to walk through it but that door of knowledge is going to be open. We want change because what has been happening hasn't worked, but, Sky wonders what will it look like when we get there? They talk about colonization creating a false belief that there is only one way of knowing. They state this is the challenge in that we know things have to be done differently but how do we do it differently? Sky said it is not only philosophically wrong to think your way is the only way, but it has not worked. They said 'there are many concrete examples of how the systems that came out of colonization don't work - for anybody - to be honest'. They expand by saying it has been blatant the effects of colonization on minorities, however, it does not work for anybody. Further expanding, they say it works for only a very small few and that is also questionable depending on what lens you look through. Sky notes that if you look through a Spiritual and/or healing lens than it hasn't worked for them [small few] either. They go on to share it only works for maintaining ignorance and doing the same thing over and over that doesn't work. Sky concludes the interview by saying 'if we want to awaken from this,

which a lot of people do, then let's talk about awakening and how to get there'. (Interviewed on July 14, 2020).

EARTH

Earth believes risk assessment needs to be rooted in trauma informed practice. They expand by saying that ‘for Indigenous child welfare the lens needs to be holistic in order to embrace a holistic understanding of families and to consider the impacts of historical trauma’. They believe a wellness model that focuses on strength and resiliency rather than deficits, needs to be incorporated into the creation of Indigenous legislation and practice tools. They strongly stress that ‘looking at a strength-based model does not mean turning a blind eye to concerns and addressing the identified concerns’. Earth states it is critical to understand our families in the ‘context of their lived experiences and to never forget the impacts of structural oppression and underfunding’. They said these impacts are seen in the lack of housing and poverty.

Earth believes, within current investigation practices, the lens is too narrow, and they believe this is partially due to the high rate of staff turnover. Earth notes when using a trauma informed lens one not only looks at historical trauma but how historical treatment and experiences are still impacting/influencing people today. An example, of how this can be seen is when a social worker arrives at someone’s door and the person reacts from an emotionally disregulated place. If the social worker does not completely understand intergenerational trauma, the workers’ reaction heightens how the family will be described and how they react. Earth feels training needs to be continual. Cultural training needs to be more ongoing, especially due to high rates of staff turnover. They feel talking about culture and the impacts of history on the past and present needs to be consistently talked about, especially at the supervisory and levels above. Earth states many current social workers and supervisors are white, so ongoing cultural training is vital. They stress that many ‘current issues, such as domestic violence and addiction, are the result of the

historical impacts of residential schools, 60s scoop, and other assimilation agendas.’ In Circles Earth has heard grandmothers, who are raising three grand babies, say they didn’t have any parenting models growing up. They repeat that ‘they feel there are not enough conversations regarding how history shows up today, how people were parented in residential school, and then they too do not have healthy parenting skills. Earth goes on to say, ‘or they suffered abuses in residential schools and now with their own children/grandchildren they are being triggered and reacting due to the trauma that is still within their bodies, Spirit, emotions and mind’. An Indigenous lens would include the essence of the medicine wheel teachings and connectedness. When working with families, Earth believes today’s child welfare practices are still rooted in being punitive rather than preventative because workers do not have a deeper understanding of the issues. They talk about how the current family Circles [Wikimanej Kik-manaq/FGC] are more strength based and have a collaborative approach to creating plans and making decisions. However, Earth says this needs to go further and ensure decisions made within the Circle are upheld and honoured, without them being changed or overruled within the risk meeting. Earth talks about experiencing the Circle as a Spiritual practice that inherently carries intervention, but not seen or experienced as this in a broader sense due to mainstream or western practice and legislation/guidelines.

Earth believes the western lens categorizes information and writes about it from the intellectual, left brain rather than from an Indigenous lens, which is connected to the heart and soul - the right brain. They continue to express that ‘western approaches are given more weight, higher value than Indigenous approaches and/or views, and that this needs to change. It is common for people to want evidence-based approaches, however, it is now recognized from scientists and

social scientists that Indigenous approaches of holistic healing, connection, groundedness with the earth, are what heals trauma and cultivates well-being. Earth states that ‘people such as Bessel Van der Kolk (2014), Jon Kabat-Zinn (2013) and Bruce Perry (2007) talk about healing in these ways that come from Indigenous knowledge/practice - even if not named this - and that we are born from connectedness and are holistic beings that need the energies of family and community to heal’. They go on to say sometimes the formal process of a risk meeting is given more weight than the collaborate process within the Family Circle. They note the Family Circle includes community members, clients, professionals, support people, social worker, and supervisor. They collectively discuss the issues, what has been happening, and then create a collaborative plan, which should be upheld as the best plan. Earth hopes the new Mi’kmaq legislation states if a collection of ‘players’ are part of creating the plan for the family/individual, to address recognized protection concerns, that it will be the plan going forward. They continue to note the ‘language within the legislation would promote family wellness and consider the person as a whole’. They talked about the Signs of Safety program and Thunderbird organization using programs that come from a wellness model. They note research and literature, in all Nations, is showing the importance of Traditional knowledge and language within assessment. Earth feels this is because ‘Spirituality is not an add on, it should be front and centre if creating and practicing from a Traditional worldview’. They believe and experience that ‘our work, especially within Circles, is Spiritual, yet it is not first and foremost within the larger organization’. Earth believes this is due to the impacts of colonization and the materialism of the western world, which wants to categorize and judge everything. They question why we talk about the impacts of colonization, however, continue to do things the same way.

Earth talks about Mi'kmaq Peoples being relational and heart people, but there is no recognition of this when we continually use western evidence and science-based material that maintains the status quo. They state, 'yet in reality it is being shown and documented that these western approaches do not work and can continue to perpetuate harm'. Earth respects and values the work of Cindy Blackstock and talked about Blackstock's truth telling practices. Blackstock believes reconciliation within child welfare will occur when voices and stories are heard and valued - when people can voice their story about how child welfare affected them as individuals and as families.

This is another reason Earth values the Circle because it gives space for people to tell their stories for others to hear. Earth expressed feeling MFCS owes this to Mi'kmaq Peoples because 'they never have had space to tell their story and then to collaborate to build something together, in collaboration that is rooted in respect, values, and is culturally safe'. Earth states, 'in the Circle we are equals connected through the heart'. Again, Earth stresses this approach is not turning a blind eye to protection concerns, but it is about understanding the context of peoples' lived experiences and expands by saying you would never leave a child(ren) in an unsafe environment. They stress the necessity for social workers to learn how to work with families and community to develop a culturally safe intervention.

Earth notes MFCS has come a long way. The low numbers of children in care due to kinship and customary care is one example. However, she strives for further transformations such as seeing culture as a protective factor. They suggest that when talking about risk factors in the home that are impacting a child that we also talk about the risk factors that impact a child when removed from the family and/or community. They repeat that we have come a long way but

stresses we can't stop. Earth has concerns for lack of resources and supports for families who are caring for family members under a Parenting Support Application and often they are struggling. These concerns include family supported situations breaking down, which would lead to being back before the court. Present policy and legislation are developed by the province and Earth feels there needs to be a recognition of the right to self-determination and that Mi'kmaq people are in the best position to make decisions that affect their communities.

Earth talks about how we are quick to identify risk and the need to mitigate it and wonders why they don't use models that are more collaborative in nature such as Circles, and Signs of Safety. They talk about using models that are more reflective of culture where everyone is seen as equals, unlike the present model that values experts. Earth states, 'currently it is experts making an assessment' and goes on to say 'Mi'kmaq people have always been at the mercy of the federal and provincial legislation and guidelines.' They state, currently an expert goes in judging and labelling people/families, using the DSM, which is very rooted in western ideology. Earth shares 'an alternate model would be to look at the present situation, understand the context of their/our experiences - where we have been and where we are now - and then collaborate on how to support family wellness'. Earth notes that due to impacts of residential school and the 60s scoop, more prevention is needed. For example, wrap around services are more intensive in supporting individuals/families. Earth talks about how trauma experienced by families is passed on generationally and has affected people in not having many positive role models, which has caused some to need a lot of intensive services. They share knowledge about programs where the children remain in the home and the family is offered supports, which keeps the family intact

Earth notes that an Indigenous model would be collaborative, working with communities,

Elders, family, agencies, and within a Circle context where one voice does not have more weight than another. They share understanding can't come through numbers and evidence when the reality is 'our experiences have been so complex, rooted in years of trauma and continued oppression due to lack of housing, poverty and underfunding and are not considered' often or as deep as should be. They question if there is enough deep understanding of how the woundedness continues to show up in the present day. Earth expands by saying history is not that far back and cultural training needs to recognize that and how it is seen today. She stresses that when looking at trauma 'one has to understand the healing journey and how long it takes to heal from deep wounds.' They clarify, for Indigenous People the wounds have been caused by the government and that 'prior to colonization, history notes that her people were doing very well, then there are years of deep, deep, deep traumatic experience'. Earth talked about feeling unease when talking with white people regarding the child welfare act and it not having a long enough timeline due to the trauma experienced by Indigenous Peoples or any Peoples that are not of the dominant culture. Earth states non-white experiences 'are different because we lived in a world where our culture was deemed to be take the savage out of us, and we have never had the opportunity over the years to embrace, celebrate, and to be proud of who we are - so that is different'. Earth states us [Mi'kmaq], African Nova Scotians, and anyone who is not white, has always been exposed to a culture that is not theirs - 'we have also always been othered'. Earth stresses this is another reason to see culture as healing and to give it recognition as an intervention. Through a cultural lens and establishing connections would be valued and integrated into assessment tools, which will help with understanding the concerns and how to deal with them. Earth talks about the changes that have been happening and that conversations are happening around how to keep

children safe and to look at and name the issues moving toward treatments that embrace land based healing practices, learning from Traditional teachers/healers, participating in storytelling and dancing. They note more often people are turning to practices that are rooted in our ways of knowing. However, many turn away from our culture, and we cannot make them participate in Traditional practices. Earth believes this is due to the internalized oppression of colonization via christianity. Earth believes that by talking about this and introducing people to culture comes wellness and reclaiming who you are as a person. Earth expanded on their experiences with internalized oppression in describing youth who went to camp and would say they don't want to be 'Indian' and some wanting to change their last name so people wouldn't know they are 'Indian'. Once they learned about their culture and get a deeper understanding of it, a shift and change happens, and then they become proud to be a Mi'kmaq person. The youth are taught in a way they can relate to and as such come to understand themselves at a deeper level. Earth believes new social workers, especially white ones, need more training, to work with Elders, and to learn from a mentor. This would help inform them about the difference between the two world views - Mi'kmaq and western. Earth stresses the tools used to assess risk need to be rooted in our ways of understanding ourselves, such as the Medicine Wheel and how to use the Seven Sacred Teachings in our work. Earth notes it is very important to learn about history and then how do we translate that into practice. They go on to express the importance of training supervisors and management on these beliefs and practices and then they can train their staff. Training staff on the Medicine Wheel and Seven Sacred Teachings and then allowing space for staff to talk about biases and to share theirs, which includes self-reflective work allows for workers to see the strengths of culture and Tradition. Overall Earth feels self-reflective work, land-based programs

- like what is offered in Labrador - is critical. They stress that we have been impacted on so many levels and we need to help the whole family to heal, rather than dealing with parts of the family. (Interviewed on August 31/20).

CHAPTER FIVE

HEART ANALYSIS

When analyzing it is important to be as subjective as possible so that the ideas of interviewees' can be clearly heard. As mentioned throughout this thesis it is vitally important for a white researcher, involved with Indigenous subjects, to be extremely subjective and non-interfering. This is when critical reflexivity is practiced discovering and understand our own values, beliefs, experiences and perspectives, that could influence the interviewee's responses. Listening to the interviewees' lived experiences and their views on assessing risk from a Mi'kmaq perspective and gathering ideas, causes the analysis to go deeper into discovering the overt and subtle points that need to be considered when assessing and mitigating risk through an Indigenous lens (Lester, 1999). These need to be considered when developing legislation, policy and practice guidelines for social workers working with Indigenous Peoples.

Thematic analysis was used for analyzing the data gathered from the interviews. Thematic analysis has a broad application and fit for these interviews in that the questions were open ended, and it was unknown what would arise from each interviewee. As mentioned, the subject of seeking to explore and discover how to assess and mitigate risk from a Mi'kmaq perspective has undercurrents of needing to explore personal beliefs and values, how to become self-reflexive and reflective, which leads social workers to think deeply with how to be culturally informed and safe. Thematic analysis allowed for this exploration to occur.

Thematic analysis looks for patterns within interviews. Once each interview was transcribed, I took each one and literally highlighted the important points within each. Examples of what was highlighted are: 'first thing I am looking at is home life' (North); 'I don't know exactly what

that assessment looks like cause I am only one perspective but I know we need to involve people that have been in the system, have worked with the system, we need the grass roots people letting us know' (East); 'like a mentor for becoming more informed, becoming better informed about the differences between the two world views and I think that's stuff that I've seen missing.

After highlighting each transcript, I went through and looked for the themes/ideas that were seen in other transcripts. Each one talked about the importance of language; however, some meant it differently. For example, South talked about how words can be used as slang in one context or another (ie the use of the word deadly). Whereas East, Sky, and Earth talked about the importance of not using social work lingo, to use language that is straight forward and direct. Once this was complete, I no longer identified the material with a particular interviewee, it became a compilation of the primary threads that I call the themes.

The themes that arose from this research are:

- the need for cultural sensitivity training that recognizes that the impacts of colonization are both historical and current
- practice must be rooted in a trauma informed, anti-oppressive approach, integrated and adopted across the whole risk assessment continuum
- that legislation, policies and guidelines need to integrate practices and tools that reflect Indigenous values and beliefs of reciprocity, reflexivity, relationship, collaboration, and connectedness

Each of the interviewees spoke about the need for cultural sensitivity training to be ongoing. To become culturally competent and safe there is a need to not only learn about history and the impacts of history on communities, family, and individuals but to also learn about the culture of

each community and how colonial power imbalances have affected, and continue to affect individuals, families, and communities. West Coast Leaf (2017) research notes, ‘cultural safety includes those who hold power reflecting and challenging the largely unconscious and unspoken, assumptions of power held in their roles, including the policies and culture of their institutions and systems’ (p. 17).

Each brought up how Mi’kmaq culture is interwoven within Mi’kmaq language and Mi’kmaq ‘slang’. There are some words that have no translation in Mi’kmaq, and there are others that, depending on where one puts the accent, they have different meanings - context of word use impacts its meaning. The significance of language within assessing and mitigating risk is critical. Many social workers go to homes and use foreign english social worker terms that are confusing for families/individuals. One example being the word risk. Each interviewee noted that when the word risk is involved it instantly assumes or concludes there is a problem, that the parents have put the children at risk and that the social worker is there to ‘fix it’. As East and West note, it is vital to use accessible language and leave social work language at the door. Sinha et al.’s (2013) study claims that when reviewing investigation data, to determine if the concerns should be substantiated or not, factors such as the social workers personal experiences, organizational factors and external factors come into play. They note ‘revealed within the study is the potential influence of case workers personal experiences or beliefs, which lead them to differentially identify and review case factors, assess risk based on equivalent case factors or to substantiate based on different thresholds of risk ...’ (p. 2089)

Qwul’sih’yah’maht and Kundoqk (2015) stress the need to move from middle-class, white perspectives when engaging with because this will also impact how the assessment is perceived

and completed. It is important to make a connection with the person and to uphold an energy of curiosity. The social worker is exploring the information that has been received. They are gathering the family's story around their life, their challenges, their strengths and their solutions. They note, 'A more accurate picture is developed when assessment takes place over time - the worker is looking for a movie rather than a snapshot of the child's and family's life' (p. 167). West Coast Leaf refer to this as family centred. Family centred practices honours the family as the expert of their life and crucial to 'maintain a sense of dignity and hope and seeing the unique circumstances of each family, including the impacts and complexities of substance use, poverty and family violence' (p. 15).

From the interviews there were two distinct attributes of language that came forward. One is the Mi'kmaq language itself. In some instances, individuals/families predominantly use Mi'kmaq language and the use of english is problematic because it may not be understood. For a non-fluent english speaker conversation needs to be slowed down, things expressed in different ways, and the accessible language used. For example, to a non-english speaker may denote that the problem is huge, going to the most extreme definition or context. However, the social work sees risk as a pendulum, moving from the identified concern(s) to addressing them. English speaking social workers must be conscious of their use of language and words and ensure that each family member truly understands what they are saying.

Interviewees talked about the importance of relationship and that it is most important that the social worker strives to create an atmosphere of collaboration, honesty, reciprocity and treating families/individuals with dignity. Relationships cannot be built with one person holding all the power. To accomplish this the social worker needs to be very self-aware, skilled within practices

of grounding, and communication. As Sky shared, all their energies could have gone into focusing on ‘the pipe’ in the man’s hands. Instead, Sky focused on communication and honesty so that a respectful conversation occurred, valid information was gathered, and the walls of mistrust were shaken. As Sky noted this shift of relationship/practice will assist in future situations when looking for community support. Relationships take time and social workers must allow time to build authentic relationship.

East, South, North, and Earth talk about the Indigenous practice of Circles. Within MFCS the Wikimanej Kikmanaq program holds the coming together of family, friends, agency workers, and professionals to collaborate in sharing information and forming plans. As they mentioned, Wikimanej Kikmanaq Circles hold many Indigenous values and beliefs such as transparency, honesty, collaboration, equality of power and reciprocity. When workers take a ‘power with’ approach to assessment it becomes possible to collaborate with families to figure out what is going on, what needs to change and how it might best be changed. It is essential to remember that ‘anti-oppressive practice is possible to achieve, whether or not children are removed from or remain in their home’ (Qwul’sih’yah’maht & Kundoqk in Carrierre & Strega, 2015, p. 162). With this practice of collaboration, it becomes ‘easier’ for individuals, families and social workers to hear each other and create long lasting, sustainable change, which is the ultimate goal.

The increased movement toward assessing and molding the criteria to enable extended family and community to step in to assist in raising children has deeper impacts with healing traumatic wounds. This healing shifts generational traumas. It shifts the DNA memory within a lineage. Menakem (2017) talks about those who come forward to raise family and/or community mem-

bers are not only kind, loving and generous, they are connecting to their own resiliency in coming forward, and this allows for the nervous systems of children to settle (p. 288). To experience a gap, or grace, where intergenerational changes can occur. When workers take a 'power with' approach to assessment it becomes possible to collaborate with families to figure out what is going on, what needs to change, and how it might best be changed.

Because trauma can be intergenerational, it is important to understanding our parent's personal lineage, to help build compassion for our parents, our experiences, and ourselves. Healing can begin and the chain of intergenerational traumas can be broken. Wa Cheew Wapaguunew Iskew (2015) discusses collective grief experienced by Indigenous people and how changing child welfare structure and practice can begin to heal this grief. Social workers have a role to play in this as do child welfare social workers. Many of the interviewee mentioned that individuals do not trust social workers for very valid and real reasons. Sometimes, due to the social worker's reactions, dysregulation, and misunderstandings, because of past experiences with clients, social workers take things personally and interaction between the social worker and client perpetuates the cycles of trauma, hurt, and judgement. Hebditch (2015) writes about the complex realities of being human. Complex personalities of social workers interact with complex personalities of families, communities and others involved with the family and the child welfare system. She notes, 'all have the capacity to charm, manipulate, and deceive. Similarly, we have the tendency to respond to each experience or encounter with emotion; if we experience remorseful, cooperative parents we respond compassionately with care and concern, likewise if we experience resistant, angry parents we respond with judgement and heavy handedness' (p. 19). When this occurs no one moves forward or evolves.

On a human Spiritual level, it can become a locking of wills where nothing sustainable gets accomplished. What if social workers embraced the role of being someone who has been plunked into a person's life, recognizing it is against their will, but holds the ground as a parent would do for a child? This does not mean that social workers treat people they work with as children and/or in a condescending manner. It means embracing an understanding of healing, starting with our own personal healing, in order to remain present. With this social workers can commit to taking up the journey with people, ride the waves of processing trauma and pain by being honest, open, real and staying present. Both the social workers and clients begin to heal the wounds in trusting themselves and others, moving to understand themselves within a bigger picture of intergenerational trauma and resiliency, to a place of wellness. In turn, wellness will get passed through their family's lineage. Hebditch (2015) states that even within frameworks that are solution focused professionals still carry a certain degree of statutory power which needs to be recognized, however, this power or authority can and should be very skillfully used with families in crisis. To assume that the professional always knows best is paternalism in its most traditional sense, what is needed instead is an understanding that the 'professional' is here to go on a journey with families; to ensure safety for children while respecting the human dignity of parent and family' (p. 31).

Focusing on attachment, the affects trauma has on attachment and connection, how attachment and connection affects many generations and must be looked at on a very broad context. The focus cannot just be on the challenges people may have within parenting. The focus is to shine light on the fact that prior to contact Indigenous peoples saw children as Sacred gifts from Creator. They had systems for politics, health, Spirituality, parenting, and criminal justice etc.

As Earth notes, 'we were doing quite well before contact'. Secure attachment, called connection, was inherent within the lifestyle.

The lifestyle was severely interfered with during colonization, genocide, and assimilation. This created generations of wounds and mistrust. Our attachments/connections are created through relationship with our caregivers. Indigenous children had 'barbarians' as caregivers who rattled and shook the soul of their Beings and worldview. Family and community was the world for Indigenous Peoples, and they were taken from their families and communities, not allowed to visit their family within the school, and beaten for speaking their language. The children were physically, emotionally, mentally, and Spiritually abused. This is opposite to being treated as Sacred. Horejsi et al. (1992) state, child removal policies may have prevented transmission of healthy parenting skills, instilled doubts about traditional parenting or resulted in negative behaviours acquired in abusive, neglectful, or culturally inappropriate settings (cited in Sinha et al., 2013, p. 2083).

Due to the traumas that are deep within Indigenous bodies, including the bodies of their ancestors, Indigenous peoples often do not feel settled or safe when near settlers. Part of sensitivity training for social workers would be learning the real history of Canada, their own history and that of their ancestors. Learning about your personal location and that of your family and how we got to the moment where we are today. Menakem (2017) stresses the importance of being aware, noticing, deconstructing, and reflecting on internal processes when white privilege is present and experienced. Menakem (2017) encourages white people to 'notice for yourself the persistent and ever-present ways in which white body supremacy provides advantage to white people' (p. 266).

When something is not working it is important for all those involved in creating the situation, and those affected by it, to work together to understand the situation and what is needed to shift it to being positive. Blackstock et al., (2006) state, ‘the definition of harm must be acknowledged to be the first property of those who experienced it, just as acknowledging the harm and learning from it is the first obligation of those who perpetrated it’ (p. 9). It is important for social workers in the system to acknowledge that sometimes their actions create harm.

When one has secure attachment from loving caregivers, moving through hurdles in life can be successful and/or smooth. As Sky noted, children, which are Indigenous Peoples greatest resource, were targeted through colonial policies and practices. Children were removed from homes under manipulation and, at times, forcefully. They were brought to institutions called schools, where they had their Sacred hair shorn, their own clothes removed, separated from family members and friends, beaten, threatened if they spoke their language, and sexually, physically, and emotionally abused by their teachers and fellow students. These abuses wound the Spirit. The people who should have protected them, abused them. The space available for healthy, secure attachments was shrouded with fear, abuse, and disconnection. During cultural sensitivity training, understanding a family’s genogram and history needs to be considered. Understanding that we learn from our parents/caregivers/social structures around us how to do things, survivors of residential school were taught to parent by insensitive, controlling, disconnected, fragmented and abusive people. Prior to residential school the children lived in very integrated, loving, and connected homes, where they were seen and treated as a Sacred part of a whole. As Anabel Gonzalez (2018) notes when there is a disconnect between what is experienced on the inside with that on the outside, trauma is cultivated. When this occurs the nervous system does what it

needs to survive. This could mean that the person might turn to drugs and/or alcohol to numb abusive/unwanted memories. They may choose abusive partners due to believing they deserve disrespectful and abusive treatment. A person who experiences trauma by their caregivers may abandonment or neglect their children, due to that was a 'normal' experience during their upbringing.

These patterns are passed down for generations not only due to the memories being within the blood and bones of the survivors, but because the oppression was upon an entire race. These patterns still exist today. This creates an umbrella where systemic, macro, micro, and far-reaching racism grows. Leaving generation after generation feeling the colonial effects of attempts of genocide. However, as mentioned earlier in this paper, these attempts were unsuccessful. Now it is time for Indigenous children and families to heal from the impact colonial child welfare policies and practices have had on their lives. It is their role to establish legislation and policies that consider the long-term effects of colonial policies and practices and establish practice models that support understanding, compassion and healing.

The Indigenous worldview sees the human as a holistic Being and this is reflected within the Medicine Wheel and Seven Sacred Teachings. These two tools can be used to help educate and support people in learning about the impacts on their internal world, reactions, survival methods and struggles regarding the impacts of colonization and its tools of assimilation, residential schools, 60s scoop and current land claims and treaty settlement. These tools can help workers understand the past and present impacts of being involved with the child welfare system. The profession of social work must make itself accountable to the history of harm that it has perpetuated as a first step in moving forward to create a system based on social justice and inclusive

of Indigenous values, culture, and knowledge (Blackstock et al., 2006, p. 9). The prices of reconciliation must not only occur at the organizational level, but social workers themselves must also take up this journey. The interviewees noted that we ask individuals to participate in supports and services to make needed changes and the same should apply to social workers. Child welfare workers expect individuals and families to engage in the change process even if they do not want to, thus social workers must be willing to do the same. There has been a denial of how the child welfare system, despite trying to progress and incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, continues to perpetuate oppression and re-traumatization. It is only when we dive into looking at what is being denied - true history and impacts in past and present - that sustainable, restorative change will occur. Alfred states, 'to deny the truth is an essential cultural and psychological process in settler society' (cited in Regan, 2006, p.27). Social workers are within the system and need to be the change, the motivator, driver for organizational and systemic change.

The interviewees talked of western assessment practices of gathering data and analyzing it in an individualized and linear way. They note the problems with this approach are the structural barriers of poverty, education, and race get overlooked. Richardson & Carriere (2017) state 'dominant approaches to assessment mask social problems and structural inequalities through individualizing problems while neglecting the social and political context in which those problems arise' (p. 157). Interviewees talked about the importance of the extended family and community being involved in gathering of information so that the bigger picture of a situation and/or peoples' lives can be seen. By focusing on the best interest of the children, as opposed to best interest of family, the focus remains on the individual. Featherstone, White and Morris

(2014) note that looking at the situation in context leads to disconnecting children from significant relationships and community ties that can leave them with severed relationships to themselves, the importance of relationships, and cultural identities.

Earth talked about the importance, and concern, of critics' fear that by implementing culturally appropriate practices, maltreatment of children will be overlooked and/or minimized. Lumping the two together is a fear-based practice that only perpetuates oppressive practice. Looking through a cultural lens offers the opportunity to gather, talk openly in a supportive group setting, in a mutually transparent manner to identify and address the identified concerns and highlights truly what best interest of the family means. It brings family, supporters together with professionals to have open conversations so that everyone is on the same page. Everyone hears what has been happening and what needs to happen to address the identified concerns.

The themes that arose in this research validate on a global scale, what all the authors in the literature review are naming. Global research is recognizing the need for: culturally sensitive practice that recognizes colonial violence and its impact on Indigenous peoples. Trauma informed; anti-oppressive approaches are needed in order for healing to occur. Legislation, policies, and guidelines need to integrate the Indigenous values and beliefs of reciprocity, reflexivity, relationship, collaboration, and connectedness. The time has arrived when Indigenous peoples and allies are demanding the long overdue justice and recognition of the truth that the Canadian nation was built, and stated within Treaty, as a second nation to the Indigenous Turtle Island Nations that were and are here.

Conclusion

The child welfare system continues to have substantial impacts on peoples' lives directly and indirectly. Assessing risk and requiring actions to mitigate the identified risk(s) is the first point of contact with a family within child welfare systems. It is a practice that continues throughout the entire involvement with child welfare social workers. This research explored looking at assessing risk to see what is working, what can change to reflect Mi'kmaq values/beliefs, and how that would look within practice to mitigate the identified risk. The journey of Indigenous resistance and self-determination has influenced the raising of awareness and consciousness to the genuine symbolic meaning of the Two Row Wampum, where the two Nations, settlers and Indigenous peoples, are moving along beside each other with non-interference.

Interviewees stress the need for continual cultural sensitivity training that focuses on a deep learning regarding the past and present impacts of colonial history and neo-liberal practices. They note that social workers need to leave english professional language terms at the door and to strive to make connection with people they are interacting with. This could be the individuals directly involved with child welfare, their family, friends, community, and support people. In looking at what is needed to assess risk from a Mi'kmaq perspective it was a challenge to name what the quality is, but that it revolves around a shift in attitude or consciousness. A transformation and/or understanding of a worldview, with values and beliefs that are just as valid as western ones. As many are now talking about, when working with Indigenous people, non-western worldview is treated as more valid and effective at supporting people with the identified need for change. As Earth, East, South and Sky mention, using a Two Eyed Seeing

approach to assess and mitigate risk is beneficial. The key is to be diligent in preventing the maintenance of the false belief that western practices are better and/or more valid.

By exploring the practices of assessing risk, the values and beliefs behind these practices, this research study could offer information needed for the necessary changes within the act, guidelines, policies and practice that reflect a Mi'kmaq way of knowing and being. This research is proposed as a steppingstone in exploring the creation of an Indigenous child welfare act and guidelines and the policies that would be created from these.

The transformations within Mi'kmaq Family and Children Services toward more Mi'kmaq practices are profound from when it first began. It has been inspiring to witness the ongoing changes that are occurring within MFCS to practice from a more Indigenous informed manner.

Examples include:

- Foster homes must be Mi'kmaq/Indigenous
- The development of the Wikimanej Kikmanaq Family Circle programs
- The development of kinship homes and alternate family homes with financial supports
- The increased supports and recognition of the use of Traditional practices for families that get recognized by the courts
- The seeking of assessments that are rooted in non-western ideologies
- The use of exemption to policy to obtain services that do not fall under the current policies

MFCS is an ongoing living example of how a community run child welfare organization, with full legal jurisdiction, can operate. Many look forward to the creation of Mi'kmaq and Indigenous laws and legislation that create a sense of honour for the wisdom inherent in Indigenous

ways of knowing and being. This can only allow for individual journeys toward healing, reclaiming and resilient healing to occur.

The will is present, however, there are times when the legislation ‘blocks’ true practice that is reflective of Mi’kmaq ways of knowing and doing. This research will assist other communities that are seeking and creating their own child welfare community organizations. The hope is that it will also impact mainstream child welfare, due to the many Indigenous families that reside off reserve. Hopefully a new legislation will allow MFCS to work with all Indigenous Peoples regardless of where they reside - on or off reserve.

Indigenized risk assessment guidelines and tools need to consider colonization, and the historical and current impact to make decisions regarding risk, and the follow up. In constantly seeing the full impact of colonization, solutions can be seen more clearly. By looking at what was working prior to contact as the guide to current practice the risk of repeating bad practice is reduced. This does not mean being non-progressive, it means looking at the essence of political, judicial, familial, community, cultural and personal practices and having that thread through. As Sky says it is Spiritual, and it is time to talk about it. Spirit is not a separate thing, practice, or philosophy. It threads through everything and inspires and creates connection, transparency, interconnection, reciprocity, humility and all the aspects that are considered when threading Indigenous worldview.

My personal journey in completing this research and thesis has led to a deeper understanding of the challenges present in looking at worldview and how to translate worldview to be reflected within legislative policies, guidelines and practices. It is important to keep questions open ended so that a broad spectrum of the interviewees’ experiences, thoughts and feelings can be explored

and shared. Open ended questions open the door to going deeper with the research subject. It was a challenge to conduct the research during covid. Having phone interviews impacted the length of the interview. When meeting in person the energies between people can be felt and this energetic resonance can amplify a deeper connection to the subject matter and reciprocity that can aid in understanding, creating enthusiasm, and clarity of information shared around the research questions and concepts. My steps going forward are to continue developing as an Ally to help de-colonize practice and deepen personally in my practice for families and perhaps in mentoring new and non-Indigenous social workers.

Considerations

This thesis obtained the input from six Mi'kmaq social workers who have experiences assessing child protection risks and collaborating on plans to mitigate the identified risks. Several of the interviewees have front line experiences within Mi'kmaq Family and Children Services (MFCS). MFCS has been a leading organization in Indigenizing child welfare. Colonization has deeply affected all of us. Within our thinking and perspectives and it has been a long, slow journey to decolonize, pause, explore, and commit to transforming into an organization that can hold all aspects of protecting children, supporting people's wellness and healing journeys. Taking action steps to dive into and change policies and practices that reflect Mi'kmaq worldview, values and beliefs requires gathering information from Indigenous Peoples.

Upholding Indigenous values and beliefs within child welfare does not mean denying or minimizing protection concerns for children. Some will critique on these grounds to perpetuation the status quo - change is difficult (just ask the families we work with). It is not about creating excuses to minimize or justify poor and abusive behaviours. For example, if it were said that of course because a person/family experienced intergenerational traumas they are going to drink and do drugs, which only feeds into stereotypes. We want to understand the experiences within intergenerational traumas, impacts of colonization on the family so that social workers and individuals/families/communities can deeply understand, form compassion and empathetic supports to enable the person/family to create their own plans in how to deal with child protection issues of substance abuse, family violence and child abuse. Indigenizing social work practices is about going deeper within yourself so that the mind, body, emotions, and Spirit are opened to accept,

understand, and honour differences. What has arisen for me within this research and writing is what could become known as restorative social work.

Restorative Social Work Suggestions

In reflecting on the interviewees Mi'kmaq lens, along with the information from the literature reviews, the following can be drawn out to influence and be incorporated into Indigenous Family and Children Services:

In creating a Risk Assessment Model from a Mi'kmaq perspective

- ensure all social workers understand the power of Circle, the 7 Sacred Teachings, Medicine Wheel Teachings, and Indigenous dispute resolution processes
- create an Elders/Knowledge Keepers advisory to ensure Mi'kmaq ways of knowing and being are embedded into risk assessment practice and they can be consulted for other practice questions and decision making
- ensure all social workers understand, Indigenous Worldview concepts/practices such as transparency, reciprocity, connection, humility, interconnection
- change the name of Risk Assessment to something that represents Mi'kmaq beliefs and values (several interviewees suggested 'wellness')
- look at the strengths of the family and how they have been protecting children from the identified risks
- identify community supports are present that do and/or could mitigate the risk
- include a broader team with direct experiences with the family (ie family support and youth support workers) at meetings
- have meetings in a Wikimanej Kikmanaq Circle format
- incorporate Traditional healing practices and Ceremonies, with land-based components

Ensure all staff, especially social workers, have strong cultural competency skills

- understand the history of Mi'kmaq people and Indigenous Peoples
- have a deep understanding of the local residential schools, Indian hospitals, day schools, 60's Scoop, White Paper, Truth & Reconciliation process, and recommendations
- have a deep understanding of residential schools and how these impacted communities and children who did or did not attend them
- understand Treaty and Treaty process
- understand Land dispossession (including meaning of ceded/unceded), self- government, inherent rights, and each's holistic impacts on Mi'kmaq/Indigenous Peoples
- understand general history of social work practice in their area
- continued cultural competency training is ongoing on a yearly basis
- ensure the learning context or container has experiential aspects to deepen the learning on physical, mental, emotional, and Spiritual level

Ensure social workers have a strong understanding of trauma informed practice

- understand the impacts of trauma on the body, mind, emotions, and Spirit
- understand healing from holistic, strength based, body, creative and land-based practices
- understand the meaning and impacts of white privilege
- understand the many layers of power and how this varies within social location
- understand the meaning and practices of critical reflection, reciprocity, reflection, mindfulness
- understand personal history, personal journey and personal strengths and challenges and the impact of these
- train in non-violent communication skills
- ensure social workers understand themselves, their strengths, and challenges, and have individual and workplace self-care practice opportunities

Restorative Social Worker: Where social workers have a deep understanding of self and the impacts of colonization on Indigenous Peoples. The ground of practice is to ensure children are safe by working with parent/family in a compassionate, informed, non-native way. Supporting and challenging in a holistic way to wellness. It arises that Traditional healing practices hold this innately. Within Ceremony and practices must face personal issues in a very strong container that honours individual journey. It arose to suggest that families [when first involved with MFCS] and social worker [cultural training] participate in a two-week land based program. Components of education around colonization and accurate history, personal work within the two eyed seeing approach to wellness and Ceremony.

CHAPTER SIX

References

Absolon, K., & Willett, C. (2004). Aboriginal Research: Berry Picking and Hunting in the 21st century. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 1(1), 5 - 17.

<https://doi.org/10.7202/1069581ar>

Absolon, K. (2011). *Kaandossiwin: how we come to know*. Fernwood Pub.

ACTION (2009).

[http://www.actionchildprotection.org/documents/2009/pdf/May_2009_Impending_Danger_and_the_Cultural_Context_\(1\).pdf](http://www.actionchildprotection.org/documents/2009/pdf/May_2009_Impending_Danger_and_the_Cultural_Context_(1).pdf)

Alfred, T. (2008). *Peace, power, righteousness: an Indigenous manifesto*. Oxford University Press.

Allan, B. (2017). Podcast: Week 3. Masters Of Indigenous Social Work 516. University of Victoria.

Anderson, K. (2011). *Life stages and Native women: Memory, teachings, and story medicine*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

Bartlett, C., Marshall, M., & Marshall, A. (2012). Two-Eyed Seeing and other lessons learned within a co-learning journey of bringing together Indigenous and mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 2(4), 331-340.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-012-0086-8>

Baskin, C. (2011). *Strong helper's teachings: The value of Indigenous knowledges in the helping professions*. Canadian Scholar's Press.

Baskin, C. (2005). Storytelling Circles: reflections of Aboriginal protocols in research.

Canadian Social Worker Review, 22(2), 171 - 187. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41669834>.

- Blackstock, C., Cross, T., George, J., Brown, I., & Formsma, J. (2006). Reconciliation in child welfare: Touchstones of hope for Indigenous children, youth, and families. Ottawa, ON, Canada: First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada / Portland, OR: National Indian Child Welfare Association.
- Blackstock, C. (2011). The Canadian Human Right Tribunal on First Nations Child Welfare: why if Canada wins, equality and justice lose. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(1), 187-194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2010.09.002>
- Blackstock, C. (2011a). The emergence of the breath of life theory. *Journal of Social Worker Values and Ethics*, 8(1). <http://www.socialworker.com/jswve>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brown, I., Mckay, S., Fuchs, D., Petrowski, N. (2012). Legacy of the centre of excellence for child welfare on child welfare in canada: The manager's perspective. In Brown, I., Mckay, S., Fuchs, D., *Awakening the spirit: moving forward in child welfare: voices from the Prairies*. Cprc Press.
- Carriere, J. (2007). Promising practice for maintaining identities in First Nation adoption. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 3(1), 46-64. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1069526ar>
- Carriere, J. & Richardson, C. (2009). From longing to belonging: Attachment theory, connectedness, and Indigenous children in canada. In S. McKay, D. Fuchs, & I. Brown (Eds.) *Passion for action in child and family services: Voices from the prairies*, 49-67). Canadian Plains Research Centre.
- Children and Family Services Act. S.N.S. 1990, c 5.

<https://novascotia.ca/just/regulation/regs/cfsregs.htm>

- Combs-Orme, T., Wilson, E. E., Cain, D. S., Page, T., & Kirby, L. D. (2003). Context-based parenting in infancy: Background and conceptual issues. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 20(6), 437–472.
- Cowie, A. (2010). Anti-oppressive social work practice in child welfare. *Critical Social Work*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.22329/csw.v11i1.5815>
- Cross, T. (2007, September 20). Through indigenous eyes: Rethinking theory and practice. Paper presented at the 2007 Conference of the Secretariat of Aboriginal and Islander Child Care in Adelaide, Australia.
- Cross, T. P., & Casanueva, C. (2009). Caseworker Judgments and Substantiation. *Child Maltreatment*, 14(1), 38–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559508318400>
- Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Foust, R., Vaithianathan, R., Putnam-Hornstein, E. (2017). Risk assessment and decision making in child protective services: Predictive risk modelling in context. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 79, 291 - 298.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.027>
- Daley, A. (2010). Reflection on Reflexivity and Critical Reflection as Critical Research Practices. *Affilia*, 25(1), 68 - 82. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0886109909354981>
- Dana, D. (2018). *The polyvagal theory in therapy: engaging the rhythm of regulation*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Davidson-Arad, B., & Benbenishty, R. (2014). Child welfare attitudes, risk assessments and intervention recommendations: The role of professional expertise. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(1), 186-203. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcu110>

- Dettlaff, A., Baumann, D., Rivaux, S.L., Fluke, J. (2011). Disentangling substantiation: The influence of race, income, and risk on the substantiation decision in child welfare. *Child and Youth Services Review*, 33(9), 1630-1637.
DOI: 10.1016/j.chilyouth.2011.04.005
- di Tomasso, L., & de Finney, S. (2015). A Discussion paper on Indigenous Custom Adoption Part 1: Severed Connects - Historical Overview of Indigenous Adoption in Canada. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 10(1), 7-18.
<https://fpcfr.com/index.php/FPCFR/article/view/247>
- Douglas, H., & Walsh, T. (2013). Continuing the Stolen Generations: Child Protection Interventions and Indigenous People. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 21(1), 59-87. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157181812x639288>
- Education Act, SNS 1995-96, c 1,
<https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/education.pdf>
- Fairbairn, M. & Strega, S. (2015). Anti-oppressive approaches to child protection: Assessment and file recording. In J. Carriere & S. Strega (Eds.) *Walking this path together: Anti-racist and anti-oppressive child welfare practice*, 157-174. Fernwood Publishing.
- Feir, D. L. (2016). The Intergenerational Effects of Residential Schools on Children's Educational Experiences in Ontario and Canada's Western Provinces. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 7(3).
- Fluke, J. D., Harden, B., Jenkins, M. and Ruehrdanz, M. (2010) Research synthesis on child welfare disproportionality and disparities. Washington, DC: American Humane Association and Center for the Study of Social Policy.

<http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/iipj/vol7/iss3/5doi:10.18584/iipj.2016.7.3.5>

- Frideres, J. (1988). *Native peoples in Canada: Contemporary conflicts*. Scarborough, ON.: Prentice-Hall Canada (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.).
- Galley, V.J., (2010). Summary review of Aboriginal over-representation in the child welfare system. Saskatchewan Child Welfare Review Panel.
- Gonzalez, A., (2018). *It's not me: understanding complex trauma, attachment and dissociation*. Anabel Gonzalez.
- Gosek, G. M., (2017). *The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-child welfare initiative in Manitoba: A study of the process and outcomes for Indigenous families and communities from a front line perspective*. University of Victoria.
- Hardisty, V., Martin, G., Murray, K., & Ramdatt J. (n.d.). PROMISING PRACTICES IN FIRST NATIONS CHILD WELFARE MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE Kunuwanimano Means 'Keeping Our Own' Practicing from a Perspective of Strength. Retrieved from https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/1.KUNUPromisingPractice_3.pdf
- Health Act, R. S., c. 195. s. 1. <https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/health.htm>
- Hebditch, H. (2015). *Risky business: child protection in Canada*. University of Victoria.
- Hedges, J. (2018). Transforming the classroom: Supporting critical change in social work education in the spirit of reconciliation for child welfare. In D. Badry, H. Montgomery, D. Kikulwe, M. Bennett, & D. Fuchs, (Eds.). *Imagining child welfare in the spirit of reconciliation* (pp. 249-267). Regina, SK: University of Regina Press.
- Horejsi, C., Craig, B. H., & Pablo, J. (1992). Reactions by Native American parents to child

protection agencies: cultural and community factors. *Child Welfare*, 71, 329–342.

Indigenous Children in Foster Care, 2011.

<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1541187352297/1541187392851>

Iseke, J., & BMJK, B. (2011). CHAPTER SIXTEEN: Learning Life Lessons from Indigenous Storytelling with Tom McCallum. *Counterpoints*, 379, 245–261. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42980900>

Jensen, S. (2014). *Aboriginal Children Welfare Policies*. www.lawnow.org. [http://](http://www.lawnow.org/aboriginal-children-child-welfare-policies/)

www.lawnow.org/aboriginal-children-child-welfare-policies/

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). Full catastrophe living: using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness. Rev. and updated edition, Bantam Books trade paperback edition. New York: Bantam Books.

King, B., Black, T., Fallon, B., Lung, Y., (2021). The role of risk in child welfare decision-making: A prospective cohort examination of families transferred to ongoing child protection services after an investigation. *Children and Youth Services Review* 125(2021), 105983.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2021.105983>

Knockwood, I., & Thomas, G. (2015). *Out of the depths: the experiences of Mi'kmaq children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie*. Fernwood Publishing.

Kohl, P., Drake, B., Jonson-Reid, M. (2008). Time to leave substantiation behind findings from a national probability study. *Child Maltreatment*, 14(1), 17-26.

DOI: 10.1177/107755908326030

Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, conversations and contexts*.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

- Kovach, M. (2010). Conversational method in Indigenous research. *First People child & Family Review*, 5(1), 40 - 48. <https://fpcfrr.com/index.php/FPCFR/article/view/172>
- Kreutzer, L., & Lafrance, J. (2010). Co-location of a Government Child Welfare Unit in a Traditional Aboriginal Agency: A Way Forward in Working in Aboriginal Communities. *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, 5(2), 34-44. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1068929ar>
- Lester, Stan. (1999). An introduction to phenomenological research. Stan Lester Developments, Taunton. <http://www.sld.demon.co.uk/resmethy.pdf>
- Levine, P.A. (1997). Waking the tiger - healing trauma: the innate capacity to transform overwhelming experiences. North Atlantic Books.
- Locust, C. (2002). Split-Feathers - Adult American Indians Who Were Placed in Non-Indian Families as Children. *OACAS Journal*, 44(3), 11-16.
- Loppie, C., Carriere, J. (2019). Indigenous worldviews and approaches to the social determinants of health. In *Pathways in the forest: Indigenous Guidance on prevention-based child welfare*. West Coast Leaf, p. 18 <https://www.westcoastleaf.org>
- Maguire, M., Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (AISHE-J)*, 9, 3351. <http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/3354>
- Maxwell, K. (2017). Settler-Humanitarianism: Healing the Indigenous Child-Victim. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 59(4), 974-1007. doi:10.1017/S0010417517000342
- McCaffrey, S. (2010). Kookum Knew. Exploring Historical Contexts: Aboriginal People, the Justice System, and Child Welfare. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 1(3/4), 340-347. <https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs13/420102090>

- Mehl-Madrona, L. (2005). *Coyote wisdom: the power of story in healing*. Bear & Co.
- Menakem, R. (2017). *My grandmother's hands*. Central Recovery Press.
- Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch*. *Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch [webpage]*. Retrieved (2017) from:
<http://www.cbu.ca/indigenous-affairs/unamaki-college/mikmaq-ethics-watch/>
- Milloy, J. S. (1999). A national crime: The Canadian government and the residential school system, 1879 to 1986. Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press.
- Neckoway, R., Brownlee, K., & Castellan, B. (2007). Is attachment theory consistent with Aboriginal parenting realities? *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, 3(2), 65-74.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1069465ar>
- Perry, B.D., Szalavitz, M. (2007). *The boy who was raised as a dog*. Basic Books.
- Pourghassemi, S. & Anandarajah, S. (2020). *Indigenous children overrepresented in Canada's child welfare system*.
<https://ryersonian.ca/indigenous-children-overrepresented-in-canadas-child-welfare-system-research-says/>
- Qwul'sih'ya'maht and Kundoqk. (2015). A way of life: Indigenous perspectives on anti-oppressive living. *In Walking This Path Together*, 2nd Ed. Fernwood Publishing.
- Regan, P.Y.L.. (2006). *Unsettling the settler within: Canada's peacemaker myth, reconciliation, and transformative pathways to decolonization*. University of Victoria.
- Richardson, C., & Carriere, J. (2017). *Calling our families home: Metis peoples' experiences with child welfare*. JCharlton Publishing.
- Richardson, C., & Wade, A. (2010). Islands of Safety: Restoring dignity in violence-prevention work with Indigenous Families. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 5(1), 137 - 145.

<https://doi.org/10.7202/1069070ar>

Riessman, C.K. (2007). Thematic analysis in *Narrative Methods for Human Sciences*. Sage Publications, Inc., 53 - 76.

Ross, R. (2014). *Indigenous healing: exploring traditional paths*. Penquin Canada.

Rowe, S., Baldry, E. & Earles, W. (2015). Decolonizing Social Work Research: Learning from Critical Indigenous Approaches. *Australian Social Work*, 68(3), 296 - 308.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407x.2015.1024264>

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996). Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Ottawa, ON: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

Scerra, N. (2011). Strength-based practice: The evidence.

[http://www.childrenyoungpeopleandfamilies.org.au/__data/assets/file/0013/62401 / Research_Paper_6_Strengths_Based_Practice.pdf](http://www.childrenyoungpeopleandfamilies.org.au/__data/assets/file/0013/62401/Research_Paper_6_Strengths_Based_Practice.pdf)

Schmid, J., Morgenshtern, M. (2022). In history's shadow: child welfare discourses regarding Indigenous communities in the canadian social work journal. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 13(1), 145-168.

DOI: 10.18357/ijcyfs131202220662

Siegel, D.J. (2020). *Developing mind: how relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are*. Guilford.

Siegel, D.J. & Bryson Payne, T. (2020). *Power of showing up: how parental presence shapes who our kids become and how their brains get wired*. Ballantine.

Simard, E. (2009). Culturally Restorative Child Welfare Practice: A Special Emphasis on Cultural Attachment Theory. *First Peoples Child & Family Review: An Interdisciplinary*

Journal honouring the Voices, Perspectives and Knowledges of First Peoples, 14(1), 56.

<https://doi.org/10.7202/1071287ar>

Sinha, V., Ellenbogen, S., Trocme, N. (2013). Substantiating neglect of first nations and non-aboriginal children. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35(2013), 2080-2090.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2013.10.007>

Sohki Aski Esquano, & Strega, S. (2015). *Walking this path together: anti-racist and anti-oppressive child welfare practice*. Fernwood Publishing.

Stevenson, A. B. (2020). *Intimate integration: A history of the 60s scoop and the colonization of Indigenous Kinshi*. Scholarly Publishing Division.

Strega, S., & Brown, L. A. (2015). *Research as resistance: revisiting critical indigenous, anti-oppressive approaches*. Canadian scholars' Press.

Thomas, R. (2005). Honouring the oral traditions of the Ta't Mustimuxw. In *Research As Resistance: Revisiting Critical, Indigenous and Anti-Oppressive Approaches 2nd Ed*, 177-199. Scholars Press.

Thomas, R. & Green J. (2015). Indigenous children in the centre: Indigenous perspectives on anti-oppressive child welfare practice. In: Strega, S. & Sohki Aski Esquao. (2015). *Walking this path together: Anti-oppressive practice in child welfare*. Fernwood Publishing.

Trocme, N., Knoke, D. & Blackstock, C. (2004). Pathways to the Overrepresentation of Aboriginal Children in Canada's Child Welfare System. *Social Science Review*, 78(4), 577 - 600. <https://doi.org/10.1086/424545>

Trocme, N., Knoke, D., Fallon, B., & MacLaurin, B. (2009). Differentiating between substantiated, suspected, and unsubstantiated maltreatment in Canada. *Child*

Maltreatment, 14(1), 4–16.

Trocme, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Sinha, V., Black, T. & Fast, E. (2010). Canadian incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect -2008: major findings, chapters 1-5. Public Health Agency of Canada (eds.). Ottawa, 2010.

Turnell, A., & Edwards, S. (1999). *Signs of Safety: A solution and safety oriented approach to child protection case*. WW Norton.

Union of BC Indian Chiefs (2002). *Calling forth our future: Options for the exercise of indigenous peoples authority in child welfare*. Vancouver: Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, brain and body in the transformation of trauma*. Penguin Books.

Wa Cheew Wapaguunew Iskeew (Carolyn Peacock) & Sohki Aski Esquano (Jeannine Carriere) (2015). *Practising from the heart: Living and working in First Nations Communities*. In *Walking This Path Together*, 2nd Ed. Fernwood Publishing.

Watson, L. (1985). Heard quote during her speech at the United Nations Decades for Women Conference. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilla_Watson

Weinhold, B.K., & Weinhold, J.B. (2018). *Developmental trauma: the game changer in the mental health profession*. Circle Press.

West Coast Leaf (2019). Pathways in the forest: Indigenous Guidance on prevention-based child welfare. <https://www.westcoastleaf.org>

Wilson, S. (2001). What is Indigenous research methodology? *Canadian Journal of Native Education*; 25(2), 175 - 179.

Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous research methods*.

Fernwood Publishing.

Wolynn, M. (2017). *It didn't start with you: how inherited family trauma shapes who we are and how to end the cycle*. Penquin Books.

Appendix A

January 6, 2020

Mary MacEachern
University of Victoria
Victoria, BC V8P 5C2

Dear Mary:

I wish to inform you that the Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch committee has reviewed and approved
"Assessing & Mitigating Risk within Child Welfare through a Mi'kmaq Lens"

As your project moves forward with the approval of the Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch, I must note that individual communities have their own perspective on research projects and it is your responsibility to consult them to ensure that you meet any further ethical requirements. Governments, universities, granting agencies, and the like also have ethical processes to which you might have to conform.

When your project is completed, the Mi'kmaq Resource Centre at Unama'ki College would be pleased to accept the results in a form that could be made available to students and other researchers (if it is appropriate to disseminate them). Our common goal is to foster a better understanding of the Indigenous knowledges.

If you have any questions concerning the Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch review of your project please do not hesitate to contact me and I will forward them to the committee members.

Appendix B

 <p>Kwilmu'kw Maw-klusuaqn Negotiation Office Mi'kmaq Rights Initiative Our Rights. Our Future.</p>	<p>75 Treaty Trail Truro, NS B6L 1W3</p> <p>Tel (902) 843 3880 Fax (902) 843 3882 Toll Free 1 888 803 3880 Email info@mikmaqrights.com www.mikmaqrights.com</p>
---	---

November 28, 2019

Attention: Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch
 c/o Unama'ki College
 1250 Grand Lake Rd,
 Sydney, NS B1P 6L2

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Mary MacEachern – Master of Social Work candidate Letter of Support

My name is Heather McNeill and I am the Legal Advisor for the Maw-Kleyu'kik Knijannaq Initiative (formerly referred to as the Mi'kmaw Child Family Initiative). Masters of Social Work student, Mary MacEachern, has asked that I provide a letter of support for the research she is doing for her thesis, which I understand is Assessing and Mitigating Risk in Child Welfare matters from a Mi'kmaq perspective.

Since 2015, the Mi'kmaw of Nova Scotia have engaged in a Mi'kmaw Child Welfare Reform. As a result of this Initiative, the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw Chiefs (the Assembly), through the Kwilmu'kw Maw-Klusuaqn Negotiation Office (KMKNO), provided input into the legislative, regulatory and policy amendments to the Nova Scotia *Children and Family Services Act*. On March 1, 2017, more than 25 legislative amendments that directly affect the Mi'kmaw of Nova Scotia, came into effect. These amendments have changed the way child welfare services are provided to Mi'kmaw children and families in Nova Scotia.

In 2017, the Assembly developed a strategic way forward for the Mi'kmaq in relation to the development of Mi'kmaw law and jurisdiction for our children through the Maw-Kleyu'kik Knijannaq (MKK) Initiative, which means 'keeping our children together'. This work includes engagement with the federal government on a long-term strategic approach to the Mi'kmaw of Nova Scotia assuming complete jurisdiction and governance over child welfare matters for all Mi'kmaq within Nova Scotia.

Appendix C

From: Johnson, Arlene M <Arlene.Johnson@novascotia.ca>
Sent: February 24, 2020 4:30 PM
To: MacEachern, Mary C <Mary.MacEachern@novascotia.ca>
Cc: Paul, Lenora <Lenora.Paul@novascotia.ca>; Clarke-Johnson, Monica <Monica.Clarke-Johnson@novascotia.ca>
Subject: RE: research question
Good afternoon Mary,

This sounds interesting!! Yes you have the Agency's support in conducting your research project.

Arlene

From: MacEachern, Mary C <Mary.MacEachern@novascotia.ca>
Sent: February 20, 2020 3:52 PM
To: Johnson, Arlene M <Arlene.Johnson@novascotia.ca>
Subject: research question

Hi Arlene,

I hope this finds you very well. I am reaching out to ask you about my research for my MSW from an Indigenous perspective. I have been approved by the Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch and UVic to complete my research, which involves interviewing Mi'kmaq Social Workers. My research project began with a consult through the Child Welfare Action group and to go over their guidelines to choose a topic of study. My research topic is Assessing and Mitigating Risk from a Mi'kmaq Perspective. At the completion of my research I will gift the results to the Action group and MFCS.

I am wondering if you (and Agency) would support my sending this enclosed flyer, via email, to Mi'kmaq Social Workers to see who would like to participate?

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions please ask – including if you would like to see the ethics applications/support letters/proposal.

Thank you,
Hope your day is going well,
Take care, mary

Appendix D

University of Victoria and Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study entitled, Assessing and Mitigating Risk within Child Welfare practices through a Mi'kmaq Lens, that is being conducted by Mary MacEachern.

Mary MacEachern is a graduate student in the department of Social Work at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by email: marymac@bellaliant.net or cell phone: 902-921-3787.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Social Work. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Robina Thomas. You may contact my supervisor at 250-472-4877 or robinat@uvic.ca.

In respect of custom I will share a little about myself. It is not a comfortable place to talk about myself, but I am very open to any questions that arise. I am a 56 yr. old woman of mostly Scottish and some IrishTrinidadian decent. I grew up in the county of Antigonish, Mi'kma'ki. I currently live on a farm in Pictou County. My education includes a BA in Psychology/Sociology/Anthropology, Enki Teacher Training, Social Service Worker from Indigenous perspective (FNTI), BSW, Whole Body Focusing, Equine Experiential Learning, Beyond Addiction training, Kundalini Yoga level 1 student and MSWI student. I have 3 grown children, whom I home-schooled and one granddaughter. I have assisted in raising several foster children. I walk a healing journey due to past traumas. I have been extremely Blessed to be able to participate in and commit to various Traditional Indigenous Ceremonies, including walking with a Spirit Helper.

You might know me as a co-worker or a community worker. Please know that there is no pressure to join the study.

Purpose and Objectives

This proposed research will explore assessing and mitigating risk within the child welfare system from a Mi'kmaq perspective. Looking at how to mitigate risk from a Mi'kmaq worldview is a stepping stone, or part of, the broader project of creating a Mi'kmaq Child & Family Services Act, guidelines and polices, under the umbrella of Mi'kmaq Legislation. This stepping stone could be part of the national goal within Indigenous Child Welfare Legislation, which would inform all child welfare work with Indigenous families. Although child welfare has progressed in Canada to the point where community based Indigenous child welfare agencies exist, they are predominantly mandated to use the provincial child welfare acts and guidelines. "One legacy of the European viewpoint is that it has shaped the way child welfare itself has been conceptualized and how child welfare systems have developed (Brown & Patrowski, 2012, p. 2). The research objectives for this study include gathering knowledge from Mi'kmaq social workers, to help inform and develop an understanding of assessing and mitigating risk through a Mi'kmaq and/or

Indigenous lens. This research seeks to open discussions regarding validating safety plans that clearly mitigate risk to the child(ren) and to discover Mi'kmaq ways of protecting the child(ren) that are as valid, or more so, than the current status quo legislated practices.

Importance of this Research

Since time immemorial, Mi'kmaq families have looked after their children. The importance of this research is to seek out traditional ways of looking after children and making recommendations to Mi'kmaq Child and Family Services regarding how risk assessments tools could be culturally supportive, safe and effective. This research will support Maw-Kleyu'kik Knijannaq Initiative (formally the Child Welfare Action Group) and MFCS as they endeavour to create their own legislation.

Participant Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a Mi'kmaq Social Worker who has experiences with assessing risk within child welfare. You have been involved in discussion and decision making that strives to mitigate the identified risks.

What is involved

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include an interview of approximately, but limited to, two hours long. The interviews will take place at a location of your choosing. The option to respond in Mi'kmaq is welcomed. If you give consent the interview you will be asked about being audio taped. There will also be notes taken throughout the interview, particularly if it is not audio taped. The audio tape will be transcribed and you will be given a copy to review and edit. Your final review will be what becomes part of the information analyzed for this research. As a participant you can choose to remain anonymous. If this is chosen you will be asked to give a name or descriptive word to identify your interview information for the initial analysis. The interviews will consist of four open ended questions. The mythology used within this research is story telling thus you are encouraged to share whatever arises for you in relation to the topic of assessing and mitigating risk through a Mi'kmaq lens. The analysis of the information gathered will explore attachment theory and you are encouraged to include thoughts and experiences regarding this.

Please be advised that the information about you that is gathered for this research study will be seen by the researcher only. It will be analyzed without the use of any software and/or online programming. There will be no way the information gathered about you can be accessed, and/or identified as you, if you choose to remain anonymous.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including rearranging your schedule, the need to obtain family supports while you are not at home, and potential transportation issues.

Risks

This research is about a process of sharing and exploring, through sharing ideas and experiences through story, thus the greatest risk is the potential to cause, stir up, emotions that could cause distress and discomfort. To mitigate this risk the participant will know they can stop the interview at any point. This could be to take a break or to stop participating completely. I will make myself available outside of the interview time to assist people who need to process following the actual interview process. All participants will have the right and option to remain anonymous. Due to this research being with a small population there is the risk that anonymity cannot be necessarily guaranteed. This risk will be mitigated by offering a name of their choosing which will be used at the initial stages of analysis only. Participants can also choose to provide a number. As the research analysis progresses there will no longer be a need to identify participant's responses. research reflects the importance of honouring Indigenous rights and treaties and Mi'kmaq ways of knowing.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include contributing information and perspectives to an area that is in need of change. Indigenous child welfare is currently mandated to follow provincial guidelines when assessing and mitigating risks to children. With the new national indigenous legislation being passed and the work being done by the child welfare action plan to create a Mi'kmagi child welfare legislation, you are contributing to substantial changes to benefits Mi'kmaq families. Your participation will contribute to Indigenizing child welfare and could be substantial when creating practices and policies within the new legislation.

A copy of the results will be gifted to Maw-Kleyu'kik Knijannaq Initiative (formally the Child Welfare Action Group) and Mi'kmaq Family & Children Services. With the passing of the National Indigenous Welfare Act, and NS working to create a Mi'kmaq Child Welfare Act, Legislation and Guidelines, this research could be used to inform either. As mentioned, this research project is a potential stepping stone. The first stone is to hear from Mi'kmaq social workers who have experience with risk assessment and proposing action/steps to mitigate the identified risk. I can foresee potential future research that explores the perspectives/understanding from Elders, those who have been involved with Mi'kmaq Family & Children Services, front line protection social worker, whatever their race, and other Indigenous child welfare agencies within Canada.

Compensation

As a way to thank you for your participation a Thanks Giving Ceremony will be held which will include a Traditional Give Away. Direct participation in the Thanks Giving Ceremony is not necessary to be part of the Give Away. There is no monetary compensation for participation in this research. If you consent to participate in this study, this form of compensation to you must not be coercive. It is unethical to provide undue compensation or inducement to research participants. If you would not participate if the compensation was 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. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be used only be included with your consent. If you do not consent to the use of your information shared the information will be destroyed in your presence. If you withdraw from the research you will still be acknowledged, anonymously, within the Thanks Giving Ceremony.

On-going Consent

As the research proceeds I will verbally ask for consent after the initial interview.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity participants can choose to remain anonymous. They can choose to provide a name and/or descriptor that they want. If participants choose to be anonymous their name and identifying information will never be written down and/or recorded.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by it being transcribed into a paper document. This document will be stored in a locked box within my home. The audio tapes will be kept for one year in case original data is needed through the research. Following the completion of the research the tapes and documents will be erased and shredded. This can occur with the participant if requested.

Dissemination of Results

A copy of the results will be gifted to Maw-Kleyu'kik Knijannaq Initiative (formally the Child Welfare Action Group) as they are continually working to create Mi'kmaq Legislation and Guidelines for Mi'kmaq child welfare.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of by erasing the digital taped materials and anything gathered on paper will be shredded.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Mary MacEachern (researcher) at 902-921-3787 or marymac@bellaliant.net and her supervisor, Robina Thomas at 250-472-4877

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.

Name of Participant:

Signature:

Date:

WAIVING CONFIDENTIALITY - PLEASE SELECT STATEMENT only if you consent:

I consent to be identified by name / credited in the results of the study: _____
(Participant to provide initials)

I consent to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results: _____
(Participant to provide initials)

Future Use of Data - PLEASE SELECT STATEMENT:

I consent to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Participant to provide initials)

I do not consent to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Participant to provide initials)

I consent to be contacted in the event my data is requested for future research:
_____ (Participant to provide initials)

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be take