Navigating the Tensions:

Decolonizing Work with the Parents in a Rural Alberta School: An Autoethnographic Account

by

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Abstract

In the fall of 2016 I began working at a small elementary school in rural Alberta. As both the principal and a teacher in the school, I set about making changes designed to meet the Calls to Action of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission while also opening up our classrooms to Indigenous knowledge inclusion. Very shortly after beginning this decolonizing and Indigenizing work, I encountered parental opposition to the changes I was beginning to introduce. Parents questioned the need for teaching and learning about treaties and residential schools. They wondered why a treaty acknowledgement statement had become a part of our public gatherings. They questioned the cross-cultural links I was trying to establish, and the Indigenous knowledge that was being included in instruction. My initial response to the parent community was to cite policies and to point to proposed changes in curriculum as a justification for the work being done. As further discussions with parents would reveal, something more was needed. Parents needed, and asked for, education about changing Indigenous - Settler relations and the decolonizing and Indigenizing work taking place in our school. Parents wanted to learn more.

Drawing on the work of Tully (2008), Veracini (2010), and Lowman & Barker (2015), I began exploring Settler Colonial Theory as a lens through which to understand and reimagine Indigenous – Settler relations in Canada. This theoretical framework helped me to understand the narratives, processes and policies that shape Canada as a Settler society. It also opened up avenues for conversation and dialogue with my parent community, providing a framework through which to begin the hard work of decolonizing hearts and minds. It furnished me with a tool for questioning those underlying assumptions about others and ourselves.

As I worked with parents to address the questions, tensions and considerations that

emerged, my research methodology and questions fell into place. I decided upon autoethnography as my research methodology. This method allowed me to focus on my own experiences as I navigated the tensions associated with living, teaching, and leading in my rural Alberta context. It allowed me to tell my story of doing this work complete with self-doubts, challenges, failings and successes. Autoethnography let me share my story, particular to my context, but more universal in its challenges and themes. Using autoethnography as my methodology, I took up the following questions: 1) In a cultural context of bewilderment, doubt, and even hostility, what questions, tensions and considerations emerge for a non-Indigenous administrator, teacher, and community member working to create a better parent understanding of the decolonizing and Indigenizing work being done within a small, rural elementary school? 2) What questions, tensions and considerations arise for parents as changes happening within the school? 3) How can a teacher/administrator help guide parents through the tensions and questions that arise? and 4) How do I, as a non-Indigenous administrator, teacher, and community member, navigate the tensions and questions that arise both on a personal and professional level?

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Tammy Lynn Tkachuk. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Decolonizing Work with Parents: An Autoethnographic Account of Decolonizing Work with Parents in Rural Alberta", Pro00077953, November 13, 2017.

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Chapter 1: Setting

How do I begin to tell this story? Where do I start? The story of decolonizing work with parents in a rural Alberta community; the story of Indigenizing curriculum and the lessons taught in school needs to begin with an understanding of how we got to this point in history. The story I want to tell stretches back thousands of years to long before Europeans arrived on this land. It includes generations of Indigenous history, 500 years of Indigenous - Settler relations and 100 years of settlement patterns on the Prairies. The backdrop of the past shapes the story of the present and, without some understanding of history it is difficult to fully understand the emotions and challenges of today. So where do I begin to tell the story?

When my partner and I got married we started a family tradition. We decided that each year we would visit a historic site. Our goal was to visit different historical locations with our children so they would grow up with an appreciation for the history of this land and a passion for stories and learning. When I look at the list of places we have visited in the last twenty-five years, they provide a map of Canadian history. The first place we visited, when our oldest child was only about six months old, was the Victoria Settlement in east central Alberta. This provincial historic site is located on the northern bank of the North Saskatchewan River a little over a hundred kilometers downriver from the city of Edmonton. The site tells the story of three different elements or eras central to Canadian history: Indigenous presence, first contacts (the fur trade and missionaries), and settlement. In examining these elements and how they come together, a picture of the complexity of today's Indigenous - Settler relations begins to develop.

A Brief Historical Introduction

Many of the sites we visited in our family travels over the years told of Indigenous history prior to contact with Europeans. We toured sites and museums all across the Prairies

such as Head Smashed in Buffalo Jump (Government of Alberta, n.d.) and Writing on Stone Provincial Park in southern Alberta (Alberta Parks, n.d.), and Wanuskewin in central Saskatchewan (Wanuskewin, n.d.). They told the story of how Indigenous peoples lived in the past. For millennia, this land has been and remains home to Indigenous communities. Adapting to every geographic region, Indigenous peoples thrived, developing a diversity of cultures and languages, knowledge systems and ways of life. In visiting Head Smashed in Buffalo Jump, my family learned about the importance of the buffalo and the relationship the Siksika, Kainai, and Pikanii had with these animals and this place. As my family toured the site, our understanding of the heritage and traditions of these three Indigenous peoples expanded (Brink, 2008; UNESCO, n.d.). We continued to learn more about the Indigenous peoples of southern Alberta at Writing on Stone where we walked through the hoodoos marveling at the petroglyphs representing thousands of years of history (Landals & James-Abra, 2019). Similarly, Wanuskewin, a site in central Saskatchewan, told us the story of those Indigenous groups of the northern plains who followed the bison through the area, living on the land, and meeting together in this sacred spot which features a medicine wheel that dates back to 1500 BCE (Wanuskewin, n.d.).

Heritage sites like these, inevitably interpreted through a white European lens, capture some important aspects of Indigenous history, but they do not, of course, tell the entire story of Indigenous peoples in Canada prior to the arrival of Europeans. The history of those Indigenous groups who populated this place before Europeans arrived and before Canada became a country is deep and rich. It is also, all too often, presented as a history that is over and done, gone, a way of life that existed before contact and has since disappeared. While this may well have been the intent of much governmental policy over the years, the truth is that Indigenous peoples continue to maintain ties to their traditions and collective identity as nations and peoples.

I realize that I am glossing over centuries of history in this retelling. There are places where the history of Canada is told in far more detail and far greater depth (Cardinal et al., 2004; Daschuk, 2019; King, 2012; Ray, 2016; Whitecomb, 2019). What I present here is our shared history of the Prairies as I have come to understand it. What I aim to provide is an introductory understanding, a basic context, for the discussion of Indigenous-Settler relations that is to follow, and the story begins with Indigenous peoples who lived on this land for generations. Then, in 1497, an Italian explorer, Giovanni Caboto, sailing for the British crown, arrived off the coast of what is now known as Newfoundland (Ray, 2016). From this date on, exploration of the northern part of North America by both French and British adventurers began. On the western Prairies, the place where my family and I currently live, the first Europeans to arrive came either as part of the growing fur trade that stretched across the landscape or as Catholic missionaries tasked with spreading religion and enlightenment to Indigenous peoples. In the specific area in which I live, the first trading post was established in the early 1800's and not long afterward, a mission was established (Dunstable Historical Society, 2007). This is discussed in more detail later on in this chapter. For the purposes of a general history lesson, suffice it to say that after millennia of habitation by Indigenous peoples, the Prairies, by the late 1700's, became a place of contact and interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Canadian Encyclopedia, n.d.).

What happened next is pivotal to the story of Indigenous - non-Indigenous relations on the Prairies. In 1867, the Dominion of Canada was formed. No longer a colony of Britain, the new nation of Canada set out to establish itself on the North American continent. The country created by the act of confederation in 1867 was much smaller than the Canada of today, consisting of only four provinces: Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia (Canada:

Peoples' History, n.d.). The dream was to create a nation that stretched from sea to sea, from Atlantic to Pacific. To this end, the Government of Canada purchased Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company, in 1869. As Ray (2016) explains "[a]fter protracted negotiations, Canada agreed to buy Rupert's Land for a mere £300,000" (p. 196). This sale included all of the land stretching from the Hudson's Bay in northern Ontario to the Rocky Mountains, meaning that the lands of the Prairies inhabited by Indigenous Peoples for generations was now owned by the Government of Canada. What is important to note, is that the Hudson's Bay Company had not, at a prior point in time, purchased or otherwise acquired these lands from Indigenous peoples. For Indigenous peoples of the Prairies land was not something to be bought and sold. Land was sacred (Archibald, 2008; Kimmerer, 2013; Mack, 2018; Michell, 2013). Land was to be cared for and shared. As Mack (2018) explains, "Indigenous Peoples have a direct relationship with the land and water, embodied in their languages, ceremonies, family relationship and worldviews (p. 38). By what right, then, did the Hudson's Bay Company sell this vast tract of territory to the Government of Canada? As a part of European exploration, the notion of *terra nullius* was used by colonial powers to claim lands as their own. In the early 1600s all lands draining into the Hudson's Bay were claimed by the British crown and control of these territories was granted to the Hudson's Bay Company by Royal Charter (Ray, 2016).

When these lands were sold in 1869, the Government of Canada wasted little time in putting its plan for this new territory into action. In an effort to entice British Columbia to join the confederacy, the Government of Canada set out to build a railway connecting the east to the west. This railway was to stretch from Ontario, across the Prairies, through the Rocky Mountains and out to Vancouver. Along its path were the traditional territories and hunting grounds of numerous Indigenous groups. How best to clear this path, became a question for

Canadian politicians to answer. Hunting the bison to near extinction was one solution. The enormous herds of bison that roamed the southern Prairies and provided Indigenous peoples with the food, tools, shelter and clothing they required for survival stood in the way of safe travel by train. The herds needed to be culled. The building of a railway and the settling of lands along the railway line also meant that surveyors needed to be sent out to this territory to parcel up sections of land for sale and development. It is at this point in history that an important act of Indigenous resistance to Settler Colonialism took place: the Red River Rebellion (Daschuk, 2013; Ray, 2016).

In the late 1600's and throughout the 1700's as the fur trade spread west across the North American continent, the Métis emerged as an important force on the Prairies. These people, the Métis, shared both a European heritage and an Indigenous background as French and Scottish fur traders and Indigenous women had children together. Many Métis worked in the fur trade, but there were also those who chose to settle along the Red River in what is now Manitoba and begin to develop farmland in the area (Royal Canadian Geographic Society, 2018; Rupertsland Institute, n.d.). When Rupert's Land was sold in 1869, the Métis feared for the future of their land, culture and religion under the control of the Government of Canada. "The Métis strongly feared the sale of Rupert's Land would hurt their economic and political interests. They distrusted Canadians" (Ray, 2016, p. 196). When surveyors arrived to resurvey their land and shift from the French seigneurial system of land ownership to square lots which limited access to the river, the Métis, led by Louis Riel, blocked the surveyors' access to their land. Tensions escalated. The Métis seized control of Fort Gary and Thomas Scott, an English-speaking man opposed to the rebellion, was shot. Eventually the Government of Canada agreed to carve out a space for the Métis and the Red River Settlers. In 1870, the small province of Manitoba was

created. Within this new province a parcel of land was set aside for the Métis and their children and both language and religious rights were guaranteed, however, Louis Riel and his closest advisors were forced into exile. Within a matter of years, the Métis were forced to leave Manitoba as more and more English-speaking Settlers arrived in the new province and, once again, the Métis felt their way of life was threatened (Canadian Encyclopedia, n.d.; Ray 2016; Royal Canadian Geographic Society, 2018).

The Numbered Treaties

This story of relocation of Indigenous peoples was to be repeated over and over across the Prairies with moments of resistance scattered throughout the timeline. To make way for the railway, the surveyors, and settlement, Indigenous peoples, who were beginning to feel the negative effects of bison decimation and European encroachment on their way of life, needed to be removed. As Neu & Therrien (2003) explain "[a] dominating nation must do something about a territory's original occupants if it is to settle its lands" (p. 18). "Separating an Indigenous population from its traditional territory is a primary need of land acquisition and resource extraction" (Neu & Therrien, 2003, p. 9). Thus began the process of negotiating the Numbered Treaties. Between 1871 and 1877, seven treaties were signed between Indigenous peoples and the Government of Canada. These treaties covered the territory of the southern Prairies. Contained in the treaties were promises of peace and cooperation. Indigenous peoples received reserved land, some monetary compensation, farming implements, promises of education, and, in some cases, healthcare. In exchange, the Government of Canada received land rights, access to resources, and space for settlements (Asch, 2014; Canadian Encyclopedia, n.d.; Miller, 2009; Ray, 2016). After a short hiatus, the Government of Canada went on to sign four more Numbered Treaties in the early 1900's covering the northern half of those territories

purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1869. The understanding and interpretation of these treaties is a contentious issue today. As Miller (2009) explains:

> Treaties between the Crown and Aboriginal Peoples are one of the paradoxes of Canadian history. Although they have been an important feature of the country since the earliest days of contact between Natives and newcomers, relatively few Canadians understand what they are or the role they have played in the country's past. Unfortunately, even fewer non-Native Canadians appreciate that treaties are a valuable part of the foundations of the Canadian state. (p. 3)

At the time, faced with starvation, illness, European encroachment and settlement expansion, many Indigenous peoples looked upon the treaties as a way to preserve their way of life.   There were, however, those Indigenous groups who opposed the treaty process and those who resisted treaties as the failings of the treaty system began to reveal themselves.

In the summer of 2020, as part of our family's annual tradition, my daughters, my partner and I travelled to Frog Lake, Alberta, the site of the Frog Lake Massacre (Beal & McLeod, 2006; Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan, n.d.). Not much remains of the buildings that were Frog Lake, but the plaques and monuments told the story of this "massacre." I put the word "massacre" in quotations. In all, nine Settlers died during this uprising. Not that the loss of nine lives is acceptable, but if nine Indigenous people had been killed, I wonder if it would have been called a massacre, an argument Thomas King takes up in *The Inconvenient Indian* (King, 2012)*.* The incident at Frog Lake grew out of frustration with the treaties. While the Cree of the area, led by Chief Big Bear, had signed Treaty 6 in 1882, they had not yet found a reserve site by 1885. They were frustrated with the lack of food and disagreements over rations with Indian Agent, Thomas Quinn. Spurred on by the Métis' second rebellion at Batoche, Big Bear's Cree

took Thomas Quinn and about seventy other White Settlers from Frog Lake hostage in the spring

of 1885. In the midst of the skirmish, Thomas Quinn and eight other Settlers were killed. In

response to the incident at Frog Lake, and several other uprisings at the time that were part of

what is known as the Northwest Rebellion, the Canadian government sent troops to the

area. The rebellion was put down. Six of the Cree leaders responsible for the Frog Lake

Massacre, including Big Bear's son, were put on trial. They were hung in November of 1885

along with two other Cree leaders in Canada's largest mass hanging (Beal & McLeod, 2006).

The Northwest Rebellion, of which the Frog Lake Massacre was a part, began in the

spring of 1885 and lasted until the fall. It was an attempt at resistance against Canadian

government initiatives to resurvey land and enforce treaty arrangements. Not long after the

province of Manitoba was formed in 1870 following the Red River Rebellion, the Métis were

forced to move further west. They settled on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River north

of present day Saskatoon. By 1885, surveyors had made their way across the Prairies and caught

up to the Métis. Once again frustrated by the threats to their land and culture, the Métis, led by

Louis Riel, who had returned from exile, took up arms against the Canadian government. At the

same time, other Indigenous groups looked upon this moment as an opportunity to also show

their opposition to treaties and European encroachment. As Ray (2016) states "[e]lsewhere,

dissident groups on various reserves, including Mistahimaskwa's [Big Bear], took advantage of

the hostilities to seek retribution against Settlers and government agents for past offences" (p.

221). Skirmishes broke out across the Prairies in places like Frog Lake, Duck Lake, Cut Knife

and Fish Creek. The response by the Canadian government was firm. A militia was organized

and the rebellion was put down. Those responsible were arrested and put on trial. In addition to

those hung in November of 1885, several members of the Métis peoples provisional government

were imprisoned and Louis Riel himself was sentenced to death and hung in Regina in the fall of the year (Beal & McLeod, 2006; Ray, 2016).

Settlement

With Indigenous Peoples moved onto reserves and the process of surveying underway, the path was clear for further settlement into the west (Daschuk, 2013). The Government of Canada began advertising free land available to those who would come and establish farms on the Prairies. Settlement was seen as a path forward and a way to civilize the territory. As Neu & Therrien (2003) argue "[u]sing Settlers to crowd out the Indigenous peoples and gaining control by importing an elite to oversee the territorial operations are commonly used strategies" for those nations wishing to gain control of a new territory (p. 18). The legislation allowing for the settlement of the west was actually passed in 1872 as the Dominion Land Act. This Act allowed for the creation of reserves for Indigenous peoples and "the extinguishment of the Indian title" (Ray, 2016, p. 217). The land could now be surveyed and divided into parcels which could be given to Settlers provided they met government requirements (Chandler, 2006). At the turn of the twentieth century, Settlers from across Eastern Europe began arriving on the Prairies to claim their section of land and establish family farms, many of which are still held by descendants of these initial Settlers.

This is where ties to the land become more complicated. For Indigenous peoples, the land was sacred. The land provided everything people needed to survive. In exchange, the land was to be cared for and respected, to be shared and cherished (Mack, 2018). For many of the Settlers who arrived on the Prairies in the early 1900's the land was a new beginning. It was the tablet on which to write a new story. It was a clean slate. I imagine Settlers knew of the Indigenous peoples who had once inhabited the spaces they now claimed, but the government

had made arrangements with this Indigenous population and the land was now clear and free for the taking. For those families who came to Canada for a fresh beginning, this land became their refuge, their hope, their future, and their home. My father's ancestors came to Canada as part of this wave of Settlers. They left Ukraine and travelled by train and steamer to Strathcona, Alberta. From Strathcona, they travelled down river on a raft of their own making until they arrived at a point in the river close to where other families from Ukraine had already settled. They climbed the high banks of the river and walked through the brush until they reached the site that would become their new home. Here they began a new life. It was difficult for them. Starting with very little, they cleared the land, built a home for themselves and raised their family. I have heard this story told since early childhood by my aunties, my uncles, my parents, and grandparents. It is told around the kitchen table. It is recorded in the local history book (Two Hills Historical Society, 1989). It is a story so similar to that of other Settler Canadians (Kostash, 1978). I am now the third generation on my father's side to be born in Canada and I am forever grateful for the hardships they endured so that I could enjoy a life in Canada.

In fact, there is another annual tradition that my family and I observe. Each spring, once the snow has melted and the trees are leaved, my family and I embark upon a pilgrimage of sorts. With a picnic lunch in the trunk of the car, we travel back to this ancestral homeland, to this place where my great-grandparents started a new life. We visit the stone church my great-grandparents helped to build and walk through the cemetery where they and other family members are buried. As I walk through the trees planted by grandfather, and stand in front of the house my great-grandfather built, I imagine what those first years must have been like. I think of those stories of struggle and endurance. I feel the pride they must have felt at tending this Prairie

soil, of raising crops and animals, and of watching their children, their grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren thrive. For over 100 years, this land has been a part of my family. It is our home. Two years ago the gravel road that runs past my great-grandparents' farm down to the church they helped to build was renamed. There is now a sign on the corner letting travelers know that this is Tkachuk Road. There is also a plaque in the cemetery commemorating 100 year of farming on this land by my family. This is my heritage. I feel a connection to this place.   This is where my family's story in Canada began.

I dwell on my connection to my great-grandparents' homestead because the connection I feel to the land of my great-grandparents, is a connection shared by many Settler families. As discussion in chapter four will reveal, this imprinting on the land, this claiming of origins in this new place, is a part of Settler colonial identity. For, "as far as Settlers are concerned, they are the first real inhabitants of the place they settle" (Veracini, 2010, p.92). The connection, the emotion associated with the land, these are deep feelings. I have no doubt that for Indigenous people who were relocated off of their traditional lands, the connection to the land and the emotion associated with the land is even more important. My 100 years of family history in this place pales in comparison to the number of generations of Indigenous ancestors who have walked in this land. This deep and complex relationship to land complicates Indigenous - Settler relations. When I talk to other descendants of those original Settlers, their connection to the land and the pride they feel at the struggles endured by their ancestors is huge. The idea that someone else also has a claim to this same land is threatening. The loss of this ancestral land would be tragic. What is often missing for most Settlers is the understanding that this loss of land was no less tragic for those Indigenous peoples who were first torn from the land of their ancestors, their home, their sacred place.

The *Indian Act* and Residential Schools

For those Indigenous people who signed treaties and moved to reserves in the late 1800's, the story of disruption does not end there. The establishment of treaties was a first step, but further actions were deemed necessary to erase Indigenous peoples from this new land. Disease and starvation had driven Indigenous peoples to sign treaties (Daschuk, 2013), but as Neu & Therrien (2006) argue, more was required:

> Separating an Indigenous population from its tradition territory is a primary need of land acquisition and resource extraction. This is because the fundamental relationship between Indigenous people and their land base is irrevocable: Tradition is Place, and sovereignty over Place is the basis for a sustainable future. The tight interweaving of existence, self-definition and territory is the essence of Indigenous identity – a reality that is a complete anathema to the principles that allow non-Indigenous cultures to objectify land into real estate, divorce it from tradition and exploit its natural bounty without regard for the long-term future. The fusion of Indigenous culture with their land is so complete that the only way to take the land is to destroy the Indigenous culture. (p. 9)

To this end, "Parliament passed the first Indian Act in 1876, which combined all laws affecting Indian people" (Ray, 2016, p. 2013). This piece of legislation brought together all those separate laws and agreements that related to Indigenous people in Canada. It codified policies and procedures for managing Indigenous peoples' lives. Included in the Act were definitions of who would and who would not be considered an Indian (the term for Indigenous people in the *Indian Act*) according to the law. Indians with status would be able to live on reserves and receive treaty benefits. Indians without status, were to be absorbed into the body politic. The *Indian Act* also controlled movement on and off reserve, imposed a Chief and Council Governmental

structure on reserves, denied women status, banned religious ceremonies, enforced enfranchisement, renamed individuals with European names, created a permit system for the sale of goods by Indigenous peoples and prohibited the sale of certain goods to Indigenous peoples (Joseph, 2018; Ray, 2016). The Act also denied Indigenous peoples the right to vote, the ability to form political organizations and the ability to solicit funds to hire legal counsel. Perhaps most devastatingly, the *Indian Act* created the residential school system, forbid the use of Indigenous languages, the celebration of Indigenous cultural events, and led to 100 years of targeted assimilation practices (Joseph, 2018). Clearly, the intent of this piece of legislation was to erase Indigenous identity. Ry Moran, Director of the National Center for Truth and Reconciliation in 2018 summed up the consequences of these numerous government policies in the following way:

> There are two primary perspectives on the country we call Canada – the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples and the perspectives of the tens of millions of people from different backgrounds who have come to this country to find a new home. While there is great diversity among Indigenous perspectives, one fact remains central – the traditional lands, practices, values, cultures, languages, systems and understandings of Indigenous Peoples have been systematically attacked, dismantled and destroyed at the hands of the Canadian state. (Moran, 2018, p. 60)

Perhaps most destructive of all these forces of cultural genocide were the residential schools.

The term residential schools is used to refer to those government sponsored religious schools in operation throughout Canada from the 1880's to the 1990's (MacDonald, 2015; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Their goal was the education of Indigenous children into the Christian faith and the assimilation of Indigenous children into Canadian society. In total, more than 150 000 Indigenous children were forced to attend residential school

(MacDonald, 2015). Removed from their families, sometimes permanently, children were stripped of their Indigenous identity. They were provided with religious instruction and training in tasks such as farming or domestic work that would prepare them for assimilation in to Canadian society. "As education institutions, the residential schools were failures" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. 71). Academic skills were not the focus of instruction and children regularly spent more time in religious observance and manual labor at the school than in the classroom. As stated in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the goal of these school was "not to education them [Indigenous children], but primarily to break their link to their culture and identity" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. 2). These schools were a part of the government's deliberate policy to eradicate Indigenous identity, to complete the relocation and removal of Indigenous peoples. "Additionally, many children suffered malnutrition and abuse while attending residential school. It is estimated that over 3000 children died while at residential school although "the number of students who died at Canada's residential schools is not likely ever to be known in full" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. 90).

The forced removal of Indigenous children from their parents and communities continues to have a lasting impact on Indigenous peoples. For those children torn from their language, culture and traditional religious beliefs, the trauma experienced at school has left scars that pass from generation to generation. As explained in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

Residential schools are a tragic part of Canada's history. But they cannot simply be consigned to history. The legacy from the schools and the political and legal policies and mechanisms surrounding their history continue to this day. This is reflected in the

significant educational, income, health, and social disparities between Aboriginal people

and other Canadians. It is reflected in the intense racism some people harbor against

Aboriginal people and in the systemic and other forms of discrimination Aboriginal

people regularly experience in this country. It is reflected too in the critically endangered

status of most Aboriginal languages. Current conditions such as the disproportionate

apprehension of Aboriginal children by child-welfare agencies and the disproportionate

imprisonment and victimization of Aboriginal people can be explained in part as a result

or legacy of the way that Aboriginal children were treated in residential schools and were

denied an environment of positive parenting, worthy community leaders, and a positive

sense of identity and self-worth. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, pp. 135-

136)

Instead of the education Indigenous peoples asked for when the Numbered Treaties were signed,

they received a system bent on assimilation which resulted in cultural genocide.

For 100 years Indigenous people endured education aimed at assimilation and erasure of

Indigenous languages, cultures, and people. At the same time, Settlers told their own stories of

the settlement of Canada. The general Settler narrative painted a picture of an empty land, ripe

for the taking by hardworking, industrious pioneers. Through their hard work and perseverance

they tamed the wilds and replaced the savages. In the words on Thomas King (2012), any

discussion of Indigenous people that took place tended to focus on the "Dead Indian", or

Indigenous peoples of the past, who once lived in this place but are now long gone. There is no

place in Settler society, as King (2012) argues for "Live Indians." This erasure of Indigenous

peoples is a part of Settler Colonialism that is discussed in chapter four. While forces of

assimilation attempted to destroy Indigenous identity, Settler society was learning a different

narrative, a narrative of erasure and replacement. As Murray Sinclair, chair of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, wrote in 2014, understanding the history and legacy of residential schools "only explains one side of the issue" (Sinclair, 2014, p. 7). He states that:

> we are governed in our approach to reconciliation with this thought: the way that we have all been educated in this country— Aboriginal children in residential schools and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in public and other schools – has brought us to where we are today…It is our view that, in broad terms, education has brought us to the current state of poor relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country, but education holds the key to making things better. (Sinclair, 2014, p.7)

Uncovering and unravelling these different narratives is the work of decolonizing and Indigenizing. It is the work of reconciliation. It is the work that I have been undertaking with students and parents in my community. Understanding and appreciating this history and these experiences, only broadly outlined here, is the work that needs to be done within Canadian society as a whole.

Resistance and Advocacy

From the 1880's to the 1960's, there were those Indigenous families and communities who resisted the Residential School System and unequal treatment under the law. Some families tried to hide their children or shelter their children from the Residential School System, and there are stories of children who tried to leave the school and travel back home. Unfortunately, the consequences for those who attempted to flee the system were severe, ranging from fines to loss of life. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) states "[r]unning away could be risky. At least thirty-three students died, usually due to exposure after running away from school" (p. 119). In spite of the risks, resistance continued. According to the TRC, "[s]tudents

knew they might be caught, returned, and punished. Still, they believed the effort to make it home and have a measure of freedom was worth it" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. 118).

In 1918, the League of Indians was formed by Indigenous soldiers returning home from the First World War. The League, led by "Frederick Ogilvie Loft, a Mohawk veteran who was born on the Six Nations reserve in 1862" (Ray, 2016, p. 317) advocated for Indigenous rights and the return of Indigenous religious and cultural practices. Throughout the 1930's, provincial Indigenous associations, like the Indian Association of Alberta, and the League of Indians in western Canada were formed. As Ray (2016) explains, "[b]esides continuing the struggle for the preservation of hunting, trapping, and fishing rights in the 1930's, the association lobbied for an end to reserve-land surrenders, Indian control over reserve lands, and the termination of the pass-permit system" (p. 319). Together these organization advocated for change and, in 1951, the *Indian Act* was amended removing the prohibition against Indigenous cultural practices and the injunction against legal action (Ray, 2016).

By the 1960's, attitudes about the subjugation of peoples were changing around the globe. The Civil Rights Movement in the United States was in full swing and, in 1960, the United Nations adopted its *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples* (UN General Assembly, 1960). Indigenous people in Canada were given the right to vote and, in 1963, H.B. Hawthorn was commissioned to investigate the social conditions of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The *Hawthorn Report* (Hawthorn, 1966) found that Indigenous peoples were the most disadvantaged group in Canadian society. It included recommendations for increased resources, supports and opportunities for Indigenous people. It also introduced the concept of "citizens plus," citizens deserving of additional rights and protections, and argued for

an end to assimilation policies and discriminatory practices. Then, in 1969, the federal

government of Canada published a policy proposal known as the *White Paper* which focused on

abolishing Indian status (Government of Canada, 1969). The idea was to eliminate the *Indian*

Act, all legislation contained within it, and to turn reserve land into private property. While

presented as a progressive proposal to create an equal playing field for Indigenous and Settler

Canadians, the *White Paper* set off a wave of Indigenous activism as many Indigenous peoples

strongly opposed the federal government's attempts to absolve itself of legal and treaty

responsibilities (Kerr, 2017). In response to the *White Paper*, Harold Cardinal and the Alberta

Indian Association released its *Red Paper* and argued for the idea of "citizens plus," the idea that

Indigenous peoples should have the same rights as all other Canadians in addition to those rights

guaranteed in the treaties (Cardinal, 1969). With the *Red Paper*, Indigenous advocacy and

resistance in Canada gained more momentum (Kerr, 2017). The National Indian Brotherhood

advocated for Indigenous control of education. Residential schools began to close and

Indigenous peoples began to operate their own day school.

For the next thirty years, awareness and advocacy centered on Indigenous issues

continued to grow. In the 1970's three important legal cases advanced Indigenous rights in

Canada. The first case, often referred to as the *Calder Case,* recognized the rights of the Nisga'a

in British Columbia to disputed lands. As Ray (2016) explains, in "*Calder*, six of the seven

Supreme Court of Canada judges recognized that Aboriginal Title did exist when European

colonization of the territory began" (p. 337). The second case involved the James Bay Cree and

opposition to a hydroelectric project on their traditional territory in northern Quebec. The James

Bay Cree "sought an injunction against the construction of the dams, arguing that they would

have a negative impact on their way of life…Persuaded by the evidence, on 13 November 1973,

Mr. Justice Albert Malouf granted the injunction" (Asch, 2014, p.17). In subsequent negations

with the Government of Quebec, the James Bay Cree did reach a settlement in which they were

granted "both cash compensation and specified rights" (Asch, 2014, p. 18) in exchange "for

agreeing to extinguish rights based on the pre-existence of their society" (Asch, 2014, p. 18). In

the third case, known as the *Paulette Caveat*, the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories

found that the Government of Canada had not fulfilled agreements made in Treaties 8 and

11(Asch, 2014). Each of these legal decisions advanced Indigenous rights and brought the issue

of Indigenous land claims into the public eye.

In 1982, Canada repatriated its constitution. As a part of this process, Aboriginal and

treaty rights were entrenched in the new Constitution Act. The collective rights of Aboriginal

peoples became a guarantee within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Then, in

1985, the *Indian Act* was amended again. As Ray (2016) states "[u]ntil 1985, the Indian Act

specified that Aboriginal women who married non-status Indians lost their status and their

children could not register as Indians. In 1985 Parliament amended the act through Bill C-31 to

address this gender-based discrimination" (p. 392). With Bill C-31 over 100 000 Indigenous

people gained or regained Indian status denied to them through the discriminatory

enfranchisement practices of the *Indian Act*. There remain, however, many Indigenous people

who are still without status under the *Indian Act.*

Throughout the 1980's and 1990's, Indigenous protests over lost land and Settler

encroachment continued. From the Innu of Ungava to the Lubicon of Northern Alberta to the

Mohawk of Kanesatake (Richardson, 1989; Ray 2016), Indigenous peoples continued to stand up

for their land and their rights. The Oka Crisis in 1990 brought tensions over Indigenous land

rights into the national spotlight, and international spotlight. "For a brief moment, the eyes of

the world focused on Oka" states Ray (2016, p. 359). These events helped prompt the federal government's Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). The final report of this Royal Commission was released in 1996. Included in the recommendations was a call for a complete restructuring of Indigenous – non-Indigenous relations. The report also acknowledged the detrimental legacy of the Residential School System (Government of Canada, 1996). The federal government responded by issuing a statement of reconciliation and by establishing the federal Office of Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada. A class action law suit was soon launched against the federal government by residential school survivors and, in 2006, an agreement between the federal government and residential school survivors known as the *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement* was released (Government of Canada, 2006). From this agreement, came the formal apology to residential school survivors by Prime Minister Stephen Harper and plans for a national commission on truth and reconciliation.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

This rapid overview of Canadian history now brings me to 2008 when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established. Its mandate was laid out in the *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement* (2006). The commission was to host national and community events to gather documents and statements/truth sharings about Canada's Residential School System. The TRC was also to establish a national research center and administer a commemoration fund. Early on in its inception, the commission faced challenges. The task the commission had been given seemed insurmountable and interference from the federal government slowed their progress. Before the end of its first year, all three commissioners, Justice Harry Laforme, Jane Brewin Morley, and Claudette Dumont-Smith, resigned. In 2009 they were replaced by Justice Murray Sinclair, an Ojibwa judge from Manitoba, Chief Wilton

Littlechild, from Maskwacis, Alberta, and Marie Wilson, a CBC broadcaster from the Northwest

Territories. Its first national event was held in 2010 at the Forks in Winnipeg, Manitoba, a

traditional meeting ground of Indigenous peoples prior to colonization and the location of the

Red River Colony and the events of the Red River Rebellion in 1869. Over the course of its

public hearings, the TRC visited more than 70 communities and gathered together over 7000

statements. The work of the TRC was challenging and not always met with cooperation and

understanding (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Over the years, the commission

found itself in court several times in its efforts to compel churches, governments and

organizations to provide requested information and documentation, and the degree to which the

public embraced national TRC events varied with location and context. The final national event

of the TRC was held in Edmonton in 2014.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released its final

report. Contained within the final report of the TRC are 94 Calls to Action. These

recommendations outline ways in which:

> the way we govern ourselves must change, laws must change, policies and programs must
>
> change, the way we educate our children and ourselves must change, the way we do
>
> business must change, thinking must change, [and] the way we talk to, and about, each
>
> other must change. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, pp. 316-317)

In the spirit of reconciliation, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal Government began

implementing a number of the recommendations, including Call to Action #41, an inquiry into

missing and murdered Indigenous women. The final report of the inquiry was released in 2019.

The TRC's Calls to Action ask every Canadian to take up the task of reconciliation and

contribute to the betterment of our society. It is in this spirit and with the Calls to Action of the

TRC in mind, that I began the decolonizing and Indigenizing work that is the focus of this dissertation. In an effort to move from apology to action, from guilt to Allyship, I used the tool at my disposal, education, to begin challenging mindsets and "decolonizing hearts and minds" (Battiste, 2013).

Local History

The first part of this chapter has attempted to provide a basic understanding of Indigenous – Settler interactions and the historical events that have led up to Canada's current situation. This description has been broad and general encompassing generations and the Prairies as a whole. These events are also very local and very personal for me and for my community. In front of the school in which I teach, there is a large stone cairn surrounded by trees and benches that invites passersby to stop and take a moment to remember those proud Settlers and pioneering families who first came to this area. Engraved on the cairn's plaque is the following information:

> This plaque is dedicated to all the pioneers, parents and students of the area…July 8, 1907 was a memorable day in the history of Lac la Nonne as it marked the opening of the Dunstable School, the first school in the Lac La Nonne District #1529.

The plaque details the history of the school from its days as a one room schoolhouse to its amalgamation with other schools in the area in 1948. At the bottom of the plaque is a statement acknowledging the contributions of the local Historical Society and many area volunteers in making the placement of this monument possible in 2005, the Centennial year of the Province of Alberta. This monument links the school to its past, as do the many families who continue to send their children to our school as they have for multiple generations. Looking back at the local history book, I see family names that date back to the early 1900's and are still prevalent in the

area today. I also find the introduction to the local history book an important reminder of the

Settler story told throughout this area and throughout much of western Canada. The introduction

to *Tales & Trails: Dunstable & Area History* (2007) begins in the following way:

> The Hudson's Bay Co. (HBC) fur traders started the development of western Canada.
>
> They established fur trading posts and used the rivers as their highways. Fort Augustus
>
> (Edmonton) was a major trading and supply post, and in 1823 a trading post was
>
> established at Fort Assiniboine, on the Athabasca River. The HBS fur traders would
>
> travel up the Saskatchewan River, portage across to the Athabasca River, then upstream
>
> to Fort Assiniboine. In 1825 an overland route was established to Fort Assiniboine. A
>
> trail was built from Edmonton, through Riviere Qui Barre, past the infamous Deadman
>
> Lake, through Sion with a stopover spot a Lac La Nonne. From there the trail went north
>
> to Fort Assiniboine. It continued north to the HBC trading posts on Lesser Slave Lake.
>
> This HBC trail was the first access into the Dunstable area, and was used by the HBC fur
>
> traders until 1860 when the HBC started using the Athabasca Trail. The trail through the
>
> Dunstable area got very little use after 1860, until gold was discovered in the Yukon. In
>
> 1897 this HBC trail to Fort Assiniboine became the first part of the Klondike Trail, and
>
> was traveled by many gold seekers. (Dunstable Communities Historical Society, 2007, v)

There is, hanging on the wall in the library of our school, another plaque commemorating our

location as a point along the Klondike Trail. The introduction to the local history book continues

with the following:

> The Canadian Government wanted to encourage the settlement of western Canada, and in
>
> 1872 they passed the Federal Dominion Land Act which established homesteading on
>
> crown land which had been surveyed. Surveying the townships and section across

western Canada was a massive project. The homesteaders followed the surveyors across the Prairies, then into Alberta, to the west and to the north. The land in the Dunstable area north and south of the 15th Baseline (Township Road 570) was surveyed in 1903 and 1904, and the homesteaders followed. Some homesteaders preceded the surveyors, and had to wait for the survey before they could file on their homesteads. During the years 1900 to 1905 many homesteaders came into the Dunstable area, and they continue to come. They build homes and farms, and then they built churches, schools, and post offices, country stores and community halls. By 1913 there was a railway to the east of the Dunstable area, and the first road were built on the road allowances near the railway lines. One-room schools were built about 5 miles apart, and communities formed around the schools…In 1948 the one-room country schools were moved to the new site of the Dunstable Consolidated School. The children were bussed to the new school location at Dunstable, and a modern school was built. This new school then became the center of the community. (Dunstable Communities Historical Society, 2007, v)

I realize I have included some rather lengthy quotes, but it is important to listen to the wording and the language Settlers use to tell their story. This is the story Settlers tell of their own history. This is the story that is told of the place in which I live and the school in which I teach. This is the story I wish to examine with the students and the parents in my community.

Missing from this retelling of local history, is any mention of those Indigenous people who came before fur traders, prospectors, surveyors and homesteaders. It is only in discussing the first Catholic Mission at Lac La Nonne and the naming of Lac La Nonne that reference is made to the Indigenous peoples who lived in this area prior to settlement. In discussing the name of the lake close to our school, Lac La Nonne, it is stated that "there is some controversy as to

how Lac La Nonne got its name. The Natives first called it 'Mekisiw-sakayioan' or Lac des Aigles (Eagles)" (Dunstable Communities Historical Society, 2007, 124). The next reference to Indigenous peoples comes in the form of an explanation for the arrival of missionaries in the area:

> Stone-age tools and weapons have been found on the shores of Lac La Nonne so we know that it was a gathering place for Indians in ages past. By the time the missionaries started to evangelize the northwest part of Canada, the territory between the Saskatchewan River and the Athabasca River was preferred land for hunting and fishing for the Cree and Stony [Nakota Sioux] Indians. (Dunstable Communities Historical Society, 2007, 124).

The account relates how a Hudson's Bay Company Trading Post was established on the north east shore of the lake and that by 1869 a small settlement had grown around the trading post. Cree peoples of the area, the report says, "began to favour wintering in the area. Around 1875 they requested that a Catholic mission be established in their midst" (Dunstable Communities Historical Society, 2007, 124).

It was at the time, that Catholic nuns came to live on the shores of Lac la Nonne "to serve the Indians living in the area" (Dunstable Communities Historical Society, 2007, 124). They established a house on the north shore of the lake close to the trading post. In 1877, the first Catholic priest arrived in the area.

> In June 1877 the Rev. Fr. Fafard was sent to the Indians. He built the first residence adjacent to that of Chief Katchikawasham on the eastern shore of the lake…The Chief offered hospitality and in return he and his family received a thorough course of religious instruction. He sent away one of his two wives and he and his chosen wife Marie

Attikoss (Godin) were baptized in St. Albert on Easter Sunday, 1878. He took the

Christian name Alexander and since then has been better known by that name –

Alexander Arcand. (Dunstable Communities Historical Society, 2007, 124)

The final reference to Indigenous peoples of the area comes in relating how the Cree people who

lived around Lac La Nonne, moved to live on the newly formed Alexander Reserve in 1881.

In the fall of 1877 the Cree Indians had signed a treaty with the Government and

Alexander was recognized as Chief of the band. The Government forced the native

people to relocate to the newly established Indian Reservation and the Government run

farm near Riviere Qui Barre. The Indians took possession of the reserve in 1881. The

change necessitated the abandonment of the mission of Lac La Nonne after only 2 years

of existence. Father Touzé returned to St. Albert and continued to visit the Indians in

Riviere Qui Barre until 1883 when he was replaced by Father Rémas who now resided on

the new Alexander Indian Reserve. And so it was that the first Catholic mission at Lac

La Nonne was officially closed on December 12, 1883, when Father Scollen removed the

few remaining articles that were left from their first mission. (Dunstable Communities

Historical Society, 2007, 124-125).

There is one final note indicating that, while the mission was closed and the Cree people were

relocated, "there still remained at Lac La Nonne several Métis and white families" (Dunstable

Communities Historical Society, 2007, 125). As a result, missionaries continued to visit the

region several times throughout the year and, in 1911 the first church was constructed close to

the lake. This past November, I took the students in our grade 4, 5 & 6 classes to the cemetery of

this first church to place poppies beside the graves of Canadian soldiers. Before we went to the

cemetery, I was reminded by those who care for the graveyard to keep the students out of the

section of the cemetery farthest away from the entrance. The graves in that part of the cemetery date back to the time of the Oblate Mission formed in the later 1800's, and many of the crosses, which were wooden, are fallen or gone. As I stood there with the students in my class, I found myself thinking that the land on which I was standing was the same land the Cree used to use as their campsite. It is the same land where Chief Katchikawasham lived before signing Treaty 6 and moving his people to the Alexander Reserve. This is the history I share with my students. This is the history that all people should know.

The Context for My Research

It is within this context and in this place that I undertook decolonizing and Indigenizing work within my school. This community has been my home for the past 19 years. My partner and I came here looking for a place we could live and work and start a family. We wanted to be closer to either my parents or his, because connection to family was and is something we both value and wanted to make possible for our children. So we found ourselves settling in a community about 45 minutes from my parents' home. The community in which I now live and work is on Treaty 6 land about 30 kilometer northwest of the Alexander First Nations Reserve where the descendants of Chief Katchikawasham live and about 45 kilometers northeast of the Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nations Reserve. Since the creation of these two reserves, Alexis in 1880 and Alexander in 1881, the area has become home to Settler families who began arriving in the late 1800's. The fur trading post has long since been replaced by numerous cottages and acreages surrounding the lake. Many of the small churches, community halls, and general stores in the area have closed their doors. There are still a few services available close to the lake or 30 minutes away in the town of Barrhead, and the school in which I teach remains at the center of this small, rural community.

From the outside, the community I teach in appears to be little more than a school and a handful of houses, but the community is much larger than those buildings left in town. Down the road there is the small rural church that still holds mass once a week. There are two corner stores within five minutes of the school that serve local families and holidayers who come to the nearby lakes on weekends. Most of those who travel through the area, and even those who live here, do not realize that the Lac La Nonne General Store sits but a few 100 meters from the Hudson's Bay Trading Post that once provided fur traders and fortune seekers with supplies. Neighbours still help neighbours mend fences and look after sick animals. At the center is the school which draws in people from the surrounding farms and acreages. It has been the site of soccer practices, ball games, yoga classes, and weekend craft sales. The school brings in young families and older volunteers, and helps to tie people together creating bonds that draw young people back home to raise the next generation of community members. Looking back at the local history book, one sees that the "founding families" were a mixture of French, British, and Eastern European peoples. Many of those family names are still present in the school population. And while there are families within our community who identify as Métis or Indigenous, the majority of community members would most likely classify themselves as people of European descent. They are the great-grandchildren of the first Settlers in this area. Admittedly, it is difficult to describe the ethnic makeup of a community without generalizing. It is also difficult to know the values and beliefs of every community member. In conversation with neighbours and as evident in recent elections, both provincially and federally, the majority of people in the area tend to be conservative both fiscally and socially. While the area has been part of several different electoral constituencies over the years, it has sent a conservative candidate to the legislature since 1971 and a conservative candidate to parliament since 1979.

Being a teacher at the school has immersed me in the community. I have come to know parents and grandparents as well as the children. In some cases three and even four generations have attended classes in this same building. It has never been a large school. It came into existence in 1948 when six of the small one-room school houses that served the area amalgamated. At that time it served grades 1 to 11 and had about 100 students. The current building was erected in 1953 and, with the exception of a small addition designed to house the library and the front entry, it looks, from the outside, much the same as it did about 65 years ago. But that does not mean that nothing has changed. With the help of a very supportive community the school has added outdoor classrooms, a vegetable garden complete with an apple orchard, as well as tower gardens for growing produce inside. There are enough chromebooks and iPads for each child to access a device for his or her own use throughout the school year, and children frequently have the opportunity to Videoconference or Skype with experts from across the country, or attend presentations by guest artists invited into the school. At the time of my research, the school enrollment was 61 students from pre-K to grade 6. In addition to myself, there were four teachers, two of whom were part-time, two program assistants, and one administrative assistant. I was both a teacher and the school's principal, and I was and still am a part of this community. I live next door to one of the bus drivers. My daughters babysit for families who have children attending my classes. At Halloween students from my school trick-or-treat at my door. This is my home. I realize I am painting a picture, in the broadest, most general strokes, of the parents with whom I worked, the community in which I live and the history that has shaped this place, but my hope is that this basic understanding will provide a backdrop for the discussion to come. It is a beginning, a setting, for my story.

Chapter 2: My Journey

The process of researching and writing this dissertation has been a journey for me. My views have been challenged, my actions questioned. I have had to examine my beliefs and my assumptions, reflecting upon how and why I hold these convictions. It has been a frustrating, and at times painful, process. At times I have wanted to stop; the opposition too strong to overcome. But then a student will says something or a parent will comment and I remember the importance of decolonizing and Indigenizing efforts in school. When I began my doctoral studies in 2015, one of the first courses I took was on anti-racism education. As a part of the course, we were each asked to write a decolonizing autobiography (Haig-Brown, 2009). The process was, in many ways, cathartic for me. It gave me the opportunity to evaluate and express in writing the journey I have taken to arrive at my present position. I reflected upon my own uncomfortable prejudices and my position in perpetuating or challenging systems of oppression in the spirit of reconciliation. I have come to the point in my own journey where I can state that I am a Settler in this land and that I live a privileged life at the expense of others.

My Decolonizing Autobiography

I am a Settler in this country. As discussed in chapter one, my ancestors came to this country as immigrants from Europe during the early part of the twentieth century. My father's side of the family came from Ukraine in the early 1900's. The land they chose to settle on was located south east of the area now known as Métis Crossing, home to Métis families since the late 1800's. It was also across the river from the Saddle Lake Reserve and part of the territory covered by Treaty 6. How aware my great-grandparents were, at the time of their arrival in Canada, about the displacement of Indigenous peoples to make way for their homestead, I do not know. Upon arriving in Western Canada, the story of my Settler ancestors on my father's side is

very typical of the hardships faced by many Ukrainian Settlers. They worked hard to clear the land. They spent their first winter in a soddie, a home dug into the ground and covered with a roof of sod, and they struggled through the first few years. As their farm grew, so did their family. Their children went to school and several, including my grandfather, went on to normal school, the teacher-training school of the day, and university. My grandfather became a teacher and my grandmother went on to work as a bookkeeper after my grandfather passed away.

My mother's family settled on land north of the Pigeon Lake Reserve, which was land shared by members of the Samson Cree Nation, the Montana Cree Nation, the Louis Bull Tribe, and the Ermineskin Cree Nation. The story of her family's arrival in Canada is slightly different than my father's family narrative. My mother's paternal grandfather was born in Ontario. He came to Edmonton as a young man. He went to work for John Walters who owned a saw mill on the south side of the North Saskatchewan River across from the current site of the Alberta Legislature Building and for whom the community of Walterdale is named. This land was part of the ancestral territory of the Papaschase Cree, land on which the Papaschase were not permitted to stay. My great-grandfather worked for John Walters for a few years and he also found employment as a construction worker of the High Level Bridge in Edmonton. Eventually he met and married my great-grandmother who had emigrated from Scotland as a single young woman. Together they moved to a farm north of Pigeon Lake Reserve and raised three sons. My family still owns the mineral rights to the land my great-grandparents purchased as a young couple. Again, I do not know how much my great-grandparents knew about the Indigenous peoples who had lived on the flats along the North Saskatchewan River, but I imagine that the displacement of the Papaschase people was not something that concerned many people at the time (Donald, 2004).

Three generations later, I continue to live on Treaty 6 territory. As a young girl, I lived approximately 15 kilometers west of the Stony Plain Reserve No. 135, home to the Enoch Cree. My father, as the Superintendent of Schools for the school division adjacent to the Stony Plain Reserve, had interactions with the Band Council and with the First Nations School on the reserve, but I did not. There were a few students in my school whose families had moved off reserve and into town, but their numbers were very small, and they were not in my circle of friends.

When my father was fifteen, his father passed away. As a result, the family moved into the city of Edmonton so that my grandmother could go to work. Thanks to a family friend, Mr. William Hawreluk, whose family had homesteaded in the same area as my grandmother's family, she secured a job as a bookkeeper. With her three sons, she moved into a rooming house in what is now Chinatown, but what was then a part of the city populated by many new immigrant families including Italians and Ukrainians. My father's small town existence was soon replaced by a rougher inner city experience as he navigated his way through high school in the more multicultural environment of McCauley School in the 1950's. Upon completing two years of university, my father went north to teach. His first teaching job was in the small community of Anzac where many of the students were descended from Cree and Métis families who had moved to the area of the Athabasca Basin. After a year in Anzac, he went to teach in another northern Alberta community, before returning to live and work closer to Edmonton. His experiences in northern Alberta stayed with him throughout his teaching career and, when my sister and I were young, he would often share stories with us of having to adapt and be open to new experiences in the many different communities in which he lived and taught as a young man. His perspective on embracing diversity and my mother's belief in inclusion shaped the

person I would become.

I have lived my whole life in close proximity to Indigenous communities, but it is only in more recent years that I have come to understand my relationship with the people whose traditional lands I inhabit. I live in a world that is still shaped by colonial ideas of colonizer and colonized (Razack, 1998, 2015). As a member of Settler society, I do not have to interact with Indigenous people if I choose not to. As a member of Settler society, I can live my life unchallenged and untroubled by issues of discrimination and suppression. As a member of Settler society, I enjoy a "backpack of privileges" (MacIntosh, 1998) that results from the colonial legacy of Indigenous people in Canada, and I can use the advantages contained within that backpack to live a life of untroubled white privilege.

As a teacher, however, I feel it is my responsibility to prepare all of my students for their role as future decision makers in society. Christopher Stonebanks (2008) argues that "teachers are in a unique position in our society to be at the forefront of [social] transformation and have the ability through their own classrooms to be actively conscious of social injustices, carry out research, and with their students work toward positive change" (p. 296). I feel it is my moral obligation to help my students understand the politics of whiteness (Levine-Rasky, 2000), Settler colonialism, and epistemicide, while empowering them to be questioning of assumptions and open to ways of being and knowing that are not European in origin. I wish to develop in my students a spirit of openness to diversity and inclusion.

Introducing Changes

The work for this dissertation began in 2016 when I became the principal of a small, rural, elementary school in north central Alberta. It was my first year as an administrator and, while I knew I had a lot to learn, I also had a vision of where I wanted our school to go; of how I

wanted to shape teaching and learning within our school community. With a year of doctoral

studies under my belt and a keen interest in the Calls to Action of Canada's Truth and

Reconciliation Commission, I began planting seeds of change. I began laying the foundation for

the vital work of Indigenous knowledge inclusion within our school community. One of the first

steps, a simple step, was to introduction a treaty recognition statement read at the start of

significant school events. I also invited two Indigenous Knowledge Keepers into our school to

lead our grade 5 & 6 students through a blanket exercise. They also shared, throughout the

winter months, some legends with the students in each of our different classrooms. The grade 5

& 6 students were also given the opportunity to travel to a neighboring school to listen to a

speaker who shared with us a history of treaties and residential schooling, and, as a staff, we

participated in a number of Professional Development sessions focussed on the history of

Indigenous - Settler relations. In my mind it was a modest start, but we were off and running.

     I had expected some resistance. Growing up in rural Alberta myself, I suspected that not

all community members would look favourably on these efforts at opening up our school to

Indigenous history and knowledge, but the work of this first year had done little more than shine

a light on the facts of our shared history. I had not yet begun to include Indigenous knowledge

and pedagogy within the curriculum. I also felt I had done my part to explain and justify my

actions within the larger Canadian context. So, when a neighbour said I had been the topic of

conversation at a meeting for parents at our School Division office, I was caught off guard. I

had? What had people been saying? And who had been speaking?

     Expecting resistance throughout the school year, I thought I had been careful to inform

our school community about changes to policy, procedures and practices. At each juncture, there

had been questions. Why was I starting public events with this acknowledgement statement that

the school is on treaty land? Why was learning about treaties and residential schools something

we needed to do in our school? I answered by providing information about the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,

2015) and the School Division's policy honouring First Nations, Métis, and Inuit culture (PHRD

2016). I had informed parents that this was something important that many different

organizations from universities, to municipalities, to school divisions were beginning to take up

and that I was excited to include our school in this project. In the end, I did have one parent

refuse to send her child to the speaking engagement on residential schools, but it is not always

possible to convince everybody, and I did not let it bother me. The work would continue and,

with time, the hope was that more and more parents would change their minds. So the news that I

had been the topic of conversation at this school division meeting, did catch me off guard.

Explanations about the importance of what we were doing had been provided. The value of

educating ourselves about the past, understanding our present, and shaping a different future had

been discussed. I had explained all of this.

In hindsight, it is clear that all I had really been doing was stating my opinion and

backing it up with reference to policies and government initiatives like the Alberta Government's

statement on proposed curriculum changes and Indigenous knowledge inclusion (Alberta

Learning, 2015). I had not done anything to truly explain or educate people on the need for

change. I had failed to listen to and address parental concerns, and parents continued to question

the practice of reading a treaty recognition statement and discussing residential schooling in our

classrooms. Clearly, more work was needed and, to do this work, I would need to slow down

and truly listen to the concerns being raised. Time needed to be taken to better understand

parents' perspectives and the questions, tensions and considerations that were emerging.

With news of growing discontent at the front of my mind, I attended the final Parent Council meeting of the school year. The topic of treaty recognition, teaching about residential schools, and Indigenous knowledge would certainly come up. I was not sure of how I was going to respond. What was I going to say? In the end, there was not much need for comment from me. The parent who had attended the school division meeting spoke first. She explained that she had brought up the topic of Indigenous knowledge inclusion and treaty education, and had been told that not all schools were doing the things that I had undertaken. So, if others were not focussing on this, she wanted to know why it was happening in our building. She added that in the politically correct environment of our day and age, it can be difficult to question policies about minority groups and inclusion for fear of appearing insensitive. She felt she had made people uncomfortable at the meeting for bringing up her concerns. She noted anger and hostility from some. She had been told by those present at the meeting that she should just talk to me.

At this point in the conversation she turned to me and asked the most important question. She asked me to take time to work with the parents in our community so that they could come to understand. In her words, the challenge would not be teaching our students about treaties and residential schools and Indigenous ways of doing things. The challenge would be to help those who grew up not knowing the history of Indigenous - Settler relations, who grew up with different attitudes towards Indigenous peoples, to understand the work I was doing in our school. Parents needed time and education to come to better understand the changes being made. We all needed to explore, discuss, and come to understand the tensions that were emerging.

This insight furnished me with two amazing opportunities. First, it opened a door for discussion. It was an invitation to take up decolonizing work with our parent community. It also provided me with the research questions that would shape the work I undertook for my

dissertation. It was clear that I needed to work with my parent community. I needed to navigate the tensions with them. As a result, I took up the following research questions: 1) In a cultural context of bewilderment, doubt, and even hostility, where parents have questioned and opposed the work being done, what questions, tensions and considerations emerge for a non-Indigenous administrator, teacher, and community member working to create a better parent understanding of the decolonizing and Indigenizing work being done within a small, rural elementary school? 2) What questions, tensions and considerations arise for parents as changes happen within the school? 3) How can a teacher/administrator help guide parents through the tensions and questions that arise? and 4) How do I, as a non-Indigenous administrator, teacher, and community member, navigate the tensions and questions that arise both on a personal and professional level?

The Myth of Innocence

Like many of the parents in my community, I grew up believing the myths of Settler society. In school, I learned to see Canada as a multicultural society based on the principles of equity and pluralism. I learned that racism and discrimination were not problems in Canada, and I truly believed that Canada was an accepting and tolerant place where colour and ethnicity are not seen as reasons to hate and mistreat others. In my mind, racism did not exist in Canada. In the school I attended, we did not have many students of colour or many Indigenous students. There were a few, but I did not move in the same circles as most of them. That said, I did not bear them any ill will. In fact, I did not give them much thought. My dearest friend in high school was of mixed Indian and Dutch heritage. Together we ate at Indian restaurants, celebrated different Hindu holidays, and even went to temple once or twice. Clearly, I was not a racist person, right? I was an example of the inclusive and accepting Canadian. What I know

now, is that I lived the denial of systemic racism described by Hampton & St. Denis (2002) and Razack (2015).

It was not until I started my undergraduate degree in the early 1990's that I began to see inequalities and divisions within our Canadian society, and I soon realized that I was not immune to prejudice. After my first year of university at the University of Alberta, I transferred to an International Development Studies program offered jointly by St. Mary's University and Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. My plan was to take my Canadian benevolence abroad to aid and assist the people of developing countries. Shortly after arriving in the city, I met a young Black man who would become a very good friend. He asked me if I would consider volunteering with the YMCA. I soon became involved in a tutoring program at an inner-city school near the downtown core. Most of the students were Black and I was told that many also came from low income families. This volunteer program provided students with a place to be after school, to play basketball, eat a healthy meal and receive academic supports. For the first time in my own experiences, I began to see divisions within Canadian society along racial lines. Add to that, conversations I had with my new friend about growing up as a young Black man in rural Nova Scotia. Back home in Alberta, I had never learned about Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia. I did not know that Black families had been living in Nova Scotia a hundred years before my ancestors even left Europe to travel to Canada. I knew nothing of the history of places like Africville and Birchtown. In listening to my friend, I learned about the struggles his family had faced and that he continued to encounter. I began to open my eyes. I began to see some of the ongoing socioeconomic divisions along racial lines, that I had never been aware of before. I began to see that Canada was not exactly the prejudice free place I had grown up believe it to be (Bolaria & Li, 1988; Bolaria & Hier, 2007). As part of my undergraduate degree in International

Development Studies, I learned about colonialism and its legacy in Africa, Asia, and South

America (Gordon & Gordon, 1992; Mittelman, 1988; Sen & Grown, 1987). I learned about

developed, developing, and underdeveloped countries, about newly industrialized countries, and

the processes of colonization and decolonization in the developing world (Césaire, 1955; Fanon,

1963). Slowly, I began to see that Canada, in many ways, shared characteristics of colonial

resources exploitation and the oppression of Indigenous peoples with many former colonial

powers. I began to think that, maybe, Canada was not the egalitarian society I had grown up

believing it to be.

Even more uncomfortable for me was the realization that I had held racist assumptions

about Indigenous peoples. Why did I have such beliefs? Where had these views come from?

These were very difficult questions for me to ask of myself. Growing up, my contact with

Indigenous peoples was almost none existent. I knew that, historically, Indigenous people had

lived in Canada. I enjoyed reading Indigenous mythology about how Turtle got his shell and

how Bear lost his tail, but I had never really met anyone Indigenous. My experience with

Indigenous people was limited to driving through the Enoch Reserve on my way to the city from

my parents' house. I never stopped on the reserve. And sometimes I might encounter a

homeless person in the city who appeared to be Indigenous. Such people were easily avoided by

crossing the street or walking away. Somehow, in my unconscious mind, I have absorbed some

terrible stereotypes about Indigenous people. Never stop on a reserve. Cross the street. Avoid

them. My own racism disturbed me deeply.

In an effort to better understand my own prejudice, I took a number of classes on race and

racism during my early university years. The first book I ever read on the subject of race, was

The Mismeasure of Man, by Stephen Jay Gould (1983). I also remember reading *Racial*

Oppression in Canada by Bolaria & Li (1988). From this book, I recall a chapter by James S. Frideres titled "Institutional Structures and Economic Deprivation: Native People in Canada." He argued, much like Razack (1998, 2015), that there are institutional structures, both historic and current, that work to oppress Indigenous people in Canadian society. My awareness of racist attitudes and the way they shape institutions began to develop. As a part of my learning, I started to reflect upon my own experiences, or lack of experiences, with Indigenous peoples. Why was it that I knew nothing about Indigenous history other than the fact that there were once different nations of Indigenous people who lived in North America? Why was it that, although I grew up 15 kilometers away from the Enoch Cree Nation and had driven through the reserve many times on my way to the city, I had never come to know anything about Cree people? Why was it that I held such negative feelings about a group of people with whom I had never had any real interaction?

I carried this emerging understanding of Indigenous - Settler relations into my Master's degree. I read works such as *Thresholds of Difference: Feminist Critique, Native Women's Writings, Postcolonial Theory* by Julia V. Emberley (1993), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* by Chandra Mohanty *et al* (1991), and Patricia Monture-Okanee's article (1992) "The Violence We Women Do: A First Nations' View." I began to see the complex interrelationship between race, class, and gender, and this became the area of focus for my thesis. I was interested in the role feminist theories play in both reproducing and challenging assumptions about race and class. In particular, I wanted to know how Indigenous women viewed feminism and gender issues in Canada. To that end, I undertook a research project in which I interviewed Indigenous women in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. This was very uncomfortable work for me. While doing my research, I felt out of place. I was very aware of

my outsider position and I was uncomfortable with my method. I was also uncomfortable with my own thoughts as I visited different Native Friendship Centers and offices on reserves. I had preconceptions about what I would encounter or observe as I visited these places. Challenging my own biases was and remains a difficult and ongoing process. From my Master's Degree research, I came to understand the importance of viewing my own position and privilege with regards to the systemic racism inherent in Canadian society.

Sherene Razack (1998) takes up this topic in the introduction to her book *Looking White People in the Eye*. She speaks of interlocking systems of subordination on the basis of race, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. She also points out that:

> In focusing on our subordination, and not on our privilege, and in failing to see the connections between them, we perform what Mary Louise Fellows and I call 'the race to innocence,' a belief that we are uninvolved in subordinating others. More to the point, we fail to realize that we cannot undo our own marginality without simultaneously undoing all the systems of oppression. (Razack, 1998, p. 14)

As a white, middle-class woman, I came to understand that I enjoy a position of privilege and that, in ignoring the racism around me and of which I am a part, I do more harm than good.

Experiencing Difference

With my Master's degree done, I spent several years teaching English as a Second Language abroad. My first teaching position was in South Korea in the mid-1990s. Harry Wolcott (2008) writes that experiencing difference helps us better understand our own culture. My experiences in South Korea certainly opened my eyes to what it feels like to be a visible minority. As a white woman, I had always found myself to be a member of the majority in Canadian society. In South Korea, that was not the case. South Korea is a largely homogeneous

society with Koreans making up roughly 99% of the population. The next largest ethnic group is those of Chinese ancestry. So a white woman walking down the street was a very visible anomaly. For the first time in my life, I was a visible minority. For most of the young Korean people I interacted with, I was a novelty and someone they wanted to get to know. However, on more than one occasion as I walked down the street or entered a shop, I would feel a certain hostility or dislike from older Koreans. Sometimes older people would cross the street if they saw me coming. Some shopkeepers would hustle me out of their business as quickly as they could. Less frequent, were the verbal assaults and the physical act of being spat at. At the time, I remember being shocked and upset. I remember turning my anger at the way I was treated into blanket statements about xenophobia and gross generalizations about the racism of Korean people. Looking back, I see this experience as having shown me, however fleetingly, what it can be like to experience discrimination and racial tension on a daily basis. To feel the prejudice and see the actions of others directed toward me for no other reason that my physical appearance was an experience so foreign to my upbringing, yet so instructive for my future.

A similar experience in Istanbul, Turkey, raised my feminist ire. My partner and I were living at a school on the outskirts of the city. We had travelled downtown to purchase a transformer that would make it possible for me to use my computer. We were pretty sure we had located what we needed, but decided to go home and double check before making the purchase. So, the next day, after making sure we were looking at the correct part, I went back to the store to make the purchase. When I walked in, the shopkeeper, with whom my partner and I had been dealing with the day before, seemed to ignore my presence. Puzzled, I approached the counter and asked if he had the part I was looking for. He told me he did not. I reminded him that he had shown us the part the day before and that we had promised to come back to pick it up once

we had confirmed that it was what we needed. Again he told me that he did not have the part.

By now I was growing frustrated. I had ridden a crowded bus for an hour to get here and I just

wanted the part so I could go home. I asked once more if he could take another look for the part.

Turning, he looked straight at me and told me to go home and come back with my husband.

Then, he would have the part. Such incidents, while rare in my life, have helped to shape my

understanding of prejudice, discrimination and differences in worldview. They have put me in

the position of being "the other" and the discomfort I felt not only opened my eyes but also set

me on a path to do things differently in my own life.

Learning from Teaching

Upon returning to Canada at the end of the 1990's, I undertook an After Degree in

Education. When my first year of study was done, I went up north to join my partner for the

spring and summer. He was teaching at a school in Sandy Bay, Saskatchewan. The community

of Sandy Bay developed in the 1920's when a hydroelectric plant was built to provide power to

the mines in Flin Flon, Manitoba, although Cree people had inhabited the area long before that.

While the hydroelectric plant was under construction, the Cree were relocated and non-

Indigenous workers were encouraged to move north and live near the worksite. For several

decades, the community was made up of non-Indigenous power plant workers and their families

living next door to the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation Reserve. In the 1960's, the plant became

automatically controlled and the non-Indigenous families moved away. Today, the majority of

those who live in the community are part of the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation. In fact, the

northern part of the community is on reserve land. The school, which is in the southern part of

the community, is not on Wapaskokimaw Reserve land. It is run by Northern Lights School

Division, but all of the students who attend the school are part of the Peter Ballantyne Cree

Nation. Although I only had one year of teacher training, I was granted permission to act as a substitute teacher in the school because of a shortage of teaching staff. I spent most days from the end of April to the end of June subbing in different classes. I remember how much I did not know or understand about this first teaching experience. Why did the grade 5 teacher spend the first hour of everyday making bannock in her classroom while chatting and eating with her students? Why was she wasting time instead of focussing on literacy and numeracy instruction? I still had so much to learn.

When I finished my teaching degree, my partner and I moved away from Saskatchewan and I soon found myself teaching in rural Alberta not more than an hour from where I had grown up. As a classroom teacher, I tried to make my students more aware of prejudice and discrimination. I wanted them to understand the stories of oppression that are a part of Canadian history, to appreciate and value diverse cultural perspectives. To that end, we talked about historical injustices faced by many different groups throughout Canadian history, and we focussed in on Indigenous people because it tied in well with curriculum and was relevant as some of my students were Métis, Cree or Nakota Sioux. We talked about the history of Indigenous People in Canada and, with the help of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit liaison workers in our school division, I was able to invite traditional Indigenous dancers and singers into our school to share their culture with us.

But I still failed to create a space for Indigenous students. I think of two sisters who I taught in the early 2000's. I remember both girls as such quiet children. The oldest sister always sat at the back of the classroom. Each morning she would slip silently into class and find a seat in the furthest corner of the room. At the end of the day, she would leave often without saying a word. From time to time, she would raise her hand and beckon me over. I would walk over to

her desk and she would point to a problem on her page. I would help her find the answer or work out the solution. She would write it down and silently go on to the next task. She was never disruptive, never disrespectful, and never unkind. She was simply silent. As the year went on, she did open up a little bit but I can probably count on one hand the number of times we had a conversation of any real length even though it was something I tried to engage her in on multiple occasions. At first I told myself that she was just shy. She was new to our school and taking time to find her way. I was sure she would open up, but she never did. Two years later, her sister was in my class. She was a little more talkative. She would answer questions when called upon in class, but she would never volunteer information. "They're a traditional family. They're just quiet people. The girls just like to keep to themselves," other staff would say. Quiet. Silent. Silenced? I remember my administrator telling me, "It's just a cultural thing." She explained that First Nations students do not talk much at school. "It's their way," she reassured me. I wondered if this was a convenient story; something to say so we do not have to look for other explanations. Was it one of those "stories we tell ourselves" that Thomas King (2003) talks about? Maybe they were just quiet children, introverted, but I would see them outside at recess playing with each other and looking after their younger siblings and there was nothing quiet about them. They would giggle and shout and push each other on the swings. They would laugh and run and sing songs together. Then the bell would ring, and they would come back inside where the silence enveloped them again. Each day they travelled to the world of school where the frames of reference, norms of interaction, and cultural assumptions are decidedly non-Indigenous. I wondered to what extent the dominant narratives of Canadian society and the expectations of the school environment had silenced them. Every day they travelled to the world of school, but no one from the school ever travelled back to their world

with them. Nor was there space for them to share experiences from the world they inhabited

when at school. These sisters passed through our school as shadows on the peripheries. They

were seen but never really heard; present but never really included. Their stories were never

told.

Creating Space

I began to wonder about a way to create a different space in my classroom. What if I

could create a space where the experiences of silenced students were included? What if I made it

possible for them to not only share stories with others, but for others to travel back to their world

of experience with them? What benefits would there be for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous

students if I created a space where both Indigenous and non-Indigenous epistemologies are

validated? I realized that my previous efforts to be inclusive had only ever reflected the cultural

sensitivity approach discussed by Razack (2015) in *Dying From Improvement*. Just as Shick &

St. Denis (2001) describe, I had been providing my students with a historical, faraway, and

surface-level summary about Indigenous peoples in Canada. I had left out any meaningful

discussion of existing forms of racism, oppression and colonialism today and thereby fed the

myth that such structures do not exist in our current Canadian society. I was guilty of what

Verna St. Denis (2007) describes below:

> Instead of doing anti-racist education that explores why and how race matters, educators
>
> can end up doing cross-cultural awareness training that often has the effect of
>
> encouraging the belief that the cultural difference of the Aboriginal "Other" is the
>
> problem (p. 1086).

I had been offering cultural awareness as a solution to the problems of racism without looking at or discussing with my students the underlying and continued racism and oppression inherent in our modern society.

I had also failed to shed light on the ongoing colonization of Indigenous people in Canada (Razack, 2015). As Razack (1998) says, "As long as we see ourselves as not implicated in relations of power, as innocent, we cannot begin to walk the path of social justice" (p. 22). I needed to do a better job of engaging my students in anti-racist, decolonizing education. Those questions of the social, economic, and political conditions that continue to disadvantage Indigenous people while privileging non-Indigenous people needed to be better addressed in my classroom. I came to understand what St. Denis' (2007) means when she says:

> The many social, economic, and education problems faced by Aboriginal people have been created and are profoundly situated in historical and contemporary social, economic, and political conditions. By acknowledging a common experience of colonization and racism educators can enact solidarity and join together to challenge racism and racialization. Coalition and alliances can be made within and across the diversity within Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people's lives through a common understanding and commitment to anti-racist education. (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1087)

I wanted to create a different space in my classroom, but what might that look like?

Hospitality

In pursuing decolonizing education in my classroom and my school, my aim was to open the eyes of my students, staff and parents; to help us all see more clearly the systemic oppression that surrounds us, and to better understand the roles we play in this system and the ways that we can bring about change. This is why I decided to place such emphasis on Indigenous knowledge

inclusion. My goal was to begin challenging western epistemological assumptions. I wanted students to understand the historical roots of racism and colonialism in Canada and the current structures that perpetuate racism and privilege. I also hoped to help students recognize that there are other equally valid ways of understanding and interpreting the world around them. There are other ways of knowing. This desire grew out of my interest in the notion of "hospitality" as described by Rauna Kuokkanen (2003) and her argument that welcoming the epistemes of Indigenous peoples is beneficial for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Kuokkanen argues that immersion in other ways of knowing would not only create better mutual understanding but would also open up the eyes of non-Indigenous people who have never had to look at things through a different lens or worldview. Like Kuokkanen, I believe an attitude of epistemological pluralism and an anti-racist, decolonizing critical consciousness will help my students to far better understand the world that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people share, and will move us closer to social justice and equality.

"To develop relationships of genuine reciprocity with Indigenous peoples, we non-Indigenous peoples must embark on this anti-colonial journey" (Razack, 2015, p. 210). There is much that needs to be examined in our institutions and assumptions, but it is only by having these conversations that change can come about. As painful as it was for me as an undergraduate student to admit my own racist attitudes and prejudices, it is only by continually reflecting on my actions and assumptions, that I am able to see my role in perpetuating or challenging the ongoing colonialism in Canada. I hope to remain critically conscious in my approach and I aim to learn from those with knowledge to share. As a non-Indigenous Canadian I truly believe there is much to be gained from the sharing of epistemes, and challenging the ongoing structures of

colonization. Making this a reality not only for myself but for the students in my own classroom has become my focus.

In addition to the questioning of assumptions of privilege and structures of systemic racism in Canadian society I hoped to create in my school an openness toward and engagement in Indigenous knowledges. I aimed to move beyond the teaching of historical understanding and cultural sensitivity to a place of "hospitality" (Kuokkanen, 2003) toward Indigenous epistemologies, a place where the "ecologies of knowledges" described by de Sousa Santos (2014) allow for the interplay of knowledge systems leading to a richer deeper understanding of our world. In her article, "Toward a new relation of hospitality in the academy," Kuokkanen (2003) refers to a quote from Luther Standing Bear. "While the white people had much to teach us, we had much to teach them, and what a school could have been established upon that idea" (Standing-Bear as cited in Kuokkanen, 2003, p. 270). Kuokkanen states that:

> "white people" learning about Indigenous philosophies and epistemes would not only benefit Indigenous peoples (in that they would be understood better) but possibly even more so "white people" themselves, who are not usually forced to know other ways of thinking and perceiving the world in the same way that peoples and groups of nondominant positions in society are. (Kuokkanen, 2003, p. 281).

This learning from and with others is something I want to encourage all students to undertake. When we share our ways of knowing and make room for other epistemologies, we all benefit.

Marie Battiste (2013) makes a similar argument for greater epistemic openness when she states that "[t]he most important educational reform is to acknowledge that Canadian schools teach a silent curriculum of Eurocentric knowledge that is not accommodating to other ways of knowing and learning" (p. 66). She argues that "[t]o effect reform, educators need to make

conscious decisions to nurture Indigenous knowledge, dignity, identity, and integrity by making a direct change in school philosophy, pedagogy, and practice" (p. 66). There is an imperative, then, to move beyond the teaching of history and culture and anti-racist practices to a fostering of open-mindedness or hospitality to epistemic pluralism. There is a need to challenge deep-seated ignorance and willful blindness within our educational system.

When Europeans first arrived on the shore of North America, they brought with them a knowledge system and worldview based on Eurocentric notions of cultural and epistemic superiority. Indigenous peoples "were subjected not simply to a rapacious exploitation of all their resources but also to a hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge systems" (Alcoff, 2007, p. 83). Over the centuries, the unquestioned superiority of western scientific knowledge has been entrenched throughout North America and the world. In the introduction to her book, *Reshaping the University: Responsibility; Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift,* Kuokkanen (2003) writes:

> To a large extent, the academy remains founded on epistemological practices and traditions that are selective and exclusionary and that are reflective of and reinscribed by the Enlightenment, colonialism, modernity, and, in particular, liberalism. These traditions, discourses, and practices have very little awareness of other epistemologies and ontologies, and offer them heavily restricted space at best. Even in the academic spaces that consider themselves most open to "changing the paradigm," individuals are often unwilling to examine their own blind spots. Nor are they willing to acknowledge either their privilege or their participation in academic structures and the various colonial processes of society in general. (p. 1)

The same can be said of our primary and secondary education systems. Students are presented

with a body of knowledge based on western, Eurocentric understandings and there is very little room for questioning ways of knowing or learning from other epistemes. If schools are truly places where students are to develop their thinking, explore new ideas, and broaden their minds, then offering up only one view of the world is limiting. "It becomes…increasingly indefensible to structure knowledge monologically" (Greene 1993, p. 212). As Dei (2011) suggests in his book, *Indigenous Philosophies and Critical Education: A Reader*, openness to Indigenous epistemologies provides an important direction for future developments in education:

> As educators at the classroom, administrative, board, ministry/department, regional, and federal levels debate questions of community integration, whole child education , multiple intelligence-based instruction, differentiated instruction, environmental education, and holistic pedagogy, Indigenous knowledges bring much to offer in all these areas. (p. 8-9)

Epistemic pluralism offers an alternative framework for building a future model of education, a model where epistemologies meet, mix and inform each other.

Aparicio & Blaser (2009) probably describe this cross-pollination of knowledge systems best when they talk about the concept of relationality:

> Relationality is conceived within a cosmovisional framework whose basic assumption is multiplicity. The image that best captures this notion is one of diverse threads weaving themselves into a tapestry. In this context, knowledge is conceived not as an isolated "thing," extracted out of a context, but rather as the emergent result of communal effort. (p.78)

In this way, different knowledges are brought together to create a tapestry of understandings, skills, values, and pedagogy. In so doing, we weave a tapestry characterized by "a new way of

seeing and conceptualizing knowledge as well as our relationships and responsibilities in terms of other individuals, groups and epistemes" (Kuokkanen, 2007, p.159). When we limit our approach to teaching and learning to one single epistemology and one particular canon we limit not only what can be known, but how we can learn about it. Opening the door to different epistemologies provides access to counternarratives and alternate perspectives that can open the thoughts and minds of our students. Kuokkanen (2007) writes about learning from others and how this "gift" (p. 120) encourages teachers of western knowledge to "reconsider the existing, dominant modes of learning and ultimately to learn a new way of learning…This in turn will require a willingness to stretch into different modes of perceiving the human relationship to the world" (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 121). As Spivak explains "the process of learning to learn from Indigenous philosophies could constitute a powerful mobilizing discourse from which the entire world would benefit" (Spivak as cited in Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 120-121). In opening the doors and receiving the gift, we all benefit.

We only benefit, however, if we accept different epistemes as equally valid and informative. The multiplicity of epistemes must be maintained in order for us all to benefit and learn from each other. The idea is not to take from Indigenous knowledge that which is seen as desirable and fit it into the dominant discourse of education. Rather, the idea is to create spaces of coexistence or co-adjustment (Aparicio & Blaser, 2008) in which different epistemologies share space and inform the creation of new understandings built from multiple ontologies and epistemologies. It is about developing what Kuokkanen (2007) refers to as " 'multiepistemic literacy' with literacy understood in the broad sense, as an ability not only to read and write but also to listen and hear, to learn" (p. 155). We must learn to learn from each other (Kuokkanen, 2007). For, as de Sousa Santos (2013) points out, no epistemology is complete and this

"incompleteness of all knowledges is the precondition for epistemological dialogues" (p. 189). It is in developing relationships of epistemic respect, reciprocity and responsibility that we will all benefit.

The Need for Decolonizing Practices

In coming to understand the need for epistemic hospitality, I also came to realize that there is a lack of knowledge amongst Canadians about the history and legacy of colonialism in Canada. In her article, "The Possibilities of Reconciliation through Difficult Dialogues," Jennifer Tupper (2014) looks at the ways in which treaty education can cause students to rethink their understandings of Canadian history and the official story of Canada's past. She points out how "dominant historical narratives have failed to make visible the importance of Aboriginal peoples to the foundation of the country" (Tupper, 2014, p. 475) while presenting an image of Canada as a nation of explorer and Settlers or "new people building a new land" (Tupper, 2014, p. 475). The stories of frontiers, farmers, and fur traders are well known in Canada, but the history of treaties and residential school are less commonly discussed.

Tupper relates how many of the students in her undergraduate education classes at the University of Regina demonstrate a lack of familiarity with the history of treaties and residential schools:

> As we read, watched and discussed [course] materials, I spoke with the teacher
> candidates about my own journey to learning about the numbered treaties and residential
> schools. Many of them expressed anger that they had not learned about this aspect of
> Canadian history in their schooling, and so we discussed how they had been
> systematically denied this opportunity. One of the teacher candidates shared with me that
> he had "learned nothing about First Nations peoples, let alone residential schools" until

coming to this class (e-mail correspondence, October 24, 2012). Another teacher

candidate shared that her high school social studies teacher had described residential

schools as a positive government initiative to educate Aboriginal children who would not

otherwise have had the opportunity. (Tupper, 2014, p. 479).

Such sentiments were repeated by a professor of mine in the fall of 2015 when referring to

students in her second year Education class at the University of Alberta. Both she and the

teaching assistants in this teacher training class, repeatedly commented on how the

undergraduate students they were working with expressed a general lack of knowledge about

Aboriginal people and the history of Aboriginal relations in Canada. Many Canadians simply do

not know about the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Many parents in my community

are in this same position. It would seem logical, then, to focus our educational efforts on greater

knowledge of treaties, residential schools, and Indigenous history, and there is no doubt a need to

increase awareness and challenge "dominant historical narratives [that] shape our understandings

of Canada and our identities as Settler Canadians" (Tupper, 2014, p. 479). Indeed, this is where

my work with our parent community began. The fear, however, is that, in focussing only on the

history of treaties and residential schools, we create an impression that injustice, racism,

oppression, and discrimination are historical events, leaving unchallenged the continued colonial

relations and systemic oppression within modern Canadian society.

 As Razack (2015) and St. Denis & Schick (2003) argue, injustice and discrimination are

often seen as something that may have been a part of Canada's history, but they are not viewed

as a current problem within the modern Canadian context. There is a denial that we continue to

live in a Settler colonial society where disadvantage is the result of systemic oppression and

racism (Lowman & Barker, 2015). Speaking of the American context, Smedley and Smedley

(2005) state that while overt forms of discrimination may no longer be a part of American legislation:

> policymakers cannot avoid the fact that social [constructions of] race remains a significant predictor of which groups have greater access to societal goods and resources and which groups face barriers…discrimination has simply taken on subtler forms that make it difficult to define and identify….the history of racial discrimination in the United States has left a lasting residue, even in a society that overtly abhors discrimination. (p. 22)

The same can be said of Canadian society. Most Canadians live with the myth that Canada is a fair and just society; a level playing field, where all members of society have an equal opportunity to succeed. Policies of assimilation, discrimination, and colonialism are things of the past. There is a denial that we live in a Settler society characterized by ongoing systems of domination and suppression (Lowman & Barker, 2015). There is a need to see the ongoing internal colonialism (Tully, 2008) that continues to shape Canadian society.

A greater knowledge of history is not by itself enough to transform relationships in Canada. Kuokkanen (2007) argues that "while knowledge is very necessary and a prerequisite for any human relationship, it cannot by itself end deep-seated hostility or change fundamental attitudes, many of which are clearly prejudiced" (p. 101). There is a need to move beyond the historical and to see the systems of advantage and disadvantage in present processes of Aboriginal relations (Lowman & Barker, 2015). We need to work towards a more culturally inclusive approach to teaching and learning about Aboriginal peoples. Such an approach would not only focus on the history of Aboriginal relations but also build cultural sensitivity and understanding. The literature describes such approaches as cultural inclusion and multicultural

education programs (Dei, 1999; Hampton & St. Denis, 2002; Hermes, 2005). Efforts are made to increase acceptance and cultural awareness through the inclusion of Aboriginal art, stories, music, history, and dance. In this approach, Aboriginal cultural practices and traditions are celebrated and learned about as part of the overall Canadian identity. Aboriginal culture is presented as an important addition to the cultural mosaic of Canada.

While understanding cultural differences is a necessary part of learning to accept and appreciate others, it does little to address underlying systemic assumptions about privilege and power (Hampton & St. Denis, 2002; Kuokkanen, 2003). As Kuokkanen (2007) suggests, "the idea of cultural sensitivity – of being aware of other groups' cultural behaviour – only produces a 'catalogue of cultural differences' and leaves systemic oppression unaddressed" (p. 109). She argues that such an approach is not only "an inadequate response but also an irresponsible one" (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 109) because it allows the dominant culture to maintain its position of dominance and universality. "It reflects a specific type of racism that enables the dominant to occupy the position of universality while consigning the 'other' to a partial and particular one" (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 109).

This focus on cultural diversity and understanding is also problematic because it presents Aboriginal culture as one of many different heritages and ethnicities within our cultural mosaic. In this way, the experiences of Aboriginal peoples is no different from the experiences of Ukrainian, Irish, Chinese or Black Loyalist immigrants to Canada. Such a superficial understanding of relations between "others" has the potential to lead to a blaming of Aboriginal people for their own disadvantaged position in society. While other ethnic groups have enjoyed upward mobility and economic successes as a result of hard work and perseverance, Aboriginal peoples continue to face social problems. This cultural deficiency theory has led to a blaming of

Aboriginal culture as a limiting factor in the success of Aboriginal people in Canadian society (Hampton & St. Denis, 2002; Razack, 2015), and perpetuates systemic racism. St. Denis (2007) sums it up nicely when she says that cross-cultural awareness training "often has the effect of encouraging the belief that the cultural difference of the Aboriginal 'Other' is the problem" (p. 1086).

To better draw attention to the roots of inequalities and injustices in society, an anti-racist education approach is sometimes advocated (Dei, 1999; Hampton & St. Denis, 2002; St. Denis, 2007). Anti-racist education offers a way for teachers and students to examine why and how race matters (Hampton & St. Denis, 2002; St. Denis, 2007). It is about understanding power relations within society. As Calliou (1995) explains, anti-racist education is an effort "to deconstruct and understand the complex nature and purpose of events and conditions which create and reinforce racism at all levels" (p. 70). It is "an intellectual discourse as well as an educational advocacy for social change" (Dei, 1999, p. 24). Anti-racist education, creates a space for educators and students to engage in conversations about racists assumptions within our Canadian society and institutions. It is a way to "begin to tell more uncomfortable stories; and to tell different stories" (Kaomea, 2003, p. 23). Anti-racist education has done much to reveal systemic racism in society. "But discrimination in society cannot be defined solely in racial terms" (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 63). As Kuokkanen (2007) argues "[w]hen we focus on racism, we end up ignoring both colonial history and contemporary colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal relations that extend beyond racism and racial discrimination" (p. 63). She argues that "antiracist theorising needs to do much more careful thinking before it seeks to include Indigenous peoples in its analysis" (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 65).

Learning about the history of treaties and residential schools is important for improved

relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Greater cultural understanding is also beneficial "for people in reality are diverse and do have culturally specific practices that must be taken into account" (Razack, 1998, p. 10). Anti-racist education has also been instrumental in drawing attention to the ongoing systemic racism faced by Aboriginal groups within Canadian society. As part of my journey, I have some to believe that, if we are to truly build a relationship of reconciliation, reciprocity and responsibility, we must find new ways of redefining relationships between Indigenous peoples and Settler society. We must question previous assumptions and rethink relations of power and privilege. As educators, we must work toward decolonizing and Indigenizing education in Canada.

Calls to Action

In the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, several recommendations are made for educating all Canadians in a way that builds respect and understanding. In suggesting changes for provincial education, the TRC has two Calls to Action in particular that address the changes provincial governments need to make to redress past wrongs and correct ongoing prejudices. In Call to Action #62, the TRC asks that provincial governments "[m]ake age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students" (TRC, 2015, p. 331). This same Call to Action also requests that the provincial government "[p]rovide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms" (TRC, 2015, p. 331), and that the necessary funding be made available "to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms" (TRC, 2015, p. 331). Call to Action #63 further calls on the Council of Ministers of Education to develop and implement "Kindergarten

to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools" (TRC, 2015, p. 331), and to find ways to share "information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history" (TRC, 2015, p. 331). Finally, Call to Action #63, calls upon the Council of Ministers to build "student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" (TRC, 2015, p. 331).

In response to the work of the TRC, the province of Alberta issued its *Expression of Reconciliation* (Government of Alberta, 2014). This documents states that all "Alberta students will learn about the history and legacy of residential schools, along with the history of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples of Canada" (Government of Alberta, 2014, para 7). Promises have also been made to "work to raise awareness" (Government of Alberta, 2014, para 14) and to ensure that the curriculum includes "the diverse perspectives of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples living in Alberta in relation to historical and contemporary contexts" (Government of Alberta, 2014, para 9). At the school level, the promises made in the *Expression of Reconciliation* have largely translated into an increased focus on teaching and learning about the history of treaties and residential schooling in our province. In October 2015, Alberta Learning released a document titled *Residential Schools and Treaties in Alberta Kindergarten to Grade 12 Social Studies Program of Studies* which points to the places in the existing curriculum where the history and legacy of treaties and residential schooling should be addressed. The Department has also strengthened the First Nations, Métis and Inuit branch of its Curriculum Development Branch and has begun to curate and make available more teaching resources on the topics of treaties and residential schooling.

In my own school jurisdiction, our school board has recently approved an administrative procedure, *AP 60-20 Honoring First Nations, Métis and Inuit Culture,* that "honors and respects the historical significance and contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canada and it recognizes the important role that the Aboriginal community plays today and in the future" (PHRD, 2016, para 1). Included in this document is the statement that the "Division [also] strives to increase understanding of all members of the learning community regarding First Nations, Métis and Inuit history and culture" (PHRD, 2016, para 2). As a symbol of its commitment to increasing understanding of and respect for Aboriginal culture and history, the administrative procedure commits the school board and all of the schools within our jurisdiction to begin public events with the reading of an acknowledgement statement. In the words of the administrative procedure:

> With the intention of strengthening relations and building bridges with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples living in and contributing to our communities of learning, past, present and future, the Division commits to acknowledging the Treaty 6 Territory and the Aboriginal people in our communities with the following Acknowledgement Statement…We honour the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit whose footsteps have marked these lands for centuries. We acknowledge that the ancestral and traditional lands on which we gather are Treaty 6 territory, a traditional meeting ground for many Indigenous peoples, and in particular our neighbors, Enoch Cree Nation, Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, and Alexander Cree Nation; on whose territory we work, live, and play, and on whose territory we stand. We honor the presence and contribution of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit people who live, work and learn together in our communities. (PHRD, 2016, para 8)

Along with the commitment to honour and respect Indigenous culture and history as outlined in this administrative procedure, the school jurisdiction has also committed to increased staff professional development in order to facilitate greater understanding and competency when addressing the history of treaties and residential schools and when building greater cultural understanding amongst students. Most recently, our School Board has struck an Indigenous Education Advisory Committee to oversee and promote the education of Indigenous learners and the inclusion of Indigenous content for all learners.

Rewriting Alberta's Curriculum

In 2016 I became involved in the province of Alberta's Curriculum Working Group tasked with rewriting the K to 12 curriculum in all subject areas. My area of focus was the Middle Years (Grade 5-9) Social Studies Curriculum. Guiding all of the curriculum work being done was the provincial government's *Guiding Framework for the Design and Development Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum*. Written into this framework was specific references to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its Calls to Action with regards to education:

> To honour the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Alberta is committed to rebalancing the education system by including Indigenous ways of knowing in curriculum to advance reconciliation for all Albertans. (Alberta Education, 2017, p. 10).

Reflected throughout the guiding framework and throughout the curriculum writing process in which I was excited to engage was a commitment to Indigenous knowledge inclusion and Indigenous pedagogy.

Curriculum was seen as a tool for reconciliations, as summarized in the following excerpt

from the guiding framework:

Diverse First Nations, Métis and Inuit experiences and perspectives across the curriculum

provide means for reconciliation. Increasing inter- and cross-cultural understanding and

initiating shifts in thinking and in attitudes will build trust to improve relationships

among all Albertans. The inclusion of First Nations, Métis and Inuit historical and

contemporary experiences and contributions, residential schools and their legacy, and

treaties will help rectify social injustices and support better relationships. First Nations,

Métis and Inuit songs, stories, histories, languages, arts, sciences, and contributions to the

rich history of Alberta need to be part of every Alberta student's education. First Nations,

Métis and Inuit experiences and perspectives are included and reflected throughout K–12

provincial curriculum. Every student in the province, not only First Nations, Métis and

Inuit students, will learn about the diverse Indigenous peoples of this land and how First

Nations, Métis and Inuit contribute to the vibrancy and fabric of Alberta and Canadian

society. (Alberta Education, 2017, p. 11).

Learning about Indigenous history and contemporary experiences was seen as a step toward

reconciliations and, as curriculum was developed, it was constantly evaluated to ensure it

adhered to the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge as outlined within the guiding framework.

From the fall of 2016 to the spring of 2019, the Curriculum Working Group met three or

four times a year to develop Essential Questions and Learning Outcomes for the new curriculum,

with curriculum work continuing at the departmental level in between meetings. In December

2018, the new kindergarten to grade four curriculum was approved by Alberta Education. While

not immune to criticism, the new curriculum contained far more Indigenous content in all

curriculum areas than previous curriculum documents. The Curriculum Working Group was on track to deliver the grade five to nine curriculum in December of 2019.

The fall of 2018 also saw the introduction of the new Teacher Quality Standards, Leadership Quality Standards and Superintendent Quality Standards. In each of these professional standard documents, the inclusion of Indigenous history, knowledge and perspectives was made a specific job requirement. The professional expectation is now that each teacher "develops and applies foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students" (Alberta Education, 2018, p .5). The Leadership Quality Standard states that "a leader supports the school community in acquiring and applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students" (Alberta Education, 2018b, p. 4), and the Superintendent Quality Standards requires that "a superintendent establishes the structures and provides the resources necessary for the school community to acquire and apply foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students" (Alberta Education, 2018c, p. 5). In this way, responsibility for Indigenous history and knowledge inclusion becomes the focus and responsibility for multiple members of the education system.

This new curriculum and the new professional standards were important examples of change that I often referenced and shared with parents when discussing the decolonizing and Indigenizing work in our school. They helped to provide further justification for our efforts. I was extremely disappointed when, following the provincial election in the spring of 2019 all curriculum work was put on hold and the new K-4 curriculum was withdrawn.

Priority Shift

In April of 2019 a provincial election was held in the province of Alberta and the United Conservative Party (UCP) lead by Jason Kenney came to power replacing the New Democratic Party government of Rachel Notley. One of the first actions of the newly elected government was to put the curriculum development process on hold. In addition, land acknowledgment statements at government meeting and events were made optional. To review the curriculum developed by the Curriculum Working Group, the new UCP government convened an independent advisory panel. The panel reviewed the curriculum work done by the Curriculum Working Group and came up with recommendations for a different guiding framework. Included in the recommendations from the advisory panel was the recommendation to:

> Ensure First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives and ways of knowing continue to be reflected in curriculum, supporting the ongoing advancement of recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the calls for justice in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Final Report. It is necessary to support learning and cultural understanding of Alberta's First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples, respecting the historical and current context of their experiences and perspectives. (Curriculum Advisory Panel, 2019, p. 19)

I was somewhat hearted to see that a commitment to Indigenous perspectives remained a priority for the Curriculum Advisory Panel. In August of 2020, Alberta Education released a new Ministerial Order guiding education and curriculum development throughout the province. While it did appear as a bit of an afterthought, tagged on to the end of the second last paragraph in the document, the order still stated that:

Students will develop an understanding of and respect for the histories, contributions, and perspectives of Indigenous peoples in Alberta and Canada, including Treaty Rights and the importance of reconciliation. (Department of Education, 2020)

Until early in 2021, there did appear to be hope for a way forward and an ongoing commitment to reconciliation.

At the time of writing, the Province of Alberta has just released its new Draft K-6 Curriculum (Government of Alberta, 2021). The response from teachers, academics, parents, and Indigenous groups has been overwhelmingly unfavourable. In spite of promising to continue the work of reconciliation, the proposed new curriculum fails in many ways to address the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and efforts made to date to decolonize and Indigenize education (Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations, 2021; Métis Nation of Alberta, 2021; Peck, 2021). As Carla Peck (2021) argues in her critique of the draft Social Studies curriculum:

The efforts to include some Indigenous content are worthwhile but they don't go far enough. At times, the references are too vague and at other times, they are focused on factual knowledge only, not on Indigenous Knowledge systems or perspectives. There is no mention of treaties, Residential Schools, or reconciliation in the K-2 portion of the curriculum. In addition, most references to Indigenous peoples are in the past, with little to no attention paid to the present. (para. 13)

From my own analysis of the draft curriculum, I would certainly concur. It appears that this proposed curriculum does little more than provide a historical and far away (Shick & St. Denis, 2001) perspective on Indigenous peoples. In addition, when treaties, Residential Schools, and Indigenous – Settler relations are brought up, they are done so in a way that omits or fails to fully

examine in a critical way the topic under consideration. The focus is on all of North America

rather than Canada or Alberta specifically. For example, in grade 6, students are to learn that:

> Indigenous peoples were displaced and forced onto reservations in both the United States
>
> and Canada. The American Indian Wars were tragic encounters. The American Republic
>
> encroached on Indigenous traditional territory and dispatched the US cavalry to escort
>
> First Nations to reservations. (Government of Alberta, 2021)

What of those acts of displacement and erasure that occurred right here in Alberta and across the

Prairie provinces (Daschuk, 2019)? It is much more comfortable for Settler society to turn its

gaze to its southern neighbours rather than to examine case studies that occurred right here in this

province.

The draft curriculum has also removed discussions of residential schools, treaties and

Indigenous – Settler relations from Kindergarten, Grade 1 and Grade 2 a move that is

contradictory to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action number 62 which

calls upon provincial governments to:

> Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal
>
> peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education
>
> requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students. (Truth and Reconciliation
>
> Commission, 2015, p. 331)

The Draft K-6 Curriculum does not meet this requirement. In an interview given March 30,

2021, Dwayne Donald talks about curriculum as story and the story people wish to tell about

themselves (Real Talk Ryan Jespersen, 2021). He argues in the same interview that the Draft K-

6 Curriculum is the "the moral success story of liberal world view and how it arose" (Real Talk

Ryan Jespersen, 2021). Donald also commented on the way in which the proposed curriculum is

a list of facts to be learned, a time-line approach where students learn facts in a chronological order to support the overall narrative of progress and growth. He states that "they've taken Indigenous themes and issues and experiences…and they've plugged them into the time line. So it's like incorporating Indigenous experience into this bigger, better, stronger, faster, smarter story that they want to tell. So the best thing for Indigenous people to do is to come to terms with this story and join this moral success [story]. That's the message that I get from that" (Real Talk Ryan Jespersen, 2021). Rather than this "moral success story," Donald suggests that truth and reconciliation "should be infused through the documents as a guiding ethic and help us generate a new story" (Real Talk Ryan Jespersen, 2021).

As I write, opposition to the proposed K-6 curriculum for the province of Alberta continues to grow. In a survey conducted by the Alberta Teachers' Association from March 29 and April 7, 2021, 91% of respondents were unhappy with the draft curriculum and 90% of teachers said they are not comfortable teaching the new curriculum (Rosov, 2021). In addition, numerous school divisions from across the province have stated that they will not be piloting the draft curriculum in the upcoming school year (Johnson, 2021). While not all of this opposition to the draft curriculum stems from the lack of meaningful Indigenous content and inclusion, the curriculum is, in the eyes of many, deeply flawed. It is my hope, that there may yet be revisions made and the new story that Dr. Dwayne Donald referred to in the interview mentioned above, may yet come to fruition.

Chapter 3: Literature on Decolonizing and Indigenizing Education

After the parents in my community requested more information about reconciliation and Indigenous knowledge inclusion in our school, I sought out articles that might set me on the right path or give me some guidance as to how I might go about this process. In my earlier studies as an undergraduate students in an International Development Studies program, I had been introduced to the idea of decolonization. From the United Nation's Resolution on the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and People (UN General Assembly, 1960), to Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1963), from *Discourse on Colonialism* by Aimé Césaire (1955, 1972, 2000), and *The Colonizer and the Colonized* by Albert Memmi (1965), I had read about colonization and decolonization in the context of the developing world. While this body of literature was extremely important in shaping my understanding of subjugation and oppression and the challenges of state building in postcolonial times, it did not address decolonization in a Canadian context, nor did it specifically address education reform. As will be discussed in chapter 4, Canada is a Settler colonial state and it seems unlikely that the process of decolonization in the Canadian context will result from the removal of the colonizers. Decolonizing in the Canadian context is something different. The literature I was searching for needed to focus on how educators might go about disrupting epistemic hegemony in schools and creating space for epistemic plurality. What would decolonizing look like in the Canadian context and in the context of education?

My initial searches of the university library database brought up numerous articles on Indigenizing education in Canada (Archibald & Hare, 2016; Armstrong, 2013; Battiste, Bell, Findlay, Findlay & Youngblood Henderson, 2005; Kerr, 2014; Kitchen & Raynor, 2013; Kortweg & Russell, 2012; Pete, 2016; Smith, 2016). I also came across a number of books and

articles that focus on decolonizing education (Abdi, 2012; Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew & Hunt, 2015; Battiste, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012).   As I read through these different chapters and articles, two key groups of literature emerged: texts that focussed on the postsecondary level and those that dealt with the K to 12 education system. I found a growing body of literature centered on decolonizing and Indigenizing the academy, and significantly fewer articles that talked about Indigenizing the K to 12 education system. Within these larger groups, three further categories became apparent: The first focussed on the impact decolonizing and Indigenizing education can have for Indigenous learners. The second looked at the challenges faced by educators, many of whom are non-Indigenous, as they undertake the task of Indigenizing their work. The final group of articles focussed on resistance to Indigenizing efforts. What was missing from the literature, was a discussion of the successes, failures and challenges encountered as schools, particularly rural schools, worked with parents to build an understanding of the changes being made in an effort to transform relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

Decolonizing Education

In relating what I have come to understand from the existing literature, it is important to begin with a discussion of what is meant by colonialism, decolonizing education, and Indigenizing education, followed by an examination of how indigenization has been taken up at the postsecondary level, and closing with a look at Indigenizing efforts within the K to 12 education system. A number of the texts I read about decolonizing education began by defining the term colonialism (Abdi, 2012; Smith 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Smith (2012), for example, writes about colonialism as "one expression of imperialism" (p. 22). She describes how many people see imperialism as economic expansion and the physical subjugation of "others", but she

explains that there is a need to see colonialism as a much deeper, lingering process. "There is...a greater and more immediate need to understand the complex ways in which people were brought within the imperial system, because its impact is still being felt, despite the apparent independence gained by former colonial territories" (Smith, 2012, p. 24). Colonialism is more than territorial control and resource exploitation. It reaches "into 'our heads'" (p. 24).

Similarly, Abdi (2012), in the introduction to *Decolonizing Philosophies of Education*, describes colonialism as having "psychological, educational, cultural, technological, economic and political dimensions" (p. 2) that have "not been cleansed from all of its former colonies and colonized spaces" (p. 2). He argues that "in schooling...the way of the colonial is not only still intact, it actually assumes the point of prominence in almost all transactions that affect the lives of people" (p. 2). The political, territorial, and economic dimensions of colonialism may have changed and been removed from certain former colonies, but the "psycho-cultural and educational" (Abdi, 2012, p.3) remain present.

Tuck & Yang (2012) point to yet another way in which colonialism remains intact. They begin their article with a discussion of different forms of colonialism: external, internal, and Settler. For them, Settler Colonialism differs from external and internal colonialism in that the Settler comes to stay and to make a new home, and in so doing, a new society based on colonial assumptions and relationships is established (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 4-5). Settler societies cannot be undone in the same way that the political and military control of external colonialism, for example, may come to an end. Settler Colonialism, like the colonialism of the mind mentioned above, is deeper, ongoing, and much more difficult to disrupt.

In the context of colonialism as a deeper rooted system that cannot be erased by removing the colonizer, what is meant by decolonization? Since the end of World War II, the

term decolonization has been used to refer to the return of political and economic control to local governments within former European colonies (Smith, 2012, p. 28). With the gaining of independence, former colonies are seen to be decolonized with lands and sovereignty returned to the local population. What the arguments above indicate, however, is that, while the returning of lands and sovereignty are essential components of decolonization, they are not enough. Decolonizing the hearts and minds of both colonizers and the colonized is required. Dismantling the ongoing systematic oppression of colonial systems is still required. As Iseke-Barnes (2008) states:

> The system of colonial oppression did not end with the creation of Canada. Understanding this colonial system is of central importance if students are to begin to consider how it has historically oppressed and how it continues to oppress and then to understand how this can be disrupted. (p. 124)

This dismantling is where decolonizing education begins.

In education, decolonization ultimately seeks to unsettle epistemic hegemony. As Abdi (2012) argues, "it is important to counter...the continuities of colonially based education and attached ways of reading and relating to the world" (p. 6). He adds that "it is important to establish a body of anti-colonial criticism and deconstructionist notations that hasten the now incomplete processes of epistemic decolonization, which could slowly liberate spaces and intersection of learning and social progress" (Abdi, 2012, p. 6). In a similar vein, Battiste (2013), states that "until institutions also interrogate the existing cultural interpretive monopoly of Eurocentric knowledges, assumptions, and methodologies" (p. 103) efforts to create inclusion and epistemic pluralism will be "band-aids on festering wounds" (p. 103).

Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew, & Hunt (2015) provide a useful mapping of what decolonization means in higher education. They refer to a radical-reform position where decolonization translates into calls for a "re-structuring [of] social relations at multiple levels" (p. 26). The aim is to "'fix' the mechanisms that produce inequalities. These solutions often entail strategies of empowerment, 'giving voice', recognition, representation, redistribution, reconciliation, affirmative action, recentering of marginalized subjects and/or 'transformation' of the borders of the dominant system" (Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew, & Hunt, 2015, p. 26). Within this position there is a recognition of epistemic dominance but the focus is on "fixing" the existing system in a way that allows for inclusion and to "make it work for marginalised subjects" (Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew, & Hunt, 2015, p. 27).

Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew, & Hunt (2015) then describe a beyond-reform position. Within this position there is a recognition of epistemic, ontological, and metaphysical enclosure. Within this space:

> Analyses...connect different dimensions of oppression and reject the idea that the mere addition of other ways of knowing (through a critique of epistemological dominance) will ultimately change the system, as dominance is exercised primarily through the conditioning of particular ways of being that, in turn, prescribe particular ways of knowing. In other words, the incorporation of multiple ways of knowing (grafted onto the same hegemonic ontological foundation that is left unexamined) through strategies of equity, access, voice, recognition, representation, or redistribution, does not change ontological dominance. (p. 27)

What is required, then, is a dismantling of "modernity's systemic violences" (Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew, & Hunt, 2015, p. 31).

Decolonizing education is an uncomfortable process. It requires a challenging or assumptions, a rethinking of the structures of modernity and colonialism, and a reimagining of relationships. Decolonization is not easily achieved or quickly moved through. As Tuck & Yang (2012) explain:

> Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposition of decolonization is yet another form of Settler appropriation. When we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression. Decolonization is not a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. Decolonization doesn't have a synonym. (p. 3)

It is an unsettling process that results in the reinvention of society. It is a difficult and revolutionary process.

The first step in this process of decolonization is an unsettling the Settler by challenging epistemic and ontological dominance, and the ongoing coloniality of Canadian society. The process is not easy. There are many "moves to innocence" (Tuck & Yang, 2012), feelings of guilt, and jumps to premature reconciliation. In spite of best intentions, it is easy to fall back into the comfortable patterns of dominant epistemic and ontologic assumptions, but the effort to decolonize is still the crucial first step in the Indigenizing process. "[T]he act of de/colonizing out minds is not as clean and simple as it sounds in theory" (Dénommé-Welch & Montero 2014, p. 144), but it is this process, this ongoing process, taken up with parents, that had been the focus of my research.

What it Means to Indigenize Education

What is meant by Indigenizing education? For Marlene Brant Castellano "Indigenizing education means that every subject at every level is examined to consider how and to what extent current content and pedagogy reflect the presence of Indigenous/aboriginal peoples and the valid contribution of Indigenous knowledge" (Brant Castellano, 2014, as cited in Archibald & Hare, 2016, p. 2). It is a process that involves "both decolonizing and Indigenizing energies, as inquiry and sustained action," (Korteweg & Russell, 2012, p. 8) where decolonizing is seen as "critical reflexivity by researchers/educators that makes explicit the present marinade of neocolonialism in mainstream...education, and Indigenizing as moving towards an Indigenized future of improved Indigenous - non-Indigenous relations as treaty partners on the same land" (Korteweg & Russell, 2012, pp. 8-9). It is a process in which we must first decolonize the mind and the heart (Battiste, 2002) so that we may come to "believe that Indigenous knowledge is of the same value as mainstream knowledge, and [that] education systems must be a place that fosters such ideologies" (Smith, 2016, p. 49).

At the postsecondary level, Moira MacDonald (2016) adds that Indigenizing the academy can take many forms from changing campus spaces and symbols, to rethinking academic programs and resources, to recruiting more Indigenous students and faculty; themes that are also taken up by Shauneen Pete (2016) in her article "100 Ways: Indigenizing & Decolonizing Academic Programs." Citing the work of the University of Regina's Indigenous Advisory Circle, Pete states that:

> Indigenization is understood as the transformation of the existing academy by including
> Indigenous knowledges, voices, critiques, scholars, students and materials as well as the
> establishment of physical and epistemic spaces that facilitate the ethical stewardship of a

plurality of Indigenous knowledges and practices so thoroughly as to constitute an

essential element of the University. (Pete, 2016, p. 81)

Indigenization is the inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies on an equal footing alongside

existing knowledge and pedagogy so as to counter the epistemic hegemony of western thought

and create a place of epistemic pluralism (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Kuokkanen, 2003, 2007)

within the academy.

Indigenizing Postsecondary Education

Indigenization has been taken up in numerous ways by many different universities and

faculty across Canada. As evident in the writing of Archibald & Hare (2016), Belczewski (2009),

MacDonald (2016), Dénommé-Welch & Montero (2014), Hatcher et al (2009), Bartlett, Marshall

& Marshall (2012), Oberg, Blades & Thom (2007), and Pete (2016), universities have come to

recognize the need for a greater hospitality (Kuokkanen 2003, 2007) toward Indigenous

knowledge and pedagogy. MacDonald (2016) makes reference to Universities Canada's 13

principles of Indigenous education which "among other things, aim to encourage intercultural

dialogue and 'the cohabitation of Western science and Indigenous knowledge on campuses'" (p.

2). Even before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released its recommendations

calling on universities to play a fundamental role in transforming Indigenous - non-Indigenous

relations, MacDonald (2016) argues that many universities had begun to make "a conscious

effort to bring Indigenous people, as well as their philosophies and cultures, into strategic plans,

governance roles, academics, research and recruitment" (p. 2). Evidence of such efforts can be

found in policy documents, lists of course offerings, faculty rosters, and governance

appointments (Archibald & Hare, 2016; MacDonald, 2016).

Of particular note for my research as an educator was the growing trend to include Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy within teacher education programs. Archibald & Hare (2016) point to a growing body of literature that looks at the focus on both Indigenous education and Indigenizing education within teacher education programs, and my own search of the literature revealed a number of works on this topic (Armstrong, 2013; Cannon, 2012; Cardinal & Fenichel, 2017; Kitchen & Raynor, 2013; Tupper, 2014). As already indicated, much of this literature focuses on one of two things: pre-service teachers', both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, responses to the inclusion of Indigenous history, knowledge, and pedagogy; and the challenges faced by faculty, most of whom are non-Indigenous, as they search for ways to decolonize and Indigenize their own teachings and research.

Challenges for Faculty

One of the initial challenges for faculty, as expressed by the literature, is coming to understand their own role within Settler Colonialism and how this impacts their teaching (Belczewski, 2009; Kerr, 2014; Oberg, Blades, & Thom, 2007; Scully, 2015). The process of decolonizing and deconstructing their own privilege and epistemic assumptions is often a focus of their writing (Biermann, 2011; Oberg, Blades, & Thom, 2007). For example, in "Knowledge, power, and decolonization: Implications for non-Indigenous scholars, researchers, and educators," Soenke Biermann (2011) looks at what he calls the three main challenges non-Indigenous academics must face as they take up the work of decolonization:

> deconstructing colonial privilege, engaging with Indigenous and majority-world theories and practices, and, in conversation with Indigenous scholars and thinkers, developing models that facilitate "epistemological equity" (Dei, 2008, p. 8) inside and outside of the classroom. (p. 394)

The need to begin by critically examining one's own role within colonial structures and epistemological dominance is a common theme in through the literature, and echoes where we plan to being with parents.

Another theme within the writing centers on how to go about the process of Indigenizing coursework and programs (Belczewski, 2009; Cannon, 2012; Cardinal & Fenichel, 2017; Iseke-Barnes, 2008; Kerr, 2014; Kitchen & Raynor, 2013; Oberg, Blades & Thom, 2007; Scully, 2015). As faculty work to change their practices, they are writing about the pedagogical shifts they are making. Alexa Scully (2015), for instance, writes about the ways in which she uses place-based education to disrupt dominant narratives about Indigenous peoples, knowledge, land, and relationships in Canada. Kitchen & Raynor (2013), in delivering their introduction to Indigenous peoples, issues, and ways of knowing, highlight the use of "[e]xperiential activities, class discussions, and perspectives from experiences educators [to help] candidates learn how to Indigenize education for/about Aboriginal Peoples" (p. 45). They describe the use of smudging, visits from Elders, talking circles, stories, reflective journaling, and activity-based learning as key elements necessary elements of a more Indigenized pedagogy. For Cardinal & Fenichel (2017) relational pedagogy as a part of both Narrative Inquiry and Indigenous approaches to education provides a powerful tool for building the shared, safe, reflective space for stories and dialogue about teaching and learning in the context of Language Arts instruction for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) students.

What underpins much of this literature is the need to not only rethink knowledge systems within the academy, but to also rethink the pedagogy used. As Marie Battiste (2002) explains:

> The Aboriginal people of Canada have their own epistemology and pedagogy. Aboriginal
>
> epistemology is found in theories, philosophies, histories, ceremonies, and stories as

ways of knowing. Aboriginal pedagogy is found in talking or sharing circles and

dialogues, participant observations, experiential learning, modeling, meditation, prayer,

ceremonies, or storytelling as ways of knowing and learning. (p. 18)

Indigenizing teacher education programs, as examined in the literature, is taking up the challenge

of decolonizing education while moving to include both Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy.

Implications for Indigenous learners

Archibald & Hare (2016) note that between 2013-2015 Universities Canada indicated a

33% increase in programming and services for Indigenous students. Universities, they argue,

"have created some fairly recent systemic change to make their learning environments and

processes more culturally relevant and safe for Indigenous learners" (Archibald & Hare, 2016, p.

31). Andrea Belczewski (2009) speaks to the way in which her efforts to decolonize and

Indigenize her undergraduate biology classes, as part of the "Integrative Science" undergraduate

program at Cape Breton University (Hatcher et al 2009; Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall 2012),

have made her teaching and learning more relevant for her Mi'kmaq & Maliseet students. She

explains how, prior to taking up the challenge of "how to teach science that honors ancestral and

contemporary coming to know while highlighting positive aspects of WMS [western modern

science] in an educational experience that recognizes, appreciates, and incorporates different

worldviews, without becoming colonially tokenistic" (Belczewski, 2009, p. 193), her students

often commented on the irrelevance of course material in their lived experience and questioned

the way in which what they were learning fit into the larger picture. Indigenizing content and

pedagogy, the Two-Eyed Seeing described by Elder Albert Marshall (Hatcher et al 2009;

Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall 2012) where learners see through both an Indigenous and a

Western lens, makes coursework more relevant and meaningful in the lives of Indigenous students.

Emerging from the literature there is also a desire, on the part of Indigenous students and faculty, to see the critically reflective practice of decolonizing hearts and minds (Battiste, 2002) continue so that genuine moves to reconciliation may begin (Cannon, 2012). As Cannon (2012) argues:

> As long as we remain focused on racism and colonialism as an exclusively Indigenous struggle, we do very little in the way of encouraging non-Indigenous peoples to think about what it might mean to be an "Ally" of Indigenous sovereignty in education. Moreover, we do little to urge them to think about matters of restitution, their own decolonization, and transforming their complicity and ongoing dispossession. pp. 21-22

In a similar manner, Dwayne Donald (2009) argues that there is a "relationality and connectivity that comes from living together in a place for a long time" (p. 6). As a result, the fate and future of colonizer and colonized are intertwined and connected. Thus Donald (2009) argues that it is "an ethical imperative to recognize the significance of the relationships we have with others, how our histories and experiences are layered and position us in relation to others, and how our futures as people similarly are tied together" (p. 7). As decolonization and indigenization take place in teacher education programs and across the academy, there is hope that this decolonizing work will not only create a space of hospitality (Kuokkanen 2003, 2007) toward Indigenous people, epistemology and pedagogy, but that it will also fuel true efforts at reconciliation and redefining relationships.

Responses of non-Indigenous Students

The response of non-Indigenous post-secondary students to decolonizing and Indigenizing efforts is another area of growing research and writing (Iseke-Barnes, 2008; Kitchen & Raynor, 2013; Kerr, 2014; Tupper, 2011). There are those teacher candidates who appreciate the opportunity to learn about the impact of colonization and residential schooling on Indigenous peoples, and to begin decolonizing their own understandings of knowledge and education, while also exploring Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy (Cardinal & Fenichel, 2017; Iseke-Barnes, 2014; Kitchen & Raynor, 2013). Similarly, there are those parents in our community who embrace the learning opportunities we offer.

The feedback Kitchen & Raynor (2013) have received from students in their classes indicates that "teacher candidates made significant movement toward understanding, articulating, and implementing *Indigagogy* [Indigenous pedagogy]" (p. 53 italics are added). More importantly, Kitchen & Raynor (2013) also use student feedback to demonstrate that they were able to "engage them [students] in thinking and reflecting deeply about their identity, Aboriginal culture, and teaching to make the world a better place" (p. 54).

In her article "Pedagogies for decolonizing," Judy Iseke-Barnes (2008) describes the way in which she engages students in the dual work of decolonizing and moving forward. She explains that, since the work of decolonizing can be difficult and lead to emotional stress and feelings of guilt in some students, "[i]t is important to find a balance between discussing colonization and its many forms that exist today, and decolonizing and processes and strategies helpful to achieve it" (Iseke-Barnes, 2008, p. 133).

Cardinal & Fenichel (2017) also describe the need to create a shared, respectful, reflexive space through relational pedagogy where pre-service teachers can safely unpack thinking about teaching and learning, Indigenous education, subject matter, themselves and others. Within this

safe place, where admitting misconceptions and self-reflection is permissible, students have been able to reflect, learn and rethink assumptions.

More prevalent in the literature, however, are writing that point to teacher candidates who struggle with the *difficult knowledge* (Kerr, 2014) brought to light by decolonizing and Indigenizing projects. Kerr (2014) describes varying forms of resistance to this difficult knowledge ranging from open anger and hostility, to disengagement, to denial or "positioning oneself outside of complicity" (p. 97). She relates an incident in which a visiting Indigenous scholar was invited into her class to speak:

> students had been generally invited from the outset to ask questions, but when the scholar discussed Indigenous notions of spirituality in terms of pedagogy, one table of students started a heated and prolonged questioning of the scholar. The mood and tone of this table of five students was passionate and...aggressive" (Kerr, 2014, p. 95).

Hostility and resistance to difficult knowledge is a theme that runs through the literature on decolonization and Indigenizing education (Kerr, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Tupper, 2011).

The self-reflection required as a part of decolonizing projects is unsettling. It requires non-Indigenous students to look at themselves, their assumptions, their philosophies, their beliefs, and what they may have been taught in the past in a critical light and to examine their own privileged position in Settler colonial society (Cannon, 2012; Czyzewski, 2011; Gebhard, 2017; Iseke-Barnes, 2014; Kerr, 2014). A considerable amount of literature examines the challenges involved in this process of unsettling truths (Biermann, 2011; Cannon, 2012; Gebhard, 2017; Kerr, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012), and many teacher educators have written about ways in which to begin the process and assist students as they navigate this difficult terrain (Curry-Stevens, 2007; Iseke-Barnes, 2008).

There is also a body of literature that looks at the ways in which claims of innocence and feelings of guilt coupled with a desire to return to normalcy play into these discussions. Tuck & Yang (2012), for example, describe six moves to innocence; six ways in which non-Indigenous members of Settler society may seek to appease feelings of guilt and return to a sense of normalcy. Gebhard (2017) and Czyzewski (2011) are two more examples of literature that examines the desire on the part of non-Indigenous Canadians to move through the process of critical self-reflection quickly and without truly transforming relationships or positions of privilege and suppression.

At the heart of the literature on resistance to decolonizing and Indigenizing efforts is the argument that, in Canada, racism continues to shape institutions, hearts, and minds, and that this racism continues to be denied by non-Indigenous Canadians (Battiste, 2002; Cannon, 2012; Gebhard, 2017). Suggesting that racism continues to be a part of Canadian society is taboo and can provoke hostility and outrage (Gebhard, 2017; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). For decolonization and indigenization of our education system to truly take place there is a need to address the racism that underpins Canadian society. In the words of Martin Cannon (2012) "change means more that the mere incorporation of Indigenous culture and world-views into teacher education programs and other curricula. It also requires that we give thought to racism and working together across our differences" (p. 33). To this end, anti-oppressive educational practices (Kumashiro, 2000), transformative educational practices (Curry-Stevens, 2007), and antiracism education (Dei, 1996, 1998), to name a few, enter into the discussion as means of furthering the project of decolonizing and transforming Settler society.

The literature on Indigenizing the academy reveals the complexity and difficulty associated with transforming a system of epistemic dominance into one of pluralism and

openness, but there is evidence that this important work is beginning to take place, in varying forms, and to varying degrees across Canadian post-secondary institutions. With this information as a backdrop for my own project, I also wanted to see what the literature reveals about Indigenizing the K to 12 system.

Indigenizing K to 12 Education

It was more difficult to find literature that focused on Indigenizing education at the K to 12 level. Rather, the literature often focused on culturally inclusive practices of Indigenous education and ways in which to close the achievement gap for Indigenous students, and I could find no reference to parental opposition to Indigenous knowledge inclusion within the literature examined. Archibald & Hare (2016), in there review of educational reforms aimed at Indigenizing K to 12 education found that across the country "Ministries of Education have developed Aboriginal education province-wide strategies that include policy frameworks, action plans, and agreements" (p. 19). They cite curriculum changes, the creation of Indigenous teaching resources, local consultation processes, and efforts to hire more Indigenous teachers as examples of steps taken in provincial education to increase Indigenous content. Missing from this discussion is the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy that sees learning outcomes addressed using both Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy alongside western thought and practice.

Some literature does take up this deeper challenge of decolonizing and Indigenizing K to 12 education (Armstrong, 2013; Donald, 2009; Senk, 2014; Smith, 2016; Kanu, 2005). Smith (2016), for example, in her article "Making space for Indigeneity: Decolonizing education" argues that:

Educational leaders must be agentic in their thinking toward Indigenous peoples and model this thinking for other teachers (Berryman, Carr-Stewart, Kovach & Steeves, 2014). Society must believe that Indigenous knowledge is of the same value as mainstream knowledge, and the education systems must be a place that fosters such ideologies. (p. 49)

Teachers need to develop "flexibility in thinking" (Smith, 2016, p. 50) and "work to acknowledge that there are other ways of knowing that exist, and value such ways (Smith, 2016, p. 50). She argues that, for decolonization and indigenization to occur in our schools, educators must resist ethnocentric thinking, seek reciprocity, establish a whole school approach to change, and resist colonial paradigms (Smith, 2016). Teachers may begin to build an educational system that uses Indigenous voice and Indigenous teaching methodologies to build relationships, put students at the center of learning, and successfully challenge the dominant epistemology and pedagogy found in schools (Smith, 2016).

Senk (2014) echoes the need for more than the simple infusion of Indigenous cultural elements. "Decolonization is not 'integration' or the token inclusion of Indigenous ceremonies" (Senk, 2014, p. 103) through simple curricular add-ons. Rather:

revising and rethinking pedagogy to include Indigenous ways of knowing and being needs to involve not just curricular change, but also more inclusive and 'wholistic' teaching and learning experiences for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students that focus on Indigenous pedagogies...it involves a paradigm shift from a culture of denial to the making of space for Indigenous political philosophies and knowledge systems as they resurge, thereby shifting perceptions and power relations in real ways. (Senk, 2014, p. 102-103)

Like the efforts seen at the postsecondary level, Indigenizing initiatives within the K to 12

educational system focus on the need to understand and decolonize the current educational

system while moving toward the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in a

move toward epistemic and pedagogical pluralism (Battiste, 2002).

A few examples of specific projects to Indigenize education can be found in the

literature. Senk (2014) describes a high school arts education project in Toronto that used

Indigenous art and knowledge along with an Indigenous pedagogy, which she refers to as a

pedagogy of relationship, to decolonize and Indigenize arts education. Yatta Kanu (2005) details

a research project involving grade 9 Social Studies classes, one of which integrated Indigenous

knowledge and content while the other maintained a more mainstream approach. Helen

Armstrong's (2013) research looks at the use of story as a method of Indigenizing the

curriculum. Both Jennifer Wemigwans (2018) with her website FourDirectionsTeachings.com

and Susan D. Dion (2004) with *Braiding History* have provided powerful Indigenous resources

for teachers to access, and Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, Renaud, and McMillan (2014) document

community-based research work in the Yukon aimed at Indigenizing educational content and

pedagogy.

Responses of Indigenous Students and Implications

Battiste (2002) argues that "[t]he central purpose of integrating Indigenous knowledge

into Canadian schools is to balance the educational system to make it a transforming and

capacity-building place for First Nations students (p. 29). Indeed, the initial findings by

Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, Renaud, and McMillan (2014) demonstrate that where Indigenous

content and pedagogy were incorporated in the classroom students made significant gains in the

six learning attributes identified by the researchers: effort, contribution, attentiveness, attitude,

self-image, and problem-solving skills. Kanu (2005) cites similar findings stated that students who participated in classroom activities that were infused with Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy "performed dramatically better than their counterparts in the regular class on Social Studies test/exam scores" (p. 11). She adds that these students also "demonstrated better understanding of Social Studies content, higher level thinking, and improved self-confidence as the year progressed" (Kanu, 2005, p. 11).

There is a great deal of literature that takes the position that cultural inclusion can positively impact the success of Indigenous learners (Vogt, Jordan & Tharp, 1987; Zurawsky, 2004). What is different about attempts to Indigenize K to 12 education is the move beyond simply adding in cultural elements to a push to meet curricular outcomes through the use of Indigenous pedagogy and Indigenous knowledge. In other words, Indigenizing education means going beyond art projects, cultural events, and cultural add-ons to curriculum. Rather, it means teaching and learning using Indigenous knowledge, methods, examples, resources, and structures alongside mainstream practices. Armstrong (2013) explains one approach to this process in her article "Indigenizing the curriculum: The importance of story":

> In Manitoba, as well as in some other Canadian provinces, the curricula are outcomes based. Thus, in Grade one, with a Science outcome involving the senses, any resource can be used to achieve the various specific outcomes through which the child learns about their sense. Aboriginal peoples' knowledge...could help the children - all children - achieve those outcomes. (p. 44-45)

The literature indicates that, through the focus on meaningfully integrating Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods, Indigenous students benefit both academically and in the areas of self-confidence and engagement.

While Indigenizing content and pedagogy may positively impacts the academic success of Indigenous learners, Kanu (2005) found that school retention and school attendance were not impacted by changes made to Indigenize teaching and learning in specific subject areas. This seems to challenge the idea that culturally responsive teaching can mitigate against attendance issues and dropout rates. When students were asked about irregular attendance they cited reasons unrelated to class content and teaching method to explain their absence from class (Kanu, 2005). Rather, larger societal issues often played a role in student absenteeism and attrition. Indigenizing content and pedagogy, then, "cannot be pursued in isolation from other factors involving larger societal changes in policies and practices that enshrine the colonial project of othering and excluding" (Kanu, 2005, p. 14-15)

An initial reading of literature on both New Zealand's Māori education policy, Ka Hikitia (Berryman & Eley, 2017), and "the 'closing the gap' focus of contemporary Indigenous policy in Australia" (Lingard, Vass, & Mackinlay, 2016, p. 126), reveal similar situations. Efforts at culturally responsive education or Indigenizing schooling remain largely ineffective when larger issues of structural racism and ongoing Settler Colonialism remain invisible, unchallenged, and unaddressed. Berryman & Eley (2017) found that even after 14 years of trying to Indigenize Māori education, "the daily experiences of Māori students within our schools has not dramatically improved - in 2015, Māori students still speak of a significant disjuncture between the promise of equity and excellence within our education system and their lived realities" (p. 105). There is still a long way to go.

Challenges for Teachers

Kanu's (2005) findings from the research project discussed above indicates that "successful integration [of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy] requires sensitive caring

teachers who are knowledgeable about Aboriginal issues/topics and preferred pedagogical strategies (or are willing to acquire such knowledge) and value them sufficiently to integrate them into their curricula on a consistent basis" (p. 15). In a similar fashion, the work of Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, Renaud, and McMillan (2014) points to teachers as "central players in fostering change" (p. 10); change in themselves and their assumptions, and change in their classrooms in terms of content and method. Teachers' beliefs about Indigenization and the reasons for these beliefs have a profound effect on the way in which change is implemented.

In a second study conducted by Yatta Kanu (2005b), teachers, most of whom were non-Indigenous, were interviewed as part of a research project to gauge their perceptions of the integration of Aboriginal culture in the high school curriculum. In this study, teachers approached the integration of Aboriginal culture in different ways. Some took a contributions approach, where they focussed on the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canadian society. Others took an additive approach where they occasionally added Aboriginal stories or perspectives to mainstream curriculum. While others took a more transformative approach teaching content from multiple perspectives and encouraging social change (Kanu, 2005b, p. 55). For those teachers who took a contributions approach or an additive approach, there was a reluctance to question or challenge mainstream approaches to teaching and learning. If teachers are unwilling to engage in the difficult knowledge of decolonizing education, indigenization is not possible.

Other insights emerge from Kanu's work with the high school teachers in the study mentioned above. These teacher identified five challenges to the integration of Aboriginal culture. The first challenge to integration was non-Indigenous teachers' lack of knowledge; lack of knowledge of Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning, lack of knowledge of

Indigenous issues and tropics, or lack of knowledge of Indigenous epistemology. Kanu (2005) questions whether this lack of knowledge was "simply a passive lack of information or in part an active resistance to the difficult knowledge of cultural differences" (p. 58) and the privilege and suppression in our schools and classrooms.

Teacher also indicated that racism often stood in the way of integration. As Kanu (2005b) explains:

> Teachers reported a perception among some teachers and school administrators that integration is not relevant to majority-culture students and is, therefore, not worth spending money or resources on...Overwhelmingly the teachers identified racist, stereotypical images of Aboriginal peoples held by some of their non-Aboriginal colleagues and students as a most difficult challenge. (p. 60)

Gebhard (2017) also found that, in a similar way, racism is shaping current discourse about treaty and residential school education within Canadian schools. As indicated in the literature about responses to indigenization at the postsecondary level, racism remains an issue to be addressed as a part of Indigenizing education.

The three final challenges identified by the teachers in Kanu's (2005b) study were: lack of resources, school administrators' lukewarm support for integration, and incompatibility between school structures and Aboriginal cultural values/practices. Each of these challenges, in their own way, point to the needs for systemic changes in our schools and our educational system to support the process of Indigenizing. As Kanu (2005b) suggests, school cultures need to change, school structures need to change, school principals and school divisions must act as catalysts for change, and provincial government and faculties of education must put more effort into training and resources (pp. 65-66).

Benefits for All

The least talked about group in the literature on Indigenizing K to 12 education are non-Indigenous students. Change within Canadian society must involve both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Cannon, 2012). It is important to consider the impact and benefits of Indigenizing education on non-Indigenous students.

Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, Renaud, and McMillan (2014) do indicate that the use of Indigenous pedagogy in their study benefited all learners, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, although they did not separate data for these two groups in the analysis of their results. Armstrong (2013) also argues that the use of stories and Aboriginal teaching methods benefits all learners but no real explanation of how and why was provided, and, while the impact of integration on non-Indigenous students was not the focus of Kanu's (2005b) study, she did find that where additive or contribution approaches were taken to integrating Aboriginal content informal conversations with non-Indigenous students "revealed that these activities had little or no effect on the students in terms of either how they perceived Aboriginal students or of moving them toward interrogation of power structures in society" (p. 56). How do we shift the attitudes and perceptions of non-Indigenous students? This is an area requiring further research.

White Settler Resistance

There is much to learn from the literature reviewed above. I see the importance of decolonizing hearts and minds (Battiste, 2002) as we move to Indigenize teaching and learning within our classrooms. I can better anticipate some of the challenges that we will face and I see in the literature possible strategies for addressing these challenges and pitfalls. The experiences of others will no doubt assist in my own efforts.

The one big piece that I have taken away from the literature and my own experiences to date, has been the need to address white Settler reluctance to engage in dialogue, and the feelings of guilt and hostility that attempts to engage in dialogue may bring about. As I think about my research question and the work of decolonizing with our parent community, I realize the need to make the case for why this is important and why it is something all Canadians, even white Settler Canadians, need to be a part of.

Two articles in particular, both written by Carol Schick (2000, 2014) speak to the resistance of white Settler society in the face of efforts to learn about, from, and with Aboriginal peoples. In "White Resentment in Settler Society" Schick (2014) examines reactions by white Settler parents to a school resource developed in the Province of Saskatchewan. *The Treaty Resource Kit* was "designed for all students and teachers and mandated to be taught across all schools in the province" (Schick, 2014, p. 89). Based on her research, Schick (2014) concludes that the resentment expressed by many white Settler parents is linked to "deep emotional attachment to a particular identity formation on the part of white Settler community" (p. 91). She argues that, for white Settler parents, education which "takes up the stories and images of 'the Other' as a mandated and required part of schooling is [perceived as] a direct challenge" (Schick, 2014, p. 97). Such teaching threaten white Settler identity and contradict the myth of Canada.

> The National Narrative of the tolerant and cohesive Settler nation is challenged by the voices, stories and traditions of others that have been systematically excluded, especially if these other stories challenge the innocence of the colonial Settlers and the identity of the present-day descendants. (Schick, 2014, p.97)

I am reminded of Dwayne Donald's dissertation (2009) and the way in which he demonstrates how "the pedagogy of the fort" shapes understandings of history and identity in Alberta, and I have seen the resentment Schick talks about when such ideas are challenged. What emerges is a need to address this discourse of resentment, a discourse which emerged at our school in response to the reading of our Treaty Acknowledgement Statement.

In the literature, I came across examples, practices and case studies that provide possibilities for engaging white Settler parents and community members in the difficult conversations surrounding Settler Colonialism and epistemic dominance. One such example comes from Ann Curry-Stevens (2007) in her article "New Forms of Transformative Education: Pedagogy for the Privileged." In her writing she describes a process of transformative education designed to "transform those with more advantages into Allies for those with fewer" (Curry-Stevens, 2007, p. 35). Having conducted research with adult educators working with privileged groups in the area of social justice education, Curry-Stevens has identified six steps that privileged learners need to be guided through as a part of their transformative education. The first six steps work at the cognitive level: 1) awareness of oppression, 2) oppression as structural and, thus, enduring and pervasive, 3) locating oneself as oppressed, 4) locating oneself as privileged, 5) understanding the benefits that flow from privilege, and 6) understanding oneself as implicated in the oppression of others and understanding oneself as an oppressor. Each of these steps, according to Curry-Stevens (2007) needs to occur in order with the learner first understanding that structural and systemic oppression exists in Canada, then seeing how they themselves may be impacted by and implicated in such forms of oppression, before they can begin to understand how they play a role in the oppression of others.

Once work has been done at this cognitive level, Curry-Stevens describes four more steps in the transformation of privileged learners. Once awareness and understanding has been achieved, steps can be taken to build agency: 7) building confidence to take action, 8) planning what actions one will undertake, 9) finding supportive connections to sustain commitment, and 10) declaring intentions for future action. Underpinning the whole process of transformative education for the privileged is the idea that:

> an ideal trajectory for dismantling oppression is where there is awareness on both sides of the polarity. That the oppressed are able to problematize their situation as one that needs addressing and can be addressed. But if on the other side, privilege is understood also as the problem...then maybe peace is possible...then something that meets in the middle that is reconciliation - that is, peace - becomes more possible. (Curry-Steven, 2007, p. 39)

Transformative education for the privileged is a key part of decolonizing and Indigenizing education, and it will be a necessary part of the work we do at our school.

Kevin Kumashiro (2000) also provides useful insights into the practices of anti-oppressive education in his article, "Toward a Theory of Anti-Oppressive Education." He examines four different approaches to anti-oppressive education: 1) education for the other, 2) education about the other, 3) education that is critical of privileging and othering, and 4) education that changes students and society. Much of the work being done right now in the Province of Alberta falls within the first two approaches where the focus is on improving learning for Aboriginal students and also increasing knowledge and awareness of non-Aboriginal students when it comes to treaties and residential schooling, for example. Kumashiro (2000) discusses the strengths and weakness of both of these first two approaches and then moves on to look at the benefits and limitations of the third and fourth approach to anti-oppressive education

as ways to critique and transform both educational spaces and society in general. In the end, Kumashiro argues that elements of all four approaches are needed to bring about meaningful change. In my school, I began with education about the other and then moved to critique privileging and othering in order to bring about changes for our students and parent community.

As we navigated this path in our small, rural elementary school I continued to search the literature for guidance and suggestions. It was clear that my initial work needed to increase awareness and understanding on the part of our parents and community. There was also a need to address feelings of resentment and guilt, and to challenge "moves to innocence" (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

Contributing to the Conversation

As the review above reveals, there is a growing body of literature on the work being done to decolonize and Indigenizing education at the postsecondary level. Much of this literature focuses on the challenges faculty face in decolonizing and Indigenizing the academy, and there is also a growing body of research on how non-Indigenous students respond to these decolonizing and Indigenizing efforts. At the K to 12 level, the literature focuses more on the benefits that Indigenizing education can have for Indigenous learning achievement levels, although the challenges faced by teachers carrying out this work are also discussed. What is lacking from the literature, is research on the benefits of decolonizing and Indigenizing education for non-Indigenous students. I could not find any research into parents' reactions and responses to decolonizing and Indigenizing work in Canadian schools, and how school administration could work with parents to build understanding. I am eager to contribute to this discussion.

As I worked to decolonize and Indigenize education within our small rural school, beginning with our parent community, I aimed to make a difference for all students, Indigenous

and non-Indigenous. The successes, failures and challenges encountered as I have taken up and continue to engage in this work with a largely non-Indigenous parent and student population may be of interest to other teachers and administrators in Canada as they encounter similar situations. This is an area of research that is not well represented in the literature, but it is a key part of transforming relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. Decolonizing and Indigenizing education is a long term project, but the experiences in our small, rural community offer insights for others as they embark upon similar journeys.

Chapter 4: Settler Colonial Theory

There is something jarring about hearing Canada described as a Settler society. Many non-Indigenous people, myself included, are uncomfortable with the idea that they are Settlers in the land they call home. There is something unnerving about using the language of Settler and colonizer to describe myself and my family. This feeling stuck with me as I first read the work of scholars such as Sharene Razack (1998, 2015) and Paulette Regan (2010) who use the framework of Settler Colonialism to frame their work. Could I really be a Settler in my own homeland?

The idea of Settler Colonialism intrigued me as a theoretical framework for rethinking Indigenous - non-Indigenous relations in Canada. To better understand the theory, I read works by Lowman & Barker (2015), Veracini (2010, 2011), Wolfe (1999, 2006), and, later, James Tully (2008). The more I read, the more convinced I became that describing Canada as a Settler society is not only an accurate representation of the current political and socio-economic structures in this country, it is also a very powerful tool for engaging Canadians in a rethinking of Indigenous – Non-Indigenous relations. As Macoun & Strakosch (2013) point out, it is particularly useful in "providing non-Indigenous people in Settler states with a better account of ourselves" (p. 15). As I took up decolonizing work with the parent community and the students in my school, Settler Colonial Theory provided a theoretical framework from which to begin. It also shaped the form of decolonizing practices undertaken.

Settler Colonialism

Lowman & Barker (2015) describe Settler Colonialism as "a way of thinking about power and migration that allows us to better understand the nature of contemporary Canadian society" (p. 24). Drawing on the work of Lorenzo Veracini (2010), they explain that Settler

Colonialism is distinct from other forms of colonialism. In Settler society, a history of colonization has led to the creation of a new homeland, a new country, and a new people. The Settlers have come and stayed and to build new lives for themselves and their descendants. They have built new institutions, new economic opportunities, and new ways of defining themselves and their relationships.

In his book *Settler Colonialism: a theoretical overview*, Lorenzo Veracini begins by examining the difference between Settler Colonialism and colonialism as it is widely understood. In our traditional understanding, colonialism is often seen as the control of an Indigenous population by an exogenous other. The goal of colonialism is usually the extraction of the natural and labour resources of the colony for the benefit of distant administrators. While elements of colonialism are found in Settler Colonialism, Settler Colonialism can be seen as structurally different from colonialism. As Veracini (2010) explains:

> Settler Colonialism constitutes a circumstance where the colonising effort is exercised
>
> from *within* the bounds of a Settler colonising political entity, [whereas] colonialism is
>
> driven by an expanding metropole that remains permanently distant from it…Settlers, by
>
> definition, stay, in specific contradiction, colonial sojourners – administrators,
>
> missionaries, military personnel, entrepreneurs, and adventures – return. (p. 6)

In Settler Colonialism control of the land, the people, and the economy is administered by a Settler population that has come to stay.

The end goal of Settler Colonialism is the transcendence of colonialism itself (Lowman & Barker, 2015). "That is, Indigenous people are eliminated and the presence of the new people – the Settler society – becomes so deeply established that it is naturalized, normalized, unquestioned and unchallenged" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 26). Settler Colonialism has

succeeded, then, when the Indigenous peoples have been replaced by Settler society in a thorough, complete, and irreversible way.

"The trajectory of Settler Colonialism can be summed up through three intertwined goals: elimination, indigenization, and transcendence" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 31). Upon arrival Settlers seek to eliminate Indigenous claims to sovereignty over the land. Next, Settler society seeks to establish its legitimacy and "Indigenous" status to the land through stories of settling, clearing, and homesteading on the land. "Finally, colonialism is transcended – put into the past – when Settler societies fully replace Indigenous sovereignties on the land" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 31). As Neu & Therrien (2003) explain:

> Using Settlers to crowd out the Indigenous peoples and gaining control by importing an elite to oversee the territorial operations are commonly used strategies. The Indigenous inhabitants are the targeted subjects of a social control so concentrated its outcomes can be indistinguishable from genocide. (p. 18)

The Settler comes to replace and erase the original inhabitants of the land establishing themselves as the legitimate owners of the territory.

Elimination

As indicated above, there are several structural differences between colonialism as it is most commonly understood and Settler Colonialism. One key difference, is that of "transfer" as it is described by Veracini (2010), "invasion" as it is referred to by Wolfe (1999), or the establishment of systems of "internal colonialism" according to Tully (2008). What all of these authors are describing is the way in which Settlers come to take over and dominate a new territory.

According to Wolfe (1998), invasion begins with the displacement of Indigenous peoples from the land, but it continues through the ongoing exercise of Settler control over the territory. "[S]ettler colonies were not primarily established to extract surplus value from Indigenous labour. Rather, they are premised on displacing indigenes from (or replacing them on) the land" (Wolfe, 1999, p. 1). The arrival of Settlers marks the beginning of an invasion, and the continued presence and control of Settler society solidifies structures that make the invasion ongoing and enduring. "Settler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of native societies…The colonizers come to stay – invasion is a structure not an event" (Wolfe, 1999, p. 2). The invasion becomes codified in the laws and norms of Settler society. As Lowman & Barker (2015) clarify:

> invasion is not the moment that the foreign army sweeps into the area; it continues until the occupying forces leave. In Canada, this is to say invasion did not finish at the moment when Indigenous lands were first occupied or appropriated by Euro American people in the past. Rather, it continues to happen because the social, political, and economic structures built by the invading people endure. (p. 25)

The initial invasion gives rise to laws, norms, and practices that maintain control of the land for the Settler society.

Veracini (2010) examines this same process of Settler Colonialism through the lenses of transfer and sovereignty. He argues that Settler societies enter a territory and exert control over the land, the Indigenous Other and any exogenous Others within that territory. Settler Colonialism "establishes a system of relationships comprising three different agencies: the Settler coloniser, the Indigenous colonised, and a variety of different categorised exogenous alterities" (Veracini, 2010, p. 16). What then develops is:

an inherently dynamic circumstance where Indigenous and exogenous Others
progressively disappear in a variety of ways: extermination, expulsion, incarceration
containment, and assimilation for Indigenous peoples (or a combination of all these
elements), restrictions and selective assimilation for subaltern exogenous Others, and an
ultimate affirmation of Settler control against exogenous metropolitan interference (or a
coordinated devolution of responsibility that pre-empts the need for revolutionary
disruptions on the other). Only the Settler body politic in its ultimate sovereign assertion
against metropolitan interference and against Indigenous residues or other insurgencies is
expected to survive. (Veracini, 2010, pp. 16-17)

Through various means of "transfer," in fact Veracini mentions 26 methods of transfer in his
book, Settler societies remove Indigenous populations and make room for Settler colonization
and Settler sovereignty over the land, Indigenous peoples, and exogenous Others.

Tully (2008) speaks of this same aspect of Settler Colonialism when discussing the
"relation between the establishment and development of Western societies and the preexisting
and continuing resistance of Indigenous societies on the same territory" (p. 259). Tully uses the
term "internal colonisation" to describe "the historical processes by which structures of
domination have been set in place on Great Turtle Island (North America) over the Indigenous
peoples and their territories without their consent and in response to their resistance both against
and within these structures" (Tully, 2008, p. 259). He also argues that Settler society maintains
its domination over land and Indigenous peoples into the present moment through a "vast array
of more mobile and changeable techniques of government." (Tully, 2008, p. 259).

Where Veracini investigates transfer and justification of sovereignty as a part of this
"invasion" process, Tully looks at four different dimension of this process. He talks about how,

firstly, through the spread of disease, war, and the destruction of Indigenous societies, Settlers reduced the Indigenous population in North and South America by roughly 90 percent (Tully, 2008, p. 261). Secondly, "they usurped the existing traditional forms of government and subjected Indigenous peoples to French, British, and then Canadian and US governments" (Tully, 2008, p. 261). Thirdly, the significantly decreased Native populations were gradually displaces to small reserves and their land was appropriated and opened up for settlement and resource development. Finally, the process of treaty making was used and continues to be used as a means of settling disputes and resolving outstanding claims to territory by Indigenous peoples. In the end, the goal of this process is "the appropriation of the land, resources and jurisdiction of Indigenous peoples, not only for the sake of resettlement and exploitation (which is also true of external colonisation) but for the territorial foundation of the dominant society itself" (Tully, 2008, p. 262).

At work within this process, Tully (2008) argues, are two "strategies of extinguishment" and two "strategies of incorporation." These strategies parallel the methods of "transfer" taken up by Veracini (2010) but are more specific to the context of Settler Colonialism within Canada. The two "strategies of extinguishment" examined by Tully are: 1) the actual extinction of Indigenous peoples either in fact, through dying out, intermarriage, or enfranchisement, for example, or in deed, through the gradual wearing down of Indigenous peoples until they become totally incorporated into the Settler body politic; and 2) the extinguishing of rights of Indigenous peoples to their territories and self-government. This extinguishing of rights can be done in three ways, according to Tully: 1) by denying that Indigenous people ever had a right to self-government using the notion of *terra nullius* as justification; 2) by unilateral extinguishment through conquest or voluntary extinguishment through treaties; or 3) by transforming

"Indigenous peoples into members of the dominant society through education, incentives and socialization so that they lose their attachment to their identity" (Tully, 2008, p. 263).

The two "strategies of incorporation" that Tully (2008) outlines are: 1) assimilation, where Indigenous peoples are treated just like every other member of Settler society, and 2) a limited form of accommodation whereby certain group rights are assigned to Indigenous peoples within the existing structures of the Settler state in exchange for surrendering their right to exist as free peoples. Both of these forms of incorporation seek to remove the claims that Indigenous Others have to existing territory, to control their rights within the limits of Settler society, and maintain Settler sovereignty over Indigenous groups and land.

What all of these writers are describing in different detail is the way in which Settlers arrive, move in, take over, establish and maintain dominance. This is the first of several important structural characteristics of Settler Colonialism. In a Settler colonial society, the "Settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 5). What has been described above is the process of settlement which begins as the usurping of territory and continues into the present as Settler societies maintain their sovereignty over Indigenous Others and the lands they once inhabited. Thus, as Wolfe states "invasion is a structure not an event" (Wolfe, 1999, p. 2).

Narratives (Indigenization and Transcendence)

The other structure of Settler Colonialism that Wolfe, Veracini, Lowman & Barker, and Tully all discuss is the idea that, since Settlers come to stay, with time they begin to see the new land as their home. They come to see themselves as Indigenous. Stories of political belonging and narratives that solidify connections to the land soon develop. History is seen to begin with the arrival of the explorers, pioneers, and Settlers. Settlers arrive in a new land carrying "their

sovereignty and their lifestyles with them" (Veracini, 2010, p. 98). They then set out to "justify asserting sovereignty – their power of governance over that territory – through narratives of progress and racial or cultural superiority" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 26). The right of Indigenous peoples to be on the land is denied; replaced by Settler stories of pioneering and building on empty land. Through the use of state power, the land is cleared of Indigenous peoples and opened to settlement, and Settler-colonial discourse then begins to produce stories of savage, untamed Indigenous peoples "to warrant, to rationalize and to authenticate official definitions, policies and programmes for dealing with 'the Aboriginal problem'" (Wolfe, 1999, p. 3).

As stories of Settler connections to the land solidify Settler sovereignty, Settlers come to see themselves as separate from their lands of origin and belonging to their new home. They become a new people; linked to their new homeland within their new country, and they become the gatekeepers of this new land controlling who may come in and how new arrivals will relate to the land and to Indigenous peoples. New arrivals are enfolded into the story of Settler society and adopt the stories and growing sense of nationalism associated with the Settler colonial identity.

Veracini argues that Settler stories are based upon a disavowal of the violence at the foundation of Settler societies. "Settler projects are inevitably premised on the traumatic, that is, *violent*, replacement and/or displacement of Indigenous Others. However...Settler Colonialism also needs to disavow any foundational violence" (Veracini, 2010, p. 75). Thus stories develop of empty lands, peaceful settlement, Indigenous others as nomadic in the first place, or already on the decline before Settlers arrived. These narratives work to conceal important truths about

the creation of Settler society. As a result, many Settlers are not aware of the truth of their

position on the land

Tully (2008) points to the way in "Western political theory has played the role of

legitimation in the past and continues to do so today" (p. 266). Combined with stories of

peaceful settlement, Western political and legal theory has been used to legitimate Settler control

of formerly Indigenous territories and the establishment of internal colonialism, justifying the

creation of Settler society and the continued dominance of Settlers on the land and over

Indigenous Others. In Tully's (2008) words:

> the reigning ideology of the superiority of European-derived societies and the inferiority
>
> of Indigenous societies served as the taken-for-granted justification for the removal of
>
> Indigenous populations, who were seen as obstacles to the progressive exploitation of
>
> their lands.   (p. 267)

Settlers were justified in their management of the land and their settlement of otherwise "under"

or "unused" lands. Through the use of Western political theory and the narratives of peaceful

settlement, the violence of Indigenous replacement is removed and settled society becomes

normalized.

The establishment of such narratives is a key part of Settler Colonialism; validating

Settler society and giving rise to a collective amnesia that mutes the past and creates a false

starting point for Settler history. Tully makes this point in the following way:

> In late nineteenth-century Canada, as the Indigenous population was reduced and
>
> marginalised and internal colonisation firmly secured, the need for further legitimation
>
> was correspondingly diminished...the immigrant society now took the exclusive and
>
> legitimate exercise of sovereignty over Great Turtle Island for granted as the

unquestionable basis of their society. The question disappeared and was replaced by an

abstract starting point for theories of constitutional democracy that has nothing to do with

the way societies were founded. The prior existence and sovereignty, as well as the

continuing colonisation and resistance, of Indigenous peoples was rarely mentioned.

(Tully, 2008, p. 267)

These narratives erase the past and establish the Settler as always having belonged or as the

legitimate inheritors of the land. In so doing, histories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous

relations are obscured and Settler society is absolved of any and all culpability.

Canada: A Settler Society

Canada is a Settler society where those Settlers who arrived in the new colony stayed,

cleared the land, built narratives of belonging, worked to solidify their claim to this place, and

created a new national identity. According to Lowman & Barker, there are three structures of

Settler invasion at work in Canada: spaces, systems, and stories. First, Settlers take over the land

and space that once belonged to Indigenous peoples. Consider the city of Edmonton, for

example, which sits on traditional Cree lands. This space was first negotiated away from the

Cree people under Treaty 6 in 1876 and Indigenous peoples were moved to reservations the size

of which was to be 1 square mile of land for each family of five. The Papaschase band was

settled on the south side of the North Saskatchewan River near Fort Edmonton. However,

residents of the growing Settler community of Edmonton complained about the band's close

proximity to Settler territory and this, in combination with illness and starvation, led to the

eventual relocation of the Papaschase people and the subdivision of their lands for the use of

Settler society (Donald, 2004; Wadsworth, n.d.). This land has long been a part of the city of

Edmonton and residents who live and work here see the space as theirs and they have no doubts

that the private and public spaces they occupy belong to them. In this way, the spaces of Indigenous people have been invaded and remain occupied by Settler peoples who have established their own deep connections to the land based on the legal concepts of private ownership and private property. The experience of the Papaschase is but one example. The removal of Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands and territories to make room for Settler peoples was an act duplicated hundreds of thousands of times throughout Canadian history.

The second structure of invasion is more fluid, to use the words of Lowman and Barker. This second structure takes the form of systemic operations put in place to solidify Settler claims and legitimacy to the land. "[S]ettler colonial systems can be defined as the processes by which Canada runs and through which Settler colonization is asserted and adapted over time" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 32). Education, for example, and the history of residential schools was a system of invasion set up to assimilate and erase Indigenous peoples and their claim to this land and place (Regan, 2010). While the history of residential schooling may be over, our current educational system remains a system set up "to socialize children and youth into Canadian society and to instill the values of 'good citizenship'" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 33). In other words, the goal of education largely remains the assimilation of Indigenous peoples, of all Canadian peoples, into the Settler mainstream economy and social-political structures.

The system of Settler Colonialism is further shored up by an economic system that includes impoverished reserves and Indigenous communities, a biased judicial system (Razack, 2014) that sees a higher percentage of Indigenous peoples incarcerated and a health care system that fails to meet the needs of Indigenous communities (Lowman & Barker, 2015). In describing these systems of invasion Lowman and Barker (2015) state that:

these systems have been created to homogenize all peoples, including Settler and

Indigenous peoples, to meet the needs of expansive capital and nationalist

governance…what is often ignored is the particular effects these systems have on

Indigenous peoples, and the ways that Settler identity and governance are especially

dependent on anti-Indigenous violence and erasure. All these structures reinforce each

other, disempowering and displacing Indigenous peoples, knowledge, and practice. (p.

33)

The second structures of invasion, then, is the establishment of systems and structures that

reinforce Settler control of land and territory while working to erase Indigenous presence and

identity.

The final structure of invasion identified by Lowman and Barker aims to build a sense of

belonging for the Settler society. This final structure:

Underpins the other two and is perhaps the most powerful and pervasive: the narratives

that are the means through which violent colonization is transformed into the story of

heroic struggle and the inevitable establishment of an exceptionally successful, just, and

distinct society. These are the narratives that form the basis of the stories Settler

Canadians tell ourselves and each other about who we are as a people. (Lowman &

Barker, 2015, p. 33)

These narratives work to not only justify and solidify Settler invasion of and claims to land and

territory, they also add to the sense of belonging identified by Wolfe and Veracini as the second

element of Settler Colonialism.

I need only think of my own family narratives to see this third structure of invasion at

work. My ancestors came from Ukraine. They arrived in a harsh and hostile place but through

perseverance, hard work, courage and fortitude, they survived and thrived. This is the narrative I have been taught about my ancestors, but what is left out from this story is the fact that the land was not empty and free for the taking when they arrived. The first structure of invasion had already seen to the clearing of the land and the second systemic structures of invasion were already in place to keep the land free for Settlers. Throughout their lifetimes and into my own, those structures of invasion have remained in place making continued Settler Colonialism possible. Stories like these "are key to defining our belonging in Canada, and the narratives that normalize Settler people on the land and exclude or eliminate Indigenous people and Indigenous presence on the land further the end goals of Settler colonization" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 34). Left out of these stories is, of course, the true history of disease, forced relocation, assimilation, warfare, abduction, and incarceration, and when such narratives are brought forward they are often met with hostility on the part of Settler society. This third structure of invasion has shaped the Canadian identity and makes the telling of a different set of stories difficult.

These structures of invasion are not, of course, the only structures shaping relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. Nor can it be said that all Non-Indigenous peoples enjoy the same benefits and privileges as a result of Settler Colonialism. There is no single cause of oppression in Canada. Race, sexuality, age, gender, physical ability, class, and more intersect to determine privilege and power, and prejudice and discrimination in this country, but a focus on Settler Colonialism helps to bring to the forefront an unrecognized and often invisible structure of oppression that lies at the very heart of Canadian society. As Lowman and Barker (2015) explain:

We do not propose that an understanding of the Settler identity and Settler Colonialism in Canadian society can explain all of these injustices. But these concepts are necessary to making sense of how Canada remains an oppressive place, and why so few people are able to see and understand it. (p. 35)

The intersectionality of privilege and oppression should not be ignored in Canada, but a focus on Settler Colonialism brings to light unseen factors that must be recognized and addressed if meaningful change is to take place.

It is difficult to move beyond our present Indigenous – Non-Indigenous relations if we do not identify and address both the legacy of colonialism in Canada and the ongoing ideologies and practices of Settler Colonialism that continue to shape both our relationships with each other and our understandings of who we are as a people. With a clearer understanding, action becomes possible:

Settler colonial structures combine to influence and involve nearly everything about life in Canada: from large-scale politics and economics to banal aspects of everyday life, from official histories to family stories, from the sovereign state to the family home. Police officers and lawyers, steel workers and farmers, homeowners and those moving to new places in search of work: all are complicit in and live lives informed by Settler Colonialism…This should not be read as a blanket and inevitable condemnation of Settler Canadians. Rather, in understanding that we all bear some responsibility for Settler colonization, this means that we are all capable of making a positive difference as well. (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 35)

In truly understanding our role within Settler society and the ways in which Settler Colonialism operates we can begin to shift the narratives and create new relationships to the land and Indigenous peoples.

Strengths of Settler Colonial Theory

As a theoretical framework, one of the most important contributions of Settler Colonialism is that it exposes colonisation as "a structure not an event" (Wolfe, 1999, p. 2). Settler Colonial Theory highlights the ongoing nature of colonisation in Settler colonial societies. It brings to light "the contemporary nature of colonialism [and] disrupts familiar temporal political narratives and emphasizes the partisan nature of Settler institutions" (Macoun & Strakosch, 2013, p. 427). Colonisation is no longer a thing of the past. It is an ongoing feature of Settler societies, as Tully (2008) points out in his description of internal colonialism at work in the Canadian context, and, as Lowman and Barker (2015) argue:

> As Settler Canadians, we are a part of a colonizing collection, and there is no simple place we can go, or declaration we can make, that will sever us from our unearned benefits and privileges, insulate us from our fears of change or abstract us from descriptive practices on the land…Coming to understand Settler Colonialism and its importance in informing almost everything we know about the Canadian state and nation…is a major task and an important step. In a society defined in part by the invisibility of systemic oppression from within, and on a disavowal of our identification with that systemic oppression, *knowing is important*. (pp. 109-110)

Settler Colonial Theory, then, presents the Settler with a lens through which to more accurately see the structure of modern day Settler societies.

By drawing attention to the ongoing nature of internal colonial structures within Settler societies, Settler Colonial Theory also points out the limitations of efforts to address Indigenous concerns within the existing structures of the Settler state. As James Tully points out in examining the history of Indigenous - non-Indigenous relations in Canada, when Indigenous peoples "are treated as minorities with a degree of legal autonomy, self-government and claims to land within the Canadian political system" the underlying assumption that they "are subordinate and subject to the Canadian political government, rather than equal, self-governing nations" remains unchallenged (Tully, 2008, pp. 226-227). It is this notion that has led Tuck & Yang (2012) to point out how Indigenous struggles are different from civil rights projects, for example, and Macoun & Strakosch (2013) to argue that even progressive policies can reinscribe or strengthen Settler investments by leaving the assumptions and structures of Settler Colonialism unchallenged. In this way, progressive policies "such as treaty making, reconciliation and formal apologies may also serve colonial ends by absorbing and extinguishing Aboriginal political difference without disturbing the foundational structures of Settler dominance" (Macoun & Strakosch, 2013, p. 435).

A second insight provided by Settler Colonial Theory is that it calls into question the narratives of Settler legitimacy and identifies "ways that the political interests infusing structures of Settler Colonialism are perpetuated through broader social narratives" (Macoun & Strakosch, 2013, p. 433). It calls into question "Settler common sense" (Rifkin, 2013).

Settler Canadians, according to Lowman & Barker, are defined by their participation in Settler colonial systems and practices. "Settler people are tied together by common histories and by participation and membership in various structures of invasion" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 38). They go on to argue that:

In Canada, the structures of invasion that have been built through five hundred years of colonial settlement are pervasive, and almost impossible to avoid. Almost everything we think about as being Canadian or associated with Canadian identity is caught up in the process of building, expanding, or maintaining the invasive structures of Canada. And that means that the vast majority of people who live within that structure participate in it, benefit from it, and are complicit in colonial dispossession and elimination through it. (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 39).

Settler Canadian identity, then, is situational and not based upon a shared ethnicity, race, level of wealth, or education. It is our relationship to the land, to this place, to "Settler colonial myths, understandings of public and private spaces, and systems of government and economy" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 69) that make us Settler Canadians. As new people move into Canada, they too become a part of Settler society taking their place within the operations and process of Settler Colonialism as it plays out on a daily basis. We continue to settle and occupy this land.

Settler Colonialism is deeply ingrained into the Canadian psyche. It is difficult to imagine a different possibility. What happens to us, to Settler Canadians, if Settler Colonialism and relationships to the land and Indigenous peoples are transformed? Lowman and Barker (2015) argue "[s]cratch the surface of Settler Canadian identity, and there is a deep well of anxiety and even terror of what it might mean to be cut off from the structures of invasion that define us" (p. 90).

People react with anger, fear and denial when confronted with the reality of Settler Colonialism in Canada. "Exposure to our own Settler colonial complicity, and the overwhelming uncertainty of imaging life without our Settler colonial benefits, provokes an unpleasant

emotional reaction which can and frequently does manifest as fear" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 94). Such fear leads many to seek a return to comfort and willful ignorance of the operating of Settler Colonialism within modern Canadian society.

Along with reactions of reactions of anger, fear and denial, come arguments of exception where some Settler people may argue that they are not part of Settler society by virtue of race, gender, sexuality, Allyship or other identity markers that set them apart from mainstream Settler society. All of these responses indicate that Settler Canadians are uncomfortable with the notion that we play a role in the ongoing colonial practices, but it is precisely this discomfort that can prompt us to question and reimagine relationships to the land and Indigenous peoples in Canada. Paraphrasing Paulette Regan, Lowman & Barker (2015) write that "as a Settler person, if you feel uncomfortable, you are probably in the right place. The experience of discomfort, then, can work as a compass, pointing away from Settler colonial security" (p. 106). Unsettling the narratives of legitimacy in Settler society is the second great advantage of Settler Colonial Theory as a theoretical framework.

Limitations of Settler Colonial Theory

Ironically, there is a limitation to Settler Colonial Theory that stems from the first benefit mentioned above. By pointing to colonialism as an ongoing part of Settler society and by highlighting the challenges of taking progressive actions within the internal colonial structures of the Settler state, Settler Colonial Theory can lead to a sort of "Settler colonial fatalism" (Macoun & Strakosch, 2013, p. 435); the idea that Settler Colonialism is inescapable and inevitable. Seeing Settler Colonialism as structural makes it appear "highly stable and 'relatively impervious to regime change'. Therefore, at the same moment Settler scholars finally see the depth and reach of Settler Colonialism in the present they are unable to find 'post Settler colonial

passages'" (Macound & Strakosch, 2013, p. 435). This structuralism can lead to inertia or even reinforce Settler colonial dominance.

Settler Colonial Theory is also limited by the fact that it "remains a largely White attempt to think through contemporary colonial relationships" (Macoun & Strakosch, 2013, p. 426). As Macoun & Strakosch (2013) point out Settler Colonial Theory "may be revelatory to many Settler scholars, but Indigenous people have been speaking for a long time about colonial continuities based on their lived experiences" (p. 436). The danger is that Settler Colonial Theory may ignore the experiences of Indigenous people and reaffirm Settler authority to speak for the Indigenous Other when discussing Settler Colonialism. Macoun & Strakosch (2013) warn that:

> when deployed with a neutral descriptive authority, and used by Settler scholars to explain not just our own political drives but the entire field of our relationships with Indigenous people, this can serve to re-enact the central Settler fantasy that we constitute and have authority over this space. (p. 437)

Settler scholars must be forever vigilant in making sure that settle colonial theory and Settler colonial studies are not used to "displace, overshadow, or even mask over Indigenous studies," (Snelgrove, Dhamoon & Corntassel, 2014, p. 9) Indigenous perspectives, and Indigenous voices.

Decolonizing Settler Society

Veracini (2010) argues that "if decolonization is generally understood as a transaction whereby a colonial state is transformed into a self-governing territorial successor polity, problems inevitably arise when the (Settler) colonising state *is* the self-governing territorial successor polity" (p. 105). Within the logic of Settler Colonialism, Veracini argues that "one can detect three approaches to Settler decolonization: Settler evacuation, the promotion of various

processes of Indigenous reconciliation, and denial associated with an explicit rejection of the possibility of reforming the Settler body politic" (Veracini, 2010, p. 105). Settler Colonialism may only be decolonized, then, with the removal of the Settler, the erasure of the Indigenous, ongoing efforts to reconcile Indigenous survival within Settler colonial structures, or with the complete "denial of the Settler colonial character of the polity" (Veracini, 2010, p. 107). There is something of an all or nothing stance involved in Settler Colonialism. Either the Settler is sovereign, or Settler Colonialism has failed (Veracini, 2010). According to Veracini (2012):

> in Settler colonial contexts withdrawing from colonial practices of Indigenous
>
> dispossession can be only perceived as a 'backward' movement signalling the demise of
>
> original Settler claims and their legitimacies. Lacking the possibility of a clearly defined
>
> decolonising movement...Settler colonial contexts [retain] the policy objectives, if not the
>
> methods, of their Settler colonising pasts. (pp. 113-114)

What is needed, then, is an alternate way of conceptualizing decolonisation in the Settler colonial context; a form of "coexistence" (Tully, 2008) or "isopolitical relationship" (Veracini, 2011) in which both Settler sovereignty and Indigenous sovereignty may be maintained. "Discontinuing Settler colonial forms requires conceptual frames and supporting narratives of reconciliation that have yet to be fully developed and narrated" (Veracini, 2010, p. 115). A new narrative must be hypothesised.

James Tully (2008) posits one alternative approach to decolonizing Settler Colonialism. He argues for a reimagining of the Canadian confederacy. The future of Canada, according to Tully, may be imagined not as one confederation but as two: an agreement between sovereign First Nations people and the Crown in addition to the existing confederation between provinces and the federal government. For Tully, the decolonising of Canadian Settler Colonialism needs

to be based on the recognition of Indigenous peoples as "equal, coexisting and self-governing peoples and cultures" (Tully, 2008, p. 229) and the following five principles need to shape the new relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples: mutual recognition, intercultural dialogue, mutual respect, sharing, and mutual responsibility. As Tully develops his vision of a decolonized Canada he stresses the importance of challenging "deep-seated prejudices and habits of thought and behaviour inherited from the imperial past" (Tully, 2008, p. 230), and in exploring his ideas, a role for education in building mutual recognition, intercultural dialogue, mutual respect, sharing, and mutual responsibility can be envisioned

Tully begins his argument with the principle of mutual recognition. By this, he means that both Settlers and Indigenous peoples must recognize the permanence of each groups on the land. Tully's vision of decolonization means that:

> non-Aboriginal Canadians recognise the distinctive presence of First Peoples in Canadian life and, at the same time, Aboriginal people recognize that non-Aboriginal people, are also of this land, by birth and adoption, with histories, institutions, rights and enduring interests having their equal legitimacy. This form of mutual recognition replaces the unilateral recognition of the colonial relationship, where non-Aboriginal Canadians recognised themselves as self-governing and Aboriginal peoples as subject to Canadian governments, as either a persisting or extinguishable minority. (Tully, 2008, pp. 229-230)

Neither the Settler nor Indigenous peoples are going away. As a result, both parties must come to recognize each other as "equal and coexisting" (Tully, 2008, p. 229).

Tully also argues that non-Indigenous Canadians must recognize Indigenous peoples as having a right to self-government. This right to self-government, according to Tully, predates the arrival of the Settler and the Confederation of Canada and is based on both international law

and Canada's own common law tradition (Tully, 2008). When Europeans first arrived, "the Aboriginal people they encountered were independent, self-governing nations equal in status to European nations...Their status as self-governing nations rested on exactly the same criteria in international law, then and now, as the status of European nations: the proven ability to govern themselves on a territory over time and to enter into international relations with other nations." (Tully, 2008, p. 233). In the first interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, each group recognized the other as coexisting, sovereign nations with a status equal to their own. For Tully, "the basic justness of Canada as a self-governing federation actually rests on its recognition by Aboriginal peoples, not the other way round" (Tully, 2008, p. 234). He states that "if Canadian governments fail to enter into negotiations to recognize the status of the Aboriginal peoples as equal yet prior nations, then they violate the inherent right to self-government, the ground on which the legitimacy of the global system of nations rests." (Tully, 2008, p. 234). For Canada itself to remain a just federation, Indigenous sovereignty must be recognized.

This new relationship imagines Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples living together in a mutually respectful, mutually beneficial, and mutually responsible manner characterized by intercultural dialogue and a commitment to supporting the well-being of each other. In Tully's words:

> Coexistence is a relationship in which Aboriginal peoples and Canadians live side-by-side, governing their own affairs in a relationship that values this form of political diversity. However, this is not a relationship of separation and isolation. Natives and newcomers have interacted for centuries. Their identities and cultures have been shaped by these interactions, and a dense set of Intercultural relations of interdependency and shared history has developed on the middle ground wherever interaction takes place.

Although many of the interrelations are unequal and dominating, they cannot be

disentangled and separated from the peoples who have associated within them for so

long. The objective of a new relationship is rather to lay the guidelines for the reform of

these interrelations and the formation of egalitarian relations of interdependency.

Nevertheless, no matter how interdependent the partners become, the recognition of

coexistence ensures that Aboriginal cultures and government will continue throughout.

(Tully, 2008, pp. 231-232)

While this vision of Settler decolonization is based upon the circumstances of the Canadian

Settler state, Tully's (2008) argument for the recognition of Indigenous and non-Indigenous

peoples as "equal, coexisting, and self-governing peoples and cultures" (p. 229) living together

in a confederacy built upon the principles of mutual recognition, intercultural dialogue, mutual

respect, sharing, and mutual responsibility offers the kind of alternative conceptualization of

decolonization called for by Veracini (2010).

In developing his vision of how to decolonize Settler colonial society, Tully also speaks

of "struggles for freedom" and "struggles of freedom", the former being those efforts that

challenge the structures of domination, and the latter being struggles within the structures of

dominance that serve the purpose of "modifying the system in the short term and transforming it

from within in the long term" (Tully, 2008, p. 276). Using Settler Colonial Theory as a

theoretical framework makes visible several ways in which to engage in struggles for and of

freedom. Struggles for freedom may take the form of revolutionary action against the structures

of dominance where the authority of the Settler over land and people is removed. It may also

take the form of actions that challenge the legitimacy of internal colonialism: namely the

legitimacy of exclusive Settler control over territory and peoples, and the argument that the

Settler Colonialism is an inevitable structure that cannot be altered (Tully, 2008). Appeals to international law, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, self-government legal challenges, and the formulating of alternate futures all serve to challenge the validity of Settler society. However, as Tully points out, "despite the cogency of research and arguments supporting the freedom of Indigenous peoples in domestic and international arenas, the system of international colonisation remains in place and the two presumptions that reinforce it remain largely unquestioned" (Tully, 2008, p. 287). It is here that the importance of struggles of freedom are revealed.

It was noted earlier that one of the greatest strengths of Settler Colonial Theory lies in the fact that it makes visible the ongoing structures of colonialism and the stories/myths of legitimacy upon which Settler societies are based. By laying bare these structures of Settler Colonialism and calling them into question, Settler Colonial Theory points to ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples may begin to think critically, reimagine relationships, and challenge existing systems. As Tully argues:

> The multiplicity of immanent activities of challenging specific strategies and techniques by the available democratic means of dissent, insubordination and acting otherwise may not only modify this or that rule of the system, which is important in itself, but may also in the long run bring about self-overcoming of the system itself. Consequently, the acts of resistance involved in struggles *of* freedom to modify the system of internal colonization from within are a necessary complement to the refutation of the legitimation arguments [struggles for freedom] of the last section. They are arguably more effective in the long run. (Tully, 2008, p. 287)

Coming to see Settler Colonialism at work, understand its structures and narratives, call these assumptions and systems into questions, and begin reshaping relationships and interactions, then, is an essential part of Settler decolonizing work.

For Settler Canadians one important part of Settler decolonization means unlearning certain narratives and reshaping relationships. "Decolonization has to be about changing relationships and making them healthy, supportive, and safe, not just in spite of colonial power, but actively against it" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 117). Settler people need to work to decolonize their own relationships with the land and Indigenous peoples. "For Settler people, too, decolonization implies a deep and transformative struggle" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 114). Decolonization is a process of unlearning, rethinking, challenging assumptions and actions, and taking responsibility for their own complicity in Settler Colonialism. Settler people can become Allies in the process of decolonization. They can actively seek to build and sustain different kinds of relationship with the land and Indigenous peoples.

The process of decolonization is ongoing and complex. It is not about simply declaring oneself an Ally of Indigenous peoples. It requires rethinking, new learnings, and reshaping actions and behaviours. "Settler people need to start by knowing whose land they are on, knowing the histories of the treaties and agreements that predate the histories of colonialism and settlement" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 114). Then they must take responsibility for changing their own practices, questioning the narratives they have been told, and encouraging others to do the same, building relationships with Indigenous communities and allowing Indigenous peoples to set the agenda and lead the charge. A new set of relationships must be forged and, in my view, it all begins with education.

Settler Complicity, Benefits, Fear, and Discomfort

The most difficult part of Settler Colonialism for most Settler people to address is the idea that, if the processes of Settler Colonialism are still at work within Canadian society that means that my family and I are somehow implicated in it and that the stories and the Canadian identity I have grown up believing in and being a part of are somehow skewed. The myth of a peace-loving nation built on cooperation, hard work, multiculturalism and acceptance of others may not be as accurate as I have been lead to believe. While my ancestors may not have been responsible for overt acts of violence, relocation and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, they certainly benefited from these practices, as do I today. "If Canada [remains] a nation in the act of colonizing, then we ourselves [are] implicated" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 15). It is this aspect of the Settler identity that is most difficult for Settler Canadians to swallow. "There is significant resistance and reluctance to acknowledge Canada's colonial present" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 15) and our role and identity as Settler Canadians.

This denial and disavowal of our Settler identity feeds and strengthens Settler Colonialism. For if Settler Colonialism remains unrecognized, it remains unchallenged. As Lowman and Barker (2015) argue:

> Settler Colonialism is produced and upheld not just by governments and corporations –
> the usual targets of anti-colonial critique – but by people, and in our case, by
> Canadians…through everyday actions, from seemingly innocuous to explicitly violent,
> Settler people perpetuate Settler Colonialism in Canada today. (p. 39)

There is a need then for Settler Canadians to come to understand ourselves as Settlers and colonizers and as "a people with deep moral and ethical responsibilities to change our relationships to the lands that we call home" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 15) and the original inhabitants of this territory as well. There is a need for the mutual recognition, respect,

responsibility, sharing, and intercultural dialogue called for by Tully. For it is this new relationship that "brings decolonisation and freedom to Aboriginal peoples and to all Canadians, who long to free themselves and their children of any further complicity in a democratic society that contains a regime of inequality within" (Tully, 2008, p. 232).

Settler Colonial Theory and My Research

The lens of Settler Colonialism provides valuable insight into the current practices, assumptions, and structures in place within Canadian Settler society, and it helped focus my research and efforts on particular aspects of Settler Colonialism. The three elements of Settler Colonialism described earlier - invasion, narratives of belonging, and the eventual replacement of Indigenous presence – provide a framework for understanding where efforts at decolonization might begin. In a similar way, the three structures of invasion discussed by Lowman and Barker helped to direct my research focus and guide my actions as a teacher in a school attended by the children of both Settler Canadians and Indigenous peoples. This framework helped me to identify the ways in which current Canadian society operates to silence and erase Indigenous peoples and it helped me to identify the role that education currently plays in sustaining and supporting Settler Colonialism. It also helped me to see how I might begin to disrupt, in my own limited way, the narratives of belonging told within our educational system and encourage a rethinking of the histories we teach, the voices we exclude, and the forms of knowledge we validate. As an educator and a researcher I need to play a role in the telling of different stories and the creation of space for Indigenous peoples to share their epistemologies and ontologies. Lowman and Barker (2015) articulate an argument similar to my own when they say that:

> For centuries, Indigenous people have had to learn to understand how Settler people think and know the world as a matter of survival. In order to find new ways of living together

respectfully on this land, Settler people need to take up the responsibility of learning

about Indigenous ontologies. This mean broad-based understandings of Indigenous

worldviews, but also the understanding and worldviews of the specific peoples on whose

lands Settlers live. This is how we can create respectful spaces of knowing, and as

Settlers, learn how we might relate in non-dominating non-colonials relationships. (p. 20)

We must learn from and with Indigenous peoples shaping a new tapestry of understanding and

building new ways of being and growing together in a decolonized existence.

Clearly this is not a process that will occur overnight and it will be fraught with setbacks

and challenges, but it is a journey worth pursuing and I see the work I undertook and continue to

do with my community of learners as a starting point, as a small step towards understanding

Settler Colonialism, taking responsibility for our own complicity in the system, and opening the

doors to greater dialogue, learning and understanding.   When I engaged in decolonizing work

with parents in our school community, I aimed to take up Tully's "struggles of freedom" and

begin the decolonizing of hearts and minds within our school.

Chapter 5: Methodology and Method

The dictaphone sat on the table. My mother had come across it while cleaning out some cupboards in her house and she had brought it to me thinking I might have a use for it given my return to university. Looking at it made me remember my first research experience so many years ago. I had travelled from my apartment in Halifax to the small Acadian town of Bouctouche, New Brunswick to undertake a large part of my research. I was staying in the apartment of a friend of a friend. She was out of town for a few weeks and had offered me her apartment as a place to stay while undertaking my research. I had come to Bouctouche not to engage with the Acadian community that populated the town, but to meet with two of the women who worked at the Buctouche First Nation Band Office on the reserve that neighboured the community. I was a stranger to this place and it was strange to me. I had come to ask questions. I was on the outside looking in, trying to listen to the voices of others and be a vehicle through which different narratives could be heard. As I looked at that dictaphone, I was reminded of how young I was when undertaking my first research study.

Several summers ago, as a part of a summer course on narrative inquiry, I participated in a discussion with Jean Clandinin (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). She made a comment about experience and which experiences are worthy of inquiry. She said that, if you continue to think about an experience, you are not done with it. There is something more to learn from it. As I reflected upon my early research experience, I remembered the feelings of tension that engulfed me as I wrote up my final research findings. I felt like a trespasser. Someone who had walked into a space in which I did not live and taken stories and voices away with me that were not mine. I had been on the outside looking in and I did not leave that outsider position during my

entire research project. Those feelings of trespassing and usurping the voices of others sit with me still.

My research method at that time consisted of a set of structured interview questions which I proceeded to ask each of my participants. Using my dictaphone, I recorded our conversations. I then went home, transcribed the interviews, coded the information, and wrote up my findings. But something bothered me. Something about the voices of the women I had interviewed. Something about their lives and experiences. I had taken their answers to my scripted questions, sorted through them, and used them to fit my research needs. What had I really learned? What kind of space had I created for the voices of these women to be heard? I had not created space at all. I had taken the words of these women and used them to my own end. I had remained on the outside looking in and then I had gone away.

This time, as I set out to begin research for my dissertation, I did not want to use the experiences of others. I did not want to be on the outside. I wanted to be in the midst, in the field, living the experience. As a result of both my past experience and my different location as a researcher this time around, I wanted to use a research methodology that better fit my situatedness and my hopes for my research. What I chose was autoethnography.

Autoethnography: A Methodological Framework

Norman Denzin (2014), in his book *Interpretive Autoethnography* begins the chapter titled "A Clarification of Terms" with six different definitions of autoethnography. What quickly becomes apparent as one peruses the literature, is that autoethnography is a dynamic and developing methodology. At the root of all autoethnographic studies, however, is the focus on "research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal

experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011).

At one end of the spectrum is Leon Anderson's approach to autoethnography, which he and subsequent researchers have termed *analytic autoethnography*. For Anderson, autoethnography is:

> ethnographic work in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher's published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understanding of broader social phenomena. (Anderson, 2006, p. 375).

It is a branch of ethnography that prioritizes the role of the researcher and employs the tools of ethnography to interpret experience.

Anderson (2006) outlines what he calls the five key features of analytic autoethnography. First, he refers to "complete member researcher (CMR) status" (Anderson, 2006, p. 378) where the researcher is a full member of the group or social world being studied. He then argues that analytic research requires both analytic reflexivity and narrative visibility on the part of the researcher (Anderson, 2006, p. 378). Researchers must be ever aware of their relationship to the research, to those they observe, to the role they play as both participant and observer, and to their interpretations of their own experiences. The role of the researcher must be visible in the observing, analyzing and writing processes. "By virtue of the autoethnographer's dual role as a member in the social world under study and as a researcher of that world, autoethnography demands enhanced textual visibility of the researcher's self" (Anderson, 2006, p. 384).

The last two features of analytic autoethnography, as outlined by Anderson, are a requirement for "dialogue with informants beyond the self, and commitment to theoretical

analysis" (Anderson, 2006, p. 378). For Anderson, the input of other members of the social world under study is vital. "The ethnographic imperative calls for dialogue with 'data' or 'others'" (Anderson, 2006, p. 386). To avoid the self-indulgent solipsism for which autoethnography is sometime criticized, Anderson argues for the inclusion of participant voices and experiences. He also argues for a commitment to analysis as a way to avoid self-indulgent navel gazing.

For autoethnography to be a useful methodology, Anderson argues that it must engage in meaningful analysis aimed at "theoretical development, refinement and extension" (2006, p. 387).

> The purpose of analytic autoethnography is not simply to document personal experience, to provide an 'insider's perspective,' or to evoke emotional resonance with the reader. Rather, the defining characteristic of analytic social science is to use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves. (Anderson, 2006, p.387)

The autoethnographer must seek not simply to describe his or her experience but to understand and relate that experience to a body of knowledge and theory. That is not to say that experience must be generalizable or produce universally applicable conclusions. "But analytic autoethnography does contribute to a spiraling refinement, elaboration, extension, and revision of theoretical understandings" (Anderson, 2006, p. 388).

At the other end of the spectrum, as far as definitions of autoethnography go, is the more *evocative autoethnography* of Ellis, Bochner, and others. For more evocative autoethnographers, autoethnography is a methodology that embraces "ground-level, intimate, and close-up perspectives on experience" (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p. 23), and

makes use of narrative in many forms to represent the research. Through the production of poetic texts, dramas, personal narratives, introspective writings, and the like, it "allows the researcher to take up each person's life in its immediate particularity and to ground the life in the historical moment...interrogating the historical, cultural, and biographical conditions that moved the person to experience the events" (Denzin, 2013, p. 124).

More evocative autoethnography bridges autobiography and ethnography, writing about past experience in order to better understand culture and society. "When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 276). The goal of autoethnography is to produce a rich and engaging text that draws the reader into the researcher's experience illuminating elements of culture as the text unwinds. "When researchers write autoethnographies, they seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 277).

Falling within the realm of more evocative autoethnography, as already indicated, are various forms and approaches from Indigenous ethnographies, narrative ethnographies, and reflexive ethnographies, to dyadic interviews, interactive interviews, personal narratives and coconstructed narratives (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011, p. 277). One glance at the *The Handbook of Autoethnography* (Holman Jonas, Adams & Ellis, 2013) provides a range of approaches and types of text that fall within the broader framework of this more evocative form.

As Sarah Wall (2006) points out, "there is considerable latitude with respect to how autoethnography is conducted and what product results" (p. 6). She argues that "it varies widely, from highly introspective, through more familiar approaches connected to qualitative research, to

somewhat experimental literary methods" (Wall, 2006, p. 6). Along this continuum from analytic to evocative autoethnography, there are those autoethnographers who place themselves somewhere in the middle (Chang, 2008; Duncan, 2004; Vryan, 2006; Wall, 2006, 2008, 2016). Duncan (2004), for instance, suggests that in autoethnography, the researcher is an insider who conducts research on and tells the story of his or her personal experience. But beyond telling his or her story, the researcher also provides an analysis of the data collected during the research process. Similarly, Wall (2016) advocates for a more moderate autoethnography that "allows for innovation, imagination, and the representation of a range of voices in qualitative inquiry while also sustaining confidence in the quality, rigor, and usefulness of academic research" (p. 2). Wall (2016) sees in autoethnography 'tremendous potential for building sociological knowledge by tapping into unique personal experiences to illuminate those small spaces where understanding has not yet reached" (p. 7). What must remain, however, is the commitment to analysis and research.

For Chang (2008), autoethnography "combines cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details" (p. 46). It is "ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientations, and autobiographical in its content orientation" (Chang, 2008, 0. 48). Like ethnographers, autoethnographers are focussed on experiencing, enquiring, and examining (Wolcott, 2008). Through participant observation, interviewing, and document analysis, they gather together data and use that information to describe a particular culture. "The underlying purpose of ethnographic research in [a] traditional view is to describe what people in some particular place or status ordinarily do and the *meanings* they ascribe to the doing, under ordinary or particular circumstance" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 72-73). Ethnography is not simply a method of inquiry aimed at description. It is the study of culture. Wolcott (2008) states that "ethnography

finds its orienting and overarching purpose in an underlying concern with cultural interpretation" (p. 72). It is a way of looking but it is also a way of seeing (Wolcott, 2008). Ethnography, for Wolcott (2008) is:

> *both* the way we study culture and the interpretive framework that ethnographers impose on what they study. I do not set out to 'observe' culture, but I do take responsibility for making culture explicit in whatever I observe, because that is how ethnographers make sense of what they see. (p.81)

The same is true of autoethnography. "Autoethnography is not about focusing on the self alone, but about searching for understanding of others (culture/society) through self" (Chang, 2008, p. 48-49). The self is a lens to look through in order to examine culture (Duckart, 2005, as cited in Chang 2008).

I see my approach to autoethnography as falling between the two poles of analytic and evocative autoethnography. Like Wall (2016), I argue that autoethnography needs to include "some kind of analysis of the description of the experience to link the personal with the social" (p. 4). For me, autoethnography needs to be more than a sharing of experience. There must be a deliberate attempt made to situate that experience within literature and theory, within its social and cultural context, and to interpret and analyze that experience using recognized methods associated with qualitative research. For me, autoethnography draws on personal experience as its primary source of data, analyses that data in its cultural and theoretical context, and then creates a narrative product that shares both the experience and the analysis. The goal of such analysis, as Anderson (2006) and as Vryen (2006) argue is not something generalizable or undebatable, but rather something that contributes to theory or knowledge in some small way. As Vryen (2006) states, "value as an analytical product is more appropriately determined by

usefulness to others – does the work help us better understand or explain other people, experiences, and/or contexts? does it contribute to collective knowledge in some way?" (p. 408). For these reasons, I see autoethnography as the perfect methodology for my research.

Autoethnography: A Method of Inquiry

In the *Handbook of Autoethnography* (2013)*,* Anderson & Glass-Coffin have a chapter on autoethnographic methods of inquiry. They begin by stating that for scholars new to autoethnography it can be difficult to grasp the "varieties of engagement or inquiry used by autoethnographers" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 64). Two reasons are given for this "lack of methodological clarity" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 64). First, autoethnographers tend to draw upon a wide range of materials, "from 'impressionistic' personal memories and musings to more traditionally 'objective' data like fieldnotes and informant interviews" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 64). The methods used to then interpret this data are also varied. "Indeed, for many, a key virtue of autoethnography is its methodological openness. But that virtue can be a challenge as well" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 64), especially for those new to autoethnography.

The second reason given for the lack of clarity of method is that most evocative autoethnographic texts "do not conform to traditional social science journal article structure, characterized by an extended 'methods' section" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 65). Rather, the focus of autoethnographic texts is on the story being told. This lack of methods description poses a challenge in that:

> many traditional social science scholars (and journal editors) may view this as indicating
> a lack of discipline and rigor in research, for many autoethnographers, there is a sense of
> principle involved. Their goal is not to highlight methodological criteria, but rather to tell

a story in a way that reveals the self as a central character with rich emotional evocation that serves to ground the story being told. (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 65) Rather than specifically separate out a methodological explanation, autoethnography weaves the description of methodology into the story being told, if it is discussed at all (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 65).

The challenge faced by Anderson & Glass-Coffin (2013), then, in writing their methods chapter was to combine "the relatively limited literature on autoethnographic methods per se with the rich autoethnographic literature itself" (p. 65) to develop an overview of common methods and techniques. Like Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2015), Anderson & Glass Coffin (2013) point out that many of the methods used in autoethnography have been adapted from ethnography. What is different is the way in which the focus on personal experience changes the way in which these methods are understood and carried out.

On Data in Autoethnography

The three most common sources of data in autoethnography are fieldnotes, personal documents, and interviews. Fieldnotes are described in ethnography as "accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher has made while participating [in the field] in an intense and involved manner" (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p. 3). "The writing of autoethnographic fieldnotes...involves not only the 'representation of social reality of others' but of oneself as well" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 66). These fieldnotes may be written immediately after events take place or observations have been made (contemporaneously written fieldnotes), or the researcher may go for longer periods of time living in the experience before writing anything down (focused recollections). In doing autoethnography both of these methods may be used.

What is central to autoethnographic fieldnotes is the focus on self. In the case of focused recollections, fieldnotes are often written as "autoethnographic vignettes" (Ellis, 2004) and take on a form similar to diary or journal entries. When a more contemporaneously written form of fieldnotes is used, the writing may be "less detailed reflexivity in the moment, followed by more reflexive engagement at a later point in time" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 67). This process of writing fieldnotes allows the researcher to reflect upon interactions in and with the field, and the ways in which these interactions shape the understandings emerging from their lived experience.

In addition to fieldnotes, the autoethnographer may make use of a wealth of personal documents and artifacts. Emails, newspaper articles, and letters, for example, can be drawn upon and incorporated into autoethnographic inquiry. As Anderson & Glass-Coffin (2013) argue:

> the massive proliferation of media in the internet age has dramatically expanded the range of personal documents upon which autoethnographers and other social scientist may draw...The value of any document or artifact for such research depends on its evocative potential -- its ability to either open the researcher to deeper reflection on relevant experiences and relationships or to evoke compelling images, emotions, or understandings in other readers. (pp. 68-69)

The recollections and reflections drawn out by personal documents add to the sources from which autoethnographers draw their data.

The third source of data most common to autoethnography is interviews. As with other methods of inquiry, these interviews may take different forms. Ellis and Berger (2002) describe three forms of interviews used in autoethnography: reflexive dyadic interviews, interactive interviews, and co-constructed interviews. Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis (2015) write about the

use of oral histories, personal narratives, and topical interviews. They also describe interviews

as taking on a collaborative form that may be developed through emergent interviewing, sensory-

based interviewing, participatory photo interviewing, or interactive interviewing techniques

(Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2015). Regardless of the approach taken, Adams, Holman Jones

& Ellis (2015) point out that:

> interviews are a way to connect our personal experiences, epiphanies, and intuitions to
>
> those of others. Sometimes, these connections confirm our experiences; other times
>
> interview conversations contradict or conflict with our experiences. In both instances, the
>
> insights we acquire from talking with and listening to others can deepen and complicate
>
> our own stories. (p. 55)

In this way, the autoethnographer gains a deeper understanding of an experience.

To this list of approaches to the interview, Anderson & Glass-Coffin (2013) add the self-

interview or autoethnographic interview:

> At first glance, the term "autoethnographic interview" may seem an oxymoron. If the
>
> purpose of an interview is to obtain new information or "data," what possibly can I tell
>
> myself that I do not already know? The answer, autoethnographers would reply is, "A
>
> lot."...In keeping with Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) conception of an interview as "an
>
> occasion for purposefully animated participants to *construct* versions of reality
>
> interactionally rather than merely purvey data" (p. 79), an autoethnographic self-
>
> interview involves dialogues between one's past and present selves, at times actively with
>
> others as well, in which memories and understandings about the past are constructed a
>
> new. (p. 69)

Such interviews are often textual in nature and they allow the autoethnographer to probe deeply into the ways in which time and context may change interpretations and understanding of past experience.

It is important to pause here and take up Wall's (2008) call for memory as a source of data as well. As Wall (2008) points out, data in autoethnography, as in ethnography, comes from interviews, participant observation (fieldnotes), research journals or diaries, documents and artifacts. In analyzing her experience of international adoption, Wall drew heavily on her memories. At the time that she was going through the process of adopting, she did not keep fieldnotes or a research journal. So when it came to doing her research, her memories were her main source of data. When asked to justify the use of memory as a data sources, Wall (2008) argued that if someone had interviewed her about her experience and she had shared her memories, those interview transcripts would be viewed as a valid source of data for analysis. Memory is an important part of autoethnography. As Coffey (1999) argues, "ethnography is an act of memory" (p. 127). All fieldnotes, research journals, diaries, and even interview transcripts rely on memory, on recall. They combine with headnotes, which are memories of the field (Coffey, 1999). As such, Wall (2008) was able to justify the use of memory as her data sources in her autoethnographic writing.

Autoethnographic Methods

In adapting methods from ethnography to autoethnography, Adams, Homan Jones, & Ellis (2015) outline six priorities, concerns, or ways of doing autoethnographic inquiry. The first is that autoethnography foregrounds personal experience. The second priority is a focus on sense-making processes. A third concern of autoethnography is reflexivity or the continual questioning and reflecting upon one's own biases, assumptions, and role in the research. The

fourth piece is that autoethnography offers insider knowledge of an experience or phenomenon. Fifth, autoethnography looks to describe and critique cultural norms and practices. Finally, autoethnography calls for "reciprocal responses" from participants and readers. "like the positive and productive relationships in our lives, reciprocal relationships are marked by a sense of mutual responsibility and care" (Adams, Jones, and Ellis, 2015, p. 35). The sharing of stories and listening to responses is an integral part of the process.

Anderson & Glass-Coffin (2013) echo several of these priorities in their description of autoethnographic methods. Autoethnographic inquiry is distinguished from traditional ethnography by five key features: visibility of self, strong reflexivity, engagement, vulnerability, and open-endedness/rejection of finality and closure. For Anderson & Glass-Coffin (2013) the researcher must be visible in both the data and the final text of autoethnography. "Autoethnographers are self-consciously involved in the construction of meaning and values in the social worlds they investigate and the data they collect or create in the course of inquiry should reflect this personal connection" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 72). The centrality of self to the research also means that the autoethnographer must demonstrate strong reflexivity characterized by awareness, at a deep level, of the:

> reciprocal influence between autoethnographers and their settings and co-participants. It entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one's actions and perceptions in reference to dialogue with those of others. For autoethnographers this is part of a holistic process of inquiry.
> (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 73)

Autoethnographers must be aware of their influence on the setting, the participants, and the inquiry itself.

Engagement is the third feature discussed by Anderson & Glass-Coffin (2013). This feature brings up the ethical and relational dimensions of autoethnography. "Writing about the self always involves writing about others" (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2015, p. 56). Doing autoethnography ethically requires the researcher to respect the following guidelines:

> Respect for persons, which means we must treat research participants as autonomous persons and acquire their consent to participate in our research project...Beneficence, which means we must work to ensure participants' well-being by doing no harm and maximizing possible benefits...Justice, which means we must work to ensure a fair distribution of research benefits and burdens (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2015, p. 56-57)

Being engaged in the field means being in relationship with participants and held to higher ethical standards.

Engagement and the visibility of self also leads to increased vulnerability in autoethnographic writing. Protection of identities and caring for the self, become important consideration. In her chapter "Self and Other" in the *Handbook of Autoethnography* Jillian Tullis (2013) reminds us that once an autoethnography is written it will be read, and reactions may be both positive and negative. Making the personal public presents risks for autoethnographers and participants and care must be taken to anticipate and mitigate against harm.

The final feature of autoethnography for Anderson & Glass-Coffin (2013) is that it is open-ended and rejects finality and closure. Autoethnographic inquiry represents an understanding developed at a certain time and in a certain context. "Social life, identities, and

relationships are fluid, not static, and autoethnographic inquiry is self-consciously situated ethnography" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 78).

Writing is also a very important part of autoethnography. "Writing is a part of the autoethnographic process from the beginning of a project through its completion. Viewed as a mode of inquiry, writing is a way of coming to know an experience better or differently" (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2015, p. 68). Making fieldnotes, journaling, writing an email, blogging, all of these forms of writing allow the autoethnographer to reflect upon experience. Writing is a way of processing experience, exploring developing understandings and examining emerging ideas. Making time to write, then, is the first essential step in autoethnography.

As a research methodology, autoethnography fits with my research. It is a research method that:

> emerged in response to concerns about colonialism, the need to recognize social difference and identity politics, an insistence on respecting research participants, and an acknowledgment of different ways of learning about culture. (Adams, Jones, and Ellis, 2015, pp. 21-22)

The self-reflection and interrogation of culture that are part of autoethnography also make it a useful tool in educational research. "Because autoethnography revolves around the exploration of self in relation to other and the space created between them, disciplines like education are ripe grounds of autoethnographic study because a social construction of knowledge, identity and culture is inherent" (Starr, 2010, p. 4). As Starr (2010) states in her article "The Use of Autoethnography in Educational Research: Locating Who We are in What We Do:"

> Autoethnography allows the educator the opportunity to effectively acknowledge the pragmatic demands of teaching and of everyday life to take stock of experiences and how

they shape who we are and what we do. The subsequent process becomes one of conscientization and moves individuals towards a practice and pedagogy of emancipation at micro and macro levels (Austin & Hickey, 2007, p. 4)

Autoethnographic inquiry allows for the exploration of personal experiences, historical moments, and cultural contexts so as to illuminate and share insights and epiphanies. Sharing the story of my experience working with our parent community is my goal and autoethnography makes that possible.

Using Autoethnography as My Method

During my first two years as the school's administrator, I worked with parents and began to lay the foundation for what would become my research study. As the principal and a teacher in my school, I initiated the first steps toward decolonizing and Indigenizing education within our school. During the 2016-2017 school year, our students were involved in several activities designed to build greater understanding of treaties, residential schooling, Indigenous - non-Indigenous relations, and to facilitate Indigenous knowledge inclusion in our classrooms. One other activity that was added to our school's practices was the reading of an acknowledgment statements at significant school events. It was the reading of this acknowledgment statement that first sparked debate and interest within our parent community, and led to the request of our parents for more parent education in the areas of truth and reconciliation, Indigenous knowledge inclusions, and decolonization.

During the 2017-2018 school year, I held a Blanket Exercise (Kairos, n.d.) for our parent community. As some of our parents had heard about the Blanket Exercise before, this event was specifically requested by our parent community and was meant to be an introduction to the history of treaties and residential schooling. The goal was to provide some basic knowledge

about facts and events that are often lacking for non-Indigenous Canadians. I was guided in the process by two wonderful Indigenous women who are both knowledge keepers and cultural liaisons. In advance of the event, several conversations were held with members of our parent community informing them of the event and its purpose. Information about the event was also posted on our school website, sent home in our school newsletter, included on our Facebook page, and included in the minutes of our Parent Council meetings. News of the event was also shared with our larger community through posters and postings in various places.

The evening of the Blanket Exercise we had 16 members of our community come out to participate. The sharing circle at the end of the event gave rise to questions and a request for further gatherings to take up some of the issues raised as a result of the Blanket Exercise. Debriefing about the event with individual parents and with our parent council confirmed the desire to hold a second event focussed on some specific questions generated by our parent group. The task of organizing the event and gathering together the questions fell to me. I shared with parents those questions that I had recorded following the Blanket Exercise. These questions were then distilled down to three main topics for our second parent meeting: a) What is the desired end goal of Truth & Reconciliation? b) What specific information will students be taught about treaties, residential schools, and Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations? and c) How do we move forward?

Our second parent community meeting was attended by myself, the two female knowledge keepers who had helped me to organize the Blanket Exercise, one of our School Board Trustees, and five parents. Before the meeting, I gathered together video clips, newspaper articles, Alberta Education materials, and other resources aimed at addressing these three key

questions. I also shared the questions in advance with the two cultural liaisons who attended the meeting and our School Board Trustee so that we could all be prepared for the discussion.

While the turnout was limited, this second event, which was held in February 2018, was well received by those in attendance and a request was made to keep the discussions going. A general consensus emerged from the group that, while not many people came to this second event, it was important to continue providing opportunities for dialogue, discussion, and learning. The most outspoken member of the group asked how often we planned to have information meetings for the parent community and suggested that we even try to make it a monthly event.

As I was preparing for this second parent event, I was approached by a member of our school community who also had contacts within the neighbouring Indigenous community. She was curious as to what my aim was in holding these parent information nights. What was I trying to achieve? When I explained to her that the purpose was to discuss with parents the history of Indigenous - non-Indigenous relations in Canada and help them understand why truth, reconciliation, decolonization, and indigenization are important activities for our students and our school to be engaged in, she was very interested. She asked if she could be a part of facilitating interactions between our school community and our neighbouring Indigenous community. Through her work and family connections, she had connections with Elders, knowledge keepers, and teachers in the neighbouring Indigenous community who would, in her opinion, be thrilled to build a connection between our two school communities. In addition, her own children had attended our school and she felt a responsibility to support the work of decolonization and indigenization at our school.

As a result, before the end of the school year, we took the first steps toward connecting our two communities. With the help of my community contact, I invited a member of the neighbouring Indigenous community to visit our grade 5 & 6 classroom and share with us some introductory information about her people. She shared with us some history and she also introduced us to her language and culture. More importantly, she and I had time to connect and make plans for future interactions between our communities. These plans were then included in the Annual Education Plan for my school.

For the 2018-2019 school year, the year in which my research took place, building bridges between our school and the neighbouring First Nations school was to be a priority. These connections were to support efforts to decolonize hearts and minds and Indigenize education at our school, and I hoped they would begin a partnership that would continue long into the future.   As I worked to facilitate interactions between my school and our neighboring school, I also planned to work with parents to address those questions, tensions and considerations that emerged. In the end, my plan changed significantly, but, at the outset of my research, this is what I had hoped to do.

Data Collection

In August 2018 I began preparing for the new school year. The plan for my research had been approved and I was ready to begin pursuing closer ties with our neighbours. As I started to plan for the year to come, I created for myself a fieldnotes template that allowed me to record fieldnotes about conversations and events. I also began keeping a field journal or reflective journal in which I gathered my thoughts and reflections on the work that I was doing.

In *Autoethnography as Method*, Chang (2008) outlines the three sources of data for autoethnographers: fieldnotes, interviews, and document/artifact analysis. In my research, I

decided to make use of fieldnotes, a reflective journal, interviews, and memory. As I worked to record data during this project, I was reminded of the following guiding framework laid out be Change (2008). As Chang (2008) points out:

> Autoethnographic research takes careful planning like any other research design. Given that autoethnography is more than casually recalled and accounted memories, your research plan needs to delineate why and how you want to explore your own life and what you want to explore in it. The *why*-question helps you articulate a research *purpose:* Why do you want to undertake a study of yourself, and what is the goal you intend to accomplish at the end of the research process? The *what*-question guides you to narrow a research *topic*: What do you intend to study in your life? When the goal and direction of a study are clear in your mind, you are ready to ask *how*-questions: How will you collect data about yourself and integrate others into your study? How will you manage, analyze, and interpret data? How will you present research outcomes? (p. 61)

Keeping these questions, and my responses to, them in mind, helped to shape my research process.

To answer my own *why* question, I felt there would be value in sharing the journey I am taking with other educators. The challenges, pitfalls, isolation, partnerships, compromises, and success of my experience offer insights for other educators engaged in similar work across the province and across the country. At the end of this process, I have a story to share that examines the decolonizing and Indigenizing work underway in our school and the challenges and changes that have been a part of the journey. The work undertaken in our school reflects a process being undertaken in schools throughout Canada. The journey of each school is unique, but in sharing

experiences there are insights to be gained both for the self and for those wishing to understand and bring changes to the larger social context.

My *what* questions focused on understanding the tensions and questions within a school community as it is confronted with decolonizing and Indigenizing efforts aimed at bringing about reconciliation and improved Indigenous - non-Indigenous relations. I wanted to look at how I worked with parents to build understanding and "acceptance" of changes made at our school in the name of reconciliation and Indigenous knowledge inclusion. How did I help parents understand the decolonizing and Indigenizing work that we were doing? What were the challenges to address? What information was helpful for me and for parents? What role did I play as a teacher, a community member, and the principal? Where did I turn for support in this process? What did I have to be willing to do and not do? What, if any, compromises did I have to be willing to live with.

To answer the *how* questions, like other autoethnographers, I borrowed from ethnography and engaged in both observation and interviews. Using Bryman's (2008) description of observation, I engaged in what could be called unstructured participant observation. This means I was a part of the activities being observed and that, rather than having a set timeline or schedule for observations, I made headnotes and jot notes of actions related to my research whenever they occurred. I then took time, when time was available, to flush out my headnotes and jot notes by filling out a digital observation form that captured information about each incident I wished to record. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) in the second edition of *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, talk about this process of participating in order to observe, making headnotes and jot notes, which become a part of the fieldnotes collected. They describe the way, after "hours participating in, observing, and perhaps jotting notes about ongoing events in a

social setting, most fieldworkers return to their desks and their computer to begin to write up their observations into full fieldnotes" (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995, p. 47).

I used both a narrative format to make my fieldnotes as well as the pre-formatted recording sheet mentioned above. The purpose of the pre-formatted recording sheets was to ensure that each occurrence was documented along with contextual information such as how long it lasted, where it occurred, who was present, and what the environment was like. Narrative recording of each occurrence ensured that the richness of detail and description associated with each event was recorded. "Narrative recording allows autoethnographers to describe in detail their observation in a free format. Flexibility of length and format is less likely to inhibit recording, which is a strength of this recording method" (Chang, 2008 p. 93).

When making my fieldnotes, I also used a mixture of both on-site and retrospective recordings. On-site recordings were those jot notes made in the moment to capture behaviours and thoughts associated with events that have just occurred or are in the midst of occurring. "This on-site recording is likely to capture immediate emotion, provide less tampered-with perspective, and record vivid memories of what you just observed" (Chang, 2008, p. 93). The benefit of on-site recordings is their immediacy. The downside is the potential to be interrupted in the process of recording. To complement on-site recordings and/or replace on-site recordings when time to write was not immediately available, retrospective observations were made. Retrospective observations of occurrences are those recordings that occurred after the event, when there was time to sit down and write about the actions, thoughts and emotions that have taken place. As Chang (2008) points out:

> The benefits and shortcomings of retrospective recording are reversed. When you wait to retreat from your field to record your self-observations, a less-fresh memory is traded for

a natural flow of occurrence. As long as the lapse between recording and occurrences of thoughts or behaviours is not great, retrospective recording is useful for autoethnography. A combination of both on-site and retrospective reporting offers the researcher flexibility while allowing for the thorough recording of data.

As time was often lacking for detailed in-the-moment writing, I often found myself writing down reflections and recollections at the end of a busy day or week.

In addition to my fieldnotes, I also used reflective diary in my study. This reflective data was recorded in my field journal, which I referred to as my reflections. A field journal, as described by Chang (2008) differs from fieldnotes in that fieldnotes record more objective data from the field while a field journal is more subjective. My field journal, or reflections, allowed for the collecting of queries and tensions, as well as metacognitive insights. As I kept these notes the first themes of my research project began to emerge.

As stated earlier, the plan for my research year (the 2018-2019 school year) was to work with members of our neighbouring First Nations community and establish connections between my school and their school. When I reached out to those community members I had hoped to make connections with, however, I was disheartened to receive very little response or interest in what I thought was going to be a sure thing. June of 2018 had ended on such a positive note with promises and dreams of building bridges and inroads. Not wanting to give up on this opportunity, but aiming to be respectful, I allowed for time and space; reflection and considerations. In the end, my proposal to build connections between our two schools was rejected.

There were many reasons for the collapse of my plan. First, I had been dealing with members of our neighbouring community who worked in the school but who were not part of the

administration at the school or at the Band level. Rather, they were knowledge keepers and consultants who worked within the school building. They did not have the authority to approve school wide activities. Although I did approach school administration, my offer to build connections was declined. There may have been some politics involved in the reluctance to engage with our school. I had not approached people in the proper order or manner, perhaps. I also believe that the staff of our neighbouring school had other concerns they wished to focus on for their academic year. In my conversations with the school administration, I was informed that the staff had goals and considerations of their own and they did not feel they were in a place where they could reach out to other schools or communities.

The first entries in my fieldnotes and field journal reflect the numerous conversations that took place early in September and October between myself and our neighbouring community as I struggled to establish relations. By mid-October it was evident that my initial plan for the school year was not going to work out. At this point I admit to feeling both frustrated and disheartened. It also dawned on me that I could simply stop. No one was looking over my shoulder watching to see that I was working to Indigenize curriculum. I was certain there would be people who would be happy to see the work end. But I was not ready or willing to let it die. I was determined to do something. So we continued with smaller actions.

In the fall of 2018, we attended a presentation by Phyllis Webstad. She shared with us her story of residential schooling, and she spoke to us about her book and Orange Shirt Day. Attending her presentation allowed staff to keep having conversations with students about historical events and acts of reconciliation. It also gave me the opportunity to share more information with parents.

As the date for Ms. Webstad's presentation drew near, I shared information with parents about her story and experience. Parents had asked for information and I tried to be very clear about what teaching and learning were taking place within our school. I made use of our website, our monthly newsletter, and our Facebook page to inform parents of our participation in this presentation and in Orange Shirt Day activities. As in the past, this communication was primarily one way. I put the information out there but received very little feedback or return communication from any parents either in favour or opposed to the activities we were undertaking.

By mid-November I was still struggling to determine a direction for the school year. I wanted to do something more than simply continue with the process of building awareness amongst students and those parents willing to engage in dialogue. I also wanted the experience to be authentic and informed by people with lived experience and Indigenous knowledge of their own to share. It was at this time that I attended a Curriculum Working Group meeting where teachers and other stakeholders gathered to plan and write the proposed new Alberta curriculum. As we worked to create the grades five to nine Social Studies Curriculum, I had the opportunity to talk with colleagues and share the work that we had been trying to do in the school. The idea of engaging students in an inquiry process that culminated in a showcase of learning for our school community began to develop. I could engage students in a learning process that they could share with parents and community members. After further thought and refinement, this is indeed what I decided to undertake for the 2018-2019 school year.

Drawing on materials from the Critical Thinking Consortium, *What Can I Contribute to Meaningful Reconciliation?*, and the District School Board of Niagara, *Uncovering the Past: A Journey from Residential Schools Toward Reconciliation*, I began planning activities and finding

resources that would lead students through an inquiry process aimed at moving our learning

beyond residential schools and treaties. The goal was to have students investigate their role in

reconciliation and then share their learning with parents and community members at a school

open house. It was also in mid-December that I began approaching parents and asking them to

participate in my research. I wanted to make sure that I approached parents who had a familiarity

with the work that we had been doing. I wanted to include parents who had been a part of some

of our previous discussions and whose children were still a part of the process. I also wanted to

make sure I had parents who had been both supportive of the work I was doing and those who

had questioned the process.

Anderson (2006) argues that interviews are a required part of autoethnographic research.

For him, the input of other participants is essential to clarify and validate the experience of the

researcher. Not all autoethnographers agree with Anderson that interviews must be a part of

autoethnography. In fact, there appears to be considerable debate over the use of a sample size

of one within the field (Vryan, 2006; Wall, 2006; Ellis, 2006). For me, the use of interviews was

important. In working with parents, I felt I needed to hear their impressions of the work being

done. These interviews supplemented my own self-observations and recordings and provided

greater richness to my own data and insights that I might not have otherwise realized.

By mid-December I had secured six participants for my research. All six were female.

Four of the six had children who were in my classroom. Two of them had younger children in

our school. All but one of these mothers had participated in one or more of the information

events previously held for our parent community. Four of these women were also active

members of our Parent Council and had been engaged in conversations surrounding Indigenous

history and knowledge inclusion prior to this particular school year. One of the women involved

in the study had not participated in past information events but I asked her to participate because her child took part in the inquiry projects and she also self-identifies as Cree.

Doing the Research

In January 2019 the students in our upper grade began their investigation into several different topics related to reconciliation. Students chose from a list of topics. These topics ranged from learning about the Indian Act and its continued implications, to discussions of racism and privilege and their own beliefs and biases, and to explorations of Indigenous ways of knowing. Students drew on print and digital resources as well as from a collection of videos featuring Elders and knowledge keepers sharing their experiences and knowledge. I also had our Indigenous liaisons visit our classroom on several; different occasions to work with the students as they developed their project and came to understand these topics and the role they might play in reconciliation.

We launched our investigation with some focussed instruction on Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations within Canada and one of our Indigenous liaisons lead us through a Blanket Exercise (www.kairoscanada.org). Prior to the launch of our inquiry, which came to be referred to as our Reconciliation Projects, I sent home information with students explaining the project and informing parents that we would be participating in a blanket exercise. I shared the list of topics we would cover and invited parents to contact me with any questions they might have. I did not hear from anyone.

During the months of January and February students worked on their projects. As a part of the learning, many rich conversations were held between both myself and individual students and between our Indigenous liaisons, individual students, and the class as a whole. Through these conversations I came to realize that while students were engaged in this work at school

there were numerous conversations taking place at home and outside of school on the topics involved. Students would come to school and make reference to conversations they had engaged in with family members outside of class. From these teacher-student conversations emerged some interesting themes, tensions, and strategies. As interviews with parents would later reveal, there was great power in the dialogue between students and family members during this time.

When the projects were finished we displayed them for our school community. Mid-March is typically when our school holds two evenings of open house events to showcase student learning. Our projects were on display during this time. As parents toured the classrooms they also paraded through our gymnasium. Whether their child had participated in the project or not, parents were able to view student work and read through the information that students had collected.

My fieldnotes and reflective journal contain my observations of the way in which these projects were received and discussed by community members. For the most part, the projects were positively received. There were some parents who were ambivalent or lukewarm in their reaction to their child's work but most parents were interested in discussing what their children had been learning and what they had come to understand about reconciliation. It was not my intent, in encouraging students to investigate the topic of truth and reconciliation, to place children in a role where they were at odds with their parents. I tried throughout this process to be mindful and respectful of parent-child relations. Maintaining this respectful tones is one of the tensions associated with this work that I will discuss in chapters six and seven.

These projects provided an opportunity to increase student knowledge of several important topics related to reconciliation, decolonization and Indigenization but they were also the major "community outreach" component of the 2018-2019 school year. Every parent who

attended our open house in March had the opportunity to view our projects and share in our learning. In addition to the projects, books, posters, pamphlets and displays were available for people to peruse.   I was thrilled to overhear conversations between parents and students as they discussed concepts such as racism, privilege, reconciliation and change. Many of these conversations took place between older students and their parents, but I was pleased to hear younger students educating their parents as well. I recall one conversation between a boy in our grade one students and his parents as they looked at a table full of picture books. This young boy had not completed one of our Reconciliation Projects, but he had clearly been a part of different conversations about Indigenous history. As I listened, I heard him explaining the story of a grandfather who had lost his Cree language as a child but who was now relearning it with the help of his granddaughter. I watched the parents listening to their son and learning from him about a part of history they may not have known about before. This power of children teaching parents became an important theme in my fieldnotes and it was also very strongly reflected in the parent interviews I went on to conduct.

The projects students worked on were not the community to community connection building experience I had hoped to create during the 2018-2019 school year. Rather, our Reconciliation Projects were another awareness and acknowledgement piece, but they were certainly better than not doing anything at all. In the end, we did accomplish something, but I still felt frustrated. This work is so very slow, for many reasons. Our school is not geographically located right beside a First Nations community and although we were looking to build connections with her closest neighbour there is still distance both geographical and cultural.   We do have some self-identified Indigenous students within our school, but neither my staff nor I have personal connections within the neighbouring Indigenous communities, and

those members of these Indigenous communities who we tried to draw upon had priorities of their own which superseded the need to connect with our school. So we continued to scratch the surface making slow progress.   It is sometimes a very daunting process. One that, at times, feels very lonely and unsupported. More than once the thought has crossed my mind that, should I simply decide to quit, no one would really notice or be too upset.   This is extra. This is hard. But this is important.

In May I began conducting interviews with the parents who had agreed to participate in my study. I was apprehensive at first. Of the parents I had chosen to participate, I knew some were supporters of the work we were doing, but I also knew some questioned the *why* and the *what* of our work. These interviews were reflective in nature; focussing on the work that our school community has been engaged in over the past school year. Parents were asked to reflect on their thoughts and feelings about the decolonizing and Indigenizing work that was an ongoing part of the work in our classrooms and school community. The insights provided by the parents added to my own reflections. As Chang (2008) argues:

> interviews with others are...useful for this research method [autoethnography] for various reasons: to stimulate your memory, to fill in gaps in information, to gather new information about you and other relevant topics, to validate your personal data, and to grain others' perspectives on you. (p. 106)

Using interviews to supplement my own self-observations and recordings has provided richness and help to triangulate my own data.

In preparing for my interviews, I found the work of Jamie Harding (2019) particularly helpful. In writing about the process of semi-structured interviews, those interviews where the researcher has a set of initial questions and prompts and a willingness to let the interview

progress in new and different directions, Harding refers to the use of an interview guide. My interview guide was based upon the consent form I developed when first inviting my participants to become involved in my research. It began with a summary of the research project and then included the four questions I had shared with participants when seeking their participation: 1) What questions, tensions, and considerations have emerged for you as our school has worked to include Indigenous knowledge in our classrooms? 2) As a parent, what is it like to be a part of these changes or to see these changes happening in our school? 3) What can administration do to guide parents through the tensions and questions that arise? and 4) What would you like to see administration do, from this point forward, to help make decolonizing and Indigenizing education more understandable for parents? These questions were a starting place for discussion. To my surprise, several of my participants came to the interview with answers to these questions already prepared, but our conversations expanded as these open ended questions were addressed. As the interviews progressed, we often drifted down different paths and new ideas and information were introduced or shared. My job was to prompt the interviewee to conversation flowing, to ask for clarification or corroboration, and to create a space in which my participants felt free to express their ideas.

Harding (2019) spends time in her chapter on collecting and managing interview data talking about the need to create rapport at the start of an interview. Citing Hennink et al (2011), Harding (2019) encourages the researcher to begin with some small talk and pleasant conversation in order to create a comfortable atmosphere. I most certainly began each interview with an open and friendly manner. Each of the participants in my study were well known members of our school community and, while we may not have seen eye to eye at all times, our relationships were always cordial. My positionality, as Harding (2019) refers to my relationship

with my participants, was something that did give me pause. As the principal in the school and their children's teacher, my relationship could have served to limit the comfort level of my participants.   I also worried that some respondents might say what they thought I wanted to hear, rather than give their honest opinion. In the end, I believe my participants were comfortable enough to share honestly and openly during the interview process. Their willingness to participate in the interviews, their continued participation in school activities and the ongoing discussion we continue to have about truth and reconciliation lead me to believe that a level of comfort existed between myself and my participants.

The first interview I conducted was with the mother of two children in our school: an older child who took part in our inquiry project, and a younger took part in the whole school presentations and activities. We sat down to chat one morning after she dropped her children off at school. I began the conversation by asking the questions that I had shared with participants when I invited them to participate in the interviews. One of the first things she brought up in our conversation was that neither she nor her husband had learned anything about Indigenous peoples' history or knowledge when they were in school. She talked about how this lack of information and understanding created tension for her. Not knowing or understanding what her children were learning made conversations difficult. She said she would like to learn with her children; learn what they are learning and come to understand along with her children. For her, the biggest tension was the knowledge gap and lack of understanding between her children's learning and her own.

Throughout May and June, as I continued with the interview, lack of knowledge and understanding was mentioned by almost all of the participants. Other tensions were raised as well: feelings of guilt, discomfort with certain topics, concern over what was being taught and

how we would continue to make this work meaningful. As the interviews progressed, I was heartened to hear that most of my participants could see the importance of the work being done. While tensions do exist, most participants wanted their children to learn what they had never been taught, and there was hope for better relations between future generations.

Conducting the interviews was a very interesting process for me. Throughout the year I had wondered at the silence from my parent community. The chance to sit down with six different people to talk about what was being done in our school was a chance to have frank and open conversations. It was also time for me to reflect even more upon my own struggles, tensions and doubts.

Research Participants

I am very grateful to the six women who agreed to participate in my research project. Initially I had hoped to have male and female participants for my interviews. I approached a few dads to be involved in my interviews, but, in the end, I had six mothers agree to participate instead. All of the participants had children in my school during the 2018-2019 school year. Many of the participants were also part of the parent learning events that were held in the school during the 2017-2018 school year. Four of them also had children who took part directly in the inquiry based reconciliation projects that were shared with parents in the spring of 2019.

All the participants in my research project live east of Lac La Nonne on those lands which used to be the territory of the Alexander Cree Nation. Two of them are relatively new to the community, having moved to the area in the last ten to twenty years. The rest have longer ties to the community. The two who moved here more recently, have connections to one of the church run camps near our school. There are two church run camps in the area. The first camp is on the east shore of Lac La Nonne, next to the location of the original Oblate Mission and

home to the Alexander Cree before they were relocated. The second camp, the camp with which the participants in my study have connections, is on Lake Nakamun, a smaller lake five minutes south of the school. This camp on Lake Nakamun brings in visitors from across central Alberta, and our school has close connections with the camp making use of their skating rink, swimming pool, and their outdoor recreation facilities. The other four participants in my interviews, have longer ties to the community. One of these women grew up in the area. Both her family and her husband's family have Settler roots in the neighbourhood. Another participant lives with her husband on the family farm. While she moved to the community when she got married, her husband grew up here and remembers our school from his childhood. Yet another participant spent her childhood summers at a cabin on the shores of Lac La Nonne, and the final participant grew up further north in Treaty 8 territory but she now lives with her husband on his family's farm which dates back to the early 1900's. Farming, then, was one of the occupations in which participants in my study were involved. I also had participants who worked in the education system, one being a teacher and another being an educational assistant. One of my interview participants also self-identified as Cree. These women all, in one way or another, had close ties with the school. Some were members of our Parent Council. Others attended our workshops. I appreciate all the time that they took to share their thoughts with me.

Data Analysis

As the interviews were completed, and data accumulated, the task of interpreting and analyzing notes began. At first, I turned to the work of other autoethnographers for insight into the data analysis process. Chang (2013) describes how "some autoethnographers may elect an organic, intuitive approach to meaning-making (Ellis, 2004; Goodall, 2008; Muncey, 2010); others take an analytical approach to arriving at cohesive meanings out of fragments of life

(Anderson, 2006; Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006)" (p. 116). Carolyn Holman Jones describes how she begins with the question "what is going on here" and then begins writing and exploring the themes that emerge as she answers that question (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2015, p. 56). What was lacking in the autoethnographic literature I consulted was a clear method of conducting and analyzing interviews, fieldnotes, and my reflective journal.

Given that interviews and fieldnotes are not exclusive to autoethnography, I turned to other texts on qualitative research methods to help me navigate my way through the data I had collected. When conducting my interviews, I used a voice recorder to capture the conversations. I finished these interviews in mid-June and, once the school year was done, I began the process of transcription. The first step was to run the audio files through transcription software. This software provided a text format for each conversation, but I was unwilling to simply leave the transcription to the inaccuracies of technology. With a software generated transcription in hand, I began the process of carefully and repeatedly listening to each conversation and verifying/validating the transcription. As I listened to each conversation over and over, verifying that the transcription was correct, I began identifying general themes and elements of note within the discussions. I made a list of these themes in my journal and reflected on them as they came to light. When I finished verifying the transcriptions, I shared them with the individual participants. This process is outlined in Harding (2019) in her chapter on the first steps of analyzing interview data.

With the transcriptions done and a preliminary list of themes in hand, I decided to use NVivo to further analyze the interviews, my fieldnotes, and my own reflective field journal. I uploaded all the materials into NVivo and used the automatic coding process to identify topics and sentiments within the data. This auto-coding was helpful at pointing out recurring topics and

provided a different lens through which to view the data, but I still felt the need to go back through the data and do my own manual coding beginning with the themes I had earlier identified. I used NVivo to keep track of my codes (nodes) and organize highlighted sections of text according to which code or codes they related to. I repeated this process with all of my interview transcripts, my fieldnotes, and my reflective journal. Essentially, I read through my interviews, fieldnotes and reflective journal yet again, highlighting text, line by line, identifying codes as they emerged, and using NVivo to keep track of my coding.

When I performed auto-coding on my fieldnotes, I did not find the topics identified particularly helpful. The software generated a list of topics that came up often in my notes. Topics such as knowledge, residential schools, inclusion, acknowledgement, school, and projects were identified. This information did demonstrate the frequency with which I wrote about these areas, but, as the purpose of my fieldnotes was to capture conversations and events related to these topics, I did not find much insight within this list of topics. What was insightful were the sentiments identified by the auto-coding.

After running an auto-coding function to identify topics, I ran a similar auto-coding program to identify sentiments in the fieldnotes. According to the auto-coding, my fieldnotes reflected moderately negative to very negative sentiments 47% of the time and positive to very positive sentiments 53% of the time. I was curious to see what would be considered negative and what would be considered positive sentiments. When I made comments about being uncertain, worried, unwilling, or finding conversations difficult, the software identified them as moderately negative or very negative interactions. Those notes that registered as moderately positive or very positive were ones in which I used words like respectful, inclusion, pleased and impressed. The language that I used in my notes was clearly not neutral, but what impressed me

was the fact that the data was almost evenly positive and negative. At times in this journey, I felt

defeated and frustrated, but the auto sentiment revealed that more than 50% of the time,

conversations and notes were positive.

My own coding of my fieldnotes revealed a number of different themes. One set of

themes related to communication with parents and community members. Included in this theme

were the topics of quiet parents and what their silence might mean, and conversations in a social

setting. Another set of themes related to my own feelings of frustration and questioning

including my concerns about cultural appropriation, the lonely nature of this work, the slow pace

of change, my desire to find authentic voices, and my fear that this work is my vision and that it

will not endure without my presence in the school. A third set of themes centered on dealing

with others' questions and reactions to our work. This theme included topics such as a lack of

foundational knowledge, way of dealing with misinformation, and the questioning of the specific

content being taught. Finally, the last set of themes focused on how children's learning can help

with parents' learning from reaching parents through children, addressing students' comments

about parent conversations and being age appropriate without losing meaning.

Having taken this first look at my fieldnotes, I turned to my field journal or my

reflections. Five general sets of themes emerged from my reflective journal. First, there were

themes that reflected my frustration and questioning whether the work we are doing is making a

difference. At many time I felt it would be easier to stop and I struggled with how to keep going

in this slow and frustrating process. I felt I was only scratching the surface and I worried about a

lack of government and public support. The second set of themes focused on my desire to be

respectful and authentic in the information I am sharing. My goal was to always design

respectful activities and to be authentic without appropriating knowledge or content. Third, but

linked to the first two groups of themes, was a set of themes that relate to seeking authentic

knowledge. I struggled with how to make connections with Indigenous people or groups, and I

often felt uncomfortable being seen as an expert in terms of Indigenizing education with my

school jurisdiction. The fourth theme harkened back to the theme about communication with

parents from my fieldnotes. What does silence from parents mean? The final set of themes

related to parent and student learning. It included the subtopics of how to address the difference

between students' reactions and parents' reactions, how to reach out to parents through their

children, and how to be respectful when addressing different perspectives. These were the

themes and subthemes that I identified as I reread and worked through a manual coding process

of my journal.

I did use the auto-coding to once again identify topics within my reflections, but, as with

my fieldnotes, the list of topics, while giving a different way of approaching and organizing the

data set, did not change the themes that emerged. The list of topics generated from parent

interviews was similar. Topics such as Blanket Exercise, reconciliation, treaties, residential

schools, Indigenous knowledge, communication, and curriculum stood out, but, again, as these

were the topics we were discussing, their prevalence in the transcripts was not surprising. I did,

however, appreciate the way in which this auto-coding grouped and counted this information,

revealing that the topics recurred in multiple interviews.

The auto-coding for sentiment done on parent interviews confirmed my own impressions

from each interview. There were those interviews which expressed a generally positive tone and

those that were more negative or evenly mixed. With this auto-coding as a point of reference or

entry point into the data, I then went about manually coding within the NVivo software using the

themes I had identified as I read and reread the interviews both during the transcription phase and during this initial data analysis process.

One of the major themes that the parents' interviews focused on was parental desire to learn or be better informed. Parents wanted to learn and they also wanted students to learn. Parents also commented on learning through or along with their children. The parent events we held were also discussed as were the sentiments that parents were not taught about Indigenous peoples and they held out hope for different learning and a different future for their children. Another major set of themes focused on the importance of communicating information to parents. Included in this themes were calls for continued communication about from the school about Indigenizing work with classrooms. Parents saw clear and frequent communication as vitally important and the need for ongoing dialogue was also brought up. The third set of themes dealt with how parents felt uncomfortable taking up some topics. Discussions of race and racism were identified as uncomfortable topics to discuss. The reactions of others to these topics and conversations was also a concerns. Questions about how to combat misinformation, deal with feelings of guilt and understand white privilege were also brought up. A fourth set of themes focused on where we go from here. Parents asked how we continue to move forward and how we continue to weave truth and reconciliation through curriculum. There were also questions that focused on ways in which to connections with Indigenous Elders and neighbours for our students. Finally, there was a set of themes that dealt with the questioning of what is being taught and why. There were questions about how teachers decide what to teach or what types of information to use. There were concerns about too much Indigenous content and going too far with Indigenizing efforts. Concerns were also raised about reconciling family history with national and Indigenous history. While NVivo was invaluable in keep track of my coding

process, I found I still followed a process of identifying my own codes after careful rereading of the data, and I then looked at those codes to group them together into themes (Harding, 2019).

Ethics

Autoethnography provided me with a very useful tool for me research, but it also presented some different challenges when it comes to ethics. Given that I am the researcher, the principal of the school, and a member of the larger community, there were a number of ethical considerations during this project. First and foremost, I have been guided by the ethical requirement to *do no harm to self and others* (Tullis, 2013). "It is important that autoethnographers do not ignore the potential for personal and professional self-harm while minimizing risk and maximizing benefits to others" (Tullis, 2013, p. 256). I made sure that I had the proper consent from participants as the interviews began; that I practiced both the process consent and the ethics of consequence described by Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2015), and that I met the requirements of the University of Alberta's Human Research Ethics Policy and complied with Tri-Council Ethical requirements. Before I began my research I also received permission from my school jurisdiction to conduct research in one of their community schools. It has also been important, as I work through the research process, to check in with participants as part of my data analysis and research writing process. I have also been conscious of the potential outcomes of the research, both positive and negative, while working to "minimize the power differentials and varying goals that inevitably exist between researchers and participants" (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2015, p. 58).

Protecting the privacy and identities of participants has been essential, although it has also proved challenging. We are a small community and as has been stated before, writing about personal experiences means writing about others. I have used pseudonyms for all of my

participants and their interview transcripts have been kept safely locked away on an external hard

drive stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office. As Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2015)

explain, "although our insights may be grounded in our experiences, our recollections, accounts,

and interpretations might embarrass, harm or expose others" (p. 59). Tullis (2013) advises,

ethical and prudent autoethnographers never share publicly or publish anything that they would

not show the person mentioned in the text. Respecting participants and relationships with

participants is paramount. It has, therefore, been important to ensure "process consent" as

described by Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2015):

> "Process consent" happens when researchers check in with participants during *each* stage
>
> of a project, from design to fieldwork to drafting and sharing or an autoethnographic text,
>
> to ensure participants' *continued* willingness to take part in a project. Process consent
>
> views consent as dynamic and ongoing, one that persists for the life of a project and that
>
> happens in a form and context that is accessible and comfortable for participants. (p. 57)

For the purposes of my project, I have verified participants' ongoing willingness to be a part of

the work. Consent forms were filled out by participants willing to participate in the reflective

interviews. As the data analysis took I shared transcriptions and findings with participants

ensuring that they were still willing to be a part of the project.

When my research is done, I will remain "in the field." I am a member of this

community as well as a teacher at and the principal of the school. As a result, it has been very

important for me to ensure that I treat participants and data in a way that ensures positive

relations going forward. To this end, I find *friendship as method* as described by Adams,

Holman Jones, & Ellis (2015) a particularly helpful framework. *Friendship as method* means

approaching participants as one would a friendship:

- Prioritizing the relationship, including being there for participants and not making inappropriate demands on their time, resources or emotions

- Nurturing the relationship by whatever means appropriate and being willing to change patterns of interaction to accommodate the relationship

- Addressing possible conflicts in the relationship and the research process/project explicitly

- Acknowledging issues of confidentiality, loyalty, and critique in ways that meet both the demands of the friendship *and* the demands of the research

- Maintaining the relationship after the research is complete or no longer possible. (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p. 61).

There will be no leaving the field at the end of this project so maintaining positive relationships with the parent community throughout the process and beyond is essential.

Sharing My Experience

Each month the school jurisdiction I work for has an administrators' meeting where principals and associate principals from all of our schools come together to learn, collaborate and make decisions. At a meeting held in the fall of 2019, I sat beside the principal of another one of our small, community schools during lunch. As we chatted, she brought up a conversation that she had with a parent following their most recent school assembly. The parent was upset that staff had begun the assembly with the reading of a treaty acknowledgement statement. She wanted to know why so much special emphasis was being placed on treaties and Aboriginal peoples. Why, if an apology has already been made, are there still expectations that special acknowledgments will be made? This parent went on to argue that we don't keep making a big deal about Ukrainian people who were interned during World War One, or the Japanese who

were interned in World War Two. Why are we paying special attention to Aboriginal people?
Why is this important? Why are her children being asked to learn about this?

Clearly, there is much learning and decolonizing work to be done with parents all across
our school division, all across Alberta, and all across Canada, and the insights gained from the
experience of decolonizing with my parent community can help to guide others as they navigate
the same waters in their own schools. Autoethnography has furnished me with a way of sharing
and analyzing my experience so that others may gain insight into their own journey along a
similar path.

Chapter 6: Learning from My Findings

I remember the nervous feeling in the pit of my stomach as I prepared for the first sets of interviews as a part of this research study. What would participants say about this project, about the work I had been trying to do? Would they validate my efforts? Would they feel that nothing had really been accomplished? Would they question my motives? Would they reiterate doubts and questions about the need for change? I had felt alone for so long, trying to chisel away at change without feedback or response. My own journaling was full of doubt and questioning, what would these conversations with parents reveal?

I structured my research project around four questions: 1) What questions, tensions and considerations emerge for a non-Indigenous administrator, teacher, and community member working to create a better parent understanding of the decolonizing and Indigenizing work being done at our school? 2) What questions, tensions and considerations arise for parents as changes happen within the school? 3) How can a teacher/administrator help guide parents through these tensions and questions? and 4) How do I, as a non-Indigenous administrator, teacher, and community member, navigate the tensions and questions that arise both on a personal and professional level? I also had a subset of guiding questions that I used to frame the interviews I conducted with participants. The first of these questions simply asked what questions, tensions, and considerations have emerged for you as our school has worked to include Indigenous knowledge in our classrooms? I then went on to ask three more guiding questions: 1) As a parent, what is it like to be a part of these changes or to see these changes happening in our school? 2) What can administration do to guide parents through the tensions and questions that arise? and 3) What would you like to see administration do, from this point forward, to help make decolonizing and Indigenizing education more understandable for parents?

I was not sure about how parents would respond to these broad, open-ended questions. Would the tensions I felt in doing this work be similar to the tensions they experienced? Would there be differing opinions about what the priorities and considerations should be? In the end, the information gathered by both the interviews with parent and the analysis of my own field notes and reflection, provided important insights into not only the process of decolonizing and Indigenizing within our school, but also useful reflections on Settler Colonialism and Settler Allyship within our rural Alberta context.

Parent Participants

The six women who agreed to answer my questions provided me with thoughtful and thought provoking information. In the data analysis that follows, I refer to each participant by pseudonym and, as I provide more information about who these women are, I am cognizant of the need to preserve their anonymity to the best of my ability. Given the autoethnographic nature of this work, it is difficult to be anonymous and to set the background for this research in an unknown location. I do, however, wish to preserve, as much as possible, the anonymity of my participants. To that end, my introductions here are vague, but hopefully they help to furnish some understanding of who participated in this discussion.

The first woman I interviewed was Michelle. Like the other women who participated in the interviews, she had been an active member of our parent community for several years prior to the start of this research and prior to my arrival at the school. She had two children in our school at the time of this research, one of whom was in my classroom and participated in the reconciliation unit undertaken during the research year. Michelle participated in the parent events that were held at the school and was a part of initial conversations when concern over

decolonizing and Indigenizing efforts were first raised at our Parent Council meeting. She and her family live on an acreage near our school and she is a childcare worker.

Shawna was the second woman interviewed. At the time of the interviews, she worked for our school jurisdiction as an educational assistant and she had two children in our school, one of whom participated in our reconciliation unit. Shawna also identifies as Cree. Although she did not have strong connections to her Cree culture as a child, she talked about wanting her children to learn more and have more connection and contact with their Indigenous identity. Shawna was unable to participate in the parent events held at our school, but she was present at many of the community gatherings held at our school where the land acknowledgment statement was read and she attended the open house where students shared their reconciliation projects. As a longtime volunteer in our school, she also had opportunity to engage with other parents in discussions surrounding our decolonizing and Indigenizing work.

A third participant in the interviews and in many of the discussions held throughout the years was Connie. She had also been a volunteer in our school for several years before I arrived and she continued to provide support to our school all through her children's elementary years. When questions about the decolonizing and Indigenizing work in our school were first raised, Connie had two children in our school and was a part of those initial conversations. She attended the Blanket Exercise held at our school and her children took part in a number of our truth and reconciliation activities. At the time of our reconciliation project, one of her children was in my class and participated in the activities while her other child had move out of our school and into junior high. Connie and her family have deep roots in our area, having grown up in the surrounding community. She lives on an acreage with her family and works in the one of the neighboring communities in the health care industry. Outside of school, I have connections with

her extended family and I was very grateful for her participation in answering my questions and providing her insights.

My fourth participant was Sharon. Like Michelle, she works in childcare and has for many years. Sharon has two children. One is older and no longer in school. Her second child was a student in our school at the time of this research. Her child was not in my class and was too young to participate directly in the Reconciliation Project that older students completed. There were, however, opportunities for her child to be a part of larger school wide decolonizing and Indigenizing work. Sharon also took part in one of our parent events and she was present at many of our community events and at the open house where older students displayed their reconciliation work. She was a strong supporter of our school both before I arrived at the school and during my time as a teacher and administrator in the building.

Meghan was another parent who was active as a volunteer before I arrived at the school and she continued to support the school throughout the research period. Her children were younger at the time of the research, two of them attended our school and the third was not yet of school age. None of her children were in my classroom, but they did have the opportunity to part of our whole school Indigenizing work. Meghan is also an educator who works for our school jurisdiction. In this role, she had the opportunity to participate in professional development activities aimed at teachers. She also took part in our parent events and her position as a teacher at another school gave her the ability to compare work done in our school with work done in other schools within our school division.

The final participant in the interview process was Bonnie. Bonnie had two children in our school at the time of the research, one of whom took part in the Reconciliation Unit and Indigenizing activities within my classroom. Bonnie was also an active parent volunteer during

the time of this research project and she participated in many of the discussions surrounding Indigenizing and decolonizing efforts at our school. She and her family are engaged in farming the family farm on which her husband grew up. She attended one of our parent events and both she and her husband came to our open house event to see their child's Reconciliation Project. I appreciate her contribution to this discussion. I am grateful to all the women who took time out to visit with me, to answer my questions, to share their thoughts, their tensions, and their questions. Their contribution is invaluable and, in listening to their voices, there is much I have learned. I hope to do justice to their contribution in taking up the themes of their discussions in the remainder of this chapter.

Tensions and Questions for Parents: A Lack of Knowledge

One of the first tensions expressed by parents in the interviews I conducted and in general conversations held throughout the year was their own lack of knowledge and understanding of the topics, events, and relationships being taken up in our classrooms. Repeatedly I had parents tell me that they did not learn about Indigenous peoples and Indigenous history when they were in school

"In school, I didn't learn that much. I actually learned more as an adult than what I did in school. And I think it's something that definitely shouldn't be forgotten. It needs to be out there" (Meghan).

"It's been interesting because I feel I didn't know a lot. I feel like I still don't know a lot…I feel like I need to. It's…it's good because it pushed me to. I haven't looked at as much into it as I should still…It's a part of our country's history, and yet, I know very little about it" (Bonnie)

For some, this knowledge gap created a tension because they felt they could not answer their children's questions or knowledgeably engage in conversation about the topic, or they had a different understanding of information than that which their children were bringing home.

I think the silence I often heard from parents when engaging in conversations with students around the topic of Indigenous peoples and history reflects this tension. I recall a young boy in grade one who, during one of our Open House events, was showing his parents some of the books about residential schools that his teacher had shared with the class. He picked up one book and told his parents about the story. He explained that the story was about a young girl whose grandfather did not know how to speak Cree because he had forgotten how to speak his language because of residential schools. His parents had no response for him when he finished describing the story. No follow up questions. No dialogue about residential schools or language revival. They simply moved on to a different table of books. Lack of knowledge can lead to lack of conversation. As one of the interview participants indicated when talking about conversations with her children at home, "if they said something about it I'd have no idea what they were talking about or understand why. And they probably couldn't explain it to me. Or would pretend and act like they couldn't explain it" (Bonnie). As a result, deeper conversations cannot take place.

It was this lack of knowledge that initially led parents to ask for parent information nights back in 2017, and it is this tension that has continued to fuel efforts to provide parents with as much information as possible.

"I didn't learn this stuff and I think I should have learned this stuff…that my students are learning is really good and I feel like it's going to give me the opportunity to learn more

which I wouldn't necessarily have the time or ability to learn. Like they can come home and teach me stuff. So that's really nice…And I want them to know." (Michelle).

Learning what their children are learning was a very strong theme for parents throughout this research. There was a desire on the part of all the parents interviewed to know and learn along with their children. The knowledge gap was something parents wanted to address.

Several parents interviewed felt they should have learned more about their shared history with Indigenous peoples when they were in school and they were happy to see their children learning more. In my interview with one of our Cree parents, she indicated that she wanted her students to learn about Indigenous history and knowledge at school. It not only validates what they are learning at home but, "if I can't explain something it's good that they're learning it throughout the school too" (Shawna).

There were some parents, for whom the lack of knowledge also led to a questioning of what exactly was being taught at school and why Indigenous history and knowledge was now a part of what students were expected to learn. There was a sense of concern or uncertainty surrounding this new information that their children were being exposed to, and concern that a revisionist approach to history would negate or replace important stories that were the current dominant narrative. "I would say just to make sure that it's not just switching from one side to the other" (Connie). There was concern that Indigenous history and knowledge would be the only thing taught or that the version of Indigenous history being taught would not be truthful or honest. There was a fear that history would be retold in a narrative that cast all Indigenous peoples as irreproachable helpless targets. There was concern over the unknown and how information would be presented. "I wasn't mad about it. I was just asking questions" (Connie). And in the absence of knowledge, some misunderstandings developed.

This lack of knowledge is not surprising in a Settler colonial society. As Lorenzo Veracini (2010) argues in this work *Settler Colonialism: a theoretical overview*, Settler society crafts for itself a mythology or its own version of history. Replacing stories of displacements and dispossession are stories of pioneering spirit and settlement set against the backdrop of an empty frontier. There is, within Settler society, a disavowal of violence and policies that stripped the Indigenous from the land in order to make way for Settler colonization (Veracini 2010, Lowman & Barker, 2015). As Lowman & Barker (2015) suggest, in a Settler colonial society there is the view, for Settlers, that "history begins with our national inception – with explorers, pioneers, soldiers and traders, not the incredible span of Indigenous histories" (p. 25).

It is this history of settling the Prairies, an empty land perfect for farming, which is the story most of the parents with school age children probably remember learning when they were in school. While they may have learned that there were Indigenous people in Canada prior to the arrival of Europeans, the circumstances by which the land was made ready for settlement were most likely skipped over or left out. Instead, stories were likely told about Ukrainian Settlers struggling through harsh winters in houses made of sod and soil, or Russian Doukhobor Settlers who brought to this land their religious piety, pacifism, and strong work ethic. The mythology of settlement would have featured heavily in textbooks and teachings.

If mention was made of clashes between Settlers and Indigenous people, they were likely presented in a way that represented them as threats to progress or Settler survival. As Veracini (2010) states, "even when Settler colonial narratives celebrate anti-Indigenous violence, they do so by representing a defensive battle ensuring the continued survival of the Settler community" (p. 78). I think of history lessons I received as a child about the Red River Rebellion, for example, where Settlers were killed and the settlement of the west was threatened by the Métis

refusal to allow surveyors to redefine property boundaries. A limited version of history for sure, but this is an example of how the myths surrounding Settler colonial society have shaped peoples understanding of Canadian history. It is not surprising then, that most parents express a lack of knowledge when it comes to truly understanding the past.

Paulette Regan (2010), in *Unsettling the Settler Within*, writes "most non-Native people resist the notion that violence lies at the core of Indigenous - Settler relations. This is understandable, as it raises disturbing questions about Settler identity and history" (p. 21). This is very true of those parents interviewed in my study. When I think of how it was the land acknowledgement statement that created such a wave of hostility and questioning within my school community, I should not really have been surprised. It may have seemed like a small statement recognizing Indigenous people who once lived in this place, but underlying this statement is a questioning of those assumptions and stories that unpin Settler society. I was not simply saying that someone else once lived here. In recognizing that this land belongs to someone else, I was throwing into suspicion the foundation story upon which many Settler narratives, many familial and personal narratives are based.

One of the parents who participated in my interviews commented on this. As Meghan explained:

It's the whole knowledge thing. They don't understand. So I know when you started saying the [acknowledgment] and there were people that were well [asking] why. And especially because then it wasn't too long before that that they took the Grace [Lord's Prayer] and so people were like well why can't we do this but we have to do that. That's not right. But I think it's just an understanding of it…And I think it goes back to that

they don't know. They don't know what happened. They didn't learn about what

happened. They don't…they didn't understand…and I didn't learn it in school so…

The land acknowledgment statement was seen to be replacing the Lord's Prayer, which was

recited every morning following the singing of O Canada until the fall of 2016. More

importantly, the land acknowledgement was also seen as threatening the values and the beliefs of

the community. It called into question those foundational myths of settling the empty land of the

Prairies.

When I think of my own history, my own family's story, I have had to rethink the way in

which I understand the experience of my great-grandparents. My paternal grandparent's family,

for example, came to Canada from Ukraine in the early 1900's. They came looking for land to

farm and a new life for themselves and their children. After travelling by steamer and then train,

they arrived in Edmonton with little more than a few bags and each other. Scraping together

what little they had, they built a raft, purchased some supplies, and set off on the North

Saskatchewan River. After several days travel, they climbed the banks for the river and made

their way inland until they found the plot of land that would become the family homestead.

From nothing they built a farm, raised a family, and built the foundation which made it possible

for my grandmother to get an education, my father to become a teacher, and me to lead the life

that I enjoy.

What is going to happen to this story? Some of the parents interviewed worried that

coming to understand our shared history with Indigenous peoples would mean replacing or

removing these familial narratives, these stories of struggle and perseverance that characterize

the arrival of their ancestors on the Prairies. These stories are still a part of our shared history.

What is missing, however, is a true understanding of the context in which these stories took

place. That is the myth of Settler society that needs to be revealed. When my great-grandparents arrived in this land, it was "empty" and "waiting to be settled" for a reason. The struggles my great-grandparents faced and overcame are still awe inspiring, but they did not occur on a barren landscape.

What is required is a shift away from the Settler colonial foundational myth, and a willingness to understand history differently. As Lowman and Barker (2015) explain, within the mythology of Settler society:

> Indigenous relationships to the land cannot be allowed to pre-empt and undermine colonial claims to the land. And Indigenous histories and creation stories cannot be allowed to compete with heroic origin stories of brave pioneers and frontier individualism…By erasing competing prior histories and stories, Settler societies possess and maintain the only legitimate claims to their territories. It also frees Settler people of the moral and ethical conundrum of membership in a nation founded on genocide, racism and dispossession (p. 30).

It is unsettling to rethink those foundational stories that have shaped the Canadian identity for generations. Coming to grips with the violence of the past shakes certain understandings of ourselves. In learning history anew, we must come to understand treaties, residential schools, cultural genocide, systemic racism and the way in which they shape our past and our present. This creates tension for parents and community members, but it is in uncovering these tensions and engaging in dialogue surrounding our collective past that we can begin to create a different future.

Tensions and Questions for Parents: Discomfort and Guilt

A second tension identified by parents was the uncomfortable nature of conversations and topics related to Indigenous history, Indigenous - non-Indigenous relations, and talk of reconciliation. Within Settler society, conversations about Indigenous history can become heated. Many of our parents face a degree of discomfort when discussing these issues within our local context. There are those parents who talked about being bothered by the negative reactions of others, and feeling uncomfortable when faced with racist comments or derogatory remarks. Race and racism are uncomfortable topics to take up as are discussions of white privilege and systemic advantages. In addition, for our farming community, family histories of pioneers and Settlers jar up against new knowledge in the form of treaty education and land claim discussions. Navigating feelings of blame and guilt can also feel threatening and disconcerting. Having conversations with neighbours about these topics has caused tensions for parents in our community, and countering the misinformation presented by others was also brought up as an uncomfortable part of this process. It is, for many parents, an unsettling topic.

It can be difficult to talk about race and racism with people who hold strong views on the subject. "I know a lot of people point fingers of blame and…Oh well, look at what they're doing now or like…their living situations or the abuse of drugs or alcohol in family situations" (Bonnie). Addressing these types of statements is not easy. For some parents, it is more comfortable to avoid such conversations with community members. "It gets heated and then people get…because I know when politics comes up I'm the first one to like…I'm out of here" (Sharon). There was also a sense of resignation among some parents that some people are not going to change. "And I just think there's some people that…they're not going to change and they're not going to try to see their viewpoint" (Sharon). "People often aren't willing to dialogue, which, fine, at least we're teaching the students. You know, like, sometimes…

sometimes things just have to be grandfathered out" (Michelle). In other words, some conversations were avoided because there is the impression that little will be change as a result of the conversation.

On the flip side of this, there were those parents and community members who expressed frustration because they did not think they were listened to when uncomfortable topics were brought up. "I think it's kind of a faux pas where you shouldn't challenge it. Just accept it" (Connie). This feeling of not being heard may have accounted for some of the silence from the parent community as efforts to Indigenize curriculum continued in our school. It was certainly something that I heard from community members in casual conversations. There were several people who expressed the view that students were being forced to learn about Indigenous people because of government policies that they did not agree with. There was often a sense of resignation that "It's not going away" (Connie). That it wasn't something open for discussion or debate. We were simply being told to do it.

In addition to discomfort when discussing controversial topics, parents expressed their feelings of discomfort with ideas of guilt and reconciling family histories with the broader picture of treaties and Indigenous history. More than once, non-Indigenous parents talked about feeling guilty or being made to feel guilty about the role played by non-Indigenous people in the history of Indigenous Canadians. "We were the bad guys, and I'm trying to figure out how to not make [my students] feel guilty because they didn't do anything but we did something and they're getting the privilege of that…What we have isn't necessarily what we have a right to" (Michelle). This idea of understanding privilege is often juxtaposed with anger over being blamed for past actions. "I'm not native but I'm being shamed just because I'm white. When we did a lot for our community and our country. For my family that's been here for generations"

(Connie). Finding a way to talk about Indigenous history and navigate the emotions that emerge in such discussions was a concern for parents not only because they struggle with such feelings but because they want to be able to help their children manage such emotions as well.

Working with students in the classroom, I often heard them repeat conversations that had with parents and grandparents about their own family histories; stories of struggle and endurance as great-grandparents travelled west seeking land and new opportunities; stories of clearing the land and making something from nothing so that future generations might grow up in a land of prosperity. From such conversations I came to see how uncomfortable it was for parents and community members to uncover and understand how treaties and government policies fit into these personal narratives. Such discussions bring up a lot of emotions and navigating the tensions is a challenge.

Strong emotions, feelings of guilt, anger and hostility, these reactions are a logical result of the disrupting of Settler mythologies talked about earlier and the realization that violence, racism and cultural genocide underpin our Settler society. "Coming to understand Settler Colonialism and its importance in informing almost everything we know about the Canadian state and nation…is a major task and an important step," say Lowman & Barker (2015, p. 110). I would agree, however, there is more to be done than to simply understand this history.

It is unsettling to realize one's role as a Settler complicit in system that continues to oppress and disadvantage some while providing privilege to others. Responses to this realization can take the form of anger and hostility, as in the case of those parents who feel blamed for a system they did not create. It can also lead to feelings of guilt and a desire to "fix things" and return to feeling of comfort (Lowman & Barker, 2015, Regan 2010; Barker 2010). It is difficult to acknowledge one's own privilege and, upon realizing the privilege one enjoys, what is to be

done becomes a far more difficult question. Engaging in discussions of privilege and racism are, as parents have pointed out, uncomfortable tasks that some may choose to avoid.

Adam Barker (2006) in his article "From Adversaries to Allies" refers to the paralysis many feel upon recognizing their role in Settler society. "To be an Ally first requires recognition…after this recognition, it is no easy thing to be a Settler person committed to acting as an Indigenous Ally" (p. 316). He states that "combinations of active social and cultural pressures, passive understandings of 'normal,' and internal psychological and emotional barriers often create paralysis for Settlers attempting to act in de/anti-colonial ways" (p. 316). It is not easy to recognize in oneself choices that support an oppressive system. It is equally difficult to imagine something different when it means giving up some of what one has come to enjoy and take for granted. As Albert Memmi (1965) argues in *The Colonizer and The Colonized*, "it is too much to ask one's imagination to visualize one's own end, even if it be in order to be reborn another" (p. 40). But it is in being unsettled and choosing to remain unsettled that we can continue the important dialogue that we have begun. "Settler people who hope to become effective Allies must move past the desire to reestablish comfort and ask the question 'What do we do?' from a profoundly uncomfortable place" (Barker, 2010, p. 323). We must become comfortable with this tension and use it to keep the conversation alive.

Tensions and Questions for Parents: Where do We Go From here?

Yet another theme that emerged from conversations with parents as a key consideration was the desire for ongoing and comprehensive communication. For parents, knowing what their children were learning and what activities and events their children were taking part in was of greatest importance. "For me as a parent, I just want to be informed. Like if there's something happening, it would be…I'd like to know about it. Not to take my students out of it but to be

able to talk to them about it" (Connie). Knowing what students were learning was very important. A number of parents expressed a desire to learn along with their children and they wanted the school to communicate information about events and topics. They also wanted to be included in activities or share in their children's learning whenever possible. "Tell the parents they're gonna be reading this book. You should read it" (Bonnie). Preparing parents for what their children would be learning appeared as an important theme. "So that the students are going home and talking about it and asking questions and stuff. And I know as a parent it made me have to like go and look up for me because I'm like well I don't know what…I'm going to have to see" (Meghan). Keeping parents informed was something the school tried to do to help mitigate the tension caused by lack of knowledge and uncertainty in terms of content being taught. Communication from the school also helped with those conversations in the larger community. Informing every one of our activities and the work that staff and students were doing in the name of Indigenous knowledge inclusion and reconciliation came across as being a key request from parents.

Parents also brought up questions about how we move forward from here. For some parents, the concern was a fear that the conversation might die out. They asked how the school planned to maintain momentum and build on some of the foundational knowledge that we have built. How would we build more connections for our students and help them shape personal relationships with our Indigenous neighbours and play a meaningful role in reconciliation? How would we continue to help students shape a future set of Indigenous - non-Indigenous relationships that are better than the ones we currently inhabit. How do we make sure we continue to weave Indigenous knowledge through the curriculum so this isn't just a fad of today that is forgotten tomorrow? How do we continue to engage parents and families in this crucial

dialogue? Keeping the conversation going, was mentioned by many of the participants in my research.

> You're introducing it but are you guys…is it gonna be part of the curriculum then? So the teachings of it will be continued throughout I guess?...I think that if you introduce it then you would want to stick forward with it. But I don't know if a lot of students even notice either right. But the reconciliation part of it is keeping forward with it. And if you're gonna do it now then keep going. My mom always said "What took them so long to apologize," but now it's good that you are. And stick forward with it right. Stick to it. (Shawna)
>
> Keeping it in the conversation so that it is talked about. So people understand why we're doing this and why we're bringing it back and why the students are learning. (Meghan)
>
> Planting those seeds. Constantly. (Sharon)

The importance of continuing the work we have begun was recognized by several of the women interviewed.

For some, the question of where we go from here was different. The concern was that the inclusion of Indigenous histories and knowledge would replace the stories and experiences shared by parents and grandparents in our community, as already mentioned. That curriculum would move from teaching about French Canadian heritage and the Ukrainian immigrant experience, for example, to focusing on the experiences of Indigenous peoples. Or that the histories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people would be presented in a binary manner in which Indigenous peoples are represented as victims and non-Indigenous peoples as the villains. A desire for balance and careful reflection on what we teach and how we teach it was articulated.

I think it's good that we're having more awareness about it…It's more of a where is this going. Because there's no real understanding of what the end goal of everything is and I guess that would be kind of my concern. How far is education going to take this with them? Is it going to go in all public schools that there's going to be more of a Native curriculum? To teach more Native culture to people who are and are not Native? To help bring back their understanding of their ways?...And it's tough to know because politically it gets trickle down right. Because it seems in the past the government's apologized. They've given the money and that's reflected in the curriculum and now the Natives say "No, we want this now." It seems like the end goal is always being changed. So we don't know what the end…before both parties are happy and we can move forward and continue on as a society. And we don't know what that will look like. (Connie)

Providing ongoing information about the purpose and direction of decolonizing and Indigenizing education remains a priority.

For most of the parents with whom I spoke, this is new territory. These topics are not something they are comfortable with or even familiar with. For some parents, there is a keen interest in seeing these topics addressed and included in the curriculum. Others have resigned themselves to the inclusion of some degree of Indigenous awareness education in our schools. The tension of how to navigate these topics in a respectful, open and meaningful way was foremost in the minds of our community members. There was an acknowledgment that some perspectives would not change and that not all community members would come to embrace the work we are doing, but many parents held out hope that their children would face a different future.

Paraphrasing Regan (2006), Barker (2010) suggests that "we as Settlers must learn to accept that being unsettled is not something to be avoided, but rather to be embraced and explored" (p. 323). We must become comfortable with the discomfort of questioning our assumptions and our position in society. We need to, as Barker (2010) suggests, adjust to a new reality: a reality in which we continue to question Settler society, while acknowledging that we still benefit from it; a reality in which we take the privilege afforded us by virtue of being Settlers and make it available to those whose position is not privileged by society; a reality in which we work "with the Indigenous peoples upon whose land and form whose resources Settler society has been built" (Barker, 2010, p. 324).

The parents in my study want to know what their children are learning. They want to be informed. From this information, my hope is that they will continue to question their position in Settler society, and they move further in their actions to be Allies with Indigenous Peoples.

My Tensions and Questions: Plans Fall Apart/Slow Process

Just as the parents in my study expressed tensions and questions as a result of the decolonizing and Indigenizing efforts in our school, I too faced tensions and questions along the way.

One of the big tensions that arose for me during my research was the very slow rate at which changes were and are being made. I was continually frustrated by the fact that I felt we were perpetually scraping the surface without really delving into bigger, deeper issues. "While we have been talking about residential schooling for a while, we haven't done much talking about treaties or racism and privilege, or the Indian Act. We haven't talked much about what reconciliation can look like" (Reflective Journal, March 2019). I tried to keep in perspective that the students involved were elementary school students, and that there was a need to be age

appropriate. Many times, however, I felt that we were stuck in the awareness and

acknowledgement phase of reconciliation. We did not really begin discussions of atonement and

action. In April 2019 I made the following entry in my reflective journal:

> …speaking of knowledge inclusion, I really have failed to do that. I have not managed to
>
> open that door. The work I have done this year has been much more of the awareness
>
> building type and much less of the questioning of or moving beyond epistemic
>
> hegemony. It has proven a difficult thing to do" (Reflective Journal, April 2019).

In my conversations with parents at the end of the project, there was acknowledgement that the

process had been and continues to be slow. But there was also acknowledgement and

appreciation of the fact that progress, while slow, is still progress. In a conversation between one

of our jurisdictions First Nations, Métis and Inuit liaisons and myself, for example, "we talked

about how we are only beginning to scratch the surface in terms of developing students'

understandings, but at least the conversation is beginning. What we need to do now is keep the

momentum going" (Fieldnotes, March 2019).

I did, as mentioned above, also have to remind myself, more than once, that the students I

worked with ranged in age from five to twelve. Abuse, systemic racism, intergenerational

trauma…these are topics that need to be approached in an age-appropriate manner. When

talking about residential schooling with our youngest students, for example, I tended to focus

more on being taken away from family, not being able to speak your language, feeling alone and

scared, not being about to visit with brothers and sisters. Deeper conversations about systemic

racism could and did occur with older children, but again the depth of understanding was

tempered by age and maturity level. I struggled with the following questions from my fieldnotes

throughout the research process, "how do I be sensitive and age appropriate without

downplaying the trauma?" (Questions and/or Things to Follow Up On, Fieldnotes, March 2019).

Tied into this tension was also the failure of my plans to come to fruition. When my plan to connect with our neighbouring First Nations School fell apart, I felt that not only was the whole process delayed again but that I could simply have stopped in my efforts to bring about change and no one would have cared. No one inquired as to the progress we were making. No one checked in asking for updates. Had I not had a personal desire and motive for continuing, I could have put the whole endeavor on hold and very few people would have noticed or wondered at the lack of initiative in our building. Sometimes I felt I was the sole driver of change in my building and even within our school division.

The work of reconciliation will not happen overnight. As the Honourable Murray Sinclair, one of the Commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reminds us:

> The commissioners have constantly reminded people that the achievement of reconciliation, however one defines it, within the lifetime of the commission was not a realistic ambition. We have pointed out that Indian residential schools were around for over 100 years, and that several generations of children went through the schools during their time. The damage that the schools inflicted on their lives and the lives of the members of their families and communities will take also generations to fix. (Sinclair, 2014, para. 3).

Likewise changes to our education system, our curriculum, our textbooks, and our mindsets will not occur within the span of a year or two, however much I may want them to.

I am also cautious, as I consider this particular tension, of my own desire to return to what is comfortable. Striving to be a Settler Ally is uncomfortable. It requires constant

reflexivity. It would, as my journaling during this research reflects, be much easier to simply stop trying and to move back to a position of comfort. To return to a settled position. As Regan (2010) reminds us, being unsettled is not something to be avoided. It is in this unsettled state that we continue to question, reexamine and work toward change. As appealing as the return to comfort may seem at times, it is through discomfort that change can occur. In discussing the positionality of Settler Allies, Christie Schultz (2017) talks about how the terms Settler and Ally are juxtaposed creating a sense of discomfort. It is this discomfort, according to Shultz (2010) that creates a space for "truth-telling and healing" (p. 270). Being an Ally requires "continuous rethinking, and acknowledgement, and self-reflection on positionality, power, privilege, guilt and legacies of oppression" (Kluttz, Walker & Walter 2020, p. 52). Being uncomfortable and unsettled may be exhausting but it is in this space that one learns to see and be differently.

Settler Allyship or Indigenous Allyship requires one to constantly reevaluate one's motives and actions. It also stresses the importance of relationships, and it is here that I see my mistake when seeking to work with our neighbouring community. Mitchell, Thomas & Smith (2018) speak of Indigenous Allyship as consensual and relational. Being an Indigenous Ally is not a role one assumes for oneself. It is born in relationship and maintained through action.   As Kluttz, Walker & Walter (2020) explain:

> Activists and organizers cannot self-identify as Allies; instead, this designation must come from Indigenous communities, and not just any Indigenous community, but leaders within a specific context at a specific time. 'Ally" is not a permanent designation. (p. 52)

It is this relationship with Indigenous peoples and the importance of relationships that I did not fully attend to during my study.

Mitchell, Thomas & Smith (2018) set out five features of Indigenous Allyship. These include:

> (a) supporting (not leading) Indigenous Peoples in their struggles for self-determination and liberation, (b) humility (i.e., a willingness to learn and acknowledge that one does not know what is best for Indigenous Peoples), (c) speaking with Indigenous Peoples before taking any actions that would affect them, (d) being reflexive (taking stock of ones' own feeling, power relations, and responsibility for one's words and actions), and (e) engaging in decolonizing processes within ourselves and with others through education and challenging/unsettling other non-Indigenous people. (p. 355)

While I may have recognized the importance of these features before beginning my research project, I did not truly enact them. I came up with my plan for my school and assumed that my priorities would be everyone's priorities. While I had spoken with some Indigenous community members I had not spoken to or built relationships with those who would make decisions about what was best for their school, their children and their community. I failed, in this instance, to truly be a Settler Ally for Indigenous peoples but, as indicated above, being an Ally is not a permanent state. Being a Settler Ally is complex and, while I may not have been successful in this situation, it is something I continue to strive toward.

My Tensions and Questions: Lonely Work/Silence

A second theme that emerged from the analysis of my fieldnotes and reflective journal is the lonely nature of this work.

> My impression is that this is something that very much falls on my plate. No one volunteered to take this up and work to make those connections. There were no suggestions for the types of activities we could do. This initiative will need to be

something I take on and do. If I didn't undertake this, would it happen? If this is just my

initiative, will it succeed? (Narrative Reflection on Events, Fieldnotes, August 2018)

There were several times in this process where I firmly believe I could have stopped what I was

doing and no one would have noticed or, if they had noticed, they would not have been upset.

There was very little pressure or imperative to make the inclusion of Indigenous history or

knowledge a part of what we were doing, day to day, in our school.

While the academic success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in our school

jurisdiction was a topic that featured in our district education plan and was also an item that

should have been discussed and addressed in each of our school buildings, as part of our

education planning process, most of the focus on success for Indigenous students fell on the

shoulders of our First Nations, Métis and Inuit liaison workers. The small population of

Indigenous students in our school and in fact in our jurisdiction, made it possible to simply focus

on how this small group of students was performing and work to address their needs, without

necessarily looking at how everyone, all students, could begin learning about Indigenous history

and knowledge. Rare were the occasions in which the topic of Indigenous inclusion for the

benefit of all learners came up at our monthly meetings for administration or as part of division

wide professional development opportunities.

Towards the end of my research project, I learned of a leadership cohort facilitated by the

Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium that brought together school based leaders to discuss

and share initiatives and ideas aimed at increasing Indigenous content in schools across our

region. I eagerly joined the group and was excited to learn of other schools, more like my own,

where the goal was not simply to include Indigenous students and increase their success in

school, but was to provide more education for all students and see that Indigenous history and

Indigenous knowledge became a part of every child's education. Still, as I worked through most of my research, I felt like the sole force behind the work.

> If I wasn't otherwise (PhD wise and personal belief wise) motivated to make this work, it would be very tempting just to quit trying. There is no obligation, no professional requirement, no real need for me to pursue this. It would be easier to let things be, just to let it ride and follow along with what everyone else is doing. Or not to do anything at all. (Reflective Journal, October 2018)

> Adding to this sense of loneliness was parental silence during the 2018-2019 school year. Prior to conducting my interviews, I received very little feedback from parents over the course of the year. I worried about the lack of feedback and engagement from parents. In the past I had seen that it was only when people were unhappy that I heard from them. So did silence imply satisfaction or did it reflect resignation? In October 2018 I wrote, "I worry about what parental silence means. Complacency, agreement, disinterest, disillusionment, or do they not see that we have done anything or not enough to get involved in?" (Reflective Journal, October 2018). The number of entries about silence or lack of response from parents in both my fieldnotes and reflective journal is extensive.

> I wonder at the silence. What does it mean? There was silence when we first made the change of reading a Treaty Acknowledgement Statement and then, when it actually happened, we had negative feedback. I wonder if all will be quiet until we start bringing students together. (Narrative Reflection on Events, Fieldnotes, September 2018)

> I heard nothing from parents, either good or bad, about the event. I'm starting to wonder why I'm not hearing anything from people. The last time I didn't hear anything things

built and built until it became a bigger issue. (Narrative Reflection on Events, Fieldnotes,

October 2018)

I did not hear any feedback. There were two parents who were very late in returning

permission forms. One was likely just forgetfulness, but I have a feeling the other wasn't

entirely sure she wanted her daughter to attend. This is simply my speculation. She has

held her children back from similar events in the past. She did not contact me, nor did

she ask for further details. In the end, her daughter attended. (Fieldnotes, October 2018)

I sent home a letter explaining that we would be doing a Blanket exercise and beginning

projects that help us to dig deeper into Indigenous – non-Indigenous relations in Canada.

I heard absolutely nothing in response and had no questions from parents. (Fieldnotes,

January 2019)

This silence on the part of the parent community made me nervous. I had dealt with situations in

the past where there was silence between parents and the school but between parents and within

the community there was considerable more talk going on. I had been told that parents wanted to

be informed and that they valued information sent home by the school.

I worked very hard during the 2018-2019 school year to keep parents informed of the

learning taking place in our classrooms. I sent home letters. I included information in our

school's monthly newsletter. I posted items on our school website and our school Facebook

page. I directly emailed parents as well. Many times, however, I felt this communication was a

one-way street. I shared information and did not hear anything in return. The silence concerned

me. "I worry about what parental silence means. Complacency, agreement, disinterest,

disillusionment, or do they not feel that we have done anything or not enough to involved in?'"

(Reflective Journal, October 2018).

In talking with parents at the end of the school year, there was a consensus that the communication from the school had been very much appreciated throughout the year. The lack of response seemed to reflect the fact that people were satisfied with the information they were receiving. No news is good news, and parents would speak out only if they disagreed with something. So, in a sense, silence implies acceptance. In contrast, there were those who seemed to feel that this work is inevitable. The current climate in Canada is moving toward greater truth and reconciliation and, even if they had voiced opposition, the process would continue. As a result, some parent chose to stay silent. Regardless of their viewpoint on the work being done, being informed about what was happening was appreciated and was, for the most part, enough.

As Pauline Regan (2010) reminds us, it is not the responsibility of Indigenous people to shift the mindset of Settlers or to tell Settlers how to decolonize their hearts, minds and actions. This is the work of those who strive to be Settler Allies. At those moments when I felt like quitting this lonely work, it was important to remind myself that silence is not an option. Drawing on the work of Albert Memmi (1965), who talks about ways in which colonizers may choose to actively engage in colonization or may refuse to actively participate in colonization while still accepting the existence and benefit of the colonial state, Adam Barker (2010) writes: "to be in a position of privilege and power and not to question the source of that power and privilege indicates a deliberate choice of colonial action and intent" (p. 319). I do not wish to let my silence speak in support of Settler colonization.

For some of the parents in my community, silence may well have been their way of refusing to engage in decolonizing efforts. While they appreciated being informed about what their children were learning in school, they themselves may not have wished to engage in the questioning of assumptions and positions of privilege and power. In *White Fragility: why is it so*

hard for white people to talk about racism, Robin Diangelo (2018), writes about silence as one of the forms of pushback that is often used by white people when encountering discussions of racism. Silence is one form of pushback that stands in the way of interrupting the forces of racism. Similarly, silence stands in the way of unsettling Settler society. Rather than engage in conversations, reflection and actions, silence offers a more comfortable path.

Silence may also have been the result of not knowing how to manage feelings of guilt and culpability. Just as I was tempted many times to let myself slip back into a position of comfort, to once again become settled, some parents may have found engaging in decolonizing discussions too unsettling and uncomfortable to maintain. Feelings of guilt were certainly brought up in the interviews with parents. Feelings of guilt may be overwhelming and lead to inaction and silence. It would seem important, then, to find a way for parents to engage in ongoing dialogue and discomfort so that they can move beyond silence.

My Tensions and Questions: Fear of Misrepresenting

Another consideration or tension that emerged from my fieldnotes and reflective journal was the fear of misrepresenting or appropriating the voices and stories of Indigenous peoples. This was one of my biggest fears in this whole process. I did not and do not wish to speak for Indigenous peoples. In fact, on more than one occasion I was asked why I was the one pushing for the inclusion on Indigenous perspectives and knowledge. If Indigenous people want us to learn about this, why aren't they here speaking to us, I was asked by a member of our school community. She asked why I was the one doing the talking. It was a question that made me pause. What right do I have to speak on the topic of truth and reconciliation? As I have worked through this process, I have come to understand that I have every right, as a Settler, to speak to other Settlers about the position we inhabit and the privilege we enjoy. It is my responsibility to

bring up the topic of treaties and racism and the legacy of residential schooling. Indigenous peoples have their own priorities and areas of focus. This work of decolonizing and Indigenizing through the creation of openness and space is my job. It is my work, but, at the time this question was first posed, it did give me reason to doubt my authority or role in taking up these conversations.

I worked throughout the process to bring in Indigenous speakers, knowledge keepers, and Elders whenever possible. I sought to use Indigenous authors and resources that had been vetted and approved by Indigenous organizations. My hope was to create person-to-person direct connections between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students. When my plan did not come to fruition, I continued to seek out authentic voices as much as I could. This struggle to always be as authentic and respectful of Indigenous voices was an ever present tension and consideration for me.

While I wanted to be as authentic as I could, I also did not want to stall or stop because I could not get an Indigenous speaker to come into a classroom or attend a community meeting. As I mentioned before, this was lonely work, and it would have been easy to let it stall. My desire to see it succeed, meant that was not an option. It was better to keep the dialogue going, to keep moving forward. Having these conversations is more important than not. Learning something about Indigenous knowledge and perspectives is better than learning nothing at all, regardless of who the teacher is. I took comfort in the words of some of the presenters I listened to at the Think Indigenous conference in the spring of 2019. We all, Indigenous and non-Indigenous have a role to play in these conversations and in this learning. I recorded the following thoughts after the Think Indigenous conference.

I am excited to see renewal, resurgence, and solidarity amongst Indigenous peoples

within Canada. I am also excited to see arguments about the role that non-Indigenous

people must also play in shaping a new and better future. Not that non-Indigenous people

have the answers, but that this is not simply an Indigenous issue or problem. It is up to

all of us to work for a better relationships in the future. This message rang loud and

clear… changing attitudes and beliefs is something that white people have to play a role

in. (Reflective Journal, March 2019)

I cannot speak for Indigenous people, but I do have an important role to play and I can use my

voice to further the conversation.

Closely connected to the struggle to avoid appropriation and speaking for others, I

struggled with the perceptions of people in my school division that I am an "expert" on

Indigenous - non-Indigenous relations and the foundational knowledge teachers have been asked

to include in our curriculum. While I do have a role to play as a non-Indigenous Ally and I know

where to look for authentic and vetted resources, I have been very uncomfortable being placed in

the role of "expert." Yet my help and guidance has often been sought when it came to

identifying resources, addressing community concerns, or weaving Indigenous content into what

we already teach. I was and still am ever wary of the "Indigenous expert" label. In September

of 2018, for example, I was asked to be our jurisdictions representative on the Edmonton

Regional Learning Consortiums First Nations, Métis and Inuit Advisory Committee. Then, later

that same month, I was approached by a new administrator in our division to ask about resources,

contacts, and advise on how to program for Indigenous knowledge inclusion. One more example

was recorded in my fieldnotes after a conversation with one of our First Nations, Métis and Inuit

liaisons. She asked me if I could help a teacher at another school with her search for Indigenous

knowledge teaching materials. Each time someone approached me for "expert advice," I felt

conflicted. I wanted to provide information, but I also wanted to make sure that I was not

speaking for or on behalf of others. I do have an interest in the issues of reconciliation and

advancing Indigenous knowledge but I was worried "I was being chosen over members of the

Indigenous community" (Narrative Reflection on Events, Fieldnotes, September 2018).

> It is great to know that other Administrators are trying to provide staff and students with
>
> learning opportunities but it concerns me that I am being put in the place of "expert" or
>
> "authority" in this area. Our First Nations, Métis and Inuit liaisons are stretched very thin
>
> between their caseloads and trying to provide educational opportunities for students and
>
> staff. I am happy to help and honoured that such trust is being placed in me but I see
>
> myself as a bridge and not as a source of information. How do I help and ensure that I
>
> am allowing others to speak? (Narrative Reflection on Events, Fieldnotes, September
>
> 2018)

As with the discussion on authentic voices and appropriation, I was and am ever conscious of

respectfully keeping the conversation going by sharing what I have learned or information I have

gathered from credible sources without speaking in the place of or directly for others.

I am reminded here of the complexity and tensions of struggling to be a Settler Ally. As

discussed earlier, Allyship requires humility and relationships where non-Indigenous Allies

make space for and support Indigenous voices and leadership. At the same time, silence and

inaction are not an option for the Settler who has come to see the systemic nature of oppression

within Canada and the role Settlers play in this power and privilege dynamic. As Kluttz, Walker

& Walter (2020) articulate in their discussion of decolonizing solidarity:

To do this work as Settlers, we must learn to balance waiting around for direction in social action with taking action consistent with Indigenous leadership. Learning this balance might result in making mistakes, but a willingness to make mistakes is necessary…Ultimately, learning towards solidarity means learning to be uncomfortable, but not to be immobilised. Learning this balance and to do the work ourselves, as uncomfortable as that may be, avoids re-centering whiteness by asking our Indigenous colleagues, leaders, organisers and activists for direction at every turn, monopolising their time and energy. (p. 63)

In other words, I must learn to live with the tension between taking actions of my own and following the leadership, direction and voices of Indigenous people.

My Tensions and Questions: Difficult Conversations and Misunderstandings

A final tension that I faced in doing this work was how to address conversations and questions about Indigenous history and issues of race and racism outside of the school. When neighbours came over or parents stopped me at the store, I struggled with how to address comments that reflect misinformation or racist attitudes? The middle of the frozen food section did not always seem the place to get into a deep philosophical question about race and identity. Such conversations in social settings caused a lot of personal tension for me. Sometimes I admit to letting things go and switching the topic because I did not feel it was the time or the place for an in-depth conversation. I will admit that this avoidance technique does not sit well with me. I often felt guilty afterwards and worried that my silence implied agreement, but there are times when I have chosen not to engage in discussions outside of school.

When I have engaged in conversations within the community, they have often been with grandparents or neighbours of the children I work with, and I have gained interesting insights

into some of the misinterpretations and misconceptions that surround the work we are doing. For example, I heard repeatedly that community members were frustrated at the way the school had been forced to replace the Lord's Prayer with a Treaty Acknowledgement Statement. Not true. Our school did stop with a daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer shortly before we began the reading of a Treaty Acknowledgement Statement at the start of formal school events, but the one event did not cause the other. Hearing that neighbours held this misconception allowed me to understand some of the passion that fueled opposition to the simple statement of acknowledgment we had introduced.

I also gained insight from conversations in social settings about misconceptions in general surrounding Indigenous peoples' history and treaties in particular. There is an enormous lack of knowledge and understanding among many non-Indigenous Canadians. In fact, there is a great degree of harmful misinformation that is propagated. Hearing neighbours and community members share such remarks helped me to understand what students might be hearing at home and allowed me to be better prepared when discussing different topics at school. I will admit it was often difficult to listen to such remarks in the community. There is deep seated prejudice and racism that is not easily overcome. It is not always easy to engage in conversations with neighbours who stop over for coffee or community members who are seated across the table at a community event. These conversations, however, did help me to understand the perspectives of others within the community so that I might better be able to take up the challenge of dispelling myths and uncovering truths.

Of particular interest to me when I sat down to reflect up my dealings with parents in social settings was a study by Sara DeTurk (2011) on communication styles used by Allies when challenging racism and striving for social justice. There is a section in her findings where she

describes, quite effectively, my approach when addressing comments and questions in the grocery store or at events outside the school. I do not enjoy verbal arguments or debates. I tend to seek less confrontational approaches to dealing with others. DeTurk (2011) references two approaches used by the Allies in her study to deal with "interpersonal situations, which Allies perceive as requiring direct communicative responses to educate other agents in the fact of apparent prejudice, stereotypes, or discrimination" (p. 579). The first is "to leverage one's authority by asserting policy" (DeTurk 2011, p. 579) and the second is what she refers to as engaging in dialogue. She describes dialogue as "relying on nonjudgmental conversation to encourage others to think about social issues or to reconsider comments that seemed to denigrate particular groups of people" (DeTurk 2011, p. 579-580). I see myself using these two approaches. From the beginning, I have cited policy and used my authority in conversation with others to try and shift the conversation and challenge assumptions about Indigenous peoples. I have also, in more social situations, used the dialogue approach described by DeTurk. Rather than become confrontational or become involved in a debate, I have tried to understand where such comments come from and provide education rather than rebuke. Paraphrasing the Allies in her study, DeTurk (2011) states that:

> most Allies talked about gently challenging racist or homophonic remarks in subtle ways, taking care to listen, learn, avoid condescension, explain their own perspectives, and use questions and other open-ended conversation styles. In explaining this dialogic approach, Allies noted that they wanted to avoid making others angry, uneasy, or embarrassed – feelings that can turn against the Ally and entrench the person's original attitude. (p. 580)

I have often used this method when dealing with comments at the gas station.

I am also conscious of the fact that I can take this position precisely because of the white/Settler privilege that I enjoy. I do not have to speak out. I can choose to remain silent. That is my privilege as a white woman. I can opt out of conversations that create tension and unease. I can choose silence, however, choosing silence means affirming my privileged position in Settler society. It is a move to comfort that comes at a cost. As Irlbacher-Fox (2014) reminds us, "there is no pass in some situations because one may have been a model Ally in other situations. As with all things, consistency reflects a mindset and an embodied reality" (p. 153). To act or not to act is a privilege and if I am to continually question my own position within Settler colonial structures then I must use my privilege to speak whenever I can, even if I speak in a less confrontational way, I must still speak.

Guiding Parents Through the Tensions: Communication

The third question in my research focused on how a teacher/administrator can help guide parents through the tensions and questions that arise. The suggestions offered by parents provide important paths and directions for future work. Each of the key recommendations is presented here and I will spend more time exploring them in the next chapter.

The first important piece that came out of my research was the need to communicate openly and often with the parent community. In fact, the need to provide ongoing communication underlies many of the other suggestions for moving forward together. To address the lack of knowledge indicated by parents, to avoid the blindsiding that the school was accused of in the past, to maintain a level of comfort among parents with the work being done, there is a definite need to keep the parent community apprised of what their children were learning and doing when it comes to Indigenous history, knowledge and reconciliation. As the confusion over the introduction of our Treaty Acknowledgment statement revealed, a lack of

communication can lead to misunderstandings and negative parent/community reactions. It also allows misinformation about curriculum, content and activities to emerge. As discussions with some parents reveal, there is a great deal of concern and misinformation out there. Parents have expressed a "lack of confidence in the education system" (Fieldnotes, November 2018) and it has been suggested that "these changes will only compound the feeling that teachers and schools aren't teaching students the right things or the things they need to know" (Fieldnotes, November 2018).

As a result of what parents told me and what I observed, I tried to provide as much information as possible to my parent community. As mentioned before, this process of keeping parents informed often felt one-sided. I seemed to put a lot of information out there and I heard very little in return. This one way nature of communication left me wondering at times if people were still interested in the work we were doing, if anyone was reading the information I sent home, or if there was just a tacit acceptance or resignation to the inclusion of Indigenous topics and knowledge in our curriculum. At times I found this silence frustrating. It caused me to doubt my own actions and made me suspicious that a parent backlash was just around the corner. As interviews with parents revealed, this communication was much appreciated and sought after by our parent community. They asked for continued and ongoing communication as we move forward. The silence with which my communiques were often met was acknowledged by parents, but their request to provide information remains. The general consensus seemed to be that it is better to have the information out there even if people do not have time to read it.

> You guys here have definitely tried and been very open and said you are welcome to any
> questions and concerns and talks and stuff. And you had those meetings and then the
> ladies that were there had brochures and everything and numbers that you could call if

you had any questions and concerns. So I think it's more up to the individual…I mean

you guys have it there available. It's just on whether they want to know or not. Sadly

there's some people out there that they won't. (Meghan)

Keeping parents informed was revealed as one of the most important steps to maintain as we

move forward.

Guiding Parents Through the Tensions: Learning Opportunities

The second way in which, as a teacher and administrator, I can help parents to understand

the topics and issues we are taking up is to provide opportunities for parents to learn along with

and through their children. My field notes and reflections reveal how powerful it was to have

students participate in an inquiry process and then share their learning with parents and

community members at an open house. While the open house itself was a wonderful community

outreach activity, the day to day conversations that occurred between students and parents while

the projects were being researched and formulated were even more important. As students

engaged in their own learning, they went home talking about what they were uncovering. These

conversations, coupled with the information I shared as part of our communication plan, allowed

parents to explore, along with their children, the themes and questions we were pondering in

class. It was also apparent that, as children engaged in discussions with parents and family

members, differences of opinion and pieces of misinformation were exposed and taken up. On

several occasions a child would come to school and ask a question that had come out of a

conversation that had taken place at home. I recall one young lady who, shortly after we talked

about treaties and the government's fiduciary responsibilities came back to class asking about all

of the money and the handouts that Indigenous people receive from the government. I am

certain she heard this myth at home or in the community. As our Indigenous liaisons and I

helped students understand their questions and debunked certain myths, we gained a sense that explanations received in class were carried home to be shared with parents and family members.

In the interviews conducted with parents, multiple references were made to parents' desire to learn with their children so that they might discuss with their own children the topics being taken up in class. There were some parents who still expressed an interest in having time set aside for parent information nights, but most agreed that it is difficult to find a time when busy parents can commit to an extra school event. Rather, the idea of pairing parent learning with student learning and providing information to parents through their children and at school events which they and their children will already be attending was voiced as a very manageable and appreciated option. Reaching parents through their children, then, appeared as a very effective and well received strategy.

As the students are learning it, the more they're learning, generally, it'll often come up at home. I don't know how you'd encourage students to even…because if there is a stigma about it at home and the parents have different feelings…For the students….to say well this is what I learned in school and kind of stand up for what they learned… I like the ideas of the info nights and doing like the blanket ceremonies kind of like how the students did this and or are going to do this and so see what they're going to be learning. I think those are super valuable. (Bonnie)

Need to continue all that and especially for them to be able to see what work their students have put into it. These are the things…not just like this is something that my kid is reading but this is something that my child is creating about…if they can see things that their students are fully involved in…that have to do with the reconciliation and the teaching of the culture that needs to be restored. That would be good… So that would be

something I would encourage. Like just encouraging them to share the information.

(Michelle)

Guiding Parents Through the Tensions: Respectful Tone

I also found that I needed to demonstrate a respectful tone in addressing some of the myths and misguided ideas held by parents and students. By that I mean I had to acknowledge these beliefs and respectfully untangle the arguments behind them. I think again of the different times that students and parents worried about or struggled with the issue of land and ownership. Discussions of treaties and land claims often provoked a defensiveness and a fear that the hard work of European ancestors who moved to Canada to build farms and build new communities would be negated. I found that it was always best to acknowledge the hard work of their ancestors and the difficulties that they faced in building new lives in a new country. I myself share this same family history and I am proud of the endurance my great-grandparents demonstrated. I shared this view with parents and students and then I would talk about how, while there were many hardships for my family to overcome, there were also many systems put in place to see that they succeeded. Yes, they struggled to survive from year to year. Yes, they faced discrimination because of their ethnic identity. Yes, their children learned English and, through a process of acculturation, became more and more "Canadian." There were pieces of heritage lost and prosperity gained in return. Along the way there were challenges, but, ultimately, the system was set up to see them emerge prosperous, well educated, and privileged as Settlers within the Settler colonial system. In such conversations with parents and students, I did not deny the amazing contributions of families with European backgrounds to the development of our community. I did not belittle their efforts either. These histories are to be celebrated, but there is also a need to more accurately understand the context in which these

stories took place. This is what I tried to explain. There is a need to recognize that systemic supports, however minimal they may have seemed at times, were put in place to assist Settlers in their struggle. For Indigenous peoples, the system was set up to have exactly the opposite impact.

Similarly, I was always conscious of the position that students would be in when potentially presented with one piece of information at school and something very different at home. I would never want to do harm to any of the students in my classroom and it was not my goal to cause strife or friction between school and home so that the child felt caught in the middle, but there were times when students were undoubtedly faced with contradictory information. My goal was to provide a safe and supportive environments where discussions about such contradictory information could take place. As I noted in my reflective journal, "What is interesting, as students take up these topics, are the reactions of students which reveal conversations and experiences beyond the classroom" (Reflective Journal, March 2019). One young girl brought up a conversation she overheard involving an extended family member and the disparaging way in which this particular family member spoke about people of colour. On another occasion I recall a student struggling to think of ways that racism might manifest itself in Canada. She had written about slavery in the United States and the ongoing struggles of Black people in America, but she could not think of a Canadian example of racism. I asked her to think about what might happen if she, a young white girl, was in a story and a young Indigenous man was also in the store and something was stolen. Who did she think would be the first person suspected of the crime? She immediately thought it would be the young Indigenous male who was suspected. Our conversation continued and was overheard by another student in the room. She came over and volunteered examples of how she had heard her uncles and other family

members talk about Indigenous people. She expressed how uncomfortable this kind of talk made her feel. She also explained that her family talks this way about people from other countries and visible minorities as well. She said she leaves or avoids these conversations when they happen. This led to a long conversation about how it is not easy to speak up or stand up to our elders when they are saying such things. This incident and others like it reminded me of the position youth may find themselves in, and the need to respectfully and tactfully help them understand the racist nature of what they may be hearing without destroying important family relationships. As a teacher, I needed to support students thinking, and also help them learn to navigate the tensions and debunk the myths they may encounter without sounding judgmental or condescending.

While there is no step-by-step guide to becoming a Settler Ally, educating oneself is most certainly a fundamentally important step along the way. The fact that parents want to know what their children are learning provides an opportunity to share information with our school community, information that can begin and extend the unsettling of Settler assumptions. While some parents may respond to the information sent home with silence or anger, it is still better to share the information, to provide opportunities for education. As Lorenzo Veracini (2010) explains in his overview of Settler Colonialism, decolonization requires either the departure of the Settler colonial presence, the denial of the Settler state as characteristic of the polity and the complete invisibility of the Indigenous, or some form of Settler/Indigenous reconciliation. This path to reconciliation is, as yet, unwritten. A new narrative is needed. We cannot begin to envision a different future until we understand the true nature of our past and our present situation. In communicating with parents what their children are learning about treaties, about residential schools, about Indigenous history and Indigenous knowledge, we can begin to shape a new narrative.

My Own Navigating of the Tensions: Striving to be a Settler Ally

My fourth and final research question was how do I, as a non-Indigenous administrator, teacher, and community member, navigate the tensions and questions that arise both on a personal and professional level. What are the challenges to address? What information is helpful for me and for parents? What role do I play as a teacher, a community member, and the principal? Where can I turn for support in this process? What do I have to be willing to do and not do? What, if any, compromises do I have to be willing to live with? There are many things that haunted me through this process and continue to haunt me as my journey progresses.

To begin with the challenges, this was lonely work. There were many times I realized that, had I chosen to stop making a conscious effort to include Indigenous knowledge in our classrooms, the work would likely have come to an end and few would have spoken out. At times I felt like no one else had this on their radar. I felt I was a lone voice. Then, something would happen. A student would talk about how excited he was that we were learning about Métis jigging in gym class, and that he could not wait to go home and share what he was learning with his mom. In fact, he asked if she could come to school and watch us dance. Or a colleague from another school in our district would talk about the work she was doing to try to include more Indigenous stories in her classroom library. I would be reminded that this work is important.

The change of government in Alberta in April of 2019 also fueled many of my concerns about the lonely and unsupported nature of this work. In 2015, following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, there was a wave of interests and action that swept across the country. Alberta's newly elected New Democratic Party (NDP) government supported many actions in the name of reconciliation as did the federal government. Curriculum changes were in

the works. New Teacher Quality Standards (TQS) and Leadership Quality Standards (LQS) were drawn up with Indigenous Foundational Knowledge featuring prominently in the requirements for teaching and leading our schools. Our parents wanted to learn more about the topics of reconciliation and Indigenous knowledge inclusions within our school. With the passage of time, however, the shine and enthusiasm seemed to wane. Then, the provincial election was called in the spring of 2019. I remember writing the feelings of trepidation and doubt that went along with the following entry in my reflective journal:

> When we first began talking about Indigenous history and knowledge inclusion, when we first started with our acknowledgment statements, comments about "this is because of Trudeau" came out or "this is because of Notley." How does that change with a new government? I was even told, when we began this work, that it would be easier to bring in a GSA [Gay-Straight Alliance] at our school than to include Indigenous history and knowledge. And Jason Kenney's UCP's [United Conservative Party] have promised to repeal legislation about GSA's as soon as they are elected. So what happens to the government promise to include and promote and foster Indigenous knowledge in our schools? If a different government is elected, am I on thinner ground? Does support for this focus dry up? It will certainly give more credibility to [some] voices of my community. Our riding did not go NDP last time and will not go NDP this time. We are, all in all, a more socially conservative area. With social conservatives on the resurgence politically, how will the work that I am trying to do be affected? (Reflective Journal, March 2019).

As we know, the UCP did win the April 2019 election and one of the first things they did was to put curriculum changes on hold and make the reading of Treaty Acknowledgment statements optional.

What I realized as I went through this work, is that I needed to find a community of practice, so I did not feel like the lone voice. I needed to find like-minded people with whom I could share ideas and struggles. As I mentioned earlier, I was fortunate, in the spring of 2019, to learn of a leadership cohort put together by the Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium that brought together school leaders to share their work and to tour each other's schools. In the absence of vocal support from my school community or even government support for the work being done, it was essential to have a support group. The leadership cohort allowed for the sharing of strategies and frustrations while working to build Indigenous foundational knowledge within our different school communities. I also gained a great deal of confidence and strength from the Think Indigenous Conference held in March of 2019. It was another opportunity to gather together with people who share the same passion and desire to see changes brought about in our schools. The insights shared and the conversation around the role of Allies was very much appreciated. Finding that support network and reaching out to others doing the same work in different schools, was a necessary activity for me.

Making connections was essential, but it was also another one of the challenges and tensions that I found it difficult to navigate during this research project. As articulated earlier, I struggled in this whole process with the fact that this is not my story to tell. Sharing someone else's knowledge puts me in the position of a cultural appropriator. I also became frustrated with my failed attempts to build more bridges between my school community and our Indigenous neighbours. Through discussion with parents, I found that the work we were doing

in our school and with our community was appreciated by many and that, while we may not have made large, sweeping changes, the idea that we had begun and we were making slow progress was most important. In fact, I came to believe that a slower pace was more comfortable for some of our families. I also came to firmly believe that it was better to engage in conversations of Indigenous history and knowledge than to be silent on the matter. I am not an authority on Indigenous foundational knowledge, but it is better to make attempts to share what I have learned than to have our students and our parent community continue on without exposure to Indigenous stories, histories and ways of knowing. Our parents expressed repeatedly that their hope for a better future lies in their children.

> Students are so much more accepting to what they're learning about. Generally, if they come with a snarky comment or something, it's not coming from them. It's from what they've heard from other adults. Helping change those stigmas is good. (Bonnie)
>
> Well we have to start with this generation, right, of trying to change their ways and their thinking because previous generations have had lots of hostility. (Connie)
>
> And people often aren't willing to dialogue…which… fine, at least we're teaching the students…That's the only way you can do it because you can't make people be what you want them to be. And I think that's OK. I think it's hard to change…But you can teach your children and you can teach other peoples' children too. (Michelle)

As a result of these sentiments, I came to believe that, even if I could not always have an Elder come into the school or a Knowledge Keepers, that it was better to continue having discussions with students and parents. Some conversation and learning is better than no conversation and learning. Being clear about my limitations as a non-Indigenous person was also important, but

dialogue trumps silence. So while it may be an uncomfortable position to be in, I needed to keep teaching and students needed to keep learning.

There is a role for Allies to play in changing Indigenous – non-Indigenous relations. In fact, I came to believe, through this research, that Allies are needed because non-Indigenous people can speak to non-Indigenous people in a way that an Indigenous person cannot. I share with many of the people in my community a similar ancestry, a similar position of privilege, and a similar school experience. In conversation with parents, I admitted that I did not learn Indigenous history in school either. I did not learn about treaties or systemic racism. These are things I came to understand as an adult. I struggle with the discomfort of reconciling my family history with the larger Canadian context. I feel uncomfortable with my own privileged position and some of the assumptions that spring unbidden into my head before conscious thought reminds me of the misinformation and racism behind such ideas. The background I share with people in my community makes me the ideal person to do this work. At times, it is extremely uncomfortable work, but, again, it is better to have conversations than continue in silence.

Dealing with silence in terms of feedback from community members was also a challenge that I learned to live with. So many of the things I sent home were met with silence. Events that I spent weeks organizing and planning were attended by small numbers of people. Even the projects that students worked so hard to complete were viewed with reticence in many cases. In the face of this apparent indifference, I often felt discouraged. Conversations with individual parents, however, did reveal the importance of both continual communication and persistent efforts to reach and engage the school community. "Inviting people and having these things and expecting very little turnout but still doing them because, you know, that's the truth of it. But hopefully people will start having open conversations" (Sharon). It is with this hope of

continued dialogue that continued communication and sharing of information became important. Even in the face of silence, information needed to be shared.

> You can only do what you can do. And you can only communicate as much as people want to communicate. So some people read their newsletters and some people don't. Some people use the agendas and some people don't…So I think that just the continued communication…continuing to teach the students and continuing to communicate. (Michelle)
>
> There'll be people who won't read it but I think there's people out there that would read it. Sometimes if you just hear, "Oh, they did this at school," after the fact…people get upset. Whereas if it was beforehand and explained to them… (Bonnie)

Persisting through the loneliness, the discomfort and the silence is necessary.

Continuing to navigate the tensions is meaningful work. The importance of this work was made very clear to me when one of my students talked about how excited she was to share part of her Métis culture with the class and see her Métis heritage celebrated within our classroom. Its importance was made clear to me when I listened to a grade one student tell his parents about how many Indigenous people lost their language at residential schools and how they are now learning their languages again. Its importance was made clear to me when one of my interview participants told me that she herself had just recently learned that family members had attended residential schools and that she was learning through and with her children as they learned in school. "[I]f I can't explain something, it's good that they're learning it throughout school too, which is great. I've learned lots too…More than I knew even. More than what was taught. So it's good" (Shawna). There are so many ways in which the small steps we introduced caused small changes in thinking and understanding; parents who told me they

wanted to learn more because they had not learned this, parents who told me they know more

now that they did before; parents who told me they want to keep learning with their children.

For these reasons, it is necessary to navigate the tensions and live with the discomfort.

Chapter 7: Lessons Learned and Next Steps

The Honourable Murray Sinclair, in referring to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, stated that "it is precisely because education was the primary tool of oppression of Aboriginal people, and miseducation of all Canadians, that we have concluded that education holds the key to reconciliation" (Sinclair, 2014, p.7). Within my school community I have begun the conversation and started the work, but there is so much more to do. When I reflect on the changes introduced in my school over the past five years, they seem minimal. There is certainly more awareness of Indigenous history, specifically the history of residential schooling and the role of treaties in settling the west. Elements of Indigenous knowledge have also been incorporated into parts of our curriculum and there is far more willingness on the part of teachers and students to talk about Indigenous – Settler relations both past and present. Perhaps most importantly, there is a base-level of knowledge amongst our student body that was not there before. By that I mean, that when I engage in conversations with students about residential schooling, treaties, the Indian Act, racism, and reconciliation, students have some prior knowledge of these topics. Unlike their parents, who did not learn about such things in school, our students are gaining a beginning understanding of Indigenous – Settler history and colonial relationships.

I have also noted that students who self-identify as Indigenous seem more confident in sharing their identity with non-Indigenous classmates. Indigeneity is something to be proud of in our school. I do not pretend that racism and stereotyping have been eliminated within our school community. Children still come to school with misinformation and prejudiced views of others. The mythologies of Settler society remain firmly rooted in our society. Changing the Settler

narrative requires hard work and ongoing commitment, but I do honestly believe that a shift, however small, has begun.

As conversations with parents revealed, there are those who support this work and those who question it. But the parents I spoke with, whether supportive of the work or not, acknowledged that Canadian society is changing. As the brief overview of history in chapter one suggested, momentum for the recognition of Indigenous rights and reconciliation continues to grow with each passing decade. As an educator and a Settler in this land, I have a role to play in questioning Settler assumptions and privilege, and in articulating a different narrative as we rethink how we live together.

What Parents Asked For: Education and Communication

As fellow teachers and administrators look at this work, the need for and importance of both education and communication are clear. The parents I interviewed wanted to be able to learn what their children were learning and at the same time. They expressed a desire to learn alongside their child in order to be better able to engage with their child when discussing school work. As actions were taken in the school, and as students and staff navigated new learning, parents asked to be kept informed of the content and materials encountered. Parents wanted to know, before their children came home with questions or comments, what their children would be learning and when. Part of this desire to know came from parents who wanted to be kept abreast of their child's learning so that they could engage in conversations with their child and support their child's learning at home. Part of this desire to know came from parents and community members who wanted to avoid the confusion and tension they felt when first encountering this new knowledge about Indigenous – Settler relations. Part of this desire to know also came from parents who wanted to be able to discuss with their child those counter-

narratives learned in school from their own perspective. As decolonizing and Indigenizing efforts continued in our school, education and communication became a foundational part of the work.

The biggest challenge I encountered when starting the process of unsettling Settler mythology, introducing Indigenous history, and beginning the process of Indigenizing content was this lack of knowledge on the part of parents and community members about Indigenous peoples and the history of Indigenous – Settler relations in Canada. Coupled with this lack of knowledge, there was often misinformation or inaccurate information that had to be addressed. For educators, parents, and community members there is a great deal of unlearning and relearning that needs to take place. All those who grew up exposed only to the mythologies of Settler society lack knowledge of Indigenous - Settler history. Along with questions about what their children were learning came questions about why their children were being expected to learn this information. As conversation with parents revealed, some found the "why" in moral and ethical arguments, some found the "why" once they themselves had a chance to learn about past Indigenous - Settler relations, and others found the "why" in the need to prepare their children for a different social context, one they may not agree with, but one that their children will inhabit.

Inviting parents to an open house where students shared their Reconciliation Projects was a powerful tool for parent learning. Throughout the school year, some students may have shared with parents what they were learning in our Sky Science Unit about Anishinaabe, Cree and Dene stories of the constellations (Canadian Heritage Information Network, 2003). They may have shared parts of our Social Studies classes where we learned, like all grade 6 students in Alberta, about the Haudenosaunee People and the system of democracy they established long before the

arrival of Europeans, and continue to practice today (Pearson Education Canada, 2008). They may have talked about our novel studies of Indigenous literature (Brissenden & Loyie, 2003; Jordan-Fenton & Pokiak-Fenton, 2010), but it was the Reconciliation Projects, in which students began researching a number of topics centering on the themes of Indigenous – non-Indigenous history, Indigenous ways of knowing, and reconciliation (District School Board of Niagara, n.d.; Miles, Vamvalis & Woytuck, n.d.) that were most effective. These visual displays, which were then placed in our school gym for all to see on the evening of our Parent-Student-Teacher Interviews, were powerful tools for parent and community education.

It was most interesting to observe parent-student interactions as the children shared what they had learned with their families. By having children share what they are learning with a larger parent/community audience, important information about those narratives and histories too long silenced could be shared. Parents seemed far more willing to learn from their own children. When a child has put time and effort into creating something, most parents are keen to take the time to listen. In the end, they may choose to disagree with or question the information shared, but at least the conversation continues as does the unsettling of Settler society, if only momentarily. This is, in fact, what parents asked for. In my interviews with parents, I asked what parents would like administration and teachers to do to help them navigate the tensions associated with the decolonizing and Indigenizing work within the school. One of the most important things they asked for was information. They want to be able to engage in conversations with their children when they come home from school talking about language loss (Florence, 2017), treaties (Bird, 2018), Turtle Island and the 13 moons of the year (London & Bruchac, 1992), and legends of Wesakechak (Booth & Bouchard, 2015). This parental desire to learn, and the recognition that children can be conduits through which information is shared, has

given rise to an important strategy for education within our school community. Parents can learn

through their children or in parallel with their children. Instead of organizing specific parent

events which may be poorly attended, the idea of having open house events where children share

their own learning with their family members has proven more effective.

What Parents Asked For: A Respectful Tone

Although it was not always articulated in this way, parents also asked for a respectful

tone on the part of school staff when taking up issues of privilege, racism, and misinformation in

the classroom. The point of the work being done in our school was not to be confrontational and

demeaning of those members of the community who held different beliefs. Yes, the goal was to

question those assumptions and engage in anti-racism education while unsettling Settler

mythologies and uncovering misconceptions and misinformation surround Indigenous - Settler

relations. That was certainly the goal, but the process, in my experience, falls apart when it

becomes confrontational. Rather, parents, staff, and students needed to feel safe in exploring

their position, their privilege, their assumptions and their biases. Racism needed to be uncovered

and discussed so that attitudes might begin to change and systemic oppression could be

examined. All of these things needed to happen, but an adversarial environment and a climate of

judgement, would not have furthered these efforts. As a Settler, I am in a position to lead others

through the process of self-examination and soul-searching. When I reflect upon my own

coming to understand, the process was painful. Realizing certain things about myself and my

family history was disturbing. I continue to face my own shortcomings even as this research

project draws to a close, but I have always been able to do this in a supportive environment.

Extending this same respectful and understanding tone to parents became and remains an

important part of the process. We have been miseducated and undoing that wrong takes time. It

takes repeated conversations and reflection. It is a difficult process. Understanding that, respecting that, and supporting that process, is what educators need to do with their parent communities.

Working through the Reconciliation Projects with students, it was evident that conversations about the content being learned at school did also take place at home. More than once, students would come to back school with questions about something they had heard in the community or something they had learned at home and the way in which these pieces of information did not always agree with each other. Learning at school about unfulfilled treaty obligations and government underfunding and then hearing in the community that Indigenous people get free housing and free education can be confusing. Learning at school that treaties were used to clear the land for European settlement and then hearing at home about the free and empty land that was not being used and was just waiting for people to come and put it to good use can be confusing. Learning at school about intergenerational trauma and then hearing racist comments in the community about Indigenous peoples can be confusing. Taking up these conversations became an important part of the learning in the classroom, and it provided further motivation for the ongoing communication between school and home, if for no other reason than to continue the unsettling of entrenched misconceptions and stereotypes.

In addressing the contradictions students encountered as they learned about Indigenous history and Indigenous – Settler, a respectful tone was extremely important. It was important to address misinformation learned at home or in the community in a tactful way. I chose to counter myths and misunderstandings by presenting different information and reminding students and parents that what was taught in the past was not accurate, that important parts of our history have

not been told and that, as we learn the truth and fill in the gaps, our understandings of the world we inhabit will need to change.

I think again of the stories of Settlers and explorers that parents worry will be erased from our curriculum and replaced with stories of treaties and Indigenous dispossession. In the interviews I conducted with parents and in informal conversations as well, I was asked if stories of Settlers would be replaced and only stories of Indigenous histories would be told. There was concern that the pendulum would swing completed from only a Settler version of history to only an Indigenous version of history. My response was that both sets of stories need to be told, and that they need to be told together so that the interplay between them is fully understood. The story of settlement is linked to the story of dispossession and both need to be told.

I am reminded here of a conversation with one of my own family members about the struggles faced by our ancestors when they came from Ukraine to Canada. He argued that, like Indigenous peoples, our ancestors were assimilated into European culture. Through education, they became more and more westernized in order to fit into their new environment. There are stories of how his grandmother, for example, would not allow her children to speak Ukrainian in their home because the expectation was that they would need to know English in order to be successful in their lives. As a result, the ability to speak the Ukrainian language was lost for his father and for himself. In drawing parallels between school as an assimilating force and the loss of language, he was demonstrating a move to innocence (Tuck and Yang, 2012); trying to down play the role of our ancestors as Settlers to absolve himself of feelings of guilt, perhaps. What he failed to appreciate, is that while our ancestors no doubt faced struggles and discrimination, while they did find themselves needing to assimilate to fit in, they did so by choice. Moreover, the entire system was set up to see that, in spite of the hardships and difficulties, they succeeded

at their endeavours to build a farm, raise a family and become contributing members of society.

And, at the same time that the system was specifically set up to see that they were successful, it

worked to ensure that others were systematically dispossessed and oppressed. Like many other

Canadians, my family member believed the myth of free and empty land, and the power of

Settlers to individually overcome struggles and build a new life. What he and so many other

Settler Canadians still fail to see or refuse to see are the systemic supports that worked and

continue to work to their advantage, while exacting a horrendous cost from the original

inhabitants of this place for those "free lands." Reckoning with our own understandings of

history is an extremely painful process.

In all of my conversations with parents and community members, I tried to be respectful

and to listen. As discussed earlier, I tried to be non-confrontational. I have always found that

confrontation closes doors to conversations. I acknowledge that I am guilty of abiding by the

rules of engagement outlined by Robin Diangelo (2018) in her writings on "White Fragility and

the Rules of Engagement." She writes about how that first rule of engagement is to not engage.

Do not bring up topics of racism and, in this case, Settler privilege. If you must break this rule,

and engage in such conversations, Diangelo lays out ten additional rules constraining

conversations with white people about racism and privilege. Included in these rules are things

like having a proper tone, having a relationship of trust before such conversations can occur,

preserving feelings of safety during the conversation, and being as indirect as possible. All of

these rules help to "obscure racism, protect white dominance, and regain white equilibrium"

(Diangelo, 2018, p. 124). It is true that in choosing to take the tone I do I am gently shaking the

ground under Settlers' feet rather than creating the transformative upheaval that some would

argue is more effective.

There are those who may argue that my quiet tone is wrong, that racist ideas and Settler colonial myths should be loudly argued against. I do agree with challenging such notions, but I am also cognizant of the fact that I work with children. I would never disparage parents in front of children. As many of my conversations with parents took place through their children, I was ever aware of the fact that my critiques needed to be phrased in such a way that students and parents felt comfortable and willing to listen to alternate explanations and information. Children repeat what they hear. The misconceptions that students bring to the classroom require careful untangling, and parents asked that this be done in a respectful manner. It does not work to simply say that Mom and Dad are wrong. Likewise, it is not helpful to explain that Mom and Dad are operating under a set of assumptions about both themselves and others that do not accurately take into account generations of Settler colonial privilege and oppression. Rather, an age appropriate, respectful and meaningful counter-explanation of facts is required. So, when comments were made about Indigenous people getting free housing or being exempt from taxes, a conversation about the facts and myths behind those assumptions needed to occur. It is my hope that such conversations will help to shift not only the thinking of the student in my class but also those with whom that child chooses to share this information. It is, admittedly, a watered down approach, however, to paraphrase the Honorable Murray Sinclair, education got us into this mess and education can lead us out.

I am cognizant of the fact that parental requests for the school to approach difficult topics in a respectful manner may well relate to the desire to avoid those feelings of discomfort or of being unsettled that go along with conversations about Settler Colonialism, Settler privilege and decolonization. As Diangelo (2018) explains, "it is far more common for sincere white people to agonize over when and how to give feedback to a fellow white person, given the ubiquity of

white fragility" (p. 125). It is, for me, difficult to engage in these conversations, but I feel a moral imperative to do so. So I choose to do so in a less confrontational manner, but I still choose to speak. I choose to use the means available to me to make what little difference I can, and I do continue to work on my courage to speak more loudly. To quote Diangelo (2018) one last time:

> Interrupting racism [Settler Colonialism] takes courage and intentionality; the interruption is by definition not passive or complacent. So in answer to the question "Where do we go from here?" I offer that we must never consider ourselves finished with our learning. (p. 153)

For me, it is important to keep the conversation alive and to keep the dialogue going. There are quieter ways to take up these difficult topics. One way in which I have done this in the past is through the use of stories. Sharing the *Braiding History* stories written by Susan and Michael Dion, for example, is a less confrontational way of potentially opening up a conversation. While these stories were written with grade 7 to 12 students in mind, they can certainly be shared with parents as a way to provoke, as Susan Dion explains, "an awareness of their involvement in, and desire to maintain, an understanding of history that supports the 'forgetting' of conditions of injustice (both past and continuing)" (Dion 2004, p. 74). Dion (2004) goes on to articulate that:

> The need to deny history in an attempt to maintain an honourable sense of self is powerful, and the methods are deeply embedded in the dominant stories of Canadian historiography. Relying on a series of mechanism…the *Braiding Histories* stories engage readers in difficult learning…intended to enable our readers to not only recognize the limits of their knowledge, but to recognize what of themselves is tied up with their

understanding of the history and contemporary substance of Canadian-First Nations

relationships. (p. 74)

Rather than engage in a confrontational debate or argument, sharing stories, calmly responding

to questioning and providing a safe space to explore contradictory information have been more

effective strategies for me, and they have provides parents with the respectful tone they have

asked for.

The Questions and Tensions

Educators will also find it beneficial to remember that, in addition to the lack of

knowledge, need for communication and call for a respectful tone identified by participants,

parents often spoke about being uncomfortable when addressing topics surrounding this work.

They talked about being uncomfortable with the information they were learning. Information

about treaties, relocation, residential schools and cultural genocide brought up questions of

privilege and position in Settler society. While the wording and terminology may not have been

used, parents struggled with the unsettling of their Settler identity. Feelings of guilt were

expressed. Feelings of anger and hostility were also present. Reconciling their own family

histories on the land with Indigenous land claims also brought discomfort, as they did in the

story above about my own family member. Fear that the hard work of their ancestors would be

undone created anger and hostility. Dion (2005) correctly argues that:

Recognition of the post-contact experiences of First Nations people requires Canadians to

acknowledge not only our [Indigenous] place, but their relationship with us in the

constitution of their histories and cultures in both national and individual identities.

Canadian have told and retold themselves a particular story; hearing our stories disrupts

their understanding of themselves." (p. 59)

It is this disruption that is so uncomfortable and, for many of the parents and community member with whom I engaged, there was a strong desire to move from this place of discomfort to a more familiar and comfortable state of being. Here is where the hard work comes in. There is no easy out and efforts to simply apologize and return to normal reveal a desire to remain in a place of privilege. Helping parents to see this and understand this is also an important part of the work to be done. Revealing and understanding those moves to innocence as identified by Tuck and Yang (2012) can be useful in helping parents understand the many deep rooted ways in which Settler colonialism has permeated society and individual identity.

A number of parents also expressed discomfort with the racism and misinformation they encountered when discussing Indigenous peoples and history within the community. Racism is deeply rooted in Canadian society and challenging racist attitudes is not easy. The hope is that our children will grow up to be more open and accepting than past generations, but this will only happen if education helps to open their eyes. Unsettling Settler mythology is an uncomfortable process and it challenges parents and educators to examine their own positionality, a process that is not easy or painless. To once again reference Dion (2004):

> Canadians "refuse to know" that the racism that fueled colonization was a result of a system which benefits all non-Aboriginal people, not just the European settlers of long ago. The refusal to know is comforting' it supports and understanding of racism as an act of individuals and not a system. It creates a barrier allowing Canadians to resist confronting the country's racist past and the extent to which the past lives inside its present deep in the national psyche. The need to deny racism in Canada's past resurfaces again and again in its present. (p. 58)

The discomfort associated with this soul searching and questioning can lead to paralyzing guilt for some, and hostility toward disrupting forces for others, but it can also lead to change in attitude and action. Here is an opportunity for educators to delve into anti-racism educational practices with parents or those transformative education practices referred to by Curry-Stevens (2007). Again, the need to continually reexamine privilege and prejudice emerges. As a young woman, I came to see that Canada is not the racism-free country that I believed it was. With the help of friends who shared their stories with me, I came to see the multicultural image of Canada in a different light. Leading parents on a similar journey of discovery, with the help of those we experience racism on a daily basis, is another important part of the work to be done.

Related to this feeling of discomfort, parents often asked about the future directions of decolonizing and Indigenizing education. Many parents wanted to know what we do next. What is the path, the fix, the solution? What do Indigenous peoples want us to do to make this better to make this different?   Sometimes this question came from a desire to move out of discomfort, to repair damage done and return to a level of comfort knowing that a difference had been made. We will teach our children and things will be different. While I do hold out hope for a different future and see the role our children will play in shaping a different path, providing our children with education about the history of Indigenous - Settler relations is not enough. It is a beginning. What is required goes far beyond the classroom and reaches into hearts and minds, and societal structures and governmental systems. There is no simple fix. For some of the parents who asked this question, there was concern that Indigenous - Settler relations would be the next fad. It would be a topic of discussion for a year or two and then drift again to the back burner to be once again forgotten and ignored. Keeping the discussion going and the conversation alive, although it is uncomfortable, was seen as important. There were also those parents who asked this

question from a place of frustration. Hearing narratives change and feeling targeted as Settlers, some parents asked what Indigenous people want. What does the future look like for Indigenous - Settler relations? How do we reconcile? When will Indigenous people be satisfied? Fear and anger fuel such comments. It is not easy to look at one's position, one's privilege. These questions speak more to doubts about one's own legitimacy than they do to demands made by Others. How will Settlers come to address their positionality? What will be required to reshape Indigenous - Settler relations and create a just society? As parents asked these questions, I did not have a definitive answer. Imagining a different future is difficult.

I do have hopes for the direction of education. I return to the idea of hospitality (Kuokkanen, 2007) as articulated in chapter two, and the epistemic pluralism that Indigenization implies. I think again of the relationality described by Aparicio & Blaser (2009) where knowledges intertwine and are seen as "diverse threads weaving themselves into a tapestry. In this context, knowledge is conceived not as an isolated 'thing,' extracted out of a context, but rather as the emergent result of communal effort" (p.78). In holding space for Indigenous knowledge, something I have not truly managed to do within my own school, all students will benefit and we may come to the point where the "Two-Eye Seeing" described by Elder Albert Marshall enriches the lives of all students. Described by Elder Marshall (Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall, 2012), Two-Eyed Seeing is that system of knowing where "people familiar with both knowledges systems can uniquely combine the two in various ways to meet a challenge or task at hand" (Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall, 2012, p. 331). It is a weaving together of different epistemologies to create new threads of understanding. To come to this point, there is a great deal of decolonizing and Indigenizing work still to be done.

As Mitchell, Thomas and Smith (2018) argue, decolonization is an ongoing and relational

process:

> one that requires individuals to commit to a personal and ongoing process of self-reflection and decolonization and a lifetime of commitment to decolonizing the self, curriculum, research topics, process, and education spaces in tandem with a commitment to engage in partnership with Indigenous People in the indigenization of curriculum, methodologies and spaces. (p. 360)

They go on to state that this ongoing process is based on four principles, four principles which I find extremely helpful as guidelines for the next steps I take with my school community. First, there is the idea that decolonization progresses from conscientization to action. Setters must begin by understanding history and those myths of Settler society. This is a step that we have begun in my community, although there is much work still to be done. Mitchell, Thomas and Smith (2018) go on to argue that decolonization must also be informed by an Indigenous lens/worldview. I have struggled, as already indicated, with this step, but, going forward, this becomes an even bigger piece of the project. While I have a role to play in addressing Settlers' misconceptions about themselves and their stories, there is not road forward without Indigenous peoples. The third principle for Mitchell, Thomas and Smith (2018) is that decolonization transforms policy, curricula, and institutional spaces, and finally, principle four, is that decolonization interrupts colonial power dynamics. In presenting these four principles, Mitchell, Thomas and Smith have given me a guideline for what the future of this work might involve in my classroom and within my school community. While continuing with Settler self-examination, we move on to greater disruption of curriculum and institutional spaces, all while working to listen and hold space for Indigenous voices and direction.

Changes in Education

I am hopeful that, as teachers and administrators in Alberta work to implement new curriculum and address the requirements of the TRC's Calls to Action, the promises outlined in the most recent Ministerial Order from Alberta Education (August 2020) and Alberta's Teacher and Leadership Quality Standards, the mandate for decolonizing and Indigenizing education will be championed. Providing all students with an education that challenges Settler mythologies and creates space for Indigenous epistemologies is no longer optional. Each teacher, each administrator, each jurisdiction will take up this work in their own way. As educators strive to meet the requirements of the new curriculum and of societal shifts, there will be questions about how to address those tensions and questions that arise. In particular, there will be a need to address parent and community questions. Such conversations are difficult. What I have shared is my experience with this work and one possible way in which to work with parents toward decolonizing and Indigenizing our classrooms.

When I first set out to decolonize and Indigenize within our school, I had a vision of where I wanted to go and the first steps I would undertake to get there. As the work progressed, my focus shifted to include, not just the students within the school, but also their parents and members of the community at large as well. What I came to realize was that the work of decolonizing and Indigenizing could not stop at the school's front door. We cannot truly decolonize and Indigenize education, creating a space of hospitality and epistemic pluralism without reshaping the institution and addressing the larger societal structures of Settler colonialism. Parental concerns cannot simply be dismissed. Parents need to examine their own understandings or misunderstandings of history and of Indigenous – Settler relations. In the context of my school, not all parents wanted to be a part of this process, but, for those who chose

to engage, supporting changes within the school and within education meant learning stories and examining narratives that they had never been taught or that had been incomplete in their scope.

As a member of this community, I knew that people would question and challenge the different narrative being presented in our school. I knew people held strong beliefs about Indigenous people and Indigenous communities. I knew that there would be prejudice and misinformation to counter. What I failed to understand is that citing policy initiatives, referring to the work of the Truth and Reconciliations Commission and its Calls to Actions, even drawing on government actions such as the Formal Apology to Residential School Survivors in 2008, did not provide for parents a justification or explanation of what I was up to within the school. What I naively assumed was that if I provided sufficient justification in the form of policies and precedents everyone would see the work I was undertaking as important and necessary on the face of it.

Making changes to curriculum and what we teach in school about Indigenous peoples and about Indigenous – Settler relations requires a deep and close examination of assumptions and incomplete narratives on the part of non-Indigenous teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. As I quickly found out, the work we do in our classrooms is not done in a vacuum. While parents often commented on how the hope for a better future lies in our children, there is also a larger societal and systematic conversation needs to be a part of the conversation moving forward. Parents, community members, and educators all need to be a part of these larger conversations.

Decolonizing is not a once-and-done, type of process. We cannot learn some history, ask a few questions about our positionality, and consider this work of decolonizing our hearts and minds complete. To again quote Dénommé-Welch & Montero (2014), "it takes more than

simply learning to say 'miigwetch' or acknowledging the history behind North American thanksgiving holiday traditions to make this learning meaningful, relevant and transformative" (p. 145). There is a deeper, prolonged, painful reexamining and accounting that needs to happen. It is up to educators to continually examine the work they do with a decolonizing lens. "Of course it is not simple to ask these questions, nor is it simple to answer them, particularly when it comes at the cost of questioning the entire fabric of our educational system that our country prides itself on" (Dénommé-Welch & Montero 2014, p. 145). Ongoing conversations with ourselves as educators and with parents and community members are a vital part of the process.

This work of decolonizing and Indigenizing is further complicated by the fact that there is not one set path. There is no already written script to follow. Instead, there is a messy set of circumstances full of twists and turns and successes and failures. The key is to be flexible, to adapt and keep moving forward. I am reminded of the final words in Lorenzo Veracini's theoretical overview of Settler Colonialism (2010). "Discontinuing Settler colonial forms requires conceptual frames and supporting narratives of reconciliation that have yet to be fully developed and narrated" (Lorenzo 2010, p. 115). Finding a path forward will require continued effort, and a willingness to restart, shift gears, and respond to changing circumstances.

Spy Dénommé-Welch asks very important questions with regards to decolonizing work in schools and in society:

What does this look like beyond the context of the academy or the walls of a classroom? What does the work of de/colonizing actually look like on the streets, in community housing, or in public spaces where the layers of colonial structures overshadow these realities? How do we move beyond the loftiness of these words and begin considering the

realities of how oppression works and what it actually feels like to live it? (Dénommé-

Welch & Montero 2014, p. 144)

How do we make decolonizing work a lived reality for ourselves, for our students and for our

communities? Again, I do not have the answer, but I do have a vision of where I would next like

to travel on this journey. We have begun some of the learning about our shared past. It is now

time to work harder to bring in Indigenous voices and direction. To date, I have used resources

produced by or vetted by Indigenous peoples in order to bring an Indigenous lens to the work we

have been doing. I have shared videos of stories from Elder Hazel (royalsaskmuseum.ca/

educate). I see the power of the Four Directions Teachings website (fourdirectionsteaching.com)

as a tool for bringing Indigenous voices into the classroom, but, as stated earlier, I failed in this

research project to make connections with the Indigenous communities that surround me. I

failed at this important piece of Allyship and decolonization. This is the direction in which I

need to move.

Living with Discomfort: A State of Being

As an educator I faced my own discomforts during this process, discomforts I will

continue to face for the work of decolonizing and Indigenizing is more a state of being than a

simple single action. Disrupting Settler narratives is difficult, uncomfortable and ongoing work.

It requires constant self-reflection and self-examination. The workings of privilege and power

are deeply engrained. Just when I think I am making progress, I find myself saying or doing

something that reflects a deep-seated, unexamined belief based in Settler colonial mythology. I

am constantly challenging my own assumptions. As an educator, I am also challenging the

assumptions of my students, their parents, and the community. This unsettling of the Settlers

around me is met with silence, with anger, and with guilt. I have had to learn to live with these

reactions in myself and in others. Faced with the silence and reluctance to explore the guilt and anger generated by decolonizing discussions, I have often felt that this is very lonely work. Finding a community of likeminded educators has been important. Together we can support each other as we each take up this work in our own communities.

I have also had to come to terms with my fears of misrepresenting Indigenous peoples, histories, and knowledge. I often hear educators argue that we need to go slowly. We cannot do anything without first consulting Indigenous peoples. It is better to wait rather than do the wrong thing. True, there is a need to make sure we avoid those cultural appropriation practices of the past, and it is not the place of Settlers to speak for Indigenous peoples, however, it is most certainly the work of Settlers to educate themselves and other Settlers. The arguments that we, as educators, do not have enough information or that we need to wait for Indigenous people to approve what we are doing, is too often used as a reason not to act. The work of decolonizing is not an Indigenous responsibility alone. Settlers have a role to play in addressing their own privilege and position. Settlers also have a responsibility to create space for Indigenous knowledge inclusion. Indigenizing the curriculum cannot happen if Settler educators are not willing to be a part of the process. There are many places where resources that have been vetted by Indigenous peoples are available for use in the classroom. There are many ways to begin introducing Indigenous history, perspectives and content into classroom learning. When doing so, I am clear that I do not speak for Indigenous peoples. I am sharing information that has been shared with me. I admit there is much I do not know. I am not an authority, but, I would rather do something. It is my job to educate myself and my responsibility to share my learnings with others.

The Teacher Quality Standards and the Leadership Quality Standards of the province of Alberta required teachers and administrators to provide students with what is referred to as Foundation Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples. As a teacher, I am tasked with "understanding the historical, social, economic and political implications of: treaties and agreements with First Nations; legislation and agreements negotiated with Métis; and residential schools and their legacy" (Alberta Education 2018, p. 7). I am also expected to use "the programs of study to provide opportunities for all students to develop a knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, the histories, cultures, languages, contributions, perspectives, experiences and contemporary contexts of First Nations, Métis and Inuit" (Alberta Education 2018, p. 7). In addition, as an administrator within my school, the Leadership Quality Standards require that I support "the school community in acquiring and applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students" (Alberta Education 2018b, p. 6). While these standards are new and open to interpretation as to the degree of depth with which one must take up these topics, I see this as a mandate to unsettle those Settler colonial assumptions that flow through Canadian schools and society.

Inaction is not an option, and so, I find ways to continue sharing. If this puts me in the uncomfortable position of being perceived by other non-Indigenous teachers and administrators within my school division as an "expert" on Indigenous knowledge inclusion, I will humbly share what I have learned, knowing that I have much more learning to do and that I am a student myself sharing what I have learned, knowing that there is much more that I have not yet begun to understand. And I will get it wrong sometimes. That is another tension that I must live with. As I strive to be a Settler Ally of Indigenous peoples, I will make mistakes. Allyship is not a title or position one holds on a permanent basis. Allyship is relational. It is a position that fluctuates

with time and place and actions. As much as I wish to be an Ally, there will be times that the assumptions of Settler colonial privilege into which I have been socialized will cause me to misstep and to get it wrong. The key is to be always reflecting back on my own actions and the motivations and assumptions that underpin them, to always be looking at what I think and do through a critical lens. As Adam Barker (2010) states:

> The Settler who chooses a decolonizing existence must adjust to new and challenging realities. First, and most importantly, there must be an understanding that Settler people, including those who reject colonial society and culture, may continue to benefit from the society and culture on many levels. There must further be an understanding that…Settler people must be willing to take the power that has been granted to them by virtue of their 'membership' in Settler society and put it at the disposal of those whose power has been violently co-opted or stolen…For the Settler person, this means working with Indigenous people upon whose land and from whose resources Settler society has been built, and also requires that Settler people give up the often-seen need or desire for 'control' of groups or actions involved in confronting imperialism. (p. 323-324)

Walking this path is not always easy. I am, as an administrator, as an experienced teacher, accustomed to a certain level of authority. Remaining humble, seeking to learn and rethink, putting my priorities aside is not always easy. Too often I assume that my priorities are everyone's priorities and, while I tend to be non-confrontational, when I have a goal in mind I work towards it one way or another. I must remember that my goal is not always shared by others. As my experience with our neighbouring community has shown, I have much yet to learn about being humble, listening and building meaningful relationships.

Another area of discomfort for me has been the need to let go of the agenda, or perhaps a better way to put it is to understand that, while I can control things within my school, it is not my place to dictate priorities for our Indigenous neighbours. While I may wish to see connections between my school and the schools on the Alexander and Alexis Reserves develop, each of those communities has their own priorities. As someone striving to be an Ally to Indigenous peoples, I need to put my own agenda aside. That might mean that the work I had hoped to do in my school will need to shift, to look different, or to follow another path. Rather than stop because plans fall apart, I will continue to explore other options. There is no simple solution. This work takes times. If I need to pivot, I can and I will. I have also come to understand that, if I am to truly be an Ally to Indigenous peoples, I need to spend more time building a meaningful relationship with my Indigenous neighbours, a relationship that is not based on my needs, but on the directions and priorities identified by Indigenous communities. Silencing my Settler self to listen and learn is not always easy, but if meaningful relationships between Settlers and Indigenous peoples are to replace existing Indigenous - Settler relations, the Settler self needs to stop dominating the conversation

A final tension I have struggled with and that I will continue to struggle with is the often unsupported nature of this work and the loneliness of this project. While the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has issued its Calls to Action and Alberta Education has added Foundational Knowledge requirement to their Teacher and Leadership Quality Standards, there is still little emphasis placed on truly rethinking Indigenous – non-Indigenous relationship in Canada. While the intent of these documents may be for deep thinking and re-envisioning relationships, the support for shifts in ways of thinking, teachings and learning are not always there. As Memmi (1965) has said, it is difficult for the colonizer "to visualize one's own end"

(p. 41). Resistance to rethinking will remain. This will continue to be difficult work and, at times, lonely work, but it remains worthwhile work.

A Possible Path

I have said it many times already, but there is no simple solution, no easy fix, no way to magically undo centuries of miseducation and inequality. The work of decolonizing and Indigenizing education, of breaking down epistemic imperialism and creating hospitality towards Indigenous epistemologies, will take generations. The experiences within my rural Alberta school provide an insight into one effort to begin this process.

In preparation for a Principals' Meeting in my school jurisdiction held in November 2020, Principals were asked to initiate a conversation with staff on a couple of topics related to Indigenous education; specifically: how do we, and should we, understand the intent and purpose of the Acknowledgement Statement and how can we 'dress' the physical building to better represent and be more inviting to our Indigenous families. I was, in many ways, disheartened to see that these were the two most pressing questions administrators were being asked to consider at this time. When I think that, five years ago, it was the introduction of the land acknowledgement statement that put me on this research trajectory, I was discouraged to think that we are still discussing the purpose and reason behind land acknowledgements. Have we not moved further in our efforts to decolonize and Indigenize?

Perhaps I should also be glad that we continue to reflect on the meaning and intent of the land acknowledgment. There is more to a land acknowledgment statement that a few words about location. There is the deeper call to examine the dispossession, relocation, and the workings of Settler society; the spaces, systems and stories of Settler colonialism (Lowman & Barker, 2015). It is this deeper meaning that leads to a strong reaction within Settler society.

The Land is something to which both Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples have strong ties, for different reasons. One of the reasons the land acknowledgement statement is so disturbing for Settlers, is that it means questioning their own familial stories. In my school, and with my students, the focus has been on teaching the story of the land, of the displacement of one group so that another might move in. I do not mean to take away from the struggles and accomplishments of those Settlers who came and built a life for themselves and their families, but I do mean to place the actions of Settlers against the backdrop of treaties and forced relocation. What Settlers knew of the people they displaced, I am not entirely certain, but I do know that Settlers displaced Indigenous peoples and, as a result, many Indigenous peoples continue to live as displaced people in their own lands. That is the story that educators must teach. Settler children need to understand the legacy of treaties and the benefits they enjoy as a result of these treaties.

The intent of land acknowledgement statements should be to know what treaties were and are; to understand the displacement they created, the promises made and broken, and the current state of treaty arrangements. The intent is to acknowledge our shared history and, actually, to be unsettled by it. The story white Canadians have told themselves for generations about the settling of our country is incomplete. We need to make it more complete. We need to teach about treaties, about the government's fiduciary responsibilities, about assumptions we have regarding other people, about racism, about intergenerational trauma and about ongoing Settler colonial relations.

It is one thing to simply read a land acknowledgment statement, it is another to understand the history behind the statements. Understanding this history is what teachers need to share with students. We need to make discussions of land acknowledgement statements and all that lies

within them a part of lessons with the students. We talk about residential schools. We also need to talk about treaties and Settler society. We need to talk with students about treaties, about Settler Colonialism, and the fact that this land was inhabited before Settlers arrived. That Indigenous people are still here, and that there is a need to respect those fiduciary responsibilities that were agreed to in the treaties and build better relationships going forward.

So when parents say that "we didn't learn this." The land acknowledgment and what it signifies is a place where we can start. We teach. We need to talk about Settler Colonialism with students, and we also need to have these discussions, as uncomfortable as they are, with parents. People roll their eyes and say "not this again," but that shows a lack of understanding of our shared history and our ongoing Settler colonial relationship. And the conversation cannot stop. The conversation, however difficult, needs to continue.

The second question Principals were asked to consider prior to the November 2020 meeting was: how can we 'dress' the physical building to better represent and be more inviting to our Indigenous families? "Dressing" your physical building may be helpful in terms of creating a space that appears welcoming, but far more important is the climate created. Students and parents need to feel welcomed and a few posters, a posted land acknowledgement statement, a welcome sign might be a start, but more important is the way in which teachers and administrators infuse Indigenous history, Indigenous identity and Indigenous knowledge into their school, their classrooms and the culture or climate of the building.

I think of my own classroom and the way in which I attempt to weave Indigenous "content" throughout all of our subject areas. As a non-Indigenous person, I am always careful of the content I seek to infuse. I search for vetted sources, and, whenever possible, bring in a knowledge keeper or Indigenous liaison person, but I make sure that Indigenous content is

integrated into what I teach and what all students learn. In our unit on Sky Science, for example, we learn about Indigenous astronomy. We have discussions about the Thirteen Moons and what they mean to different peoples. In Language Arts, Indigenous stories are included along with all the other texts that would normally be included. In mathematics we make connections to Indigenous games and patterning, and, of course, in Social Studies we take the most time to focus on Indigenous history and Settler Colonialism in a way that honours Indigenous perspectives.

More important than "dressing" the school is the need to create a space where students are comfortable sharing their identity. As an example, I think about the school assembly we held as part of Métis week this year. As a whole school, talked about Métis culture using resources from the Rupertsland Institute. We talked about Métis beading, the Métis sash and about jigging. This whole school discussion led to classroom conversations and, in one such conversation, a young boy in my sixth grade class asked if he could bring and share his sash and some videos of himself jigging. This openness to sharing and accepting who our students are is far more important that a poster and a bulletin board display in terms of making students and families feel welcome in our building.

Going beyond just those special days and weeks, and making Indigenous history and inclusion a part of our lessons, and what we regularly do creates that welcoming climate and sense of mutual understanding. We also have those conversations that are uncomfortable with students who come to school having heard things at home or in the community. We address racism and prejudice. We address stereotypes and intolerance. We teach. We do so in a manner that is respectful, but we still have the uncomfortable conversations. In interviewing one of our Indigenous parents, she expressed her support for our approach of weaving Indigenous history

and knowledge into our regular curriculum. She argued that students should not see Indigenous knowledge and perspectives as something separate and apart. Rather, it should be seen as a part of what we regularly learn about and talk about at school. Her big concern was that teachers introduce Indigenous content for a while and then stop. Or that Indigenous knowledge inclusion would not continue. For her, for her children, for all children, it is important to continue and to validate different ways of knowing and understanding the world. For too long we have heard one particular story. It is time to hear a different point of view.

Over and over as I worked within my school and with parents and community members I heard people say "We were not taught the true history of Canada. We were never told. Not in our homes, not in the media, and not in the schools" (Jurgens 2020, p. 119). As an educator, I feel an imperative to right this wrong. For too long our Settler and Indigenous histories have been incomplete (Jurgens 2020). If we learned of Indigenous histories at all we did so in the "split tensing" way that Patrick Wolfe (2006) describes in which the Indigenous were represented as distant disappearing while the Settler was represented as enduring and nation building. This skewed mythology, this "North American Settler dream imaginary [that] has slowly morphed into a curriculum mythology and ideology" (Donald 2015, p. 1), has allowed myths and misconceptions both about others and about ourselves to linger too long. In a post-Truth and Reconciliation Commission world, we can no longer claim that we just did not know. The truth telling has begun and it must continue. My role in this is to continue learning, to share what knowledge I have gained, and to disrupt those Settler colonial narratives that I see and hear articulated around me. That is my responsibility. It is part of an unsettling pedagogy (Regan 2010) in which we begin by unsettling ourselves and continue by unsettling the Settler colonial society in which we live. "We must experience it, beginning with ourselves as individuals, and

then as morally and ethically responsible socio-political actors in Canadian society" (Regan 2010, p. 23-24).

If, as a society, we are to reinvent ourselves and move towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, we will require, as James Tully (2008) says, mutual recognition, intercultural dialogue, mutual respect, sharing, and mutual responsibility. These five principals begin with learning about and truly coming to understand our shared history of Settler Colonialism and the roles we continue to play within the Settler colonial state. It is to this end that the work within my school and within my community must continue.

There is no clear path set before us that we as a society or we as educators can follow to achieve reconciliation and create a more just society. Instead, we must begin where we are and continue to move forward adhering to the principles of mutual recognition, intercultural dialogue, mutual respect, sharing and mutual responsibility (Tully, 2008). Perhaps we may one day achieve the vision of the Two Row Wampum, that representation of "an understanding of the first and subsequent treaties on the part of Indigenous people that is starkly different from their modern interpretation by non-Indigenous Canada" (Mercer, 2019, p. 21), that vision of Indigenous – Settler people as "two separate and independent people on a shared journey, reach respecting the sovereignty and independent of the other and a shared commitment to peace, friendship and non-interference" (Mercer, 2019, p. 21). As an educator, my role in this process is to continue teaching about our shared history. My role is to disrupt and to rethink, along with my students and my community members, assumptions and misconceptions. I take direction from Paulo Freire (1998) who writes in Pedagogy of Freedom:

I teach because I search, because I question, and because I submit myself to questioning.

I research because I notice things, take cognizance of them. And in so doing, I intervene.

And intervening, I educate and educate myself. (Freire, 1998, p. 35)

I teach because I wish to see change in the future and that change begins with reshaping how we think and act today. Like bell hooks, I believe "that learning is possible, that nothing can keep an open mind from seeking after knowledge and finding a way to know" (hooks, 2003, xiv). And that is where I begin and where I continue.

I also take to heart the need to work with members of the Indigenous communities on whose lands I live and work. To this end, I will renew my efforts to make connections with our neighbouring Indigenous communities, but I will do so in a much more respectful and less presumptive manner. As a start, I will reach out again to those individuals within the community with whom I already have a relationship, and then I will stay in relationship. By that I mean, I will invest my time and make available whatever I can offer to those members of the community who may wish to work with me. I will be in relationship not seeking to fulfill my own goals, but lending my voice to the work of those Indigenous peoples with whom I can connect. From this, I can bring back to my school and my community the learnings and insights that I receive. I can share my experience and continue working within my own non-Indigenous context as well. Perhaps, in this way, I can share in what Paulette Regan (2010) in *Unsettling the Settler Within,* describes as transformative experiential learning. She writes:

I believe that education is not simply about the transfer of knowledge but it is a

transformative experiential learning that empowers people to make change in the world.

Failure to link knowledge and critical reflection to action explains why many Settlers

never move beyond denial and guilt, and why many public education efforts are

ineffective in bringing about deep social and political change. (Regan, 2010, p. 23)

My next step is to move beyond initial decolonizing efforts and to take action, to work with

Indigenous peoples to engage in those transformative experiential learnings from which I can

learn and grow, and from which I can gain knowledge to share with others.

The work that has begun in my school and in my community is such meaningful work. It

is not easy. It is not done quickly. It is ongoing and difficult, but I am in it for the long haul.

And there is hope. With perseverance, with commitment, and with a tolerance for uncertainty

and tensions, it is possible to begin decolonizing hearts and minds within our school community

and create an openness to Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing. It is possible to begin

writing a new narrative for the future.

Chapter 8: Little Bit Know Something

This project has been an effort to introduce decolonization and Indigenizing work in a small rural Alberta school and to work with parents as they come to understand the changes and challenges that emerge. There have been some successes along the way and what I offer here is my autoethnographic account of the path taken in the hopes that other teachers and administrators may find the information useful as they engage in similar work within their own context. My own journey along this path has just begun and I am excited for the future my Settler community and I, in concert with our Indigenous neighbours, can help to build.

As a Master's student in the early 1990's I read the book, *Little Bit Know Something: Stories in a Language of Anthropology*, by Robin Ridington (1990). It is a recounting of Ridington's decades of experience with the Dunne-za People of Northern British Columbia. The title of the book and the story behind it have stuck with me since I first picked the book of the library shelf. "The Dunne-za say that a person who speaks from the authority of his or her own experience 'little bit know something'" (Ridington, 1990, p.xv). I feel that "little bit know something" describes my current state when it comes to decolonizing and Indigenizing education in my small rural school. I "little bit know something" about how to work with parents and build understanding in the community of the work being done. I "little bit know something" about what actions might help other educators navigate a similar path. I "little bit know something" about the role I play as a Settler Ally in both educating other Settlers and taking direction from Indigenous peoples as to how best I can help and support their efforts. I "little bit know something about" the questions, tensions and considerations that emerge for a non-Indigenous administrator, teacher, and community member working, in a cultural context of bewilderment, doubt, and even hostility, to create a better parent understanding of the decolonizing and

Indigenizing work being done within a small, rural elementary school. My goal has been to

share the little bit I know with the reader and to provide for others both insight and hope.

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Appendix

CONSENT FORM

Study Title:

Decolonizing Work with Parents: An Autoethnographic Account of Decolonizing Work with Parents in Rural Alberta

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Background
You are being asked to participate in this research project because you have shown an interest in discussing the inclusion of Indigenous history and knowledge in our school curriculum. This research project is part of my doctoral studies at the University of Alberta and the results of this study will be used in support of my dissertation.

Purpose
Since the release of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) final report in 2015, more and more discussions about Indigenous – non-Indigenous relations have been taking place across the country. In response to these discussions and the TRC's Calls to Action, the government of Alberta is planning many changes to curriculum within the province. One major focus of the proposed curriculum is increased attention to Indigenous history and Indigenous knowledge within all subject areas. The government has also made the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge a part of the new Teacher and Leader Quality Standards that will come into effect in September 2019. The purpose of this research project is to examine what it is like, as the administrator in a small, rural, largely non-Indigenous elementary school, to work with parents and build understanding of and comfort with the inclusion of Indigenous content and knowledge within our school. This study is an autoethnography, which means it focuses primarily on the experience of the researcher as she works with parents to build familiarity with Indigenous history and knowledge, and lead discussions about reconciliation. It is hoped that the experiences shared through this research project will provide insights that may be of use to other administrators and school staff working through the same or similar situations across the province. As a participant in this study, you have the opportunity to engage in discussions about the future of education in

our school and to potentially impact education across the province as this research is shared with others.

Study Procedures
This study is an autoethnography, which means it focusses on the researcher's experience, but interviews will also be conducted with participants. These interviews will help the researcher understand the impact of the work being done. The interviews will take place during the 2018-2019 school year, and will focus on the following themes: 1) What questions, tensions, and considerations have emerged for you as our school has worked to include Indigenous knowledge in our classrooms? 2) As a parent, what is it like to be a part of these changes or to see these changes happening in our school? 3) What can administration do to guide parents through the tensions and questions that arise? and 4) What would you like to see administration do, from this point forward, to help make decolonizing and Indigenizing education more understandable for parents? Interviews will be conducted in person and in private. The interview may take up to an hour and a half. You will be provided with a transcript of our interview to verify its accuracy before the data analysis process begins. You will also be invited to read through the researcher's summary of the data that has been collected. This will occur in the summer and fall of 2019. This correspondence will take place through email. You may also withdraw from the study at any point, up until the results will be reported which will likely occur in January 2020.

Benefits
By participating in this study you gain an understanding of the efforts to include Indigenous knowledge and history in the curriculum, and you have a chance to discuss the topics of truth, reconciliation and moving forward from here. Participants will be consulted as the data is analyzed and as the final report is written up to ensure their comfort and continued consent to participate in the project. Should a participant no longer wish to participate, his or her data will be removed.

Risk
While this is an autoethnography and will focus on the experience of the researcher, such experiences do not occur in a vacuum. Participants will be invited to reflect upon their own positions and beliefs, which may lead to emotional discomfort. Participants will also be part of the background context described by the researcher.

Voluntary Participation
You are under no obligation to participate in this study nor are you obliged to answer any specific questions even if participating in the study. You may continue to be a part of our parent events and activities should you choose not to participate in the study. Even if you agree to be in the study you can change your mind and withdraw at any time. Should you choose to opt out, your interview information will not be included in the final analysis and report. You may choose to opt out of this study until the data has been analyzed and written up as part of my dissertation.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

Participants will not be personally identified in this study. Pseudonyms will be used and information that could indirectly identify a participant will be altered so that anonymity is maintained. All data will be kept confidential and only the researcher will have access to original interview transcripts and information. Interview transcripts will be kept in a password protected computer file on an external hard drive for a minimum of 5 years following completion of research project. At the end of five years, the files will be deleted. As a participant, you will receive a copy of the research findings. The data collected in this study will be used in the writing of my dissertation. Privacy and anonymity will be maintained in the writing process.

Further Information

The plan for this study has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615. This office is independent of the researchers.

Consent Statement

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

_____   _____

Participant's Name (printed) and Signature   Date

_____   _____

Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date