tapahtêyimisowin, mâtinamâtowak, wâhkôhtowin:

Wise Practices in Teacher Education to Improve Outcomes for Indigenous Students

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Abstract

Indigenous students deserve to feel a sense of holistic wellbeing and experience equitable educational outcomes, but Alberta's K-12 education system is not currently meeting the needs of many of its First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. Education should empower Indigenous students to achieve success as is understood by them and their families. While numerous systemic changes must take place to improve the holistic wellbeing and educational outcomes of Indigenous students, the role of teachers in students' lives is central. Through a woven approach grounded in Indigenous methodologies, this paper answers the question: How should teacher educators approach professional learning for teachers in order to improve outcomes for Indigenous students? Teacher educators for pre-service and in-service teachers must begin with tapahtêyimisowin (humility), mâtinamâtowak (sharing), and wâhkôhtowin (relationship); these interconnected themes are rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and provide a foundation from which to model wise practices. Teacher educators should model anti-oppressive practice, multiple forms of relationship, and Indigenous pedagogies in professional learning for teachers. The intent of sharing these wise practices is to contribute to teacher education that has a positive effect on the educational experiences of Indigenous students in colonial education, particularly Alberta's K-12 system.

Keywords: Indigenous students, teacher education, anti-oppressive practice, relationship, Indigenous pedagogies

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nakiskâtowin: Meeting

kitatamiskâtinâwâw kahkiyaw. Shannon Loutitt nitisiyihkâson. maskwasîpîsis ohci niya. niya otipêyimisow iskwêw. I greet you all. My name is Shannon Loutitt, and I am Métis from Grande Prairie, Alberta.

I am telling you my story for many reasons. As Indigenous people, stories are an important way of relating to each other, giving and receiving lessons, and transmitting knowledge from generation to generation. To understand me, you must understand who I'm from and where I'm from. Indigenous pedagogies encourage us to acknowledge story as a way of relating, teaching, and learning. Within anti-oppressive practice, a positionality statement is one way for authors to acknowledge the ways in which they may be complicit in, and/or harmed by, the many systems of oppression that dominate the societies in which we live. Lastly, I'm demonstrating my personal connection to my topic and the validity of my knowledge; this knowledge is based on my lifelong relationships with Indigenous people and lands, my lived experience, and, least importantly, my formal education and work experience.

My late mother, Irene Loutitt (Gaucher), was from Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement in Alberta and was a fluent Cree speaker her entire life; she dedicated much of her career to working with and advocating alongside First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and families within the Alberta education system. Her mother, Mary Gaucher (Whitford), was a fluent Cree speaker, a strong proponent of Canadian education, and a residential school survivor. Because of them, I have the strength to be an Indigenous woman navigating often hostile colonial systems,

while always staying true to who I am. Because of my dad Jack Loutitt, Scottish and Gwich'in from Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, I'm able to do so with love.

I am centering my ancestral language to pay homage to my ancestors who carried it for us. Although I am a pitiful Cree language learner, I'm incredibly thankful for the spirit inherent in my mother's language and the beauty and richness it teaches us. This sharing of the language is also a small act of resistance on my part; throughout my colonial education, whiteness and the English language have been pervasive. I have the opportunity to uplift my mother's language in this space and to give a gentle reminder that we are still here.

In this paper I'm discussing the realities of the colonial education system and its shortcomings in meeting the needs of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children and families so I would like to share a bit of my personal context as an Indigenous student and educator in Alberta. Because of my proximity to whiteness, I have never experienced racism. As a child, I thrived on positive attention from authority figures and, therefore, pushed myself to fit into a box to achieve academic excellence. I did not have any Indigenous teachers in my K-12 education, nor did I feel a strong connection to much of the content or how it was taught. My ways of thinking and relating to the world were not valued within those spaces. However, the matrilineal respect for education shared by my grandma and mom led me to become an elementary school teacher; I have taught in public, Catholic, and band-operated schools throughout Alberta. I also have experience as a grad coach working specifically with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, as well as Indigenous education consulting at the provincial and division levels.

A Note on Terminology

Throughout this paper, the terms Indigenous, Aboriginal, and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit may be used interchangeably, depending on the source language and context. Indigenous

and Aboriginal can be taken to mean the diverse First Peoples who have inhabited this land since time immemorial (First Nations and Inuit), as well as the post-contact Métis nation. The phrase First Nations, Métis, and Inuit is commonly used in the Alberta context, but the shortened acronym of FNMI will not be used here due to its lack of respect for distinct Indigenous nations and identities.

I have intentionally chosen to use the term "wise practices" as opposed to "best practices" because of the Cree teaching of humility. I've been taught that there are many possible ways to be correct; as such, I am avoiding the use of the word 'best,' which is inherently hierarchical. Rather, 'wise' makes space for diverse understandings which may be beyond the scope of this paper.

Methodologies

I am drawing upon Indigenous methodologies, which are "anchored in Indigenous epistemology, theory, ethics, story, and community" (Kovach, 2021, p. 42). Throughout this research process[i] I have been led by my obligations to my community, particularly my teachings from previous generations and responsibilities to future generations. Throughout my writing, I've engaged in deep reflection and have visited with and sought guidance from Indigenous Elders and friends. I have embraced the fact that Indigenous knowledge, given its cyclical nature, "requires us to re-check our truths to ensure they are still valid" (Louie, 2020, p. 189); this worldview has led to my repeated interrogation of my process and caused me to think critically about everything I read. As is the case when engaging with Indigenous methodologies, the process of writing this paper required not just my mind and body, but my heart and spirit as well (Kitchen & Raynor, 2013). As you read, take note of the ways that some common themes are

revisited throughout; this process of revisiting is an Indigenous methodology that I've experienced often within the context of cultural teachings.

mâcipayiwin (The Beginning): Problem, Purpose, Research Question, and Overview

Problem

Alberta's K-12 education system is failing to meet the needs of diverse Indigenous students; "in Alberta, like other Canadian provinces/territories, educational disparities have persisted in terms of student achievement, high school completion, and transitions to post-secondary" (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023b, p. 435). In addition to these colonial measures of success, the public education system is often a hostile environment for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children; ongoing colonialism and racism continue to impede many Indigenous students' sense of belonging and wellbeing at school (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023b).

Funding, curriculum, and insufficient resources contribute to the shortcomings of colonial education (Milne, 2016). However, given the correlation between student success and effective teaching and teacher quality (Burleigh, 2020), building teacher capacity is of the utmost importance in meeting the needs of Indigenous students. While the majority of teachers are acting with good intentions (Stelmach et al., 2017), many lack the background knowledge, resources, and skills to meaningfully engage with Indigenous students (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023a). This lack of teacher capacity can be addressed in many ways, including teacher training.
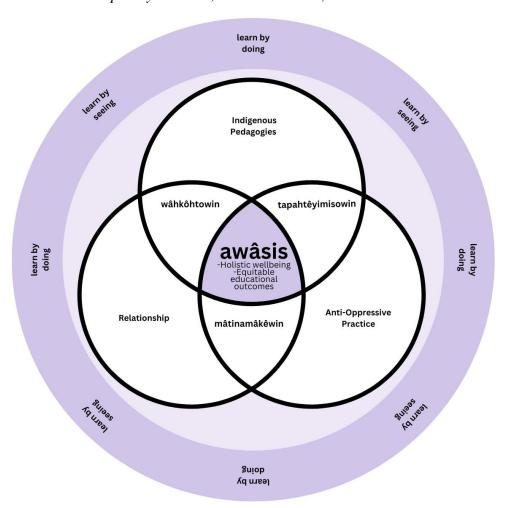
Purpose and Research Question

Two questions have guided my thinking throughout the research process: What do diverse Indigenous students need in order to experience holistic and academic success in Alberta's K-12 system? How can teacher educators build capacity in K-12 teachers to better meet the needs of Indigenous students in Alberta? The purpose of exploring these questions is to

provide practical guidelines for teacher educators as they continue to engage pre-service and in-service teachers in learning with and about Indigenous people and ways of knowing. It's important to note that the needs, voices, and wellbeing of Indigenous students must be at the forefront of any discussions about their "success" within colonial education systems. In this paper, I will answer the question: How should teacher educators approach professional learning for teachers in order to improve outcomes for Indigenous students?

Overview

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework: tapahtêyimisowin, mâtinamâtowak, wâhkôhtowin

Note. This figure is a visualization of my research findings and relevant life experiences.

This paper is organized primarily based on the framework shared in Figure 1. At this point in the paper, the framework is a conceptual overview of my findings; a detailed explanation will be provided near the end of the paper. Readers are encouraged to consider the ways their understandings of the framework may shift as they read and reflect. Rather than conduct a discrete literature review, I provide a description and analysis of my readings while weaving in my lived experiences and personal beliefs. I share three wise practices for teacher educators, while always maintaining Indigenous children at the centre of each approach. I then revisit the framework with a more fulsome explanation prior to the conclusion.

nanâtawâpiw (He/She Looks Around): Context

Diverse Understandings of Success

In discussions of education for Indigenous children, success is often identified as the goal of education. But what does success actually mean? Within colonial institutions, success is generally "oriented to competitive individualism, pressure to produce, and focus[ed] on abstracted knowledge and testing to foster labour market attachment" (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023b, p. 436). In other words, educational success means independently meeting individual goals and ultimately becoming a productive member of a capitalistic society. Attendance, grades, high school completion, and transition to post-secondary education are often seen, at least from the education system's perspective, as the ultimate measures of success in education. However, these numbers do not encapsulate the full extent of success as it may be viewed by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and families (Louie & Gereluk, 2021).

For many Indigenous people, Indigenous student success may include being in environments where they feel a sense of belonging, see multiple stories and perspectives being honoured, have opportunities to learn more about their roles in life, and are empowered to help

others (Moon & Berger, 2016). Self-concept, identity, confidence, happiness, and overall wellbeing may also be important indicators of success for Indigenous students and families (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023b). Education must nurture the mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional development and wellbeing of each child (Moon & Berger, 2016). While colonial definitions of success are based upon individualism, Indigenous perspectives are more likely to view success "in holistic and relational terms oriented to nurture general well-being" (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023b, p.431). First Nations, Métis, and Inuit families generally value formal education but may see colonial measures of success as outcomes of holistic wellbeing, rather than the goal itself (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023b).

Due to the diversity of perspectives and experiences of Indigenous students and families, "there is no single model for Indigenous students' success" (Moon & Berger, 2016, p. 5). However, for the purposes of this paper, success for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students will be understood to mean holistic wellbeing of the child alongside equitable educational outcomes[ii].

Factors Influencing Indigenous Student Success

Historical and Ongoing Colonialism

Building upon this definition of success, we must also consider the factors that influence the success, or lack thereof, of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students within K-12 education systems. Cappello and Kreuger (2022) assert that "both Canada-past and Canada-present [are] an ongoing settler-colonial project" (pp. 40-41). All Canadian institutions, including the education system, are inherently colonial in nature. Historically, Canadian education for Indigenous students took the form of the residential school system[iii], which aimed to "aggressively assimilate Indigenous children into Canadian society" (Milne, 2016, p. 68); today, it can be argued that

"contemporary schooling is a means of continued assimilation and oppression" (Milne, 2016, p. 69).

The ongoing impacts of residential schools on many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and families cannot be overstated. Fear or shame of identifying as Indigenous, a lack of trust in the education system, and intergenerational trauma from the isolation, suppression, and abuse of the children who attended residential schools continue to negatively influence the lives and educational experiences of some Indigenous students and families (Milne, 2016). Contemporary education in Canada continues, through its treatment of Indigenous students and families, to cause harm (Louie & Gereluk, 2021; Milne, 2016). Put simply, "the Canadian education system has not shifted appreciably since the residential school era to create success by Indigenous learners…it, in fact, continues to marginalize, oppress, and assimilate" (Scully, 2015, p. 90).

The Nature of Education

The very nature of colonial education itself is often starkly different from Indigenous understandings of education. Colonial education often minimizes or tokenizes Indigenous content and ways of being (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023a); Indigenous ways of knowing tend to value "strong cultural identities and community relationships, integrated into a lifelong continuum of learning, growth, and development" (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023b, p. 442). Cooperation and benefit to the broader community are often centered in Indigenous understandings of education (Brayboy, 2005); in contrast, colonial education values competition and benefit to oneself.

Colonial education often requires children to be obedient and seek permission from an authority figure to maintain control and organization, while the ethic of noninterference often

demonstrated in Indigenous homes allows children to "learn through their actions and suffer the consequences of bad decisions" (Rahman, 2013, p. 667). Indigenous children may be raised to learn self-reliance, responsibility, boundaries, and conflict resolution skills rather than always depending on adults to intervene and solve problems (Rahman, 2013). I believe that this freedom to make mistakes and determine one's own path does not align with the desire for control that is often a practice within, and a goal of, the education system.

In my experience, formal K-12 education is often viewed and delivered as a finite product, rather than a lifelong process. The separation of knowledge into discrete subjects and linear teaching and learning methods contribute to this limited understanding of education. For many Indigenous people, education is "a lifelong endeavor that is not limited to formal school contexts, but involves nurturing and relating across generations, in connection to the land, and within the larger community" (Moon & Berger, 2016, p. 3). In other words, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit understandings about the nature of education are expansive in terms of both time and space and are rooted in relationships with land and people.

"The Education Gap?"

Deficit assumptions about Indigenous students and families are rampant within the education system (Bishop et al., 2021). In my own experiences as a grad coach working directly with and on behalf of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and families, I often heard teachers, administrators, and others within my school and division express their concerns over "the achievement gap" and the perceived shortcomings and deficits of Indigenous students and families. It seems that many within the colonial education system are more comfortable blaming "the gap" on individual shortcomings, rather than critically evaluating the ways in which the system itself fails to meet the needs of Indigenous students. This way of thinking about education

for Indigenous students often fails to recognize the unique gifts that every child has, some of which are not valued within colonial education.

The tendency to view Indigenous people through a deficit lens is prevalent within educational research (Stelmach et al., 2017), funding and policy (Government of Alberta, 2023), streaming practices, and interactions with school staff (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023b). Therefore, teacher educators working to build capacity in teachers to better meet the needs of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students must do so with the goal of "contributing to the thriving as opposed to merely surviving possibilities for Indigenous peoples" (Kicya7 Schneider, 2015, p. 44).

Educator Capacity

Unfortunately, many teachers do not yet possess the knowledge (Cappello & Kreuger, 2022; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023a), relationships (Scully, 2015), or confidence (Hare, 2015) to meet the needs of diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. Barriers such as resistance (Leddy & O'Neill, 2021), lack of resources, and insufficient time (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023a) may limit teachers' learning and application of relevant skills; this gap in educator capacity must be addressed through teacher training to better serve Indigenous students (Labone et al., 2014). Such learning "is recognized to be a complex process, requiring cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers…the capacity to examine convictions and beliefs, and the willingness to enact appropriate innovations to practice" (Papp & Cottrell, 2021, p. 109).

Making the Case for Wise Practices: Global, National, and Provincial Contexts

Global Context

The 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) outlines, on a global scale, "a standard of achievement to be pursued in a spirit of partnership and

mutual respect" (p. 7). The Declaration acknowledges the rights of Indigenous peoples in many realms, including education. Article 14 asserts that Indigenous people are entitled to their own educational systems and institutions, while also accessing the State's education without discrimination (United Nations, 2007). Through the lens of UNDRIP, it could be argued that the inequitable educational outcomes of many Indigenous students in Alberta are a violation of Article 14 because although they can access the state's education, it is not always without discrimination against Indigenous peoples and ways of knowing.

National Context (Canada)

On the national stage, "the colonial nature of our school system is well-documented and calls for its transformation are frequent, including the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples' recommendations and the TRC's[iv] Calls to Action" (Cappello & Kreuger, 2022, p. 43). In 1996, the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples made a number of recommendations to begin the process of renewing relations between Canada and Indigenous peoples. Of note, teacher education programs are called upon to include at least one component teaching Indigenous content and provide options for teachers to learn about teaching Indigenous students (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015c) states that "governmental failure to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal children continues to the present day" (p. 106). In their Calls to Action, the TRC (2015a) calls upon federal, provincial, and territorial governments to "provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms," and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to "identify teacher-training needs relating to the

above" (p. 7) need for K-12 teaching and learning about Indigenous history and residential schools.

The vision of the Association of Canadian Deans' 2010 Accord on Indigenous Education is "that Indigenous identities, cultures, languages, values, ways of knowing, and knowledge systems will flourish in all Canadian learning settings" (Archibald et al., p. 4). As such, signatories are expected to commit to "transformative educational change" (Archibald et al., 2010, p. 5), including a focus on increasing skills in Indigenous education and Indigenous knowledge systems (Archibald et. al, 2010). It's clear that, at least on paper, there is a desire to take action to improve educational outcomes and experiences for Indigenous students on a national level.

Provincial Context (Alberta)

The Government of Alberta (2023) claims to be "focused on accomplishing four outcomes," including that "First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in Alberta are successful" (p. 12). Their limited measures of success focus on high school completion rates, dropout rates, and transition to postsecondary education, and these numbers do not reflect well on Alberta's K-12 education system. For example, the 2021-2022 five year high school completion rate for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students was 71.3% (Government of Alberta, 2023). Although this statistic is an improvement from the previous four years, it is still significantly behind the 88.6% five year completion rate of other students in Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2023, p. 26). Therefore, even within its own narrow parameters of determining success, it is clear that the K-12 education system in Alberta is not meeting the needs of Indigenous students.

Alberta Education's revised Teaching Quality Standard (2023) includes several components that are directly and indirectly related to Indigenous education; Competencies 1, 3,

and 5 speak to relationship-building, career-long learning, and applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit. In reference to Competency 5, Danylyuk et. al (2023) assert that "teachers who have been reluctant in the past to take up this challenging, but necessary work, are now mandated to do so" (p. 387). What was once optional for teachers in Alberta is now mandatory.

In their recent survey of Alberta teacher education programs, Danylyuk et. al (2023) find that all 10 of the programs surveyed focused primarily on providing basic foundational knowledge, which "fails to deeply engage learners" (p. 396). Although an in-depth analysis of their findings is beyond the scope of this paper, Danyluk et al., (2023) make clear that there are gaps in Alberta's teacher education as it relates to meeting the needs of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students; in my next section, I propose some tangible solutions to address these gaps.

tânisi (How): Wise Practices

Learn by Seeing, Learn by Doing

Indigenous ways of knowing can include a scaffolded teaching and learning method of modelling, followed by practicing. For example, when I attended a hide camp in 2021, the people with the most expertise in a given area demonstrated relevant skills. After seeing how they did it, we, the novices, would try to apply what had just been shown to us. If we were struggling, then experienced people would come to support us further as needed; if we were demonstrating some proficiency, we would be left to our own devices. Each person in the group took on various roles as needed; there wasn't one designated "expert" for everything we did at hide camp. This approach has also been explored in academic research; according to Danyluk et al. (2023), "as post-secondary teacher educators, it is vital that we are modelling best practices for our future teachers to practice and emulate in their own learning environments" (p. 396).

Based on this Indigenous way of knowing, teacher educators should employ a "learn by seeing, learn by doing" approach. The wise practices shared below are intended for teacher educators in their work with pre-service and in-service teachers; by modelling these wise practices, students can first learn by seeing them used, then learn by doing them in their own practice in order to improve outcomes for Indigenous students.

Anti-Oppressive Practice

Connected Frameworks and Approaches

Anti-oppressive practice is closely related to TribCrit (Brayboy, 2005), anti-racist education (Robinson & Tompkins, 2019), critical race theory (Danyluk et al, 2023), culturally sustaining practices (Papp & Cottrell, 2021), critical reflection (Robinson & Tompkins, 2019), social justice, and critical theory (Louie, 2020). I intended initially to focus my reading on anti-racist education but soon realized that such a narrow view fails to encompass the multitude of oppressive systems and practices thrust upon First Nations, Métis and Inuit within the colonial education system. Therefore, upon further reading and reflection, I chose to expand my thinking to anti-oppressive practice as a more inclusive term that better captures these realities.

Based on my experience as a student, teacher, and consultant in Alberta's K-12 system, as well as my current enrollment in a Masters of Education program in Alberta, much of what is shared here is based on an assumption that the majority of teacher educators and pre-service or in-service teachers are non-Indigenous; it's an unfortunate reality that as Indigenous people, we are still largely underrepresented in many colonial institutions, including education. Through an anti-oppressive lens, it's important to understand that the ultimate outcome of teacher education will be determined by the dynamics of the diverse individuals involved and should be informed by local Indigenous contexts.

Defining and Enacting Anti-Oppressive Practice

According to Cappello and Kreuger (2022), "anti-oppressive education refers to a broad range of teaching and learning that aims to challenge multiple forms of oppression" (p. 42). Dominant discourses that romanticize, historicize, and erase Indigenous people must be disrupted because these deficit-based understandings are the foundation of ongoing oppression of Indigenous people in the education system (Dion, 2007). This oppression can take many forms, including incorrect teaching about Indigenous people (Milne, 2016), a hidden curriculum based on dominant white worldviews, inequitable learning opportunities and assessment practices (Rahman, 2013), racism (Stelmach et al., 2017), and reinforcement of settler colonial power structures (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023a).

When applied in the context of Indigenous education, humility is at the heart of anti-oppressive practice; we must acknowledge that "none of us is perfect--we are all human--and are willing to come to understand together" (Kicya7 Schneider, 2015, p. 53). Teacher educators must be transparent about their own positionality and privilege by locating themselves (Kicya7 Schneider, 2015), modelling vulnerability in the teaching and learning process (Hare, 2015), and explicitly stating the sources of their Indigenous knowledge and their cultural authority, if any, in sharing this knowledge (Scully, 2015). This humble approach is important for teachers to see in action because it will serve them well in their own practice.

Teacher educators must consider the safety of their students, although "an important distinction is to be made between comfort and safety" (Cappello & Kreuger, 2022, p. 50). Therefore, they must be willing to challenge the anger and resistance they may encounter (Scully, 2015) and provide opportunities for students to critically reflect (Dion, 2007). Engaging with difficult knowledge, which includes sitting with discomfort, hearing from multiple

perspectives, and challenging current practices and ways of thinking (Cappello & Kreuger, 2022), should be built into learning experiences for teachers. By acknowledging and exploring difficult knowledge, students experience "interference to one's personal security leading towards internal conflict" (Robinson & Tompkins, 2019, p. 114), allowing them to develop increased agency to enact change within their spheres of influence. If students are always comfortable, then they do not have the opportunity to grow and learn (Dion, 2007).

Other approaches to anti-oppressive practice can include taking on the role of "guide" rather than expert; this method encourages students to reconsider and potentially "unlearn the still-dominant Western conception of what it means to be a teacher, namely the person who is the central conveyer of knowledge and the authority figure who must exercise control and disciple in the classroom" (Burleigh, 2020, p. 699). In Moon and Berger's 2016 study of Indigenous student success as conceptualized by Indigenous educators, "one participant stated, 'Our job is about a guide. Really, we are a guide supporting,' noting that this way of seeing things means that power and agency then lie with the student" (as cited on p. 10). Sharing power is an important foundation of anti-oppressive practice (Rahman, 2013) and is a precursor to the co-creation of knowledge (Kicya7 Schneider, 2015), which places teacher and learner in equitable positions and honours the gifts and voices of everyone within the circle of learning.

Teacher educators are modelling anti-oppressive practice when they work from a place of humility, challenge dominant discourses, engage with difficult knowledge, dismantle the role of teacher as "expert", share power, and provide opportunities for the co-creation of knowledge. The benefits of employing anti-oppressive practice are numerous; in the next section, I outline some of the ways this approach can benefit First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students in K-12 classrooms.

Connection to Teacher Capacity and Improved Outcomes for Indigenous Students

Teachers often consider themselves to be open-minded and separate from systems of oppression (Louie, 2020). They may "unsuspectingly rely on dominant discourses to give structure to their approach to teaching without recognising the inadequacy nor questioning the effects of those discourses" (Dion, 2007, p. 332). I believe that teacher educators who explicitly engage in anti-oppressive practice are creating an opportunity for their students to develop an awareness of the oppression enacted upon Indigenous people in the education system and broader society; intentional teacher educators must also make clear the ways in which the education system, and the teachers within it, continue to reproduce dominant discourses and enact colonial policies and practices that harm First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and families. Depending on their positionality, Indigenous pre-service or in-service teachers may have a wealth of first-hand and ancestral experiences of oppression at many levels, but teacher educators must not rely on them to do the emotional labour of sharing their realities for the benefit of others' learning.

As this awareness of oppression is achieved, or in some cases simply reaffirmed, the modelling of anti-oppressive practice in teacher education programs can empower teachers to implement these methods in their own classrooms and lives. They will be better equipped to meet the needs of diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners, have a deeper understanding of the ways that colonialism continues to harm Indigenous people, and be better situated, in a place of humility, to build relationships with Indigenous people.

Relationships

Connected Frameworks and Approaches

Relationship as a wise practice in teacher training is closely linked to relational pedagogy (Robinson & Tompkins, 2019), relationally responsive processes (Bishop et al., 2021), and relationship-based pedagogy (Papp & Cottrell, 2021). During my last year as a classroom teacher one of my students was an Indigenous boy who was dealing with a difficult home life and had experienced previous academic struggles. Although there were some challenges, we had a positive and mutually respectful relationship. One day, he gave me a note that said: "You make me want to come to school." At the time, and even now, it makes me tear up to think about that note; this child clearly understood that I cared deeply about him not only as a student but as a human being. The strength of our relationship contributed to his sense of belonging at school, and in turn he experienced success in the sense of holistic wellbeing as well as improved academic outcomes. I share this story to highlight my belief that in education, "relationship is everything"; this is especially true in the context of teachers working with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and families. This assertion is also supported by research, which has found that "establishing positive teacher-student relationships has been identified consistently as central to Indigenous student success and positive school experiences" (Burleigh, 2020, pp. 691-692).

Defining and Enacting Relationship

Relationship building with Indigenous people, land, and knowledge should be considered a lifelong journey. This process may take many forms for teacher educators, who must model diverse approaches to respectful relationship building and nurturing so that their students can bring this understanding into their professional practice. According to Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2019), "a stance of humility, accompanied by deep listening, is the key that opens up this relational space and makes relationship-building possible" (p. 7). This "stance of humility" is strongly tied to anti-oppressive practice, as previously outlined. Deep listening is a term that

resonates with me; as a Métis woman working in a colonial institution, it is not uncommon for non-Indigenous people to ask me a question but then, unhappy with my answer, ask one of my Indigenous colleagues in hopes of getting an answer more to their liking. However, part of being in a respectful relationship is listening sincerely to what the other person is saying, "whether you like it or not."

For teacher educators, deep listening may include inviting Indigenous community members to share their expertise in a given area. Although this should not be tokenistic in nature (Bishop et al., 2021), nor an abdication of professional responsibility, these invitations can provide opportunities for non-Indigenous teacher educators and students to access Indigenous knowledge directly from the source. Factors such as cultural protocol, hosting, and honoraria must be explicitly demonstrated to empower students to extend these invitations within their own contexts (Scully, 2015). Deep listening is connected to anti-oppressive practice, as it requires those individuals in positions of power to act with humility and to challenge entrenched power relations to uplift the often oppressed voices of Indigenous people within the education system (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019).

Modelling the process of building relationships with Indigenous people can also include rethinking the nature of relationships within teacher education; in their study of factors that influence school success for Indigenous high school students in Saskatchewan, Stelmach et al. (2017) find that relationality is "a central aspect of keeping them in school (and wanting to be there)" (p. 14). Students gave the example of having teachers who acted "'like an aunty or uncle'" (Stelmach et al, 2014, p. 14). The implication for teacher educators is to once again reconsider their position of power over their students and develop a learning environment where

their students can "relate as part of a larger kith[v] and kin network" (Stelmach et. al, 2017, p. 14). Central to developing these types of balanced relationships is trust.

The importance of building trust between Indigenous people and the education system has been examined extensively in research (Bishop et al., 2021; Kicya7 Schneider, 2015; Stelmach et al., 2017). According to Burleigh (2020), "positive relationships are especially important when working in Indigenous educational contexts because the relational ontology of Indigenous ways of knowing and learning make trust a central consideration between teachers and students, and with parents and communities" (p. 692). Because "transformative education in particular requires the building of trusting relationships that allow for the vulnerability and courage that enable shifts in one's perspective" (Leddy & O' Neill, 2021, p. 347), trust is a necessary component within teacher education. By establishing trust with and among students, teacher educators are setting them up to delve deeply into their learning and feel a sense of safety in expressing vulnerability.

In addition to humility, deep listening, explicit modelling of how to work alongside Indigenous people, and establishing trust teacher educators should also model humor, compassion, and high expectations, all of which have been identified by Indigenous students as important aspects of positive relationships with teachers (Stelmach et al., 2017). Taken together, these approaches to relationship building, modelled in teacher education, provide a basis for pre-service and in-service teachers to develop positive relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and families, having a positive influence on the educational experiences of Indigenous students.

Connection to Teacher Capacity and Improved Outcomes for Indigenous Students

As I stated above, I believe that "relationship is everything." To experience holistic wellbeing and attain equitable educational outcomes, First Nations, Métis and Inuit students must know that their teachers care about them because "the interactions that Indigenous students have with their teachers can be a critical factor for student performance and achievement" (Rahman, 2013, p. 667). Extending this care to relationships with families also supports improved communication and trust (Rahman, 2013). The implications for teacher practice are immeasurable; it could be argued that relationship is the single most important factor for Indigenous student wellbeing and learning. From my own experience with the young man who gave me the note, I believe that our mutually respectful relationship helped him to flourish in that school year; my hope is that he will carry this connection with him on the rest of his journey. In addition to directly impacting outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, relationship is a necessary condition to engage with Indigenous pedagogies; when teacher educators model the importance of relationship, they are also demonstrating "Indigenous pedagogies of intergenerational learning, storytelling, and experiential learning" (Hare, 2015, p. 113).

Indigenous Pedagogies

Connected Frameworks and Approaches

Indigenous pedagogies are deeply enmeshed with anti-oppressive practice and relationship. I believe that before you can truly understand Indigenous pedagogies, you must understand yourself and the systems in which you operate. Indigenous pedagogies require educators to value diverse ways of knowing beyond the Eurocentric approaches that are normalized in the colonial education system. Educators must also learn how to work alongside and learn *with* Indigenous people and land, rather than maintaining the separation of learning *about*. As one Indigenous scholar argues, "we need to move beyond thinking, talking, and

writing *about* Indigenous knowledge systems to instead be engaging with, practicing, and facilitating these systems" (Kicya7 Schneider, 2015, pp. 43-44). Clearly, relationship is also a precursor for working with Indigenous pedagogies.

In addition to its close ties to anti-oppressive practice and relationship, Indigenous pedagogies are also connected to culturally responsive pedagogy (Papp & Cottrell, 2021), land-based learning (Danyluk et al, 2023), and Indigagogy, which "is grounded in an understanding of relationships among learners, between teachers and learners, and between epistemologies" (Kitchen & Raynor, 2013, p. 42). Indigenous pedagogies require both anti-oppressive practice and relationship to be centered and "are much more than just good pedagogy: they hold the potential to…transform mainstream education systems" (Kicya7 Schneider, 2015, p. 58). None of the practices outlined below should be considered in isolation; Indigenous ways of knowing are expansive and interconnected, as are approaches to Indigenous pedagogies.

Defining and Enacting Indigenous Pedagogies

Indigenous pedagogies are diverse, holistic, and focused on "processes as opposed to content" (Kicya7 Schneider, 2015, p. 52). This distinction is important because unless teachers change *how* they educate our children, curriculum alone won't improve the educational experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students (Louie & Gereluk, 2021). Taking a holistic approach, teacher educators should create opportunities for their students to experience locally contextualized holistic models of learning. In the Indigenous education course requirement they taught to pre-service teachers, Kitchen and Raynor (2013) used the Medicine Wheel as a framework for planning and structured assignments to allow pre-service teachers to apply holistic ways of thinking to their own planning. These teacher educators were also intentional in selecting learning activities that spoke to each part of their students' beings including ceremony-

spiritual, building community-emotional, co-constructing knowledge-intellectual, and interactive learning-physical (Kitchen & Raynor, 2013).

A primary component of Indigenous pedagogies is land-based learning. As outlined by Danyluk et al. (2023), Indigenous land-based learning "demonstrates the physical, mental, and spiritual connections to the land and conveys concepts such as relationality, holism, and intergenerational knowledge" (p. 392). I feel strongly that teacher educators must include land-based learning in their classes so their students can learn more than what can be read in a book; in order for this learning to be accurate and respectful, it must be done in collaboration with local Indigenous peoples. For pre-service and in-service teachers, I believe that the focus of land-based learning is not to learn factual information about the lands on which they reside; rather, land-based learning offers learners the opportunity to hear the stories of the people of the land and come to understand their own responsibilities to, and connection with, Indigenous lands and people. Such knowledge transcends any singular subject area, but equips participants with the mindset to relate to Indigenous students and families on a deeper level.

Other examples of Indigenous pedagogies include holistic assessment practices, circles, storytelling, and learning with Elders. In their assessments, Kitchen and Raynor (2013) included "a variety of forms: oral, written, artistic, self and peer evaluation, thereby creating space for individuals to express their learning effectively" (p. 54). Just as Indigenous ways of knowing make space for multiple expressions of understanding, so too should assessment practices grounded in Indigenous pedagogies.

The use of circles is another method of engaging with Indigenous pedagogies. Circles create an environment where everyone is equal; this practice pushes back on dominant discourses around the hierarchical nature of teaching and learning, wherein the teacher transmits

knowledge for their students to receive. In my experience, Indigenous people use circles for many cultural and spiritual reasons; within a classroom, circles can be one way of creating a sense of community and providing space for students to share their thoughts and feelings. Hare (2015) found that instructors who used sharing circles "with the goal of building relationships, with and among students" (pp. 110-111) were successful in reflecting "Indigenous ways of knowing in their teaching with pre-service teachers" (p. 110).

In addition to the methods outlined above, storytelling is an important means of knowledge transmission that can perform many roles in Indigenous societies. According to Moon and Berger (2016), "honoring multiple stories and perspectives in public school classrooms was a common theme in participating educators' descriptions of Indigenous students' success" (p. 7). Based on my cultural teachings and professional experience I believe that teacher educators who use storytelling as an Indigenous pedagogy must do so within the confines of their own cultural authority; stories such as those written in books or in online videos can generally be shared freely, but there are some sacred stories and protocols that must be honoured in oral storytelling. Beyond the idea of story*telling* of Indigenous cultural stories, teacher educators must also embed opportunities for story*listening* to Indigenous students and families. Teacher educators must revisit the importance of deep listening and model what that looks like when listening to the stories of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and families. Importantly, pre-service and in-service teachers must also be explicitly taught the conditions under which Indigenous students and families may choose or decline to share their stories; from my perspective, trust is a necessary component of this storytelling/storylistening process.

Elders are highly respected members of Indigenous communities, and their roles are diverse. To me, Elders represent a level of knowledge not found anywhere else. My Elders are

kind people I can trust, who will help me in any way they can; they meet my needs in a holistic way, through sharing traditional foods, language, stories, ceremony, humor, and more. Many researchers (Hare, 2015; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023b; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019; Scully, 2015) advocate for the inclusion of Elders in teacher training. Based on my own experience learning with Elders, they can provide a type of learning and relating that cannot be duplicated. Their methods of teaching may also give insight to the diverse nature of Indigenous knowledge, providing a foundation for teachers to engage with Indigenous knowledge and people within their own classrooms.
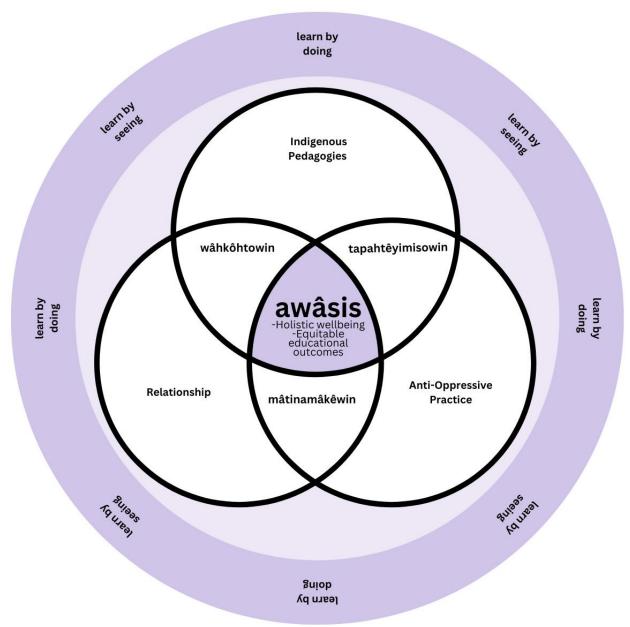
Connection to Teacher Capacity and Improved Outcomes for Indigenous Students

Research makes clear that a superficial content-focused approach to Indigenous education is insufficient in meeting the needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023a). Modelling the use of Indigenous pedagogies provides the opportunity to delve more deeply into Indigenous ways of knowing, thereby building teacher capacity to enact Indigenous pedagogies in their own classrooms. These ways of teaching and learning could heavily influence teacher practice and, by extension, the educational experiences of Indigenous students.

Framework

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework: tapahtêyimisowin, mâtinamâtowak, wâhkôhtowin

Note. This figure is a visualization of my research findings and relevant life experiences. I have

chosen this visual representation to show the interconnectedness of the wise practices as

grounded in the Cree language and my Indigenous worldview.

During the research process, I continually circled back to my intended purpose of improving outcomes for Indigenous students and began to develop a framework to visualize my thinking; this framework is based on the connections I have made between my own experiences and the themes that emerged through my reading, anchored by my mother's language. I sought guidance from Elders Bill (Cree) and Emily (Métis) Sewepagaham so that I could bring in the language. The meaning of awâsis shared here comes from Elder Jerry Saddleback (Cree), and heavily shapes how I approach my work both within and beyond academia. I purposely chose not to translate the Cree words on the framework itself because I am making a point that the Cree language is valid in its own right without being held next to English. For the reader's benefit in comprehending the framework, translations are provided below, along with a rationale for their inclusion.

- awâsis-child; little star being loaned to us from God: The child is placed in the middle of the framework to show the interconnectedness of the wise practices and themes in improving the educational experiences of Indigenous students, while always maintaining the child at the center of all that we do. The plural version of this word is awâsisak.

- tapahtêyimisowin-humility: Anti-oppressive practice and Indigenous pedagogies both require the practitioner to be humble. Within anti-oppressive practice, this may also be known as locating oneself or acknowledging privilege and power. Indigenous pedagogies require humility because they are so interconnected with complex Indigenous ways of knowing; educators should avoid the mindset of developing "expertise" in Indigenous pedagogies, but rather embrace a lifelong journey of learning.

- mâtinamâkêwin-sharing: Relationship and anti-oppressive practice each require educators to share power and share aspects of themselves. Sharing power is necessary in anti-

oppressive practice in order to deconstruct dominant discourses and uplift oppressed voices; in relationships, sharing power involves the teacher decentering themselves as the authority figure to relate to their Indigenous students on an equal level. Both approaches require vulnerability in sharing parts of oneself.

- wâhkôhtowin-relationship, kinship: wâhkôhtowin is a way of thinking about, and acting upon, our connections to other beings. In teacher education, wâhkôhtowin underlies both relationship and Indigenous pedagogies. The word itself, translated directly, can mean relationship. But deeper than that is the understanding and way of being that acknowledges our responsibilities to take care of each other. Indigenous pedagogies are inherently relational and, as such, are also connected to wâhkôhtowin as a guiding principle.

The "learn by seeing, learn by doing" approach outlined earlier is also included in the framework. It encircles the triple Venn diagram to show that modelling is integral to all of the wise practices shared here which work together to enhance the educational experiences of Indigenous students. The circular shape is an homage to the "cyclical Indigenous notions of knowledge" (Louie, 2020, p. 189); learning has no beginning and no end, and each component of learning relies upon another.

piyisk (In the End): Conclusion

Given the enormity of the journey to reconciliation, and the important role of education in that journey, the potential implications of the wise practices and framework shared here are immense. It's clear that Alberta's K-12 education system is not adequately serving diverse First Nations, Métis and Inuit children; considering the tremendous impact that teachers have on the educational experiences and outcomes of Indigenous students, we must support them in building

their capacity to do so. Teacher educators must employ a variety of wise practices, grounded in tapahtêyimisowin (humility), mâtinamâtowak (sharing), and wâhkôhtowin (relationship), to guide their students; anti-oppressive practice, relationship, and Indigenous pedagogies are three practices that they can call upon. The ultimate goal of these approaches is to positively impact the holistic wellbeing and academic outcomes of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in the K-12 system.

Further research is needed on the correlation between teacher practice and outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students; although some research is available (Burleigh, 2020; Rahman, 2013), it would be valuable to see more recent findings from the Alberta context in light of the ubiquity of Indigenous education course requirements for pre-service teachers in Alberta, as well as the implementation of the Teaching Quality Standard. In addition to the need for further context specific research, other difficulties remain.

Challenges with systemic resistance, funding, and time constraints remain barriers in teacher education intended to equip teachers to better meet the needs of Indigenous students. Individuals within a system have limited power, so improving the skills of teachers must go hand in hand with systemic changes. Robinson and Tompkins (2019) found that in their class, "overall the graduate students felt a strong sense of agency to transform their own classrooms; but they lamented the lack of institutional support to challenge Eurocentrism" (p. 124). This systemic resistance was also noted by Moon and Berger (2016) and Papp and Cottrell (2021) and echoes my own experiences in Alberta's K-12 system.

At times systemic resistance is enacted through inadequate funding. Within the Alberta context, "the number one challenge identified in the braiding and weaving of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing into teacher education programs was that of appropriate funding"

(Danyluk et al., 2023, p. 397). Due to the political nature of systemic change (Robinson & Tompkins, 2019), those in power may hesitate to adequately fund something that some individuals within the system view "as a passing fad" (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023a, p. 64). Together, systemic resistance and lack of funding may limit the amount of time that is devoted to education for pre-service and in-service teachers to better meet the needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.

Time is a necessary condition for building relationships. For Kitchen and Raynor (2013), "time was a greatest challenge, with several teacher candidates suggesting that the course be longer and spread out over the term" (p. 54). Given the expansive and complex nature of Indigenous education, adequate time must be devoted to each of the wise practices outlined here; trying to rush through content is done at the expense of the many relationships that must develop.

Although problems remain in teacher training to improve educational experiences for Indigenous students, some progress seems to be happening. In a 2016 study, Milne found that "overall, interviewees [who were Indigenous parents and educators] believed that the schooling experiences were improving for newer generations of Indigenous children" (p. 80). This intergenerational improvement of Alberta's education system in meeting the needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students is something that I am personally witnessing; there is a newfound level of awareness amongst about the unique contexts and gifts of Indigenous people in Canada amongst teachers that I didn't see as a student or beginning teacher. However, the disparate outcomes of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students in terms of holistic wellbeing and quantitative measures tell us that much more work is ahead of us. Rather than congratulating ourselves for incremental improvements, we must continue to advocate for and enact change on behalf of our children; "instead of simply pushing students through the system, we must ask

whether we have transformed schools into places of value, healing, and flourishing for Indigenous learners" (Louie & Gereluk, 2021, p. 53). awâsisak, little star being loaned to us from God, deserves the best of the K-12 education system, but the question remains: Will Alberta's education system fulfill its responsibilities to the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit awâsisak it is supposed to serve?

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Endnotes

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[i] In this context research is a process informed by my lived experience as an Indigenous educator, woven together with analysis of relevant academic articles and synthesis of my prior coursework as a Masters student.

[ii] I believe equitable educational outcomes for Indigenous students can vary among individuals, but the goal of educational equity is to empower students to meet their own goals. These goals may include service to their families or nations, colonial educational attainment such as high school graduation, entering a particular career pathway, or any number of other aspirations. Within the context of Alberta's K-12 education system, educational outcomes may be measured with quantitative data but should also consider the unique stories and dreams of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.

[iii] "In 1883, the Canadian government established a partnership with the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches to open three schools in western Canada. The establishment of these schools, known as 'industrial schools,' marked the creation of Canada's formal Indian residential school system. The system was built on the foundations established by Catholic and Protestant missionaries who saw it as their mission to 'civilize' and Christianize Aboriginal peoples. Under that system, the federal role was to fund and regulate schools for Aboriginal children, operated by Christian churches" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015b, p. 83).

[iv] Truth and Reconciliation Commission

[v] friend