Digging Up the Roots of Educational Policy:

Curriculum Infusion and Aboriginal Student Identity Development

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Educational Administration and Leadership

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Abstract

Since 2002, Alberta teachers have been required to infuse Aboriginal perspectives into the K-12 curriculum across all subject areas in order to positively impact Aboriginal children's identity development. There are several assumptions inherent in the policy of infusion that this study uncovers and examines using Cree knowledge and research methods as the foundation of inquiry. The questions that guided the study were threefold. The first task was to understand what Aboriginal identity is and how it develops and functions. Second was to examine what happened to Aboriginal identity to impact its development in Aboriginal people. The final query was to explicate the roles and impacts of Canadian teachers and schools on Aboriginal identity development. Based on the knowledge and understanding of three Cree knowledge holders, this study presents a model of Aboriginal identity as a living entity that grows and develops within a cultural ecosystem. The model is then used as an analytical framework to evaluate the policy of infusion for its potential efficacy in contributing to the development of Aboriginal identity in schools. The study concludes that Aboriginal identity development requires a cultural ecosystem that includes Aboriginal peoples, ceremonies, histories, knowledges, languages, and lands as inherent elements of identity and its development.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Christine Martineau. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office, Project Name: “Aboriginal Perspectives on Infusion”, No. 00058714, MARCH 22, 2016.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, Gerald and Yvonne Martineau. Their perseverance, strength, and commitment to family made everything possible for me. My father passed very suddenly during a critical stage of this work, leaving me reeling from the loss and unsure of how to continue. I am so grateful for coming to understand through that experience and this work that his strength lives on in me. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for your strength, love, and support, and for ensuring that we knew who we are. This was always for you. In loving memory of my father, Gerald Allan Martineau (1926-2016), who never said *whoa* in a tough spot.

Acknowledgements

I first want to acknowledge and give thanks to all of our ancestors who understood the importance of knowing who we are and how we are connected to everything else. Their struggles to hold onto and maintain the roots of Cree identity in the face of the concentrated and sustained assault mounted against it made it possible for someone like me to look to Cree knowledge for answers about my own identity and how it matters, individually and collectively. It is no surprise to me that the work this dissertation represents begins and ends with Cree identity as a core element of its significance, both philosophically and personally. I could not have embarked on and completed this personal and professional learning journey without being grounded by my identity as a Cree/Métis woman, and for that I want to acknowledge the many teachers along the way who have helped me to understand what that means.

I owe my deepest thanks for the gifts of one individual who, more than anyone else, has helped me learn to recognize myself for who I am and appreciate the necessity of that understanding. Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax was the first teacher I ever had who shared my Northern Alberta Cree/Métis identity. The impacts of this shared identity on our relationship—as teacher and student, mentor and apprentice, participant and researcher, supervisor and candidate, Elder and neophyte—are innumerable and difficult to qualify. This was the first time that I had a teacher recognize me and affirm my understanding of who I am. To have the opportunity to learn from someone *like me* was life-changing and the fact that it was Cora had everything to do with the magnitude of its impact. As a trailblazer, Cora cleared a path for me and then, as she has countless others, helped me walk it in the best way possible. She has been there through every stumble, obstacle, and wrong turn as a constant source of strength, support, and direction. She has lit the way for me with her wealth of knowledge and experience, her incredible perception and discernment, and the generosity and love with which she has shared her gifts and talents. I am incredibly grateful for all that Cora is and for all that she does to help those of us searching to find our way.

I am grateful to Dr. Randy Wimmer for his dedicated support and commitment to helping me through this experience despite the difficulties I encountered along the way. Randy has been integral to my success as a supervisor, mentor, and champion. His patience, open-mindedness, and trust in the process and in me were invaluable. They allowed me to determine the direction

of my research less burdened by the pressure to conform that academia applies to subjugated knowledge systems and in doing so push back and challenge conformity.

I want to thank Dr. Dwayne Donald for being a member of my supervisory committee and for being so generous with his knowledge and understanding throughout this journey. His grounding in Cree ways and his ability to teach others have been very influential on me both personally and professionally. I am especially grateful for the opportunities that Dwayne made possible for me to learn in ceremony and to live in ceremony. Dwayne's work with Elder Bob Cardinal and his willingness to share those experiences and lessons have had deep and lasting impacts on me. I also want to express my thanks to the other members of my examining committee. I am grateful to Dr. Michael Marker, Dr. Alex Da Costa, Dr. Rebecca Sockbeson, and Dr. Sara Carpenter for their time, expertise, support, and thoughtful participation in assessing the quality of my work and its contributions to educational theory and practice.

There are so many others who have helped and supported me along the way. I am forever thankful for my parents, Gerald and Yvonne, for giving me life and love and roots to anchor me. I am grateful for my husband, Rick and all of the love that he has brought into my life. It is no coincidence that we met at the beginning of this endeavor because I would not have made it through without his support, encouragement, partnership, and unconditional love. Together we have created a large and growing family for which I am so grateful: Tom, Alex, and Charlie, Shaun, Jay, and Wyatt, Liane and Dylan, Jordan and Alix, Matt, Claire, and Grace, Barret, and Willow, thank you for giving it all meaning and purpose. I want to also acknowledge the love and support of my mother-in-law Sheila and sister-in-law Nancy for embracing me as family and championing my dreams.

I have had the friendship and support of a few great people over the last few years. I want to especially thank some of them individually. Dr. Tim Goddard has been an incredible source of encouragement, guidance, and learning in my academic career. I am tremendously grateful for his support and friendship, which helped make this accomplishment possible. I also want to thank my friends Jen and Dave, Lauralyn, Gol, Mary Jo, Rochelle, Sarah, Jenna, and Marla, all of whom have walked with me, cried with me, laughed with me, and carried me when I was broken. Thank you for being loyal and true friends who want nothing but the best for me. Finally, I want to acknowledge and give thanks to the source of life and knowledge for all that I am and all that I have. *kinanāskomitin*

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Research

The purpose of this research study was to examine educational policy aimed at strengthening Aboriginal identity in Indigenous students as a means of improving their educational experiences and academic outcomes in Canadian schools. My objective was to analyze an Alberta education policy initiative from an Indigenous perspective in order to evaluate its potential to positively impact Aboriginal identity development and consequently improve Aboriginal student success.

In this chapter, I explain who I am and the importance of my location as a Cree researcher seeking Cree knowledge and understanding of the underlying concepts and goals of Aboriginal education policy in Alberta. I introduce the policy framework and the specific policy directive that requires all teachers in the province to infuse Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum as the main object of inquiry for this study and the context in which the policy is implemented. The chapter concludes with an overview of the purpose of the research and the processes that I engaged in carrying out the study using Indigenous Research Methodology.

Locating Myself as the Researcher

> We know what we know from where we stand.
>
> Margaret Kovach, 2009, p. 7

In order for those who read this work to have a conception of what I know and how I know it, it is important for me, as Kovach articulates, to delineate where I stand in the world. To do that, I have to start before I began.

All of my great-grandmothers were Indigenous women. Two were Cree, one was Dene, and the fourth was French and Dakota. One of my great-grandfathers was Métis and the other

three were European. This lineage, beyond all other factors, has been the most significant in shaping who I am today. My mother's grandmother, Nancy Louise Whitford, was a full-blood Cree according to the 1901 Census of Canada. She married Melvin Smith, a Methodist man formerly of Freemont, Iowa. Nancy's parents, John Whitford and Mary Rowland Kiyipatawish, were residing at Frog Lake shortly before the trouble began there in the spring of 1885. When news of the start of the Northwest Rebellion reached Frog Lake and incited trouble among some of Big Bear's followers, John and Mary relocated to the area of Whitford Lake near the present-day town of Andrew, Alberta and raised their family there. One significant result of their relocation was that neither was registered as an *Indian* with the Government of Canada, since Big Bear's band had not yet signed treaty and John and Mary were not affiliated with another band after moving to Whitford Lake.

Nancy and Melvin Smith eventually came to live in the community of Rife near Bonnyville, Alberta, which is where my grandmother, Ruth Smith was raised and met her husband, Ernie DeMarce. The DeMarce family had migrated from the United States to Harris, Saskatchewan and from there to Maloy, Alberta where they were also homesteaders. My grandparents, Ruth and Ernie, did their best to make a go of farming their homestead, supplementing their existence with hunting, trapping, and gardening. My mother, Yvonne was born in the 1930's while they were living on the homestead at Maloy. Like many other homesteaders during this time, Ruth and Ernie were unable to make any headway and decided to relocate to southern Alberta where Ernie found employment at the gas plant in Turner Valley. It wasn't until then, when my mother was eight years old, that she began school. It was also when she was first remembers being told she was an *Indian*.

Mom recalls playing outside the house with her sister one day when a man from a nearby

First Nation drove down the street in a wagon. He stopped to ask my mother where she was from. She wasn't sure what he meant when he asked the question so he replied, "Well, you're *Indian* aren't you? Where are you from?" I believe this was the first of many identity-defining moments for my mom. A second recollection she has of a similar incident, albeit with a different outcome, occurred when she went to Calgary at 17 to go to business school. In order to relocate for school, she needed both a way of supporting herself and a place to live. To meet both of these ends, she applied for a job as a nanny for a family in Calgary. When she arrived to take up her post as nanny and begin school, the mother took one look at her and said, "You're not an *Indian*, are you? We don't want an *Indian* looking after our children." I can picture her standing there with her suitcase in hand and possibly no immediate way of returning home, trying to decide how to answer this question when her education and her future livelihood were on the line. My mother assured her new employer that she was French, not *Indian*, and so she was allowed to take up the duties that would enable her to gain the skills she would use to help support her family when she was finished. My mom's education consisted of completing grades 1 through 10 in 8 years and her brief time at business school in Calgary. Her family could not afford to let her continue high school despite her natural aptitude and the rate at which she was able to catch up to her peers despite starting school at the age of eight, so she made the best of what she had and found employment in Turner Valley. Her inability to continue her education has been one of my mother's greatest regrets.

The story of my father's family also begins in part in Frog Lake. My father's great-grandmother, Genevieve Missinabiskop was the daughter of Amokamik and Marguerite Iskwesis, members of one of the bands residing at Frog Lake in 1885. John Delaney, an Irish-Canadian from Upper Canada, was the farm instructor at Frog Lake. Despite having a Canadian

wife in Ontario, Delaney had a reputation for forcing himself on the Cree women and was rumored to offer them food in exchange for sex. The bands that were living in Frog Lake then were suffering tremendously because the buffalo had been exterminated and the government was exerting its policy of half-rations of poor quality food to any bands that had not yet signed treaty. This was no doubt one of the major factors contributing to what is historically referred to as the *Frog Lake Massacre*, which took place on April 2, 1885 – and Delaney's reputed habits were quite possibly a factor in his demise that day. The crux of the story here is that, whether by force or by consent, Genevieve Missinabiskop was pregnant with Delaney's child when she left Frog Lake to escape the trouble, walking to Onion Lake with her oldest daughter and pregnant with her second, Marguerite Delaney. No one knows for sure why my great-grandmother was given John Delaney's name, just as no one knows the exact circumstances of her conception; it's simply a part of our story.

Marguerite Delaney married Adrian Martineau, a Métis man from Selkirk, Manitoba who, among other things, served as Indian Agent at Onion Lake and Cold Lake reserves. They had thirteen children together and adopted four others, the Garsons, who were orphaned. My grandfather, Herman (known as Bobby) was the second-oldest of their children. Adrian and Maggie, as she was known, were important members of the community because of the assistance and care they readily offered to anyone in need. There is a river that flows into Cold Lake that is named the Martineau River after Adrian because he managed to save some men working on the river from starvation during a storm one winter. One of the Wings at the Cold Lake Airbase is named Martineau Wing to honour Maggie's lifelong contributions to Cold Lake and its people. My grandfather Bobby married Rachel Harris, the daughter of T.W. "Flynn" Harris, a Northwest Mounted Police officer who later became an Indian Agent and Treaty Commissioner in Alberta

and the Northwest Territories, and Josette Janvier, a Chipewyan woman from Cold Lake First Nations.

My father Gerald was the oldest of Bobby and Rachel's fifteen children. He was born at Legoff on Cold Lake First Nation and spent his early years there. Dad went to the day school in Legoff and had fond memories of his teacher, Charlie Quinn. Unfortunately, he struggled with school and only spent a few years there before he began working with his father to help support their growing family. Dad travelled the province with his dad, working wherever and whenever they could find it. It was the 1930s and these were very hard times for many people throughout North America. My dad hunted, trapped, fished, picked medicines, pushed logs, built roads, and drove around North America many times over in his long life. As my understanding of Cree culture has grown, I have seen how my father's commitment to family and to his spiritual beliefs is a part of the way of life of his ancestors.

My parents knew each other through family connections and that is how they met, despite growing up in different parts of the province. After they married, they lived in Turner Valley and then moved to Calgary, where my mother still resides. They had five children, of whom I am the fourth. My family visibly reflects the genetic diversity that has been infused at various points in our ancestry. My three older siblings have dark hair, brown skin, and, except for my brother, brown eyes. My younger sister and I are blondes with blue eyes and much fairer skin. I looked so different than my siblings that, until my sister was born when I was nine, I thought I was adopted. The differences between us, however, are easily explained: Our father had blue eyes and fair skin and our mother has brown skin and eye colouring.

Government regulation of Aboriginal people through legislation that has narrowly, arbitrarily, and often in a highly skewed manner defined who is entitled to take part in the

remunerations of treaties and the benefits of Aboriginal rights to land use and harvesting in exchange for giving up their rights to half a continent has had a major impact on my family. The last persons known to have *Indian* status in my lineage were my paternal great-grandmothers, Marguerite Delaney and Josette Janvier, status that they lost when they married. My maternal great-grandmother, Nancy Whitford, did not have status because she was never registered. The implications of this on my family have been significant. The consequences of neither of my parents having *Indian* status have included where they could—or could not—live, their access to culture and community, and the language that they speak. Naturally, these results also impacted me significantly in similar ways.

Despite my family's disenfranchisement from the land through colonial legislation, we have always found ways to reconnect and renew our relationship with the natural world. I have spent every summer of my life visiting the places of my family's origins and living lightly on the land in the ways we learned. The trappings of summer camping became more modern but the principles remained the same. These brief respites from the expectations and norms that Canadian society placed on us as *Indians* allowed us to simply *be* according to our own understanding for a short time. They cemented those critical connections to our origins through immersion in places, people, knowledge, and traditions. Summers allowed us to fulfill our longing to return home to familiar faces, places, and experiences, renewing and strengthening our connections with every visit.

My ancestry could not be more firmly rooted in Canadian history because of the many complexities that arise from the contradictions between being Indigenous in a Canadian world. I developed my self-concept based on the following essential foundations: 1) knowing that I was Cree/Métis at my core and sensing the importance of this to my life; 2) understanding that I was

an *Indian* according to Canada and therefore substandard; and 3) learning that my purpose in life was to make up for that fact by becoming something else. I was taught that the way to accomplish this was through Canadian education, hard work, and by not causing problems along the way. My parents taught us all this same understanding but I wonder now if they or others thought that my younger sister and I had the advantage of not *looking like Indians* with our blonde hair, fair skin, and blue eyes. I can say that what I see reflected in the mirror has never matched what I know I am inside. The fact that I look like my grandfathers has not diminished or washed out the aspects of me that I inherited from my grandmothers. It has certainly complicated matters a great deal at times but my appearance is no more than a *red herring* in relation to my identity. I realize that this is a long introduction to who I am, but as is customary for Aboriginal people, *who are you* is a question that necessitates answering with an explanation of *who your people are.* I discuss the significance of who I am in relation to this study in the next section and in more depth in Chapter 3.

Study Impetus, Context, and Purpose

My interest in Aboriginal education is the result of my experiences, both personal and professional, with and in Aboriginal education in Alberta in a variety of roles. These include being an Aboriginal student in a public education system, a secondary teacher in public and First Nations schools, the founding principal and education director of a First Nation school, an undergraduate instructor, and a scholar and researcher. It has been and no doubt will remain the lifelong object of my inquiry and the major recipient of my intellectual passion and professional work.

I was teaching an undergraduate education course that examines contemporary issues in Aboriginal education when I was first thinking about an area to research for my dissertation. The

students in the course were predominantly non-Aboriginal, while approximately twenty percent were First Nations and Métis. Several of the students who were taking the course as a mandatory requirement of a combined degree with the Faculty of Native Studies or completing a minor in Native Studies for their Education degree program. The remainder of the students enrolled in the course chose it as an elective for various reasons. One of the course requirements was for students to give a presentation on a current issue related to Aboriginal education and it was one of these student presentations that summed up my own thinking about non-Aboriginal teachers preparing to teach Aboriginal students.

Two Cree students gave a presentation on the lack of Aboriginal content in education courses at the University of Alberta. They were concerned about how teachers were being prepared to teach Aboriginal students when there were no mandatory courses in Aboriginal education at the time. At the conclusion of their presentation, they asked the following of their peers: *We are prepared to teach your children; are you prepared to teach ours?*

Teachers in Alberta have been required to infuse Aboriginal perspectives into the K-12 curriculum since 2002 but they were not required to take any courses to help prepare them to accomplish this task until the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education instituted a mandatory course in 2013, 11 years after the policy came into effect. Teachers already in the profession had opportunities to attend professional development sessions to help them prepare to infuse Aboriginal perspectives but pre-service teachers were essentially on their own for the first decade of the policy's implementation. Social studies was the first subject area in which teachers were required to include Aboriginal perspectives under the policy so much of the early focus was on preparing social studies teachers and developing resources to support infusion in that curriculum area (Alberta Education, 2004). Under the same policy framework, curriculum for a

new optional high school subject area was developed and implemented as Aboriginal Studies 10, 20, and 30. Again, however, there were no required teacher education courses dedicated to preparing pre-service teachers to teach these courses.

As an Aboriginal teacher and teacher educator instructing courses on Aboriginal education at that time, I wondered how teachers were approaching the task of infusing Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum with minimal or no preparation. My experiences as a teacher, school administrator, and graduate student researching in the field of Aboriginal education for many years came to bear on my questions about teachers' abilities to accurately and effectively present Aboriginal perspectives. I knew what a difficult assignment it was to teach about Aboriginal Peoples' experiences and worldviews as an Indigenous educator so I could only imagine the enormity of the mandate for teachers, regardless of their cultural background. When my two Cree students asked their peers if they were prepared to teach Cree children, I realized that I was not the only one concerned about teachers and infusion. Having found my research topic, I set about examining the policy in depth and the circumstances of its implementation.

Infusion Policy Goals and Objectives

In 2002, Alberta released its *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*, which was the result of a three-year review of the province's 1987 Native Education Policy. The framework is intended in part to "increase and strengthen knowledge and understanding among all Albertans of First Nations, Métis and Inuit governance, history, treaty and Aboriginal rights, lands, cultures, and languages" (Alberta Education, 2008, p. 1) and to "provide First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners with access to culturally relevant learning opportunities" (ibid). The policy framework contains five goals intended to support First

Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners: (1) High quality learning opportunities that are responsive, flexible, accessible, and affordable to the learner; (2) Excellence in learner achievement; (3) Learners are well-prepared for participation in post-secondary studies and the labour market; (4) Effective working relationships; and (5) Highly responsive and responsible ministry. The framework also identified 24 strategies to implement in order to achieve these five goals.

In order to meet the first goal of the framework, to provide high quality learning opportunities that are responsive, flexible, accessible, and affordable to the learner, Alberta Education required teachers to infuse Aboriginal perspectives into the K-12 curriculum. Infusion was mandated under Strategy 1.1 of the policy framework, which was to "increase the quantity and quality of First Nations, Métis and Inuit curriculum, language, learning and teaching resources" (Alberta Education, 2008, p. 4). The objectives of the strategies for Goal 1 are to achieve the following:

- Identify and reduce barriers preventing First Nations, Métis and Inuit learner and community access and success.
- Prepare and support educators to meet the needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners and communities effectively.
- Strengthen the use, sharing, recognition and value of indigenous knowledge and languages. (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 11)

absent from the policy framework or from any of the reports on its implementation (Alberta Learning, 2002; Alberta Education, 2003; 2004; 2008) is an explanation of why infusion was chosen as a means of meeting these objectives. None of the policy framework documents provides the rationale for infusion or connect it, theoretically or practically, to the objectives it is intended to address.

The Context for Infusion

Another factor in implementing infusion that neither the policy framework nor the progress reports discussed was the ability of Alberta teachers to carry out the mandate. The majority of teachers in Canada are EuroCanadian (Agbo, 2004; Kanu, 2005; Johnston, Carson, Richardson, Donald, Plews, & Kim, 2009), representing up to 94% of teachers according to Agbo (2004). While Aboriginal children in Canada in 2006 made up 5.2% of the total student population, by 2009 only 2.7% of Aboriginal people were teachers (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). The large proportion of non-Aboriginal teacher candidates in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta (Johnston, Carson, Richardson, Donald, Plews, & Kim, 2009) suggests similar disproportion among teachers in Alberta, which raises important issues regarding infusion. Given the general lack of knowledge and misperceptions evident among Canadians about Aboriginal cultures, histories, and experiences (Coalition for the Advancement Aboriginal Studies, 2002; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996), how teachers are going about trying to present Aboriginal perspectives is an area of great concern.

The disproportionate numbers of non-Aboriginal teachers in public schools is compounded by the fact that, until recently, there were no mandatory courses on Aboriginal education in any of the three major teacher preparation institutions in Alberta. The University of Alberta and the University of Calgary now both have a mandatory course in Aboriginal education as part of the requirements for a Bachelor of Education degree. These courses are hopefully having a positive impact on new teachers' knowledge about Aboriginal Peoples. What it cannot address is the ten-year interval during which infusion was required but no mandatory courses existed.

One of the areas that I am most concerned about with respect to infusion are the impacts

of its implementation on Aboriginal students given the social context in which it is occurring. Mandatory courses such as this can provide information about and experiences with Aboriginal people but they cannot guarantee a change in students' attitudes, despite how critical teachers' beliefs and perceptions are to successful curriculum reform and innovative practice (Kanu, 2005). Having taught several courses on Aboriginal education, including the mandatory course in my faculty, has given me a front row perspective of what teacher candidates know, understand, and think about Aboriginal Peoples. Ignorance about Indigenous cultures, histories, and experiences can be addressed to some degree through courses, but the negative attitudes that many students have toward Aboriginal people and subjects are much more difficult to impact.

Student reactions to Aboriginal content and courses that I have witnessed include: disbelief and shock from many over what they did not learn in their own schooling; anger and frustration over the history of Aboriginal education as an instrument of colonization; guilt and shame regarding Canada's treatment of Aboriginal Peoples; apathy because they feel no connection to Aboriginal issues or experiences; and various degrees of hostility and anger toward anything related to Aboriginal Peoples' rights or needs. Coming face to face with the racist attitudes and beliefs of student teachers has been one of the most difficult aspects of my work as an Indigenous teacher educator. It requires two distinct sets of abilities. I have to respond to hostility that ranges from micro-aggressive comments and actions to more overt racial prejudice and discrimination on both a personal level as an Indigenous woman and professionally as the course instructor.

There seems to remain a large segment of Canadian society that continues to believe that Aboriginal people must be assimilated and any legal distinctions of Indigeneity eliminated. Trying to teach students why Aboriginal Peoples, including me, have the right to exist as distinct

peoples with all of the rights that our country now deems essential human rights conferred on us is incredibly taxing work. It takes a toll on Aboriginal instructors and students to have to spend valuable time and energy addressing their right to exist in response to racist comments and behaviours. It takes away valuable instructional time for the students who actually want to learn from the course and understand Aboriginal perspectives when it comes time to teach them to their own students. Thinking about what and how these students might be approaching infusion after they become teachers is truly concerning.

Teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions are critical factors in the success of curricular reforms and innovations in teacher practice (Kanu, 2005). In an investigation of Manitoba teachers' perceptions on infusing Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum, Kanu (2005) reported some of the issues that teachers considered challenging to meaningfully integrating Aboriginal perspectives and content. Her findings included: teachers' own lack of knowledge of Aboriginal cultures; racist attitudes of non-Aboriginal teachers and staff; and incompatibility between school structures and some Aboriginal cultural values as the greatest challenges of infusion (p. 57). Kanu's findings on teachers' perceptions support my concerns about asking non-Aboriginal teachers to infuse Aboriginal perspectives into school curricula and leave me wondering about the impacts this will have on Aboriginal students.

Is *Aboriginal* the new *Indian*? Will having non-Aboriginal Canadian teachers infuse *Aboriginal* perspectives into the curriculum improve Aboriginal students' educational experiences and success, or will it simply result in a new and improved *Imaginary Indian—Indian 2.0*, if you will—a perception of Aboriginal people that is still created, managed, and perpetuated by non-Aboriginal Canadians? These are some of the concerns that provided the impetus for this research study. The next section introduces the questions that guided my inquiry,

the theoretical framework of the study, and an overview of the research processes that I undertook to seek answers.

Study Purpose and Processes

The first task that I undertook after reviewing the *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* and related reports was to review the literature in order to better understand infusion and define what is meant by the term *Aboriginal perspectives*. According to the literature, infusion is a process of incorporating the worldviews and experiences of Aboriginal Peoples into the curriculum. The rationale for infusion is twofold. First, it is intended to improve Aboriginal student engagement and achievement by positively impacting Aboriginal identity development through inclusion of Aboriginal Peoples' cultures and experiences in school curriculum. The second purpose of infusion is to develop better Canadian understanding of Aboriginal Peoples, cultures, knowledges, histories, and experiences. What the literature did not provide was a concept of Aboriginal identity, an understanding of how it develops and functions, nor a comprehensive explanation of how it was weakened and why that matters in terms of educational achievement for Aboriginal students. Understanding the nature of what the policy is meant to address is seemed like a critical missing piece of both the policy itself and the literature that describes infusion theory and practice.

According to the policy framework that mandated infusion, infusing Aboriginal perspectives means that teachers are required to provide an understanding of Aboriginal worldviews and experiences relevant to the various curriculum subjects they teach. They are being asked to participate in the development of Aboriginal identity by teaching Aboriginal children about who they are, what they have experienced, and the significance of each. What are the potential outcomes of having EuroCanadian teachers carry out this critical function of

identity development? According to the literature I reviewed, the nature of Indigenous knowledges and cultures are very different from EuroCanadian knowledge and culture, as are the means by which individuals learn about them. What I wanted to understand was what roles teachers and schools can fulfill in Aboriginal identity development if they do not share the culture and experiences of their students. How teachers understand the history and relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and Canada determines how and what they can teach their students.

The issues that I had with the policy were regarding the assumptions inherent in its logic. First, the policy assumes that all teachers are capable of accurately representing Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum. The second assumption is that having all teachers infuse their understanding of Aboriginal Peoples' worldviews and histories into their teaching will positively impact Aboriginal identity development. The final assumption is that strengthening Aboriginal identity through infusion will improve the educational experiences of Aboriginal children and their levels of academic achievement.

The questions that I needed to answer in order to evaluate these assumptions and the policy's potential to achieve its goals were the following: (1) What is Aboriginal identity, how does it develop, and what are its purposes and functions? (2) What happened to weaken Aboriginal identity and what were the consequences for Aboriginal people? (3) What impacts do teachers and schooling have on Aboriginal identity development? Once I had an understanding of each of these three areas I could then apply them to the policy assumptions to evaluate the efficacy of infusion as a policy solution for improving education for Aboriginal students.

My primary objective in this study was to examine the policy of infusion from an Indigenous perspective. Infusion is part of a larger policy framework that specifically targets Indigenous students in Alberta but the framework does not ground the policies in Indigenous

epistemology and ontology. I wanted to use Indigenous knowledge and understanding as the basis of my examination in order to evaluate the policy from an Indigenous perspective because infusion was implemented in order to impact the identity of Indigenous children and youth. I wanted to understand Aboriginal identity from the perspectives of Aboriginal Elders and knowledge holders because they are the exemplars of Aboriginal identity and the keepers of the knowledge, understanding, history, and experience that are the foundations of being Indigenous. I needed to then explain what happened to Aboriginal identity to weaken it and the impacts of its deterioration on Aboriginal people from their perspectives. In order to determine the effects of teachers and schooling on Aboriginal identity, it was important to approach knowledge holders whose knowledge and experience included expertise in Canadian education as well as being grounded in Indigenous knowledge and experience.

As an Indigenous researcher seeking Indigenous knowledge from Elders and knowledge holders in order to evaluate the policy's potential effects on Indigenous students' educational experiences and outcomes, the research methodology had to fit with my purpose. Employing an Indigenous Research Methodology enabled me to ensure that my inquiry was grounded in Indigenous knowledge and experience and that the understanding I gained comprised an Indigenous viewpoint. My endeavor was to use my own Indigenous epistemology and ontology to examine educational policy. Consequently, my work provides a Cree conceptualization of identity and Cree perspectives on issues related to its development in Canadian society and schools. The study culminates in a Cree analysis of the policy of infusion and a discussion of its appropriateness as a policy solution to Aboriginal educational achievement.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained who I am as an Indigenous researcher and how that

determined my interest in and my approach to examining the policy of infusion. I have introduced the policy and the context in which it is being implemented, and introduced the questions that it raised for me. Indigenous Research Methodology framed the purpose of the research, the processes that I engaged in, and the methods that I employed in coming to understand the relationship between infusion and Aboriginal identity. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on infusion and Aboriginal perspectives, which was an important first step in understanding the rationale for infusion and what infusing Aboriginal perspectives into curriculum entails. Chapter 3 introduces IRM, explains why it is the appropriate methodological framework for the study, and how the methods I used determined the nature of the understanding I gained. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present my findings on Aboriginal identity, its deterioration under colonization, and the nature of its relationship to schools and teachers. In Chapter 7, I apply my understanding of the Cree perspectives on identity and education shared with me as an analysis of the goals and assumptions of infusion policy. I conclude the study with a discussion of Aboriginal education policy in light of the conclusions I draw in my analysis.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature on Infusion and Aboriginal Perspectives

The purpose of this review of the literature was to understand why teachers are required to infuse Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum and to define what Aboriginal perspectives entail. The first section reviews the literature on infusion in order to develop a clearer understanding of the rationale and context of infusion in Canadian education. The second section is a review of Indigenous scholarly literature on the nature of Aboriginal worldviews and experiences. It describes the nature and characteristics of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous languages as the primary elements of Aboriginal worldviews. It also examines some of the elements of colonization in order to understand what teachers are being asked to infuse into the curriculum with respect to Aboriginal experiences.

There are different approaches to and purposes for conducting a literature review. I have employed this literature review in two main ways. First, I have used it to increase my own understanding of the area under investigation: infusing Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum. A deep understanding of what is meant by infusion is necessary to investigate this policy. As I explained in Chapter 1, I had initial questions about infusion which were answered through the literature review. The sub-categories of this review address the concepts of infusion and Aboriginal perspectives respectively. The second way the literature review was instrumental in the investigative process was that it helped me clarify and refine my research questions based on what was not in the literature about Aboriginal identity and its relationship to education. The literature on infusion helped me to understand that Aboriginal identity is at the centre of the policy's objectives. The literature on Aboriginal perspectives confirmed for me that finding Indigenous answers to my questions was of paramount importance.

Literature on Infusion Policy and Practice

It is important at this point to discuss the word *infusion* and its use in this investigation, both for the sake of clarity and to explain why it is necessary to consistently use *infusion* rather than using its synonyms periodically instead. There are four terms that are regularly used to describe placing Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum in some way and to some extent. These are incorporate, infuse, integrate, and include. *Incorporate* means “to put (something into the body or substance of (something else)” (www.etymonline.com). *Infuse* is "to pour in, introduce, soak" (ibid). Donald (2013) characterizes both of these words as part of “a specific spatialized language” (p. 28) that involves putting something smaller into a larger body or substance, which is indicative of perceptions that teachers have toward what they are being asked to do in addressing Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum. The last two terms, *integrate* and *include* are also used to describe this process. *Integrate* has a slightly different etymology than *incorporate* or *infuse*, in that it means “to render (something) whole … to put together parts or elements and combine them into a whole” (ibid). The meaning of *include* is "to shut in, enclose, imprison, insert" (ibid) which is quite a different action than is described by the first three terms.

These definitions – to add or introduce a substance into another as in the first two instances; to make something whole by combining elemental parts; or to close in or insert – help make it clear that language matters in how a policy direction may be implemented. Because Alberta teachers are being asked to “infuse” Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum according to the FNMI Policy Framework, it is important to remain consistent with that language in this examination of the policy. Therefore, I use the words *infuse* and *infusion* with the understanding that they mean to pour in or introduce a substance into another substance, or to soak one substance in the essence of another substance.

Why Infusion? Policy Impetus and Rationale

The selected literature, while not exhaustive, is representative of the research in the area of infusion and Aboriginal perspectives. The motivations behind calls for infusing Aboriginal perspectives into curriculum are part of a greater struggle existing in existing and former colonies around the globe to decolonize education provided to for Indigenous peoples. The larger effort to counter colonization includes a push to critically examine the effects of internal colonization in particular, on Indigenous peoples; in these colonies, dominant groups subjugate Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and consciousness in order to subordinate and regulate Aboriginal peoples (Kanu, 2011). Kanu contends that Aboriginal scholars' efforts in decolonization have focused on two key areas: challenging the dominance of Eurocentric thought in education; and reclaiming Indigenous knowledge and understanding its critical role in decolonizing education for Aboriginal people.

According to the literature reviewed here, there are numerous reasons for infusing Aboriginal perspectives in school curricula. There are two main threads to the argument, the first of which is to provide Aboriginal students with a culturally relevant education in order to improve their academic achievement levels and subsequently ameliorate poverty and marginalization in Canada. Scholars are looking to infusion as a means of transforming Aboriginal students' image of themselves from one of inferiority to one of equality by allowing them to see themselves and their cultures reflected in the curriculum in positive ways and by creating continuity between the culture of home and the culture of school. Creating continuity between Aboriginal students' cultures and the cultural context of their education will in turn improve their academic success rates and have a positive impact on their economic and social participation in Canadian society.

The second thread is that infusing Aboriginal perspectives into public education will help to combat the racism towards Aboriginal people that is currently embedded in Canadian society. Part of the rationale is that infusion legitimates Indigenous knowledge. Providing accurate information about Aboriginal people, cultures, and their colonization experiences will promote better understanding of and respect for Aboriginal peoples. Infusion will promote improved relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada by facilitating participation in providing critical discourses on citizenship. Furthermore, including Indigenous knowledge in school curriculum for all students will allow Indigenous knowledge to contribute to Canada's knowledge economy.

One of the earliest arguments for infusion in Canada comes out of a nation-wide study published in 2002. The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies (CAAS, 2002) proposed "a critical pedagogical shift" (p. 70) away from offering separate units of study on Aboriginal peoples toward integrating Aboriginal perspectives and content into curricula across Canada. CAAS argues that integration will legitimize Indigenous knowledge and transform the dominant institutionalized discourse of curriculum in the process. They contend that the absence of Aboriginal worldviews in classrooms is a major factor in the racism and discrimination that Aboriginal peoples currently face in Canadian society and its institutions. History has typically only been presented from a European colonial perspective that paints Aboriginal peoples as inferior beings in need of salvation and civilization. In order to challenge the underpinnings of racist ideologies in an effort to eliminate racism and discrimination, Aboriginal historical experiences need to be presented.

In addition to educating non-Aboriginal Canadians, CAAS believes that including Aboriginal perspectives in the K-12 curriculum will provide additional benefits to Aboriginal

students. Providing them with an understanding of "contemporary spiritual, cultural, economic, political and social issues, events, trends and customs will help develop insightful learning and critical analysis" (p. 77). This understanding will not only create a broader knowledge base of the issues affecting Aboriginal peoples and communities today but will also enhance Aboriginal students' self-esteem in the process. CAAS argues that this will "build understanding, pride, respect and, ultimately, justice" (p. 77) for Aboriginal people in Canada. Some of the ways CASS promote using Aboriginal perspectives to decolonize education include: deconstructing multiculturalism; offering an anti-racist curriculum; promoting respect for difference, diversity and common ground; practicing Canadian human rights culture; and acknowledging Aboriginal history. In addition to improving educational outcomes and experiences for Aboriginal students, CAAS argues that it is imperative to educate non-Aboriginal people as well. They report that the majority of Canadians, despite spending more than 13 years in school, are completely ignorant of the experiences of Aboriginal people. This lack of understanding and awareness is particularly concerning in teachers. If teachers continue to remain ignorant to the experiences of Aboriginal peoples, "[h]ow will graduates from Canadian high schools today be able to make decisions on major issues facing Canada and Aboriginal Peoples" (CAAS, 2002, p. 173)? This self-perpetuating cycle of ignorance and discrimination must be addressed in teacher education in order for positive changes to occur between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Canadians, and before any transformation in the educational experiences of Aboriginal students can happen.

Preparing teachers to effectively teach Aboriginal students has been an official Canadian policy concern for Aboriginal leaders since the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) prepared its education policy document, *Indian Control of Indian Education,* in 1972. Witt (2006) uses this historical yet still highly relevant policy paper, combined with voices from his own

contemporary research on Aboriginal education, to demonstrate the importance of integrating Aboriginal education into teacher preparation. He argues that meeting the NIB's primary goal for Indian education, that of "reinforcing Indian identity" (cited in Witt, 2006, p. 348), means providing a culturally-based education predicated on Aboriginal worldviews. Witt describes a course at the University of Regina in which an Aboriginal education perspective is presented to pre-professional teachers. The course, according to Witt, purports that "successful teaching of Aboriginal students has to go beyond just adding Aboriginal contents" (p. 348). Teachers must consider the cultural identity of each of their students by being familiar with and understanding the cultural backgrounds of the students they teach.

Witt believes that character education is central to changing academic outcomes for Aboriginal students. Rather than focusing solely on the economic benefits of educational achievement, education is, in Durkheim's words, "'as applicable to the moral as to the intellectual elements of culture'" (cited in Witt, 2006, p. 349). Witt contends that this places both *knowledge* and *character* fully within the bounds of culture, therefore making education a culturally-bound process. This complicates the education of children from cultural backgrounds that differ from their teachers' "because both knowledge and *character* will be interpreted according to cultural definitions" (Witt, 2006, p. 349, emphasis original). The problem, according to Witt, is that "*mainstream* interpretations of knowledge and character would be the *favoured* part while the cultural interpretations originating in the child's home environment would be the *opposed* part" (ibid, emphasis original). This opposition results in character formation through education becoming a threat to Aboriginal cultural survival, in the form of assimilation. Schools are contributing to the destruction and elimination of Aboriginal cultures by presenting *knowledge* and *character* from a mainstream perspective, thus ensuring the

maintenance and reproduction of mainstream culture only. Witt points out the importance for pre-service teachers to understand that

> character formation is not so much presented by the contents taught, thus the inclusion of Aboriginal contents cannot be the sole answer, but that they are taught in a more hidden way by methodologies used and the structure of both the institution they are teaching in and the curriculum they have to follow. (p. 350)

What this means, according to Witt, is that pre-service teachers need an awareness of the hidden curriculum of Aboriginal cultures, knowledge about the particular cultures of their Aboriginal students, and teaching strategies to which non-Eurocentric children can respond. The challenge of Aboriginal education, Witt believes, "is to conserve the traditional philosophy and worldview, which constitutes the educational basis for those who grow up in it, despite being educated in a different, yet dominant cultural setting" (p. 355). In other words, Witt believes it is a challenge that, at its core, involves reinforcing Aboriginal identity through an education that is based in an entirely different culture.

The key reasons cited in much of the literature for low achievement rates of Aboriginal students include teacher ignorance and lack of sensitivity to Aboriginal approaches to learning, and curriculum that is not culturally relevant to Aboriginal people (Ledoux, 2006). Based on her review of the literature on integrating Aboriginal perspectives into curriculum, Ledoux (2006) also contends that education for Aboriginal students must go beyond simply adding Aboriginal content to existing curriculum. Rather, it requires fundamental change so that curriculum "is rooted in Aboriginal understanding of the world, not only in content, but also in the teaching and learning activities which are in harmony with the life experience of Aboriginal students" (p. 267). Curriculum is, according to Ledoux, the whole environment of the school, including books,

pictures, seating plans, music, announcements, staff, activities, food, and the reception parents receive in the office.

Ledoux refers to the British Columbia Human Rights Commission, arguing that educational equity for Aboriginal students will be achieved when Aboriginal children see themselves and their people reflected in the curriculum and feel a sense of belonging in the school system" (Ledoux, 2006, p. 273). Ledoux asserts that this requires culturally based education and curriculum that acknowledges and reinforces "the fact that Aboriginal people are involuntary minorities" (p. 273) and distinct people seeking self-determination in a post-colonial Canadian context. Ledoux presents a description of culturally based education from the literature:

> Demmert and Towner (2003) concluded that culturally based education has six critical elements: Aboriginal language programs; pedagogy that stresses traditional cultural characteristics; pedagogy which reflects Indigenous ways of knowing and learning; curriculum based on the culture of the community; parent/community involvement in schools; and knowledge and use of the social and political mores of the community. (p. 273)

A critical aspect of culturally based education is the role of teachers. Ledoux found that educators cannot create change unless it begins with themselves and an acknowledgement and understanding of their own worldviews. Only then will they be able to understand the worldview of their students.

Similar to Witt (2006), Ledoux underlines the importance of teachers knowing about and being familiar with the cultural background of their students. She refers to a specialized knowledge base for teachers of Aboriginal students that includes "knowledge of culture and

society; the historical background of Native education and mainstream education; and instructional methodologies for Native students" (p. 275). Teachers also need to comprehend oppression, marginalization, and historical racism, and use this understanding as a basis for "reconceptualizing teaching and classroom practice" (p. 275). Ledoux found that some improvements have been made in Aboriginal education, but major change will not occur until Aboriginal education is no longer based on a Eurocentric model of education founded on dominant theories and practices where Aboriginal children feel alien and invisible. Fundamental changes are required and Aboriginal people must lead these efforts. Unfortunately, as Ledoux points out, there are not enough Aboriginal teachers at present to meet the needs of all Aboriginal students. Ledoux posits that, if teachers want to successfully meet the needs of their Aboriginal students, they must not only include Aboriginal content, but also adopt Aboriginal methods and values "so that students may come to know their own identity and potential from within the understanding of their culture" (p. 276). Ledoux concludes that integrating Aboriginal perspectives can be successfully achieved through a culturally based curriculum that is founded on Aboriginal methods, worldviews, and theories, and requires developing a holistic approach to curriculum and instruction that at its core fosters the Indigenous identity of the student.

Any reconceptualization of Aboriginal education must also address reimagining how academic success is measured. The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL, 2007) addresses both curriculum and measurement through three holistic models of lifelong learning based respectively on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit values and beliefs. The CCL's report outlines key characteristics of holistic lifelong learning for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people according to the literature, identifies gaps and challenges to understanding Aboriginal learning, presents drafts of the three models it developed, and proposes how the models can be extended to develop "a

national, holistic framework for measuring lifelong learning" (p. 3). The impetus for their redefinition of educational success grows out of what they deem an urgent need to revisit what is currently understood as First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning and how it is monitored and measured in order to develop "policies and programs that meet the expressed needs and aspirations of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people" (p. 3). The goal of this effort is to reverse decades of poverty and marginalization for Aboriginal people in Canada.

The key attributes of Aboriginal learning that CCL identifies are that learning is: holistic; a lifelong process; experiential in nature; rooted in Aboriginal languages and cultures; spiritually oriented; a communal activity; and an integration of Aboriginal and Western knowledge. Holistic learning is a process that "simultaneously engages and develops all aspects of the individual—emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual—and of the collective" (p. 5). According to CCL, knowledge from a holistic perspective is not classified into disciplines or hierarchies. Rather, all knowledge tends to be framed according to relationships between the various forms of existence, including humans, animals, plants, the environment, and the Creator. Lifelong learning encompasses learning that occurs through the various stages of life from childhood to old age. Experiential learning occurs through lived experience so that children learn the skills and knowledge essential to their everyday lives.

The integral nature of the relationship between language and culture results from the idea that "Aboriginal languages encode unique ways of interpreting the world" (p. 6) and they are inseparable from Indigenous identity and knowledge. Spiritual development makes "'knowing possible'" through a connection with "the energy that manifests itself in all existence" (p. 7), making knowledge a sacred object, and seeking it a spiritual quest. The communal nature of Aboriginal learning means that individuals have many and diverse

teachers throughout their lives, including parents, elders, and other members of the family and community. The relationships between the individual and his or her teachers are an essential aspect of Aboriginal learning:

> Intrinsic to Aboriginal learning is the nurturing of relationships among the individual, the family, the community, the nation, and all of Creation. Learning encompasses shared values and identity, developed through the learner's relationship to other persons and to the environment. (CCL, 2007, p. 5)

The final attribute of Aboriginal learning according to the CCL is that it integrates Indigenous and Western knowledge, which can mediate "the effects of cultural mismatch" (p. 7) that contribute to low participation of Aboriginal people in various fields of study and work. Successfully merging Aboriginal and Western knowledge offers students two balanced ways of knowing.

The most extensive work to date on infusing Aboriginal perspectives into curriculum comes from Kanu's (2002; 2005; 2007; 2011) studies in Manitoba. Over the course of a six-year investigation, Kanu examined: the rationale and context for integrating Aboriginal perspectives; theories of human development; cultural mediators of learning; integration methods; elements of success; challenges to integration; and both students' and teachers' perceptions of infusion. Because Kanu's 2011 publication incorporates all of her earlier research on integrating Aboriginal perspectives into curriculum, it is the primary focus in reviewing her findings.

The central purpose behind infusion is to affect the high rates of underachievement and early leaving of Aboriginal students. Some of the factors of school failure for Aboriginal students that Kanu identified in the literature include a lack of Aboriginal cultural knowledge in curriculum and among teachers, as well as conflicting culturally embedded styles of interaction

between teachers and students. Kanu found that underlying assumption of infusion is that integrating Aboriginal socialization processes will create connections between students' home cultures and that of the school, thereby motivating them to learn and reducing the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. This is part of cultural discontinuity theory, which argues that compatibility between curriculum, teaching and learning processes increases the chances for academic success and, conversely, that a lack of cultural continuity contributes to school failure (Kanu, 2011).

The importance of culture in academic success is paramount, according to Kanu. Based on the work of Cole and Wertsch, Dewey, and Vygotsky, she identified cultural mediation as a central aspect of learning and cognitive development. Kanu (2011) summarizes Cole and Wertsch's position, which is that "the special quality of the human environment is that it is suffused with the achievements of prior generations in reified form" (p. 5). Dewey's contribution to this tenet, Kanu states, is his belief that "from birth to death we live in a world of persons and things which is in large measure what it is because of what has been done and transmitted from previous human activities" (p. 5). Vygotsky (1981) wrote that "'the central fact about human psychology is the fact of cultural mediation'" (cited in Kanu, 2011, p. 6). Kanu sees the implications of these theories as particularly important for educators to understand how they can provide disadvantaged students with opportunities "to draw on their cultural capital – what they bring from prior cultural socialization in their homes and communities – to support and enhance classroom learning for them" (p. 6). Furthermore, the strength of the link between cultural socialization and learning implies a higher level of accountability for schools in ensuring that marginalized students are successful.

The main thrust of effort to make school more culturally relevant and therefore

achievable for Aboriginal students is on infusing Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum, both in K-12 education and, more recently, in teacher preparation. Kanu contends that, for the foreseeable future, "efforts need to be made to infuse the preparation of teachers from the mainstream culture with the history, language, and pedagogical traditions of Aboriginal peoples" (p. 8). Using Ezeife's (2001) work, Kanu (2011) addresses the semantics of *integration* and *infusion*, asserting that *integration* means "consistent infusion" (p. 9) of Aboriginal knowledge "throughout the regular school curricula" (p. 9). She argues that this will positively impact employment and income, it will promote "better intercultural understanding among all students, positive intergroup relations, solidarity and community building, and overall, an enhanced social climate" (p. 9), as well as address issues of culture and identity loss.

Another area where Kanu (2011) believes integration would provide benefits is in critical discourses of citizenship. This discourse will "draw attention to issues of membership, identity, engagement, and participation in productive ways in society" (p. 10). She argues that various experiential factors have undermined Aboriginal peoples' ability to participate in Canadian society in a productive and meaningful way. These factors include: experiencing "assimilationist models of citizenship, racism, discrimination, unequal organization of social structures and decision-making bodies, and, until relatively recently, the lack of Aboriginal voice in the determination of Aboriginal affairs" (p. 11). Kanu emphasizes the institutionalized form of many of the social injustices that Aboriginal people face, arguing that they are naturalized to the point that they often go unchallenged. In schools, issues of cultural imperialism, privileging and normalizing dominant values, the exclusion of Aboriginal and other minority perspectives, and under-funding Aboriginal education are evidence that institutional injustices continue to demand focus. Kanu points out that, because cultural practices and beliefs provide emotional and spiritual

strength, security, and sustenance for Aboriginal peoples, they can no longer be ignored in formal education. She contends that respectfully integrating Aboriginal cultures into mainstream education will enable a discourse of "cultural citizenship" (p. 12) that interrogates citizenship from the perspectives of minority cultures in Canada and examines the cultural cost of Canadian citizenship for them.

Indigenous knowledges' potential contributions to a knowledge economy are the final piece of Kanu's reasoning for infusing Aboriginal perspectives into school curriculum. Kanu refers to Hargreaves' (2003) ideas about a knowledge society where learning from one another is integral to the continuous innovation required by a society in need of continuous learning. Brown and Lauder suggest that creating a pool of "'collective intelligence'" (cited in Kanu, 2011, p. 13) is essential to success for knowledge economies. Collective intelligence incorporates the contributions of all members of society, rather than of a limited few, and imagination and emotional engagement are as important to success as technical expertise (ibid). Kanu discusses some of the contributions that she believes Indigenous knowledge is beginning to make to Western knowledge, despite being largely dismissed in Canada. She asserts that our refusal "to access the knowledge and wisdom of others produces self-fragmentation in us" (p. 15), leaving us lacking full access to ourselves and to the world, and left impaired in our capacity to take informed action. Kanu contends that "our ignorance leads us to look at policies divorced from historical contexts" (p. 15-16) and make assumptions based on a predominantly Eurocentric view of how things are or should be.

Important questions about curriculum are raised throughout Kanu's work on integration, particularly because curriculum is often cited as a major cause of early school leaving for Aboriginal and other ethnic minority students (p. 16). The curriculum intends to deprive minority

students of their identities because it omits their histories, cultural values, and languages; whereas, the knowledge, values, and aspirations of the dominant culture are promoted exclusively, "thereby severely restricting what counts as worthwhile knowledge" (2011, p. 18). Kanu states that, because Aboriginal peoples understand the overarching authority of curriculum, they are now calling for reform in all areas of schooling:

> Recognition of the functioning power of the curriculum in shaping identity, representation, and social and economic circumstances lies behind the drive by Aboriginal peoples to have their perspectives integrated not only into school curricula but also the organization and delivery of formal schooling as a whole. (p. 19)

Kanu points out that the success that many First Nations schools are having when they are able to base their children's education on their languages, cultures, and beliefs is evidence that infusion works and should be implemented widely.

Sociocultural theories of learning and cognition, macro-structural theories of ethnic minority school success, theories of racism and anti-racism, critical race theory, and Aboriginal/Indigenous perspectives all inform Kanu's (2011) analysis and discussion of schooling and the role of infusing Aboriginal perspectives into curriculum. Kanu employs a cultural historical theory of learning that sees "the structure and development of human psychological processes emerge through participation in culturally mediated practical activities involving cultural practices in contexts" (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003 cited in Kanu, 2011, p. 41-42). Ogbu argues that some ethnic minorities have a "'caste-like minority status'" (cited in Kanu, 2011, p. 43) because they have been involuntarily and permanently incorporated into the larger society. Kanu also relies on Ogbu's (1982) theory that it is macro-structural variables that account for minority students' school failure, rather than an issue of cultural discontinuity,

because immigrant minority students' frequent academic success is unaccounted for by the latter.

According to Kanu, the kinds of discrimination that involuntary minorities face are threefold: 1) unequal overall educational policies and practices toward them; 2) the treatment/mistreatment of minority students in schools; and 3) the lack of reward from society for minority persons who achieve academic success (p. 43). She presents Ogbu and Simons' hypothesis that differences in school performance between immigrant and involuntary minorities are the result of differences in their "'community forces'" (cited in Kanu, 2011, p. 45). Community forces refers to how minority students perceive discrimination towards them and their perceptions of the impact that education can potentially have for them in terms of the economic success it provides majority students. Kanu determines that a synthesis of the theories of cultural continuity and those of macro-structuralists allows tenets of each to be taken into account in examining minority-student underperformance in school.

The rationale for infusion is that it will positively impact Aboriginal students' self-perceptions and sense of belonging, thus, positively impacting their identity development and improving their chances for academic success. These are critical aspects of identity development. Scholars are also looking to infusion to transform all students' experiences in school and society by promoting improved understanding of Aboriginal peoples, Indigenous knowledge, and the impacts of colonial subjugation. The benefits of infusion for Canadian society as a whole include reducing racism in individuals and in institutions, and strengthening the knowledge economy through the contributions of Indigenous knowledge. With this understanding of the rationale for infusion, the next step is to examine what Aboriginal perspectives entail.

Defining Aboriginal Perspectives Through the Literature

When teachers are asked to include Aboriginal *perspectives* in school curriculum, what

does that mean? Does it mean Aboriginal *worldviews*? *knowledge*? *experiences*? *opinions*? Or all of the above? According to Alberta Education (2005), infusing Aboriginal perspectives into curriculum means that teachers are expected to incorporate an understanding of two key concepts—Aboriginal worldviews and Aboriginal histories—into their teaching practice in order to best support their Aboriginal students. Aboriginal histories would presumably include both experiences and perspectives of those experiences. However, given the nature of Indigenous knowledge and experience, understanding Aboriginal worldviews would also necessarily have to include some understanding of Aboriginal languages, epistemologies, and ontologies as well. In other words, in order for teachers to incorporate an understanding of Aboriginal worldviews and histories into their teaching practice, they need to understand both Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous experience.

Culture and language shape our worldviews, experiences, and our interpretations of those experiences. Indigenous knowledge grows out of our cultures, our languages, and our experiences, and it is transmitted to succeeding generations orally through stories, songs and ceremonies, physically through observation and apprenticeship, and spiritually through both direct and indirect means. The spiritual and interconnected nature of Indigenous knowledge—and the ways in which it is transmitted—mean that, in order to talk about it, it is necessary to talk about Indigenous languages, cultures, and spiritual beliefs as well. This section synthesizes key aspects of Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous languages, and knowledge transmission, according to Aboriginal scholars engaged in Canadian educational research and theory.

The Nature of Indigenous Knowledge

My purpose for defining Indigenous knowledge is to understand its nature and the ways in which it is transmitted to others to determine if it is reasonable to expect non-Aboriginal

teachers to understand Aboriginal worldviews to the degree that they can teach them to others. The literature reviewed ranges from 1995 to 2011 and is limited to scholars who primarily work and publish in the field of education, as well as portions of the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996). While there are numerous authoritative voices on this subject outside of education, a foray into their work would no doubt take me far beyond the scope of this research project. What I can assure the reader is that, based on close readings of this work, the voices presented here appear to have done that deeper work, and what I am doing is summarizing the knowledge and thinking they each present.

A second constraint on the work I reviewed for this section is that all of the scholars are Indigenous to North America and work in a Canadian context. I decided early on that this would be an important consideration. One of the principles of Indigenous research is to work within a local context, so to confine my exploration of what Indigenous knowledge is to Aboriginal people in a Canadian educational context is in keeping with this principle in that it provides a description of the local setting of my study: Aboriginal people in a Canadian education system.

An additional motivation for restricting the work to Indigenous North Americans is to activate Indigenous knowledge in the academy by letting it stand on its own merit, free from comparison to Western scholars' work on the subject of Indigenous knowledge. Battiste (2002) asserts that this is an important step in decolonization:

> The recognition and intellectual activation of Indigenous knowledge today is an act of empowerment by Indigenous people…. Through this act of intellectual self-determination, Indigenous academics are developing new analyses and methodologies to decolonize themselves, their communities, and their institutions. (p. 4)

She states that our task as Indigenous academics is to affirm and activate Indigenous knowledge,

languages, worldviews, teachings, and experiences, which have all been "systematically excluded from contemporary educational institutions and from Eurocentric knowledge systems" (Battiste, 2005, p. 1). The discrete selection of literature reviewed here is indicative of the need for more Aboriginal scholars to take up this task in their work.

Characteristics of Indigenous knowledge. According to RCAP (1996), most Aboriginal people believe that knowledge—like everything else—emanates from the Creator (Vol. 4, p. 108). However, there is often a distinction between objective knowledge, which comes directly from the Creator, and subjective knowledge, which is acquired through experience in the physical world (ibid). Objective knowledge "is the source of the sacred laws that govern relationships within the community and the world at large. It is the source of the traditions and sacred ceremonies. It tells one how to lead a good life" (ibid). Subjective knowledge is learned by doing and is therefore subject to experience. RCAP states that Indigenous knowledge is both process and content, in that it addresses both what and how things should be done, therefore making it normative as well by embodying the culture's values in its teachings. Aboriginal knowledge, according to RCAP, is indigenous to this land and is the North American intellectual tradition (Vol. 4, p. 112).

Indigenous knowledge comprises all aspects of life and living and is deeply tied to community and culture. Little Bear (2009) characterizes Indigenous knowledge as exemplifying the accumulated wisdom, technology and experience of Indigenous Peoples (p. 7). Similarly, Battiste (2005) defines Indigenous knowledge as systemic in that it encompasses everything that can be thought or observed (p. 4). Ermine (1995) takes it a step further when he talks about the wholeness that the Old Ones experienced in *inwardness*. They experienced a totality that created community as "a physical manifestation of the life force" and people became empowered to

"become the 'culture' of accumulated knowledge" (p. 105). They were able to become a part of the knowledge and culture themselves by connecting with the life energy within them and among them. Thus, Ermine believes that the community is essential in its function "as repository and incubator of total tribal knowledge in the form of custom and culture" (p. 105), knowledge that evolves out of Indigenous peoples' connection to the mysterious force that connects all of existence. The idea that all knowledge is within us is key to McLeod's (2007) description of accumulated Cree Indigenous knowledge: "Cree narrative memory is a large, intergenerational, collective memory" (p. 8). He asserts that, in the Cree way, "collective narrative memory is what puts our singular lives into a larger context" (p. 11) as we tap into the knowledge within us and allow it to change our understanding and interpretation of the world. Indigenous knowledge does not live somewhere external to Indigenous people; it is within us and it germinates and grows within community.

Another important aspect of Indigenous knowledge is that it comes out of a consciousness of primary orality. Weber-Pillwax (2001) explains how the Northern Woodland Cree exemplify an Indigenous society of primary orality, where the "systems of Cree language use and Cree thinking patterns determine and guide all forms of social interaction and individual development" (p. 152). Cree orality is necessary for the survival of Cree epistemologies and cosmologies (p. 153) because primary orality is more than just language use:

> The Northern Woodland Cree societies of the past tended to reflect a primary orality that included storytelling, dancing, and singing. But primary orality went and still goes beyond this in the sense that these would be empty activities without a full *understanding and/or participation* on the parts of all listeners and participants. By full understanding is meant a capacity, an ability, and a willingness to immerse oneself totally in the event as it

> is enacted or unfolds. The vitality of primary orality in a culture rests on this full understanding in each member of the society. (p. 156) [emphasis in original]

Weber-Pillwax asserts that primary orality is not gone in Cree culture despite the transition to English literacy. Primary orality, along with full understanding, continue to structure contemporary Cree concepts and realities (p. 156). Moving from orality to literacy is not just a matter of language translation; it involves a different way of thinking, communicating, and relating, but the primary consciousness is still an oral one.

The awareness that all of life is joined is one of the most distinguishing characteristics of Indigenous knowledge. In speaking of the Old Ones, Ermine (1995) explains their understanding:

> Their fundamental insight was that all existence was connected and that the whole enmeshed the being in its inclusiveness. In the Aboriginal mind, therefore, an immanence is present that gives meaning to existence and forms the starting point for Aboriginal epistemology. It is a mysterious force that connects the totality of existence - the forms, energies, or concepts that constitute the outer and inner worlds. (p. 103)

Battiste (2002) describes this interconnectedness as a web of relationships that is "embedded in cumulative experiences and teachings rather than in a library" (p. 2). Evelyn Steinhauer describes the impact of this web on our lives and the decisions that we make:

> All things and all people, though we have our own individual gifts and special place, are dependent on and share in the growth and work of everything and everyone else. We believe that beings thrive when there is a web of interconnectedness between the individual and the community, and between the community and nature. Everything we do, every decision we make, affects our family, our community, it affects the air we

> breathe, the animals, the plants, the water in some way. Each of us is totally dependent on everything else. (cited in Alberta Education, 2005, p. 16)

Little Bear (2000) states that, within the domain of energy and spirit, the "interrelationships between all entities are of paramount importance" (p. 77). Our relatedness to Earth and all of its other inhabitants puts us in relationship with everything, including inhabitants of the spiritual realm of existence.

The importance of space and place is apparent in the ways that Indigenous knowledge is tied to the land. Little Bear (2000) contends that space is more important as a referent than time for Aboriginal people:

> The idea of all things being in constant motion or flux leads to a holistic and cyclical view of the world. If everything is constantly moving and changing, then one has to look at the whole to begin to see patterns.… Constant motion, as manifested in cyclical or repetitive patterns, emphasizes process as opposed to product. It results in a concept of time that is dynamic but without motion. Time is part of the constant flux but goes nowhere. Time just is. (p. 78)

McLeod (2007), drawing on Vine Deloria Jr., explains that, "Indigenous people tend to envision their collective memory in terms of space rather than time" (p. 6). McLeod points out that our stories are rooted in a sense of place, the sense of place that connects us to one another as communities and to the rest of creation.

Battiste (2002) observes that Indigenous knowledge is also tied to particular lands and to particular places on the land (p. 2). RCAP (1996) describes the relationship that Aboriginal people have with Turtle Island as being "governed by rules and principles formed in the distant past" (Vol. 4, p. 101) and that "the Creator preordained how that relationship should be and

provided the tools and the means to live a life that expresses that relationship" (ibid). Little Bear (2000) states that tribal territory is so essential because the Earth is literally our mother – the source of being for Indigenous people – and our being cannot be separated from her. Little Bear establishes a connection between the ceremonies and activities performed in conjunction with the Earth's cycles and the need for creation to be renewed according to a set pattern. He stresses: "Creation is a continuity. If creation is to continue, then it must be renewed" (p. 78). RCAP (1996) asserts that these relationships with the Creator, the natural world, the animals, and with other human beings are all described in Aboriginal languages, which are considered sacred gifts from the Creator for our use.

Spirituality is an integral component of Indigenous knowledge. Aboriginal epistemology involves journeying inward through prayer and ceremony. For Ermine (1995), it is the quest inward that comprises "a different, incorporeal knowledge paradigm that might be termed Aboriginal epistemology" (p. 103). He further defines it as an inward wholeness that reaches into the outer space—an intrinsic connection and presence that the Old Ones understood. The role of prayer and spiritual communion is paramount in seeking new understanding. Ermine asserts that "[p]rayer becomes power and by its very nature becomes another instrument in Aboriginal ways of knowing" (p. 109). He observes that "Aboriginal epistemology is grounded in the self, the spirit, the unknown" (p. 108), so "understanding must be grounded in the spirit" (p. 108) as well, and the quest for knowledge must be inward, "in unison with all instruments of knowing and conditions that make individuals receptive to knowing" (p. 108). Weber-Pillwax (2001) maintains that participating in spiritual ceremonies and practices is important for developing compassion, self-awareness, self-discipline, and understanding of the knowledge and practices that govern ceremonies (p. 152). Spiritual practices are also important for developing both

personal and collective identity (ibid).

Little Bear (2009) asserts that relationships, spirituality, ceremonies, language, songs, stories, and "teachings learned through dreams form the axiology of Aboriginal knowledge" (p. 10). Little Bear (2009) contends that knowledge is a methodology that we use to interpret the world and our experiences. He also characterizes Aboriginal paradigms and philosophy:

> Aboriginal paradigms include ideas of constant flux, all existence consisting of energy waves/spirit, all things being animate, all existence being interrelated, creation/existence having to be renewed, space/place as an important referent, and language, songs, stories, and ceremonies as repositories for the knowledge that arise out of these paradigms. (p. 8)

Little Bear (2000) contends that Aboriginal philosophy is based on the idea that everything is constantly animated with energy and "imbued with spirit" (p. 77). It is "holistic and cyclical or repetitive, generalist, process-oriented, and firmly grounded in a particular place" (p. 78). RCAP (1996) also describes how the "ancient wisdom, the traditions, rituals, languages and cultural values were passed on and carried forward" (RCAP, Vol 4, p. 101) by the Elders, the Old Ones, the Grandmothers and Grandfathers.

The texts represented here were selected according to the two criteria noted earlier. As I worked through each piece, I pulled out all of the descriptors of Indigenous knowledge, and then combined identical and near-identical ones. Each text revealed many common or similar descriptions of Indigenous knowledge that, extracted and compiled, form a list of 27 characteristics of Indigenous knowledge and 16 assertions that Indigenous knowledge makes, according to these authors. Indigenous knowledge is:

1. indigenous to the land;
2. from the Creator;

3. the source of the sacred laws that govern relationships;
4. the source of the traditions and sacred ceremonies;
5. the guide to leading a good life;
6. a methodology for interpreting the world;
7. both content and process (what should be done, how things should be done);
8. an embodiment of the values of the people;
9. based on a consciousness of primary orality;
10. embedded in the cumulative experiences and teachings of a people;
11. embodied in a web of relationships;
12. exemplified by accumulated wisdom, technology, and experience;
13. knowledge of inner space and outer space;
14. grounded in the self, the spirit, the unknown;
15. evolved from the connection to the mysterious force;
16. large, intergenerational, and based on collective memory;
17. tied to lands and places on the land;
18. tied to space and place more than time;
19. grounded in particular places;
20. holistic;
21. cyclical;
22. dynamic;
23. inherited;
24. generalist;
25. process-oriented;

26. systemic;
27. normative.

Indigenous knowledge asserts that:

1. we are all related (all existence is connected);
2. all existence consists of energy/spirit (everything is animate);
3. a mysterious force connects the totality of existence (inner and outer worlds);
4. life is in constant flux;
5. community is a physical manifestation of the life force;
6. the whole enmeshes the being in its inclusiveness;
7. good relationships are essential;
8. we are in relationship with the land (including animals, plants, elements);
9. Earth is literally our mother (where creation occurs);
10. all creation must be renewed;
11. the quest for knowledge must be inward;
12. we rely on spirit power rather than physical power;
13. understanding must be grounded in the spirit;
14. prayer is a principal way of seeking knowledge;
15. dreams are a fundamental way of knowing;
16. ceremonies are elemental ways of learning and knowing.

Indigenous knowledge in North America is indigenous to this land. It has developed through Indigenous North American peoples and their relationships with the land and all other existence over thousands of years. Indigenous knowledge – like all aspects of life – originates with the Creator, whether directly as objective knowledge or subjectively through physical

experience. It attends to both what should be done and how things should be done in leading a good life. The foundational assertions of Indigenous knowledge are that all life is imbued with spirit, and all existence, both physical and spiritual, is intimately interconnected. Indigenous knowledge lives within people and grows within community. It is based on a primary consciousness of orality where, in addition to spoken language, orality constructs and frames knowledge, and determines how it is preserved, recalled, and transmitted to others. Space and place are important referents of Indigenous knowledge. Place is central because Indigenous knowledge is tied to particular lands and particular places on the land. Space is critical because it incorporates the relationships between people, places, and other aspects of existence into Indigenous knowledge, making it essential to existence for Indigenous cultures and communities. Finally, spiritual ceremonies and practices are important methods of seeking knowledge and understanding, both for individuals and communities. They are vital means for developing compassion, self-awareness, self-discipline, and personal and collective identity. A final essential component of all understanding is language – as a source of knowledge, as a repository for it, and as a means of transmitting it.

Indigenous languages and knowledge transmission. Battiste (1998) asserts that Aboriginal languages are sacred, necessary for survival, and are "a critical link to knowledge given to us by our Creator" (p. 17). She states that Aboriginal languages are powerful and direct connections to cultural knowledge, providing "deep and lasting cognitive bonds that affect all aspects of Aboriginal life" (p. 18). Indigenous languages are key both to unlocking knowledge and providing an orientation that "reflects a reality of transformation and change in its holistic representations and processes that stress interaction, reciprocity, respect, and non-interference" (p. 24). The fragile state of so many Indigenous languages makes reconstructing knowledge from

them challenging. However, Battiste contends that Aboriginal languages are embedded in the next generation and that they have a spirit that can be known through the people. Battiste stresses that language exists much deeper than either its vocalizations or its linguistic characteristics. It is a part of our socialization processes and therefore not easily eradicated.

Language, according to RCAP (1996), is also critical for making and communicating meaning, and making sense of shared experiences. Languages define our experiences and the world through a cultural lens, shaping our perceptions and our worldview in the process (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 3, p. 563). According to RCAP, "Language captures our perception of the world around us and how we relate to this world. Aboriginal languages pass on what it means to be Odawa, Métis or Innu by embracing the knowledge and developing the systems of interpretation transmitted therein. Language provides meaning" (Vol. 4, p. 115). Because language is able to express a unique worldview, it is considered the "quintessence of a culture" (Vol. 3, p. 572). It is also inseparably connected to identity in that language use is "the ultimate symbol of belonging" (ibid); it is emblematic of membership within a culture. McLeod (2000) states that culture, "the core narrative with which one begins" (p. 450), gives us our vocabulary so that we can explain our existence.

The idea that language lives deeper than its sounds or linguistic qualities is also apparent in Weber-Pillwax's (2001) discussion of a consciousness of primary orality. She contends that the meanings of Cree words when they are written "are usually not reflective of the nature of primary orality in the culture" (p. 158). They are words chosen for their literate English translations that fit into a literate society, rather than in an oral one, and therefore do not express a Cree reality. Weber-Pillwax explains that this is why many Cree Elders say that Cree has not been translated properly or in some cases that it cannot be translated (ibid). She argues that you

cannot translate the "lived cultural effects of philosophies and beliefs that are embedded within and associated with the words and terms themselves" (p. 159), nor can English speakers transition from a literate understanding to an understanding of primary orality consciousness (p. 160). RCAP (1996) also states that the "difficulty of translating Aboriginal languages is not limited to specific words. It extends to the concepts embedded in the words, concepts that may not be consistent between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal speakers" (Vol. 4, p. 117). Consequently, translating Indigenous languages involves two different styles of language and two different ways of thinking, making translations very difficult at best.

Language is an important vehicle for transmitting Indigenous knowledge and culture but it is not the only means. Indigenous knowledge is transmitted in a number of ways, including through songs and stories, by means of spirit power in dreams, and in prayer and ceremony. Weber-Pillwax (2001) describes how stories and songs are "handed down orally from one teacher to one learner; the learner listened and remembered and practiced under the eyes and ears of the teachers…. No learner ever referred to written words to teach or learn any of these songs" (p. 157). Ahenakew (1973) talks about spirit power and dreams as a way of knowing:

> Now the spirit power (pu-wa-mi-win) that is secured through dreams, according to our belief, enhances and strengthens a person. We have all heard of those who in dreams have been adopted by a spirit that dwells in nature, or by many spirits, some more powerful than others. This is one of the oldest and most prevalent of Indian beliefs. (p. 93)

In addition to being one of the oldest beliefs, the role of the spirits in everyday life is one of the most defining aspects of Indigenous cultures and knowledge. This vital relationship is reflected in the epistemology, the ontology, and the languages of Indigenous Peoples. The source of all

Indigenous knowledge is the spirit world, either directly through prayer, ceremonies, or dreams, or indirectly through lived experience and the teachings of others. Indigenous knowledge is transmitted through all of our perceptions: mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual. Indigenous languages are both the source and the signifiers of Indigenous identity.

Indigenous languages are one of the primary ways that knowledge and culture are transmitted from one generation to the next. They provide a means to express ideas, experiences, and emotions and share them without difficulty with other members of the group. They signify belonging in the cultural group and are an important aspect of identity. However, Indigenous languages do much more: they shape worldviews and therefore touch on every aspect of life. They are sacred gifts given to us by the Creator and are unique to the experiences of each specific cultural group. The literature reviewed here identifies 30 characteristics of Indigenous language extracted in the same way as were the characteristics of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous languages:

1. define the world and experience in cultural terms, thus shaping our worldview;
2. capture a worldview specific to the culture;
3. pass on what it means to be a member;
4. provide meaning to life;
5. provide deep and lasting cognitive bonds that affect all aspects of aboriginal life;
6. live deep within our socialization processes and therefore are not easily eradicated;
7. have a spirit or soul that can be known through the people themselves;
8. have cultural philosophies and beliefs embedded within them;
9. embody the way a society thinks;
10. give us a vocabulary through which to explain our existence;

Indigenous languages are:

11. how culture is transmitted from one generation to another;
12. the means of communicating meaning and make sense of their shared experience;
13. threatened, fragile;
14. inseparably tied to identity;
15. the quintessence of a culture;
16. unique ways of apprehending reality;
17. symbolic of identity, emblems of group existence;
18. difficult to translate, cannot be done properly from oral to literate;
19. vocabularies given to us by culture;
20. repositories of knowledge in the minds of aboriginal peoples;
21. sacred;
22. necessary;
23. critical links to knowledge;
24. given to us by our Creator;
25. powerful and direct connections to cultural knowledge;
26. key to unlocking knowledge;
27. key to providing a holistic orientation;
28. embedded within us;
29. based on a consciousness of primary orality;
30. verb-rich and process or action oriented.

Language both defines and captures our experiences and perceptions of the world. It is an important aspect of our socialization that shapes and reflects our worldview. Language use is

symbolic of belonging to a specific collective and is therefore central to identity. For Indigenous peoples, languages are sacred, essential for survival, and powerful, direct links to cultural knowledge. Indigenous languages are both the source and the signifiers of Indigenous identity, the seeds of which are embedded in succeeding generations. They differ from other languages because they reflect a foundation of orality, making translations into literate languages difficult. Indigenous languages are one of the primary methods of intergenerational knowledge and culture transmission. Because the spirit world is the source of all Indigenous knowledge, it is transmitted through all of our senses – our mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual perception – as well. Indigenous knowledge is passed on through language and through our other faculties in stories, songs, dreams, ceremonies, and prayer.

An initial understanding of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy.

> The greatest Cree storytellers often said, "*môya mistahi ê-kiskêyihtamân* (I do not know much)." I would have to say, "*nama kîkway ê-kiskêyihtamân* (I know nothing)"; the truths that resonate from the pages of this book are not mine, but the echoes of ancient voices that I have imperfectly articulated. (McLeod, 2007, p. 5)

If Neal McLeod knows nothing, I will have to learn how to say *I know less than nothing* in Cree. For a long time, I learned *about* the experiences of being Aboriginal, but now I am learning about how I *am* Aboriginal. This is my first formal foray into the subject of Indigenous knowledge, and I feel very humble in the face of it. The purpose of this section of the literature review was to examine the nature of Indigenous knowledge. This next piece is my attempt to synthesize what I have read, merge it with what I know and believe, and articulate my opinion on one of the challenges to infusing Aboriginal perspectives into curriculum identified earlier.

In the process of collecting my thoughts, I was trying to think of ways that I could

metaphorically represent the themes of my literature review so that they followed a path of understanding in an instinctive way. What came out of musing on and digesting what I was writing about is the model of Indigenous knowledge represented by Figure 1 that helps me to understand the relationships between culture, language, experience, and knowledge, and how

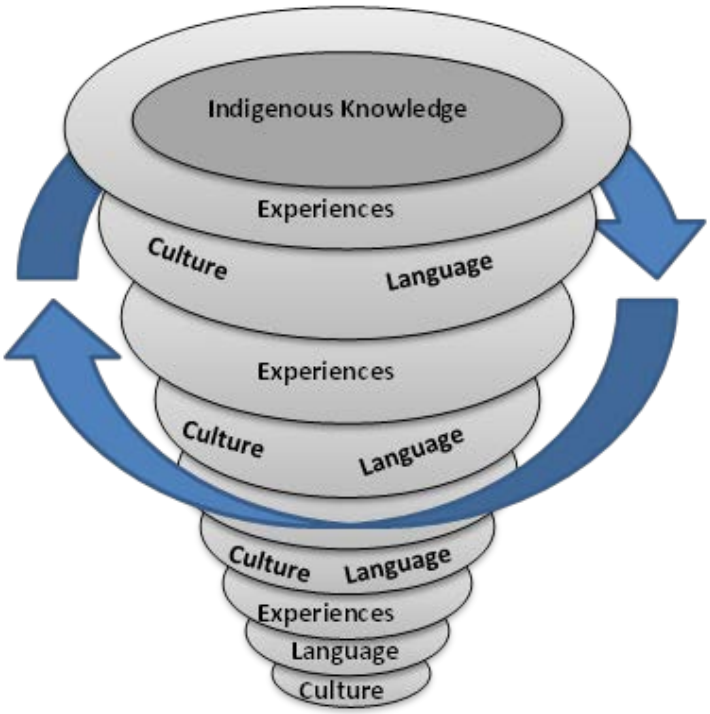

Figure 1: Model of Indigenous Knowledge

these are transmitted from generation to generation. Figure 1 represents my understanding of Indigenous culture, language, experience, and knowledge, and the acquisition and transmission of each. Each circle is a generation whose experiences take place within an environment structured by culture and language. Similar to how a pot grows out of clay on a potter's wheel, knowledge grows upward and outward with each successive generation on a cultural and linguistic foundation that maintains procedures and protocols for ensuring that all accumulated cultural knowledge is appropriately and successfully transmitted to the next generation.

As knowledge grows, experiences broaden, and culture and language – as the media for

knowledge transmission – must expand in order to be able to record, interpret, and transmit new knowledge and experiences. Culture, language, and experience create an ecosystem in which the individual, the community, the natural world, and the spirit world are maintained in a balance that allows all of life within the system to develop to its fullest potential. Knowledge travels through the circles, increasing with new experiences, and spirals up the widening spheres through the generations with language and culture as its vehicles.

What makes this a model of Indigenous knowledge is that it is self-contained; all aspects of life are within it, including all of the physical and spiritual realms. The ecosystem in which Indigenous knowledge develops does not just encompass humanity; it includes all aspects of the natural world and the spiritual world as well. This metaphor is consistent with many Aboriginal Peoples' belief that life is circular, travelling through different seasons, ages, eras, stages, and planes of existence. It is also consistent with the Northern Woodland Cree metaphor of trails rather than circles (Weber-Pillwax, 2001), in that each circle represents the paths of individuals that make up the collective trail of each generation. The trail that each generation follows contains markers for the next generation to follow in turn. The paths also extend beyond the physical world into the world of the spirits and back again – experiences that include spiritual forays into realms and states other than physical. The circles overlap, as generations do, and knowledge is often transmitted to two or more generations at once, thus strengthening it and ensuring its survival for at least two generations further.

What this metaphor lacks is an organic element. The clay only grows under external force, rather than under its own power. Indigenous knowledge is organic; it grows from a core of beliefs and experiences and changes its shape in response to its environment. A cross-section of a tree showing the growth rings emanating out from the core of the tree – its beginning – is

perhaps a better metaphor (Figure 2). Interestingly, this image also resembles the layout of a

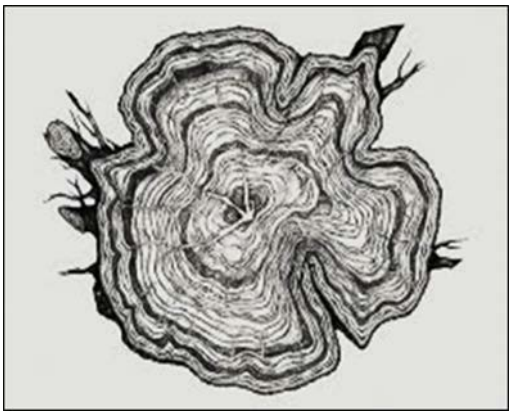

Figure 2: Tree Cross-section

Figure 3: Winter Count Robe

winter count robe, an actual record of Indigenous experiences using images to symbolically represent each year's major event (Figure 3). The rings of a tree also record significant events, such as drought, overcrowding, heavy rain, fire, infestation, and any injury that the tree has sustained. Just as the core of the tree is its oldest part, Indigenous knowledge develops from a core of beliefs. Each successive ring is another year for the tree and a generation for Indigenous knowledge. The wood just under the bark is the newest, just as the culture that is slightly below the superficial outer layer is its newest iteration. You have to go much deeper to find the oldest knowledge but it is accessible to each layer within its structure.

The image depicted in Figure 2 shows evidence of a significant injury to the tree but the core has not been damaged. The rings are displaced and restricted but not destroyed. Similarly, the injuries that colonization inflicted on Indigenous knowledge, cultures, and languages disrupted them but they did not destroy them. The different sizes and colours of the rings record the nature of the year's events and their impact on the tree's growth. Wide rings indicate good growing years, while narrow rings are indicative of a poor growing environment. For Indigenous Peoples and knowledge, these adverse conditions include periods of disease, war, starvation, assimilation, and genocide. The different colours of the rings are also significant. The lighter rings of the tree signify growth early in the year, whereas the dark rings are where extensive growth takes place in the later part of the season. The darker rings in Figure 2 are fewer in number and could be the generations where Elders were numerous and more knowledge was passed on to the next generations. The lighter rings are generations where knowledge had to grow earlier and only reached a certain point before stopping for that generation. The new branches that are evident in the tree in Figure 2 symbolize how Indigenous knowledge is branching out in new ways, including into the academy, the political arena, and into the professions.

I have a tree in my yard – a Manitoba maple – that managed to germinate of its own volition in a crack that was probably a quarter of an inch or less wide, in concrete that is 5 inches thick, where it managed to grow for several years. Many people consider this type of tree a weed because it can and does grow almost anywhere that the conditions are even remotely amenable. By the time I moved into the house, this determined tree had separated the thick concrete slab approximately 4 inches as it grew in that narrow space, eventually shifting the entire 125 square-foot slab and splitting it into several pieces. A post that was set into a concrete footing and

attached to the corner of the house roof twisted and eventually broke away from the roof as the tree made just enough room for it to survive until its trunk broke free at the surface. When it was no longer constricted by the weight and pressure of the concrete, it was able to expand to its natural shape and size once more. In the meantime, it had also begun to grow new trees off of its roots several feet away at the outer edge of the slab.

This tree is an excellent analogy for Indigenous knowledge, cultures, and people and the impact that colonization has had on their survival and development. They have managed to grow despite the tremendous pressure of colonization, and are now at the upper edge of the concrete, working to regain their natural size and shape. This is a period that Battiste (2005) refers to as an *Indigenous renaissance*, where Indigenous scholars are turning to "ancient knowledge and teachings to restore control over Indigenous development and capacity-building" (p. 2). Indigenous cultures are accessing their core – Indigenous knowledge – in order to re-establish a coherent order and resume an unhindered pattern of development comparable to how it was prior to colonization: each Indigenous nation growing and developing under its own power and according to its own understanding.

In this section I have defined Indigenous knowledge according to the work of leading scholars in the area of Aboriginal education in Canada. While my survey is by no means completely representative of the work available on Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous languages, and their transmission, it is representative of the group I have defined as my research context. My purpose in limiting the work reviewed to Indigenous North Americans working in a Canadian education context is twofold: the first is to be as accurate as possible in representing Indigenous knowledge in Canada, and the second is to contribute to decolonization by activating Indigenous knowledge in my academic work. This is decolonizing in that it privileges

Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in ways that have been suppressed for Aboriginal peoples through colonization. I have also presented my thinking, which is a synthesis of everything I have learned through the literature and how I understand it from a personal perspective. In the next section, I review literature from an educational perspective on the colonization of Aboriginal people in Canada and the impact it has on Indigenous knowledge and experiences.

Aboriginal Experiences

For the past five centuries, Indigenous experience in North America has been the experience of colonization. Since the arrival of the first Europeans to North America, Aboriginal Peoples who live in what is now Canada have experienced every tool of colonization and oppression there is and survived, albeit in relatively few numbers and with much damage suffered. The intent of this section is to briefly present how and why colonization occurred in Canada, the key aspects of colonization, and the impacts it has had on Indigenous knowledge and education. It will by no means be a complete picture of colonization in Canada. For a complete discussion, the five volumes of RCAP (1996) are probably the most comprehensive source. What is covered here is what has been written about colonization in relation to Aboriginal perspectives and curriculum.

Before launching into a discussion of colonization as Indigenous experience, it is important to acknowledge that North Americans had a long and rich history on this continent well before the arrival of the first Europeans. Métis historian Olive Dickason (1992) estimates that North America has been populated for at least 17,000 years, and perhaps as long as 50,000 years, based on linguistic and archaeological evidence. The difficulty with this history is that it has, for the most part, been recorded orally, and is embedded in the language, stories, and

traditions of Indigenous North Americans rather than being written down in books. Indigenous people on this continent know that they have been here since time began, but do not have the necessary (kind of) proof to demonstrate it to others. Dickason (1992) explains that non-Aboriginal Canadians have a very different view of North American history that stems from their European roots:

> History, for its part, has been described as a document-bound discipline. If something was not written, preferably in an official document, it was not historical. Thus were pre-literate societies excluded from history and labelled prehistoric, or perhaps proto-historic. The best they could hope for was to become historic by extension, when they came into contact with literate societies. In other words, Canada's history began with the arrival of Europeans. (p. 11)

It is this form of ethnocentric ideology displayed by the early Europeans who arrived here that set the stage for colonization in North America.

Colonization in Canada. This section describes the process of colonization in what is now Canada as the young nation worked to contain and remove any obstacles to Confederation and expansion west. There is a proliferation of sources available which describe and analyze the creation of Canada—most from a Euro-Canadian perspective. What there is very little of are written sources of Canadian history from Aboriginal perspectives. For a number of reasons, the most balanced and reliable source available is the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). First, the Commission's mandate was to detail the evolution of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians in order to make sense of the relationship that exists today:

> The Commission of Inquiry should investigate the evolution of the relationship among

> aboriginal peoples (Indian, Inuit and Métis), the Canadian government, and Canadian society as a whole. It should propose specific solutions, rooted in domestic and international experience, to the problems which have plagued those relationships and which confront aboriginal peoples today. The Commission should examine all issues which it deems to be relevant to any or all of the aboriginal peoples of Canada. (Vol. 1 overview)

The commissioners, made up of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members and researchers, were given unprecedented access to historical and government documents (Milloy, 1999), which they read specifically looking for Aboriginal perspectives and experiences. The commissioners also included oral histories and experiences from hearings, briefs, and visits to 96 Aboriginal communities in total (Smith, 2009). Where there were obvious contradictions between the oral and written records, both perspectives were included. For these reasons, the brief overview of Canada's colonization of Aboriginal Peoples provided here is based entirely on RCAP (1996) because of its comprehensiveness, and in order to ensure that Aboriginal perspectives are included and central to the perspective offered.

RCAP (1996) divides the history of what is now Canada into four stages: separate worlds; contact and cooperation; displacement and assimilation; and negotiation and renewal (Vol. 1, Ch. 3, sect. 2). *Separate worlds* covers the time prior to that of sustained contact, outlining the kinds of worlds that existed on each continent before Europeans began to settle here. *Contact and cooperation* covers a span from the early 16th century until the end of the War of 1812. This stage included trade and military alliances, intermarriage, and mutual cultural adaptation (ibid). Aboriginal people helped the newcomers survive and navigate the continent; however, not everything during this period was benign. There were efforts on the part of the

churches to change Aboriginal people, believing it was their God-given duty to save the souls of godless North American savages. Aboriginal Peoples also went to war for and against colonists, and new grievances erupted among them as a result. Finally, widespread death from European diseases was a constant feature for Aboriginal Peoples during this period of history.

After 3 centuries of continuous contact, which began in the eastern and central parts of the country and gradually moved west, disease had claimed more than 50% of the Aboriginal population, and those who survived had outlived their usefulness to both Europeans and Canadians (Vol. 1, Ch. 6). The fur trade had ended, the war with the United States was over, and Aboriginal people were by now greatly outnumbered by Loyalists fleeing from the U.S. and new immigrants pouring in from the British Isles (ibid). The next stage in the relationship is *displacement and assimilation*, which began in earnest after 1812 and lasted until 1969, according to RCAP (1996). The *Indians*, former military and trade partners, were now in the way of settlement and exploitation of the continent's abundant natural resources. The impact of several smallpox epidemics and other diseases, the extermination of the buffalo, and the decline of Aboriginal economies left Aboriginal people accepting relief payments from the government and being considered "little more than an unproductive drain on the public purse" (Vol. 1, Ch. 6). After 1830, matters of Indian policy were transferred from military to civil authority, a transfer that would signal the future direction the government planned to take: removing Indians as obstacles to settlement, placing them on reserves, and educating them to be Canadian.

All legislation regarding Indians, except for the current *Indian Act* (1985), was passed during this period, and several treaties were struck, ranging from The Selkirk Treaty in 1817 to Treaty 11 in 1921. Other legislation introduced during this period include: *Indians Protection Act,* 1850 (Upper Canada); *An Act for the Better Protection of the lands and property of the*

Indians in Lower Canada, 1850; *Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes in this Province,* 1857; *An Act respecting Indians and Indian lands,* 1860; *Gradual Enfranchisement Act,* 1869; and the *Indian Acts* of 1876, 1880, 1906, and 1951 (and 24 amendments). The Potlatch and the Sundance, "two of the most visible and spiritually significant aspects of coastal and plains culture respectively" (Vol. 1, Ch. 6) were also outlawed during this period, in 1884 and 1885.

Treaties, reserves, and laws were all efforts toward displacing Aboriginal Peoples, keeping them in manageable groups, and preventing them from organizing against the government. This is why the Potlatch and the Sundance were both outlawed; the government was afraid to allow any numbers of Aboriginal people to gather, lest they use it as an opportunity to rise up, as happened with the Métis and some First Nations individuals in 1885. Bands were not allowed to select reserves too close to one another out of the same fear. Even a glance at the titles of the legislation that was passed during this period shows the government's new policy direction:

> the federal government took for itself the power to mould, unilaterally, every aspect of life on reserves and to create whatever infrastructure it deemed necessary to achieve the desired end — assimilation through enfranchisement and, as a consequence, the eventual disappearance of Indians as distinct peoples. (Vol. 1, Ch. 6)

The assimilation project needed a vehicle and that vehicle was education.

Following the *Bagot Commission Report* in 1842, which advised that, upon inspection, most Aboriginal communities were still in a half-civilized state, civilization became the single focus of *Indian* administration. The Indian Residential Schools system began in 1849 and grew to include 80 boarding and industrial schools at its peak (Vol. 1, Ch. 6). Its singular aim was to

remove Aboriginal children from their parents, educate the *Indian* out of them, and keep them from returning to their homes afterward to prevent backsliding into *Indian* ways. This in itself had devastating effects on Aboriginal children and communities, but there were much worse problems, too:

> The removal of children from their homes and the denial of their identity through attacks on their language and spiritual beliefs were cruel. But these practices were compounded by the too frequent lack of basic care — the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, medical services and a healthful environment, and the failure to ensure that the children were safe from teachers and staff who abused them physically, sexually and emotionally. (Vol. 1, Ch. 6)

Children were removed from their families—often by force or false pretenses, abused horribly in many cases, experimented on, and kept prisoner in institutions that were chronically underfunded and unable to meet their most basic needs. Fifty percent of children who attended residential schools died while at school or shortly after leaving, and those who survived often went on to perpetuate the abuse they suffered with their own children, and abuse themselves with alcohol and drugs. Very few completed school and those who did lagged far behind non-Aboriginal students because the curriculum in the schools was so rudimentary and out of date. The Indian Residential Schools system was in operation from 1831 until 1996—a total of 165 years. What it managed to teach generations of Aboriginal children was that they were disposable and worthless in Canadian society, and the best they could hope to achieve was the bottom level of the social hierarchy. RCAP (1996) summarizes the impact that *Indian* legislation during this period had on Aboriginal people:

> Across the country, communities were trapped in a colonial system that denied them any

> degree of self-determination, consigned them to poverty, corroded families and individuals, and made them too often the objects of social welfare agencies and penal institutions. (Vol. 1, Ch. 6)

Residential schools were, by far, the worst exploit in the colonization of Aboriginal Peoples, but they were by no means the only one with long-lasting effects.

The far-reaching power of the *Indian Act*, in all of its iterations, has defined every aspect of Aboriginal life in Canada for the past 164 years. It has determined everything from whether or not one was an *Indian* at birth, who one could marry and still remain an *Indian*, and, if considered an *Indian* according to the *Indian Act*, whether or not one's children were *Indians*. It has determined where one could live, how one could make a living, whether or not one could leave home and for how long, and finally, where one could be buried. RCAP (1996) describes the impact of the *Indian Act* as "legislated dispossession" (Vol. 1, Ch. 6), under which "Aboriginal peoples lost control and management of their own lands and resources, and their traditional customs and forms of organization were interfered with in the interest of remaking Aboriginal people in the image of the newcomers" (ibid). The ultimate purpose of the *Indian Act* throughout this stage was to outlive its necessity, as *Indians* were gradually absorbed into Canadian society and all traces of distinction removed from them, including and especially, their legal status as *Indians*. It was then, and still remains, the Government of Canada's interpretation of the treaties and delineation of its fiduciary obligation regarding Aboriginal Peoples.

The next turning point in the relationship between Aboriginal people and Canada came in 1969 when the government released its *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*, ushering in the fourth stage, *negotiation and renewal*. The *White Paper*, as it has come to be known, proposed that Aboriginal people should be treated as any other cultural minority,

allowed to retain their cultures in similar ways, but everything that made them legally distinct from other Canadians would disappear. This included treaties, Aboriginal rights, federal responsibility, and the Indian Affairs department. What made this a turning point was not so much the policy itself—another piece of assimilationist legislation being imposed on *Indians*—it was the reaction that it received from Aboriginal people, communities, and organizations across the country.

The policy was denounced for its central terms of extinguishment of Aboriginal status and rights, and the fact that it was based on assumptions rather than on consultation with Aboriginal people. Aboriginal associations from every province came together to contribute to a response to the *White Paper* prepared by the Indian Association of Alberta. The result was a policy paper presented to the government by the National Indian Brotherhood (1972) entitled, *Indian Control of Indian Education*. The paper was accepted as a new direction for education policy in 1973, and Aboriginal rights did not come to the national forefront again for another decade. I have always found it interesting, and under-examined, that education was chosen as the vehicle for responding to such an all-encompassing proposal as the *White Paper*. I would have expected it to be self-government, but the leaders of the day must have understood that education was the first step necessary in any movement toward reclaiming self-determination. Had *Indian Control of Indian Education* been implemented as it was intended after its adoption as policy, we would no doubt have different results from education for Aboriginal children today.

There are a number of important areas that could be discussed here, including the Sixties Scoop, relocations, pass systems, women's rights, and the treatment of Aboriginal veterans, all of which are identified in RCAP. Unfortunately, an overview this brief cannot possibly do justice to the ways in which Aboriginal people were treated as sub-human throughout this period, and the

detrimental effects that treatment has had on individuals and communities. The *Indian Act* is still in place, and this enduring legacy of colonialism still has much of the same power over the lives of First Nations people as it did in 1876. There have also been many positive advancements, including those respecting Aboriginal rights in the courts and the Constitution. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been in place since 2008, documenting the experiences of the remaining survivors of the Indian Residential Schools system, working with survivors and other organizations, and developing recommendations for government and its institutions.

The period of displacement and assimilation of Aboriginal Peoples lasted for more than 150 years. In that time, Indigenous knowledge, epistemology, ontology and cosmology were persistently attacked, and Aboriginal people were denigrated and recast as inferior socially, intellectually, and spiritually. This inferior status was concretized by legislation that dictated every aspect of life for Aboriginal people in increasingly invasive and encompassing Acts that would ensure that the remaining feature of the continent that was in the way of colonization—Aboriginal people—would soon disappear. This next sub-section identifies the key ideologies of colonization and present discussions of how they were carried out in North America and what the consequences were for Aboriginal people.

Features of colonization. Eurocentrism and cognitive imperialism were the main ideologies behind colonization in North America, and they have had deep and lasting effects on Aboriginal people. Dickason (1992) points out the arrogance inherent in Eurocentrism and Indigenous reaction to it:

> Canada, it used to be said by non-Indians with more or less conviction, is a country of much geography and little history. The ethnocentricity of that position at first puzzled, and even confused, Amerindians, but it has lately begun to anger them. How could such a

> thing be said, much less believed, when their people have been living here for thousands of years? As they see it, Canada has fifty-five founding nations rather than just the two that have been officially acknowledged. (p. 11)

Dickason refers to the point anthropologist Robin Ridington made that, for North Americans, "their technology consisted of knowledge rather than tools" (p. 63). Similarly, Indigenous *knowledge* is also Indigenous *history*, too.

Of these two colonial principles, cognitive imperialism seems to be more insidious and harder to overcome. Any work toward undoing the *colonization of the mind* that exists in our country must begin by disrupting cognitive imperialism in our education systems. Education is the primary arena where decolonization efforts need to focus in order to have an impact on all citizens of Canada. Canadians need to know and understand the history of their country and its treatment of North Americans before any meaningful change will occur for Aboriginal Peoples. The previous section made it clear that Indigenous knowledge is the repository of all that Indigenous people are, all that they know, and all that they have experienced. This is likely why Indigenous knowledge was so vehemently attacked by those who wanted to either remake or destroy Aboriginal people (or both), the one remaining obstacle to having free reign over the land and all of its resources.

Eurocentrism. One of the most prolific and damaging outcomes of Eurocentric thought and actions in North America is the way that Indigenous people have been remade in the colonizer's image of them as Indians. As Donald (2004) states, "right from the very beginning of the use of the term Indian, Indians were conceptualized as people with specific characteristics and inclinations" (Donald, 2004, p. 27). He also points out that Columbus' mistake in calling Americans Indians and his role in Imperialism were a result of the ideas prevalent in European

society during his time, not merely personal flaws, but what he finds "astonishing is that this misnomer, and the connotations attached to it, has resisted irrelevancy to this day" (p. 26). The fact that First Nations people in Canada are still officially labeled Indian demonstrates that we have some distance to go.

Donald asserts that the processes of colonialism have rendered Aboriginal people, using Fanon's words, "'overdetermined from without'" (cited on p. 27). Donald contends that through various forces and mechanisms—most notably the *Indian Act* (1985)—Aboriginal identity has been suppressed and Aboriginal people have been redefined according to the colonizer's image, that of the *Imaginary Indian*. Referring to Francis' (1992) examination of the concept, Donald summarizes the nature of the *Imaginary Indian*:

> Imaginary *Indian* has certain characteristics and propensities that have been projected on to all Indians in the form of these well-known stereotypes: a closeness to nature, skill in producing artwork, a primitive and ancient inclination to singing and drumming, spirituality, a dislike for work and discipline, a child-like inability to resist temptation, braided hair, a natural ability to hunt, sneakiness, and a general inability to adapt to the pressures of a contemporary lifestyle. (pp. 28-29, emphasis in original)

This *Indian* is like a hologram projected out from Euro-Canadian culture based in part on stereotypical characteristics, partly on 19th century romantic ideals, and a great deal on the qualities of an *Indian* that are most beneficial to the colonizers.

Donald (2004) also quotes Vizenor, who says the "'name 'Indian' is a convenient one, to be sure, but it is an invented term that does not come from any Native language, and it does not describe or contain any aspect of traditional Native experience or literature'" (p. 27). Vizenor says that the word *Indian* is a creation of racialism used "in the political and cultural interests of

discovery and colonial settlement of new nations" (ibid). Donald contends that the legal definition of an *Indian*, which he says is based in part on the *Imaginary Indian*, has had a significant effect in Canada, working "to divide and disentitle individuals, families, and communities, and force conformity to interpretations of Indianness limited to the social, cultural, political, and legal interpretations of *Indian* endorsed by Euro-Canadians" (p. 28). He argues that identifying Indians in their own terms enabled the colonizers "to co-opt the identity and collectivity of the people they called Indians by denying them the chance to be considered real people with real tribal names living in particular places" (p. 27). This process of dehumanizing Indigenous people in order to oppress them is a key tool of colonization (Freire, 1974) and is what allows Eurocentrism to justify its self-proclaimed position at the topic of the evolutionary chain of knowledge it supposes.

Battiste (2002) notes that this exotic image of Indigenous Peoples now has competition in the form of a "developing intellectual nexus of postcolonial and poststructural theories that underscores the importance of Indigenous knowledge and languages" (p. 6-7). She argues that the Eurocentric monologue undergirding modern governments and educational systems forced assimilation and acculturation, displacing Indigenous knowledge in the process. Battiste outlines the three main approaches that Eurocentric scholars have taken to Indigenous knowledge:

> First, they have tried to reduce it to taxonomic categories that are static over time. Second, they have tried to reduce it to its quantifiably observable empirical elements. And third, they have assumed that Indigenous knowledge has no validity except in the spiritual realm. (p. 10)

She concludes that none of these approaches is accurate in accounting for the holistic nature and fundamental importance of Indigenous knowledge to Aboriginal people. Unfortunately,

according to Battiste (2005), some Indigenous scholars also take this third approach and in doing so are self-defeating. They are fulfilling stereotypes of ignorance and superstition when they treat Indigenous knowledge as sacred and therefore absolute and unimpeachable. She says this behaviour only confirms that Indigenous people "are as ignorant and superstitious as Eurocentric observers have long maintained" (Battiste, 2005, p. 7). Eurocentric perspectives and their approaches to Indigenous knowledge, according to Battiste, make putting Indigenous knowledge into Eurocentric disciplines and frameworks challenging because they refuse to acknowledge "the extent to which Indigenous communities have their own knowledge holders and workers" (p. 7-8). Suppressing Indigenous knowledge is a prime example of cognitive imperialism, the second key element of colonization.

Cognitive imperialism. How do you tell the stories of suppressed groups when the traces they have left are fragmentary and disjointed? … The problems start when one story has precedence over the others to the extent that it becomes a master narrative inscribing its influence on all texts, as well as controlling and limiting our collective thinking about history and reality. (Donald, 2004, p. 49)

Cognitive imperialism is the "master narrative" of European superiority. It has had precedence for five centuries and has left its influence everywhere in schools, in government, in Canadian society, and in Aboriginal people's minds. Donald (2004) explains the importance of writing "'History 2'" (p. 49), versions of history that provoke intercultural dialogue and work to disrupt the master narrative that history is at present. Donald's (2004) question, *How do you tell the stories of suppressed groups when the traces they have left are fragmentary and disjointed?* refers to the difficulty inherent in reanimating Indigenous knowledge and using it in new ways. RCAP (1996) asserts that Aboriginal knowledge is the North American intellectual tradition and,

despite the fact that "this fundamental truth eludes most Canadians, who seem to believe that knowledge arrived with the Europeans" (Vol. 4, p. 112), it "is indigenous to this land" (ibid). Cognitive imperialism has left fragmented and disjointed pieces of the story of North America and its Peoples.

Cognitive imperialism manipulates and discredits other sources and types of knowledge, empowering—through public education—one form as normative and ideal, and designating all other forms of knowledge inferior or illegitimate (Battiste, 1998; 2000). The result of the domination of one form of thinking and being, perpetuated and legitimated through public schooling, has been an "educational tragedy" for "Aboriginal world views, knowledge, languages, [and] cultures," resulting in "the creation of widespread social and psychological upheaval in Aboriginal communities" (Battiste, 1998, p. 19). Cognitive imperialism forms the framework for institutionalized, systemic racism where the notions of superiority are so entrenched that they are unquestioned. It has been the means for removing wealth from entire groups of people, and it "denies people their language and cultural integrity by maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference" (Battiste, 2000, p. 198). One important aspect of cognitive imperialism that Battiste (2000; 2005) identifies is leading cultural minorities to believe that they are poor and powerless because of their race rather than by any actions of the majority.

The impact of public education on Aboriginal people has not been a benign one in its function as the primary vehicle of cognitive imperialism for Aboriginal people (Battiste, 2005). The myths that have been created about Aboriginal people were *created* in schools and they are *perpetuated* through schools. How else could a large majority of the population be completely ignorant of the truth of Canada's beginnings and her treatment of Aboriginal Peoples had it not

been deliberate. The most serious problem with education, Battiste (2005) argues, is "in its quest to limit thought to cognitive imperialistic policies and practices" (p. 9). This "denies Aboriginal people access to and participation in the formulation of government policy, constrains the use and development of Aboriginal cultures in schools, and confines education to a narrow view of the world and its knowledge foundations" (ibid). Battiste (2005) asserts that the "gift of modern knowledge has been the ideology of oppression, which negates the process of knowledge as a process of inquiry to explore new solutions" (p. 9). She concludes that this "ideology seeks to change the consciousness of the oppressed, not change the situation that oppressed them" (ibid). The true story of Canada's beginnings and relationship with Aboriginal Peoples needs to be taught in schools so that we can dispel the myths, lies, and omissions that are the source of most Canadians' understanding of Aboriginal people.

The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies (CAAS, 2002) also argues that school curriculum "has been a primary vehicle for social control, delivering a *pedagogy of oppression* to both Canadians and Aboriginal Peoples" (p. 37). CAAS (2002) states that a "selective and politically motivated messaging about Aboriginal Peoples has been introduced almost anywhere that Aboriginal Peoples' histories, cultures and concerns surface in Canadian society, particularly in the Canadian classroom" (ibid). The authors contend that Euro-Canadians designed this pedagogy "to strengthen the control of the Canadian state over Aboriginal land and resources" (p. 38) by denying "the complexities, accomplishments, dynamism, and even the mere existence, of Aboriginal Peoples' many diverse cultures" (ibid). School curriculum presents theories of migration, discovery, and settlement in order to justify colonialism because an "accurate portrayal, from Aboriginal perspectives, of this history would undermine the supremacy of European culture on this land" (CAAS, 2002, p. 38). Instead, what is being taught

"still looks frighteningly like what has always been taught.… It is just wearing new clothes – the word Indian is now changed to Aboriginal" (p. 39) and teachers are still teaching what they learned in school a generation or more ago. Cognitive imperialism is insidious in the ways that it continues to attack Indigenous knowledge and the minds of Aboriginal people.

Impacts of colonization in education.

> If you haven't got the right information, if you bring your bias, or your way of thought in there, then you will influence that and we will never get rid of racism, discrimination, as we know it today. And so, as a teacher, you need to have that within you. You need to open up your heart, you need to open up your mind.
>
> Elder Marge Friedel, (2012)

As the late Elder, Marge Friedel insists, teachers need to address their own biases and prejudices or they will bring them into the classroom and continue to perpetuate them in society. We simply cannot decolonize Aboriginal education while they are present. Neither will we be able to do it without addressing the many negative impacts that colonization has had on education for Aboriginal people. Hampton (1995) discusses the impact that a colonial education has on Aboriginal people, insisting that the "horrors and indescribable pain of Native existence after the European conquest cannot be minimized" (p. 35). He explains how Aboriginal people are affected by colonial education physically, mentally, and spiritually:

> Physical, mental, and spiritual - it is all one thing to the Indian. Physical effects of the conquest on Indian education include otitis media, fetal alcohol syndrome, material poverty, poor housing, poor nutrition. Treaty provisions were not met, schools were not built, teachers were not sent. The mental effects include the erosion of our self-concept, denial of worth, the outlawing of languages. The spiritual effects include the outlawing of

> our worship, the imposition of Christian denominationalism, the destruction of Indian families. (p. 32)

Hampton asserts that oppression and resistance are inherent aspects of Aboriginal education that must be understood in order to comprehend the bearing education has on Aboriginal people. According to Hampton, "Indian children face a daily struggle against attacks on their identity, their intelligence, their way of life, their essential worth. They must continually struggle to find self-worth, dignity, and freedom in being who they are" (pp. 34-35). There is no aspect of Aboriginal people's lives that has not been impacted by having a system of education imposed on them that is completely foreign to them in every way.

Hampton (1995) explains that "Western education is in content and structure hostile to Native people" (p. 35). He asserts that we must understand that the way education is currently practiced is "cultural genocide" (p. 35) because it works "to brainwash the Native child, substituting non-Native for Native knowledge, values, and identity" (p. 35). Most of society would agree that ignorance, stereotypes, and racism are unacceptable in schools, and yet they are all still key features in public education and society. Whether, as CAAS (2002) suggests, public schooling is deliberately hostile to Aboriginal people, or it is the result of perverse ignorance as Hampton (1995) argues, the impacts it has on Aboriginal children remain the same.

Ignorance is no excuse. The adage is particularly relevant as access to information continues to grow exponentially in a digital age. Hampton (1995), however, believes that ignorance is, if not excusable, at least understandable. He asserts that white educational systems are part of a greater "pathological complex endemic to North American society" (p. 34) made up principally of unconscious processes. These processes include:

> (1) a perverse ignorance of the facts of racism and oppression; (2) delusions of

> superiority, motivated by fear of inadequacy; (3) a vicious spiral of self-justifying action, as the blame is shifted to the victims who must be 'helped,' that is, controlled for their own good; and (4) denial that the oppressor profits from the oppression materially, as well as by casting themselves as superior, powerful, and altruistic persons. (pp. 34-35)

Hampton explains that "[p]erverse ignorance is a particular form of the defence mechanism of denial" (p. 35). Citing Haan (1977), Hampton characterizes perverse ignorance as "'compelled, negating, rigid, distorting of intersubjective reality and logic, allows covert impulse expression, and embodies the expectancy that anxiety can be relieved without directly addressing the problem'" (Hampton, 1995, p. 36). He says that we are "victims of the best intentions of white educators" (p. 34) who believe that they know what is best for Aboriginal people and that everyone else is deluded. The delusion of superiority is self-sustaining and self-justifying; it has a logic of its own that maintains it uppermost and centre. Hampton concludes that white educators' "desperation to save the Indian on white terms makes me believe that it is their own world-view that the existence of Indians threatens" (p. 32). Whatever the cause or reason for their ignorance, it certainly abounds in Canadians.

CAAS (2002) conducted an extensive survey of university students across Canada in 2002 and reported that graduates from Canadian high schools told them "how little they learned about Aboriginal Peoples and this land, and how racist attitudes, that have prevailed since Canada first began, were often promoted" (p. 2). The students questioned how they could understand Aboriginal perspectives "when they lack understanding or respect for the Aboriginal Peoples' struggles, survival and traditions" (p. 2). Students who have been taught some version of the *national myth* of Canada's establishment tend to still believe, as early Canadians did, "that Aboriginal Peoples should abandon their ways i.e. languages, spirituality, economic systems,

seasonal movement to hunting and gathering places and, most importantly, their lands – and take up a new lifestyle defined by the colonizers" (CAAS, 2002, p. 34). This kind of thinking is usually accompanied by the sentiment that Aboriginal people need to just *get over it*.

RCAP (1996) also found that most Canadians are unaware of Canada's true history with Aboriginal Peoples, "and there is little understanding of the origins and evolution of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people that have led us to the present moment" (Vol. 1, Ch. 3). Canadians' lack of awareness and lack of understanding of the cultural differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people "have created fissures in relations between the original inhabitants of North America and generations of newcomers" (ibid). These fractures hamper efforts to restore "the balanced and respectful relationship that is the key to correcting our understanding of our shared past and moving forward together into the future" (ibid). The breadth and depth of the ignorance of Canadians about Canada's history plays a significant role in maintaining biases, stereotypes, and racism.

Ignorance appears to be a key cause of discrimination against Aboriginal people. Elder Bob Cardinal (2012) describes prejudice as a learned behaviour, concluding that "schools have it. It's strong still today. So there's got to be a lot of history that the teacher has to learn and make these people, our native kids, be part of that because, if not, they're [set] back because they don't understand" (Cardinal, 2012). According to CAAS (2002), for teachers to continue to teach stereotypes, racist attitudes, and "to teach what they often do not understand" (p. 3) is unacceptable. Their research indicates that "students educated in Canadian classrooms continue to complete their elementary and secondary education without acquiring adequate or even accurate information about Aboriginal Peoples" (p. 19), and that "current school and university curricula in much of Canada demonstrates that assumptions of European superiority continue to

be an organizing force for the selection of the content to which we expose the children and adult learners" (p. 33). It appears that public schooling remains to be organized around ideas of inferiority and *superiority*, underprivileged and *(over)privileged*, cultural deficits and cultural *hostility*, and teachers with little or no accurate understanding of Aboriginal people are teaching both *to* and *about* them what it is to be Aboriginal.

To say that all Canadians are just ignorant, however, is really giving them the benefit of the doubt. The experiences that my colleagues and I have as Aboriginal instructors in a mainstream institution attempting to teach about our experiences and worldviews suggest that there is still a great deal of explicit racism in Canada, and it doesn't take much to elicit hateful, ugly reactions to the truth we present. What is most concerning to me is that those who react this way are pre-service teachers who are preparing to be guides and caregivers of our children, children who will in turn learn, act on, and transmit those same prejudicial perceptions of Aboriginal Peoples. So long as these stereotypical and racist ideas exist in education, infusing non-Aboriginal teachers' conceptualizations of Aboriginal Peoples and perspectives into curriculum has the potential to do much more harm than good.

Racism underpins all aspects of colonization and as such is the primary obstacle to change. St. Denis (2007) asserts that, before Aboriginal culture and language can be integrated into the curriculum, racism in schools must be confronted. Furthermore, because colonization, racialization, and racism have been inherited by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, all teachers and administrators, including those who are Aboriginal, need "opportunities to learn more about racism and how its effects, especially the ideology of and belief in the superiority of whiteness, shapes both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of society" (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1084-5). They need to understand the causal factors of the issues Aboriginal people face today,

and see that colonization and racialization are what tie non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Canadians together (p. 1087). This idea that Aboriginal people share both a history and the experience of colonization with non-Aboriginal Canadians has other aspects as well.

The relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians has created what Ermine (1995) and Little Bear (2000) call a *fragmentary worldview* for both groups. The lack of a holistic education system that includes exploration and development in the inner space creates what Ermine (1995), using Bohm's term, describes as a "'fragmentary self-world view'" (cited on p. 110). This worldview is based on atomistic ideas about the world and how we can know it. It divides, categorizes, and compartmentalizes all knowledge into discrete categories that have been arrived at through objective analysis. Ermine insists that we cannot know our world objectively, as Western science would have it. We have to be subjective and introspective in seeking knowledge. Ermine cautions that "Aboriginal people should be wary of Western conventions that deny the practice of inwardness and fortitude to achieve transformative holism" (p. 103). Ermine contends that fragmentation is embedded in Western ideology and worldview, warning that our children are subjected to education systems that promote "the dogma of fragmentation and indelibly harm the capacity for holism" (p. 103). For Ermine, it is the danger that a fragmentary self-worldview presents to Aboriginal epistemology that is of greatest concern.

Little Bear (2000) contends that colonization has "created a fragmentary worldview among Aboriginal peoples" (p. 85) through education policy, force, and terror in its attempt to destroy the Aboriginal worldview. What it left instead is "a heritage of jagged worldviews among Indigenous peoples. They no longer had an Aboriginal worldview, nor did they adopt a Eurocentric worldview" (p. 85). Instead, they had a consciousness like a jigsaw puzzle that needs

to be put together in order for it to make sense. Little Bear states that "Aboriginal consciousness became a site of overlapping, contentious, fragmented, competing desires and values" (p. 85) selected from a collection of available views of the world. Like Ermine (1995), he also applies the concept of a fragmentary worldview to Euro-Canadians as well, only his is a shared one.

Little Bear believes that "both the colonizer and the colonized, have shared or collective views of the world embedded in their languages, stories, or narratives" (p. 85) that are a mixture of Eurocentric and Indigenous worldviews. He describes this shared worldview as "a precolonized consciousness that flows into a colonized consciousness and back again" (p. 85) as the two worldviews clash with one another. He maintains that it is "this clash that suppresses diversity in choices and denies Aboriginal people harmony in their daily lives" (p. 85). It is also a clash that we are all obligated to overcome, as Cree Elder Sidney Fiddler (Fiddler, 2012) reminds us: "there's an obligation as Treaty people to have to understand what our ways are" (video interview). The failure of Canada to uphold the treaties has left what CAAS (2002) describes as "a gulf that is widened by stereotypes, racism, misinformation and non-information" (p. 2). CAAS argues that, in order for the struggles Aboriginal people face and their lasting impacts to be understood by Canadians, they must be mandated in curriculum.

In his description of the current state of Indian education and its impact on Aboriginal people, Hampton (1995) determines that, for most Indian students, "Indian education means the education of Indians by non-Indians using non-Indian methods" (p. 6). He argues that it is the same now as it has been for the past 100 years, which leaves children without teachers who understand their culture or who can be role models for them. Hampton observes that, "far from being an opportunity, education is a critical filter indeed, filtering out hope and self-esteem" (p. 7). Aboriginal students' failure in public education has a silver lining, though. Hampton believes

it "can be read as the success of Native resistance to cultural, spiritual, and psychological genocide" (p. 7), resistance which can allow a new kind of education to be conceived of and developed to replace a system and method of educating Aboriginal children that continues to fail them. As Hampton asserts, "[n]o aspect of a culture is more vital to its integrity than its means of education" (p. 7), particularly when the culture has been under concerted and sustained attack for at least 200 years.

Indian education, according to Hampton, has five different meanings that match five stages of education for Aboriginal people. These are:

> (1) traditional Indian education, (2) schooling for self-determination, (3) schooling for assimilation, (4) education by Indians, and (5) Indian education *sui generis*. These five meanings are like five currents in a river. It is not always easy to identify the edges of the currents but some currents are stronger than others in a particular time or place. (p. 8)

Traditional teaching took many forms in North American societies and there were no doubt variations between them. They were systems that grew out of the knowledge and traditions of each culture and each was particularly adapted to its culture of origin. After Europeans arrived, Aboriginal education entered its second phase: schools specifically for Aboriginal children. There were two types, according to Hampton: "schooling for self-determination and schooling for assimilation" (p. 9). Hampton states that a small number of schools, despite being non-Aboriginal in origin and nature, have had vastly different goals, methods, and outcomes in teaching Aboriginal students. These are schools for self-determination. The second type, schools for assimilation, which are characterized throughout this section, are the norm for Aboriginal people.

Education by Indians, Hampton's fourth kind of Indian education, is preparing "the way

for a move towards Indian control through the establishment of Native-controlled schools and Native school boards" (p. 9). However, Hampton states that the structures, methods, content and faculty are still predominantly non-Aboriginal because of the "major obstacles" (p. 10) that more than a century of schooling for assimilation has created for Aboriginal-controlled education:

> Native languages have declined, non-Native standards are usually used to evaluate Native schools and Native teachers, the development of Native curricula and Native educational methods is an enormous task, and funding is uncertain and usually controlled by non-Natives. (p. 10)

Hampton believes that this is a transitional phase, as Aboriginal curriculum is being developed, the number of Aboriginal teachers has dramatically increased, and there is recognition of the need for Aboriginal approaches in education for Aboriginal students. He cites Noley, who offers an important caution in trying to improve Aboriginal education: "'What we ultimately need may not be a grafting of Indian content and personnel onto European structures, but a redefinition of education'" (cited on p. 10). What is certain is that any redefinition of Aboriginal education must be a decolonized one with Indigenous knowledge as its foundation and Aboriginal experience at the forefront.

Colonization is one of those words that hides the subject; it removes the actors from the acts so that the events seem to have just happened without any agency. Viewed in this way, no one is at fault for colonization, except perhaps the colonized for their inferiority. Cardinal Sockbeson (2011) cites examples of this in education with both the cultural deficit and low self-esteem theories that are used to explain Aboriginal student failure. Rather than schools looking at what they are doing, Aboriginal children are held responsible for a curriculum that fails to acknowledge their existence, and for educators who do not challenge the flaws in public

education that continue to fail children because of systemic racism and injustice.

We live in a country that is disinclined to acknowledge its own colonialism. In order for non-Aboriginal people to understand Aboriginal experiences, they first have to come to terms with the fact that Canada does, in fact, have a history of colonialism replete with myriad negative outcomes for Aboriginal people. They have to re-examine history and come to a new understanding of the price that Aboriginal people have paid and continue to pay so that Canada can exist. They then need to see their present reality in relation to Aboriginal reality. As Tim Wise (n.d.) says, if there are underprivileged people, then it follows that those who are not underprivileged are over-privileged. A case in point for the denial of such privilege is the fact that neither Microsoft Word nor the Merriam-Webster dictionary recognizes *overprivileged* as a word. We cannot talk about it because it is not even in our vocabulary. Finally, non-Aboriginal Canadian teachers need to become willing to act toward changing both of those realities, for one cannot change without the other changing as well. Herein lies one part of the problem of infusion.

Many, if not most, non-Aboriginal people in Canada neither know nor consequently care about Aboriginal Peoples' experiences of colonization. A large proportion of students arrive at university without ever having learned about the colonization of the First Peoples of this land (CAAS, 2002). If they have learned anything, chances are it's a whitewashed version of history that portrays the beneficent nature of the relationship between Indigenous people and *newcomers* that evolved into a peaceful surrender of half of North America to the newcomers in trade for their superior technology, society, religion, and their *protection*. Whitewashing history is the act of revising it to display European colonizers and immigrants as well-meaning people who had only the interests of Indigenous Peoples in mind in every colonizing action they took. It is to

perpetuate stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples as inferior beings in all aspects in order to justify having come into land that has been inhabited by numerous distinct and highly socially and intellectually developed peoples for thousands of years and claimed it for themselves, proclaiming the process to be one of compliance, cooperation, and ultimately, mutual benefit.

This myth is recreated in our classrooms, through our government, and almost anywhere people might have occasion to talk about Canada's formation. The vehement reactions to *Idle No More* demonstrations that were reported in the media in 2012 and 2013 provided a vivid example of the feelings that many Canadians have toward Aboriginal people. The horrible truths about colonization and the difficulty many Canadians have hearing about them must be having an impact on whether and how teachers infuse Aboriginal perspectives into their teaching practice. This phenomenon presents a huge challenge to accurately teaching about Aboriginal experience in Alberta in its full and unglossed version. However, it is a challenge that education can overcome, and has for many individuals, perhaps just not enough yet for there to be a critical mass.

Conclusion

The purpose of this review of the literature on infusion and Aboriginal perspectives was to better understand the rationale, processes, and parameters of infusion policy. Infusion policy in Alberta requires teachers to incorporate an understanding of Aboriginal Peoples' worldviews and experiences into the curriculum. According to the literature on infusion, the rationale is that including Aboriginal perspectives in school curriculum enables Aboriginal children to see themselves and their people represented in what they are learning, which helps motivate them to attend and learn by positively impacting their understanding of who they are. In order for teachers to integrate their understanding of Aboriginal Peoples' worldviews and experiences into

their teaching, they first need to understand those perspectives and experiences for themselves.

The nature of Indigenous knowledge and the ways in which it is transmitted from generation to generation may very well preclude a full understanding for non-Indigenous people. At the very least, teachers would need to dedicate significant time and involvement to learning about an Indigenous worldview. Understanding Aboriginal Peoples' experiences of colonization presents another challenge for teachers who do not share in those experiences or necessarily have any knowledge or understanding of the processes, experiences, or outcomes of colonization.

What I did not find in the literature on infusion was a definition or description of Aboriginal identity, nor an explanation of how it develops and functions. The literature on Aboriginal perspectives described many aspects of Aboriginal identity but not as a theory or conceptualization. The discussions on the elements and impacts of colonization describe many of the processes and outcomes of colonization but not in the context of weakening Aboriginal identity. Teachers and schools have been integral to colonization and assimilation and are central actors in infusion policy but the literature does not make explicit the nature of their relationship to and influence on Aboriginal identity development. In order to conduct an analysis of infusion policy and its assumptions, I needed to examine and understand Aboriginal identity, its deterioration under colonization, and its relationship to teachers and schooling. Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of my research methodology, my questions, and the methods that I employed in conducting the remainder of this study.

Chapter 3

Understanding and Applying Indigenous Research Methodology

Part of the initial impetus for conducting this study was a question posed by two Cree pre-service teachers based on their culturally and socially determined perspectives and experiences in a Canadian teacher education program. Asking their Canadian colleagues whether or not they felt prepared to teach Aboriginal students resonated with my own sense of the inconsistencies inherent in applying infusion as public education policy to remedy the problems that Aboriginal people experience in education. The policy never sat well with me and understanding why became the incentive for my research.

Despite not being fully aware of the reasons why this policy was problematic for me at the outset, this study has been grounded in Cree understanding from its beginning. From my position as a Cree educator in a public institution, I wondered how Canadian teachers could fulfill this expectation given their lack of knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal Peoples or colonization. Having two Cree pre-service teachers express concerns similar to mine about infusion established the particular Indigenous epistemology from which these concerns arose.

We were three Cree educators whose questions about infusion policy emerged out of our shared understanding, experiences, and positioning as Cree people. Our common sense was that teachers were not prepared to teach Aboriginal perspectives so the policy was not consistent with Cree understanding or experiences. Our knowledge about and experiences with both teacher preparation and Indigenous realities were grounded in our Cree perspectives and in our understanding of the critical role assigned to Canadian teachers in implementing infusion and the impacts they could potentially have on Aboriginal people's lives in Canada. Cree epistemology was not a choice but a fact determined by my perspective as researcher, the perspectives of my

students who posed the question, and by the principles of IRM.

In this chapter I describe my epistemological location as the researcher carrying out an Indigenous research study and review the purpose and context for the research. Using the literature on IRM, I provide several arguments regarding the applicability of IRM as a methodology for Indigenous researchers and Indigenous research followed by a detailed examination of the principles and processes of conducting Indigenous research. The last section of the chapter describes and discusses the research design and methods that I engaged in to conduct the remainder of the study.

Locating My Epistemology as the Researcher

I identify myself as Cree/Métis as a form of shorthand for my cultural location because Cree and Métis understanding have been the most predominant Indigenous cultural influences on the formation of my particular perspective. My father was primarily raised by his paternal Cree grandmother and Métis grandfather. He did not feel as connected to or influenced by his mother's Dene culture and had difficulty learning the language. As a child he spoke English and Cree and could understand some French because of his mother's residential school education. His earliest school experience was being with his mother while she taught school in a Cree community so he quickly became fluent through this early immersion experience. Being immersed in Cree culture and raised among an older generation of Cree and Métis relations strongly influenced my father's early experiences and shaped his worldview. His later self-perceptions were more influenced by Euro-Canadian perspectives when his family moved off-reserve because they did not have government status as *Indians*. My grandmother's status as an *Indian* changed when she married a Métis man and the direction their lives would take from then on was determined largely as a result of this official disenfranchisement.

My mother's upbringing was very different because of the predominant influence of Euro-Canadian perspectives in her family. Her maternal grandmother was Cree and her maternal grandfather was an Anglo-American man with an expressed hatred toward *Indians*. He married my great-grandmother because she was his brother's widow and he felt obligated to take care of her and her child. My mother's father was raised according to his primarily French heritage without any acknowledgement of his mother's Dakota ancestry or its influences on them. In an effort once to prove the depth of his love for my grandmother, he told her that he knew she was an *Indian* but he married her anyway. Being raised in a family with such negative opinions about Indigenous Peoples despite their own obvious and deliberate relatedness to them had tremendous negative impacts on my grandmother's and my mother's self-perceptions. They were raised knowing they were *Indians* and learning how and why they needed to overcome that essential flaw in order to be acceptable to their family and Canadian society.

Trying to establish the roots of my epistemology was complex because of the differing and often contradictory, confrontational, or hostile cultural perspectives within my own family. Sussing out the aspects of my worldview that stem from each is a lifelong endeavor involving gaining a deeper understanding of the characteristics of each tradition. My formal education has played a major role in shaping how I view the world, often creating conflict with what I know about being Cree. My Canadian education—formally through school and informally through family and society—taught me that my Indigeneity was a fatal flaw that education would help me overcome. At the same time, my spirit resisted this assessment of my worth and continually drove me to seek the truth about myself as a human being with inherent existential value.

Because I do not speak an Indigenous language, aside from knowing a few words picked up here and there, I cannot simply draw a straight line from first language to primary

epistemology. Cree scholar Michael Hart contends that not speaking Cree does not mean that he is not Cree; only that he has a different understanding than that of a Cree speaker. He believes that the journey of a Cree speaker and a non-speaker are different, but they are both part of and examples of being Cree. He concludes that, "[i]f we deny that, then we have to deny ourselves, and my understanding about our peoples is that we don't do that. We are inclusive, we bring people in" (cited in Kovach, 2009, p. 70). Language is such a critical and determining marker of culture that its absence can be a point of exclusion for those of us who have been denied the opportunity to develop such a fundamental aspect of our identities. Battiste (2008) identified this as a source of difficulty wrought by colonization but she also confirmed that understanding language is much more than making words:

> Indigenous peoples who have lost their languages due to government genocidal and assimilation policies are presented with a great challenge. Second-language research, however, has confirmed that language is more than just sound. Language includes ways of knowing, ways of socializing, and nonverbal communication. (p. 504)

My ways of knowing, socializing, and communicating have developed according to the Cree/Métis ways of my parents and ancestors.

My ancestry could not be more firmly rooted in Canadian history because of the many complexities that arise from the contradictions between being Indigenous and being Canadian. The essential foundations on which I developed my self-concept were: 1) knowing that I was Cree/Métis at my core and sensing the importance of this to my life; 2) understanding that I was an *Indian* according to Canada and therefore substandard; and 3) learning that my purpose in life was to make up for that fact by becoming something else. I was taught that the way to accomplish this was through Canadian education, hard work, and by not causing problems along

the way. My parents taught us all this same understanding but I wonder now if they or others thought that I and my younger sister had the advantage of not *looking like Indians* with our blonde hair, fair skin, and blue eyes. I can say that what I see reflected in the mirror has never matched what I know I am inside. The fact that I look like my grandfathers has not diminished or washed out the aspects of me that I inherited from my grandmothers. It has certainly complicated matters a great deal at times but my appearance is no more than a *red herring* in relation to my identity.

What I understand about my epistemology is that it is rooted in a primary orality consciousness (Weber-Pillwax, 2001) that has developed through my relationships with the places, peoples, and traditions of my Cree parents. When I analyze how my parents have taught me, I realize that it has always been through story. Never did either of my parents pull out a book to teach me something; the lessons were always oral and presented in the form of a story with an embedded lesson. I can hear my dad right now saying, "Well, I'll tell you what …" before relating a particular lesson to me from his life. My father's brief years of schooling and the difficulties he encountered in trying to read English meant that his education was informal, completely experiential, and wholly grounded in his oral consciousness. He possessed a phenomenal visual memory that, combined with the encyclopedia of his oral and experiential knowledge, guided him around the continent many times over in his ninety years. His ability to remember and recall events, places, experiences, and teachings was extraordinary, and stood as a testament to the strength, value, and endurance of oral knowledge. Literacy-based Western academic knowledge did not infiltrate or suppress his primary orality consciousness.

My mother's lessons have always been by example. We learned the lessons we needed through apprenticeship and through a method she devised for sneaking math into everything that

we did. We had to adjust recipes and patterns by fractional amounts so that we were constantly practicing the skills we would need to live in the world. Her parents were the most practical people I have ever known, having learned how to survive through difficulty and thrive despite very limited resources, and these skills were passed on to her. We were taught to have faith above all and to be good people on our journeys. We were not to cause trouble for others or take advantage of anyone's hardship or misfortune. We learned to give what we could and then some to help anyone in need. We were taught by example to put our own needs after the needs of others whenever possible. We learned to value family and tradition, giving over receiving, independence as the source of freedom, and interdependence as the source of happiness.

Despite my family's disenfranchisement from the land through colonial legislation, we have always found ways to reconnect and renew our relationship with the natural world. Every summer of my life has been spent visiting the places of my family's origins and living lightly on the land in the ways we were taught. The trappings of summer camping became more modern but the principles remained the same. These brief respites from the expectations and norms that Canadian society placed on us as *Indians* allowed us to simply *be* according to our own understanding for a short time. They cemented those critical connections to our origins through immersion in places, people, knowledge, and traditions. Summers allowed us to fulfill our longing to return home to familiar faces, places, and experiences, renewing and strengthening our connections with every visit.

I have learned Cree/Métis ways of thinking and being from both of my parents. I did not grow up participating in the ceremonies of my Cree ancestors or learning the language, but their values and principles were passed on to me in many other ways. Now that I do have access to ceremonies, the transition has felt like a natural progression that I was meant to take rather than a

strange new way of looking at the world. My spirit and being must remember and recognize these experiences as inherent aspects of my purpose to unfold according to who I am. Being recognized by the ancestors in ceremony affirms that I am Cree and that I am on the right path.

Purpose and Context of the Research

The objective of the study was to evaluate whether or not the policy and practice of infusion in Alberta's public education system has the potential to achieve its stated goal of strengthening identity in Aboriginal students by having all teachers incorporate Aboriginal perspectives throughout the curriculum. I designed the study to address three primary concerns that I had around this policy. The first was that the policy framework does not provide a construct of what a strong Aboriginal identity looks like, how its strength can be determined, or how identity develops for Aboriginal people in Canada. The second issue that had to be addressed was to understand why Aboriginal identity needs to be strengthened in the first place. This required understanding what has happened historically that has weakened Aboriginal Peoples' understanding of who they are and how that impacts their educational experiences.

The third matter of concern, the role of teachers in public schools, was not separate from the first two but did require consideration of its own because teachers are the agents expected to carry out the policy directive. Infusion policy assumes that all teachers, regardless of personal experience, cultural or societal context, background knowledge, or contemporary understanding, can positively impact Aboriginal identity by infusing Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum and, as a result, Aboriginal students' educational outcomes will improve.

The complex, multi-layered nature of this policy—evident in the issues that arise around the nature of its objectives, the assumptions inherent in its logic, and the means established for achieving its goals—demanded a multifaceted approach to evaluating its potential to ameliorate

the experiences and outcomes of education for Indigenous students.

The first consideration in this examination of public policy that specifically targets Aboriginal students was the political context. It had to account for the colonial history and context of Aboriginal existence in Canada, especially with respect to power and self-determination. The political context is defined by the power that an invading nation's colonial government asserted for itself over Indigenous nations. It is defined by that government's concerted efforts to eliminate Indigenous cultures so as to remove any distinctions as first inhabitants of the land. It continues to be defined by a discourse of cultural and intellectual superiority that justifies European conquest of the Americas and their Peoples.

The second consideration was the cultural context. It needed to acknowledge that definitions or notions of such things as *identity*, *education*, *development*, and *achievement*, for example, are culturally generated and therefore deeply embedded in specific cultural contexts. They are situated within knowledge systems complete with their own histories, values, goals, methods, languages, ceremonies, localities of origin, and peoples from whom they generate. As a result of this, it seems probable that a culturally generated construct such as *identity* could not simply be applied as either a goal or a measure in another cultural context without problems arising.

A third layer of complexity to consider was the impact that the first consideration, the political context, has had on the second, the cultural contexts of Indigenous Peoples. The central goal of colonial legislation such as the *Indian Act* (1876), its predecessors, and its many subsequent reiterations was to aggressively assimilate Indigenous Peoples into Canadian society by removing all traces of Indigenous identity from them. Legislated assimilation included involuntary enfranchisement, prohibitions on cultural practices, denial of basic human rights, and

the pinnacle of the assimilation agenda, the Indian Residential Schools system, all of which were aimed at the destruction of Indigenous cultures and the absorption of Indigenous Peoples into Canadian society. The long history and extensive legacy of the Indian Residential Schools system, and the persistence of the *Indian Act* as the legislation that still governs Aboriginal existence in Canada, mean that the colonial period is ongoing. Indigenous Peoples and cultures have been and continue to be profoundly affected by the practices and the philosophy of colonialism.

The main ideologies that have driven colonization in Canada—as the section on Aboriginal experience in Chapter 2 made evident—are *Eurocentrism*, which holds that Western European peoples and cultures are superior to Indigenous peoples and cultures, and *cognitive imperialism*, which asserts that the only legitimate knowledge system originated in Greece and spread throughout the world via Western imperialism. These ideologies have not only dominated and regulated Indigenous existence in North America for five centuries, they have also established a discourse that has shaped the field of Western sociological research and determined the boundaries of legitimate knowledge, authentic ways of knowing, and valid means of discovering *truths*. The evidence of this discourse is nowhere more evident than in the field of educational research.

The research methodology for this study had to be able to account for these multiple layers of complexity in the field of Aboriginal educational research. These include the reality that there are significant differences between the cultural foundations of Canadian education and Indigenous cultures as well as the effects of colonization on both the contemporary political and cultural contexts of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and on the act of research itself.

Why Indigenous Research Methodology

As an analysis of public policy aimed at Aboriginal Peoples, this study required a methodology that fit with its purpose. Aboriginal Peoples in North America have been studied by others since European explorers first encountered American Peoples in their search for a western passage to the Indies half a millennium ago. Since that time, as is evident in the accounts of Columbus' arrival and indeed throughout the historical record (see for example Willinsky, 1998), Indigenous North Americans have been objects of scrutiny, supposition, manipulation, and, ultimately, of control by foreign powers. North American Peoples became casualties of a European worldview that saw them as either imperial commodities to be exploited for economic, political or religious gain, or colonial obstacles to be overcome through containment, subjugation, and removal. Whether for the sake of displaying curiosities or under the guise of *scientific* study, Aboriginal peoples and cultures *as artefacts* have been a staple of European exploration and expansion for centuries.

In recent decades, Indigenous scholars, having engaged in Western scholarship to the extent of establishing a critical mass within the academy, have begun to resist objectification under the gaze of European supremacy and assert themselves within academia as primary investigators of Indigenous knowledge, experiences, and perspectives (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Marker, 2000; Smith, 1999). This requires using their respective Indigenous knowledge systems as the conceptual, theoretical and methodological foundations of their research. A critical aspect of this struggle is to examine what research using Indigenous knowledge systems looks like within the framework of Western academia. To engage in qualitative research with Indigenous peoples—regardless of the theoretical framework employed—means to seek out Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous experiences, and Indigenous perspectives. Many Indigenous

scholars have asserted that an Indigenous research methodology is required in order to obtain and interpret data in a way that maintains respect for Indigenous knowledge and knowledge holders, and therefore truly represents Indigenous insights.

A fundamental principle behind using Indigenous epistemology and ontology as the bases for inquiry into Indigenous being is how crucial it is to use one's own understanding of the world —grounded in the understanding of one's Peoples—as the means for gaining further knowledge, understanding, and direction for action. This principle is by no means a new direction of Indigenous thought about the relationship between knowledge seeking and the methods employed. Nearly a century ago, Cree historian and scholar Edward Ahenakew[1] (1885-1961) very succinctly expressed the importance of this principle in relation to the Canadian ban on Indigenous ceremonies at that time. He insisted that, for Peoples to act according to foreign ways of knowing the world to seek understanding for themselves is futile: "If a nation does not do what is right according to its own understanding, its power is worthless" (Ahenakew, 1973, p. 69). The power and worth of knowledge and any actions resulting from it rest on the alignment between a People's own ways of knowing and the knowledge system used to seek out new understanding. Ahenakew's statement does not even address the concept of *new* knowledge. Rather, it qualifies *knowledge* as either both powerful and worthwhile, *or not*, depending on the fit between the application of the knowledge and the epistemological foundation of the methods employed to gain the understanding to act. This is the essence of why Indigenous research methodologies are essential to Indigenous research.

Several Indigenous scholars have discussed using Indigenous epistemologies as the theoretical foundation of Indigenous research (research conducted by Indigenous researchers) and in research with or related to Indigenous Peoples. Their thoughts on congruence between

[1] See *Voices of the Plains Cree* by Edward Ahenakew for a fuller biography.

methodology and the researcher, as well as between the methodology and the *researched,* and on the goals and outcomes of Indigenous research and research with Indigenous Peoples, are compelling reasons for utilizing IRM as the foundation of this study.

In his articulation of IRM, Wilson (2001) argued that, as Indigenous researchers, we need to research from an Indigenous *paradigm* rather than an Indigenous *perspective* in our research. An Indigenous paradigm, Wilson contended, includes not only ontology, epistemology, and methodology, but also axiology (p. 175). He explained that ontology is a belief in the nature of reality, epistemology is how you think about that reality, methodology is how you use your epistemology to learn about your reality, and axiology is the set of ethics that guides the research. Wilson saw these four aspects as the constituents of a research paradigm. An IRM therefore "needs to reflect Indigenous contexts and world views: that is, they must come from an Indigenous paradigm rather than an Indigenous perspective" (p. 176). An Indigenous paradigm is based on the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational, that is, it is "shared with all of creation" (ibid). This tenet is part of the axiology of an Indigenous paradigm.

Steinhauer (2007) also underscored the importance of relationality as an aspect of Indigenous ontology, stating that "the one thing that binds us together as Indigenous people is the shared understanding of interconnectedness, the understanding that all things are dependent on each other" (p. 75). She added that an Indigenous worldview cannot be described only in terms of epistemology, it must also be "recognized for its connection to Indigenous ways of being" (p. 76). Furthermore, the integrity and coherence of Indigenous research is dependent on "the overt recognition, in words and actions, of the connection between Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous research" (p. 65). Steinhauer contended that Western research methodologies and Indigenous knowledge exist at odds with one another where "meanings do not 'fit' with each

other and cannot cross the worldview divide" (p. 77). Both Wilson and Steinhauer argued for using IRM to investigate any aspect of Indigenous existence because Indigenous methodologies fit with Indigenous forms of knowing and being.

Bringing a sociopolitical lens to the argument, Kovach (2009) asserted that sustaining cultural knowledges is essential to cultural longevity. She stressed that, at the "heart of a cultural renaissance, Indigenous or otherwise, is a restoration and respectful *use* of that culture's knowledge systems" (p. 12, emphasis in original). Despite the disruptions that colonialism has wrought on the "organic transmission" (ibid) of Indigenous knowledges, and the damage to Indigenous peoples' ability to maintain their knowledge through cultural methodologies, "many Indigenous peoples recognize that for their cultural knowledge to thrive it must live in many sites, including Western education and research" (ibid). Kovach related research to the current crises in education and child welfare policy respecting Aboriginal people in Canada, stating that they are the result of research being conducted from a Western paradigm rather than from Indigenous knowledges and research forms. Kovach articulated the relationship between research, policy, and programs as a formula: "Research creates policy and policy generates programs" (p. 13). She proposed that "the methodology itself necessarily influences outcomes. Indigenous research frameworks have the potential to improve relevance in policy and practice within Indigenous contexts" (ibid). Appropriate research, grounded in Indigenous knowledges, has the potential to create improved policies and more effective programs for Aboriginal people.

Politics are essentially about power and knowledge is a political asset. Because knowledge is power, Kovach contended that selecting a research methodology is a political act (p. 53). Privileging Indigenous knowledge as the foundation of an Indigenous research framework is political because it changes the power dynamic in the relationship between

Indigenous knowledge and authority; that is, the authority to act on or according to knowledge, or not. Like Wilson and Steinhauer, Kovach believed that "epistemology and research methodology are a tightly bound, complex partnership" (p. 55) and that the differentiation between Indigenous research and Western methodologies is in their epistemological foundations.

Knowledge, as the outcome of research, is owned by the researcher rather than the researched, a fact which has resulted in non-Indigenous ownership of Indigenous knowledge and the power of that knowledge being vested with non-Indigenous Peoples. Weber-Pillwax (1999) addressed the politics of methodology in terms of who has the authority to create, own, and use Indigenous knowledge. She argued that IRM as a concept implies changes regarding the creation and ownership of knowledge, its forms and definitions, and its utilization with respect to Indigenous peoples. Consequently, IRM can be an effective way of increasing the likelihood that research will be enriching "and not a source of depletion or denigration" (p. 38) for Indigenous people and communities. Using IRM is both a social and political act because it has the potential to improve policies and programs; it privileges Indigenous knowledge and ways of being; it repositions knowledge ownership as belonging to the researched rather than the researcher; and it is more likely to be a positive, affirming experience for Indigenous peoples.

Using Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies is, for Indigenous scholars, a political act in many respects, one of which is to ensure our survival as Peoples. In his examination of a critical Indigenous philosophy, Turner (2006) asserted that "a community of indigenous intellectuals—word warriors—ought to assert and defend the integrity of indigenous ways of knowing within the existing legal and political practices of the dominant culture" (p. 74). While he contended that his ideas about political philosophy being an "open-ended dialogue that involves a diversity of voices" (ibid) arise out of both critical and post-modern conceptions, he

insisted that word warriors' efforts "must be guided by indigenous philosophies; that is, indigenous philosophies—the wisdom of the elders—must inform and help shape the strategies word warriors use to engage European intellectual discourses" (ibid).

The primary aim for a community of word warriors is "to engage the legal and political discourses of the state in more serious ways" (ibid). Turner asserted that we Indigenous academics must do this work in accordance with Indigenous ways of knowing, while acknowledging that the "difficult problem is to make better sense out of what we mean by 'acting in accordance' with indigenous ways of knowing" (p. 75). The seriousness required in engaging Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies within the legal and political discourses of the state, for Turner, is because our survival as unique political nations depends on it. Scholarship from Indigenous worldviews asserts the validity and reliability of those worldviews as not only legitimate ways of carrying out research but also as the most appropriate ways for examining Indigenous knowledge and experience.

As an Indigenous researcher conducting research on a policy directed specifically at education for Indigenous children in Alberta, my first priority was that the understanding gained from the research was both powerful and worthwhile. It should empower Indigenous people first and foremost, thus proving its worthiness as part of the knowledge system from which it generated. Using a Cree understanding, Cree methods of seeking, and Cree ethics to guide the work ensured that both the processes and the outcomes of the research were positive for Indigenous Peoples because this new understanding has evolved from Indigenous knowledge in accordance with Indigenous principles of inquiry.

Why I needed to use an IRM was clear. What I needed to understand next was what IRM looks like in the application so that I could design *my* Indigenous research methodology. I

needed to understand how to conduct this research in a way that would enable me to seek out a Cree understanding of identity that would then empower me to evaluate the policy of infusion according to Cree principles, knowledge, understanding, and being. The next section explains my understanding of what IRM is and how it is carried out using Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, methodologies, and axiologies as the foundation for seeking Indigenous knowledge.

Understanding IRM

An Indigenous research methodology is a process of examining something from the position of an Indigenous People. This means privileging one Indigenous knowledge system as the way of seeking, knowing, and coming to understand the *something* being examined. What sets IRM apart from other methodologies is that engaging in Indigenous research is not an act of applying an intellectual concept to a subject. IRM is not based on a belief about reality; rather, it is grounded in the particular epistemological and ontological realities of the Indigenous People in whose knowledge system the study is established (Weber-Pillwax, personal communication). IRM accounts for the whole reality of the People as *what is* rather than *what I think might be*.

In a seminal discussion of Indigenous Research Methodology, Weber-Pillwax (1999) discussed the benefits of IRM to Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous peoples, and to researchers carrying out investigations of any aspects of Indigenous existence. She argued that an IRM "would determine standards for authenticity of indigenous research, and would enable a more effective critique of research dealing explicitly with indigenous reality" (p. 31) because IRM "is and has always been the central structure of support for the creation of indigenous knowledge" (ibid). Weber-Pillwax contended that there are two assumptions that underlie the discussion of IRM: first, that such a methodology "could provide a standard measure for indigenous research authenticity" (p. 35), and second, that such a methodology would "enable a more effective

scholarly and public critique of research identified as dealing explicitly with some aspect of indigenous reality" (ibid). Presupposed within these assumptions is the possibility that "a genuine indigenous end result or research product [will arise] from the application of an indigenous research methodology" (p. 35).

> Weber-Pillwax elucidated the risk for a researcher engaged in defining IRM:
>
> The significance of these assumptions lies in the danger that if we as indigenous scholars presume to come forward with a definition or a formal description of an indigenous research methodology, we must also accept responsibility for how those words may be used. (p. 35)

This caution to the researcher is in keeping with the responsibilities of a knowledge holder or knowledge seeker (researcher) in positioning ourselves not as creators of knowledge but as facilitators who carry out both our search for knowledge and our interpretations of the knowledge that arises from our seeking based on a set of principles derived from Indigenous knowledge. Our responsibility is to ensure that Indigenous ethical principles are adhered to at every stage of the research process, beginning with using Indigenous knowledge to frame the investigation, articulating an Indigenous research methodology, employing data collection methods, describing and analyzing data, and in how we present and use our findings. The set of principles that Weber-Pillwax (1999) stated underlie most research carried out by Indigenous researchers include: (a) the interconnectedness of all living things, (b) the impact of motives and intentions on person and community, (c) the foundation of research as lived indigenous experience, (d) the groundedness of theories in indigenous epistemology, (e) the transformative nature of research, (f) the sacredness and responsibility of maintaining personal and community integrity, and (g) the recognition of languages and cultures as living processes (pp. 30-31).

The first principle recognizes that the relationality and interconnectedness of all forms of life must be respected. This would necessarily involve spiritual forms of life, in keeping with the Indigenous perspective that sees the spiritual world as another realm of the physical world we inhabit. Respect does not just entail adhering to rituals and protocols according to Weber-Pillwax: "It means believing and living that relationship with all forms of life, and conducting all interactions in a spirit of kindness and honesty" (p. 41). Adhering to this principle as a researcher could mean including spiritually obtained knowledge, considering it as valid a form as experiential knowledge derived from the metaphysical world. The second principle involves checking your motives as a researcher throughout the research process to ensure that the research will benefit the Indigenous community with which it is associated or in which it is situated, and that it will not bring harm either within the community itself or to others, whether or not they are associated. This principle is in place from the moment a research question is conceived, through its formulation, development, implementation, and dissemination of the answers it generates. Each stage of the research process entails asking who is benefitting from the research and in what ways, as well as whether any foreseeable harm could be caused by the research project as a whole or by any of its constituent phases or actions.

The third principle asserts that Indigenous research must have its foundations within the reality of the lived experience of Indigenous people and peoples. Because the world of ideas is based on the culturally-laden, subjective perceptions of researchers' worldviews, Indigenous research must be knowingly grounded "in the lives of people as individual and social beings, and not on the world of ideas" (p. 42). Herein lays one of the conundrums of articulating a standardized description of an IRM. Each research project or event must have as its foundation the lived experiences of research participants as explicated by them, rather than assume that

Indigenous knowledge and experience is everywhere the same. Similarly, Weber-Pillwax's fourth principle requires that any theories that are developed must also "be grounded in and supported by indigenous epistemology as it is lived out and given form within the community" (ibid). This involves beginning with "an active and scholarly recognition of who our philosophers and prophets are in our own communities" (p. 43), given that they are "the keepers and teachers of our epistemology" (ibid). Both the research itself and its products must be grounded in Indigenous knowledge and experience in order to be considered Indigenous research.

The fifth principle that Weber-Pillwax presented as a guide to Indigenous scholarship is that research is transformational in nature and transformation will occur within all life forms connected to the research project. As researchers, we are responsible for the transformations that take place in connection with our work. This responsibility is maintained through personal decisions and the effects of those decisions, considered within the broad context of our inter-relatedness. There is also a responsibility on the part of the researcher to maintain personal and community integrity, the sixth principle of Indigenous research. Weber-Pillwax contended that Indigenous research cannot undermine the integrity of any one Indigenous People or community because, by its adherence to these principles, it is grounded in that integrity. Weber-Pillwax argued that the principle itself contains within it "an accurate definition and test of authenticity for indigenous research" (p. 43).

The final principle of Indigenous research recognizes Indigenous languages and cultures as living processes. As such, research and the creation or revelation of knowledge is the ongoing occupation of the thinkers and scholars of each Indigenous people or group. Weber-Pillwax asserted that "Indigenous scholarship reflects inherited ways of being and knowing and we as

indigenous researchers have a responsibility to maintain and constantly renew the connections with our ancestors and our people through the practices of these ways" (pp. 43-44). In activating this principle in our research, Indigenous people "are participating in the context of university scholarship" (p. 43). It is only through maintaining and renewing our connections with the sources of our knowledge that we can participate in knowledge creation.

There are implications for the Indigenous researcher conducting Indigenous research, some of which stem from conducting scholarly work within a Western academic setting, and others that are specific to the relationship between the researcher, the researched, and the research processes themselves. Regarding the latter, Weber-Pillwax (1999) explained the layers of research for the Indigenous researcher:

> Each individual researcher must be aware of two sets of simultaneous processes and practices which he or she is using as both an indigenous person and an indigenous researcher. Each research project will be a research project layered over a research experience layered over a personal experience layered over a research project. (p. 39)

In this way, research "becomes a process of life wherein one breath leads to another breath in an unending flow to the one uniting force of creativity" (p. 45). She stated that living through these layers and integrating the thinking, visioning, talking, intuiting, and writing of them is the level of rigor involved in the present form of Indigenous scholarship – that of presenting ideas in the form of written English. Weber-Pillwax contended that "the indigenous scholar faces the formidable challenge of meeting the standards of two knowledge systems in any research connected with a university" (p. 40). The choices we make in how we face this challenge will depend on personal factors, including the significance and weight that is assigned to each knowledge system and on "the particular factors that go into making us who we are as

individuals and as parts of a community" (ibid). Our identity as researchers will in large part determine our research questions, frameworks, and activities.

In her discussion of the characteristics of IRM, Kovach (2009) clarified three philosophical assumptions that underlie an Indigenous methodology. First, she argues that any methodology has at its core "a knowledge belief system (encompassing ontology and epistemology) and the actual methods" (p. 25). Second, Kovach asserted that IRM can be situated within the overarching category of qualitative research "because they encompass characteristics congruent with other relational qualitative approaches" (ibid) that also value both process and content. The third assumption, and most significant to Kovach, is that the epistemological framework of IRM is based on a tribal epistemology, which differentiates it from Western qualitative frameworks. Kovach believed that epistemology is "a significant site of struggle for Indigenous researchers because "Indigenous epistemologies challenge the very core of knowledge production and purpose" (p. 29), causing researchers from Western traditions to be reflexive in considering a research paradigm from outside the Western tradition. Kovach contended that Western and Indigenous research "can walk together only so far" (p. 30) because the English language is permeated with culturally-bound constructs that are not based in an Indigenous epistemology.

In delineating the relationality of IRM, Kovach related it to other forms of qualitative research in that "there must be a direct contact between researcher and research participants that includes the complex and varied responses that only an ongoing relationship can achieve" (p. 32). She presented Deloria's view that, from a tribal perspective, a relational worldview assumes relationships between all forms of life. Kovach stated that indicators of a relational approach are found in both research process and content, which must be identified in the methodology. These

include “personal preparations involving motivations, purpose, inward knowing, observation, and the variety of ways that the researcher can relate her own process undertaken in the research” (pp. 34-35). Process and content can also be assessed according to the inclusion of story and narrative by both the researcher and participant within the research project, according to Kovach. She believed that process must be considered with a capital *P* because of the holistic nature of IRM. Indigenous epistemologies are holistic, non-fragmented, and focus on “the metaphysical and pragmatic, on language and place, and on values and relationships” (p. 57). They exist within a relational web and must be understood from that perspective (ibid).

Maintaining a holistic alignment in IRM is integral according to Kovach. She explained that Indigenous researchers can apply a holistic orientation in a number of ways, the first of which is in their choices about the knowledge they privilege in their research. Other ways of ensuring a holistic orientation include honouring spiritual knowledge, using Indigenous languages to preserve Indigenous philosophies, understanding the relationship between language structure and worldview, situating knowledge in particular places rather than as a universal construct, and maintaining good relations through sharing, respect, and caring (Kovach, 2009). Kovach offers a Plains Cree research framework that involves five stages or components of a holistic, relational approach to research: 1) preparation for the research; 2) preparation of the researcher; 3) recognition of cultural and ethical protocols; 4) respectfulness; and 5) sharing the knowledge through reciprocity (p. 65). The bottom line according to Kovach is that “Indigenous research needs to benefit Indigenous people in some way, shape, or form” (p. 93).

Kovach’s (2009) assertions that IRM is holistic, relational, and beneficial to Indigenous people are subsumed within the principles of IRM presented by Weber-Pillwax (1999). By adhering to these principles, the researcher privileges Indigenous knowledge and epistemology,

honours knowledge in all its forms and from all sources, recognizes the relationship between language and worldview, situates knowledge in lived experience (as non-universal), and maintains good relations throughout the research process. These principles guide both the researcher and the research at each stage of the investigation, ensuring that an Indigenous epistemology is its foundation, and that the results will be grounded in Indigenous understanding and will provide benefits to the Indigenous community (in particular and in general) without causing harm at any step or stage. The next section describes the Indigenous Research Methodology that framed this study and the methods that I used in conducting the research.

Research Design and Methods

The primary concern of IRM is to ensure that Indigenous research remains consistent with the Indigenous epistemology in which it is grounded through adherence to the seven principles of IRM defined in the previous section. IRM does not establish a pre-determined research design, dictate the particular methods to employ, or define a correct epistemology to follow. The greatest task in which I had to engage in designing and conducting this research study was to determine the appropriate Indigenous theoretical, philosophical, and methodological foundations on which to construct and carry it out and understand the implications of those foundations on every aspect of the research processes and experiences. Engaging in IRM required blind leaps of trust at various points in the process based on the certainty that adherence to the principles of IRM would ensure the reliability of the methods and the validity of the results.

In the sections that follow, I describe and explain how I determined the appropriate Indigenous epistemological foundation for my inquiry and the ways in which my research design and methods both emerged from and observed the tenets of Cree epistemology and IRM. I

conclude the chapter by describing the layers of my experiences as an Indigenous researcher conducting Indigenous research.

Applying the principles of IRM. This section presents what it meant for me as a researcher to act in accordance with Indigenous knowledge, epistemology, and ontology, and according to Indigenous axiological principles, bearing in mind that "[t]here is no singular author of Indigenous knowledge and no singular method for understanding its totality" (Battiste, 2008, p. 500). What I am articulating here are the ways in which this research project adhered to the seven principles of IRM (Weber-Pillwax, 1999). Figure 4 is a visual representation of the research process I followed and its relationship to the seven principles. It illustrates how the research process was embedded within the principles, that the process was non-linear (represented by the multidirectional arrows connecting the various formal components of the research), and the relationship between the principles and each aspect of research development and enactment.

Rather than using *stages* or *steps* to define the elements of the process, I have described them as *components* to allow for the dynamic aspects of each piece of the project and the synergy between them. They are dynamic because they required me as the researcher to move in and out of each aspect of the research as necessary in order to adhere to the seven principles. For example, arriving at a question did not occur independently from the other components. It required background research, analysis, and sharing those initial findings for feedback and input from my supervisory team. Every facet of identifying a question meant measuring it against the principles of IRM to determine its validity. My questions evolved through several iterations before I was confident that they would ensure my study was seeking out Indigenous knowledge and perspectives and using them as an Indigenous policy analysis lens while adhering to all

seven of the principles.

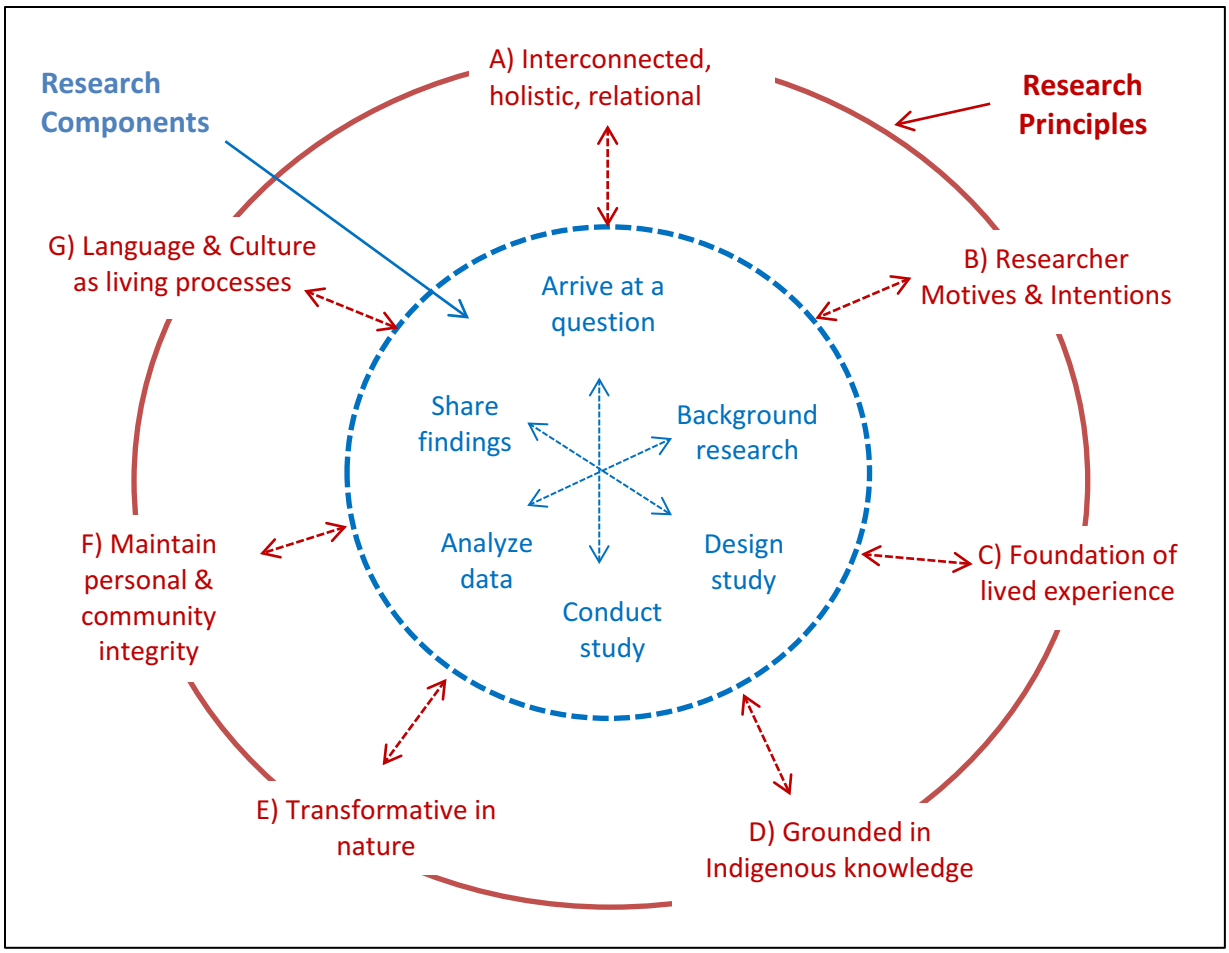

Figure 4: Research Components & IRM Principles

Designing the study also occurred in close relationship to developing the questions. This involved understanding how the research design addressed the questions and how I approached the data collected in order to answer the question. For me this was a challenging aspect of the research design. It involved seeking guidance through various means, including prayer, meditation, ceremony, and asking for feedback from other scholars who have conducted Indigenous research. I moved from the questions to the design and back again several times in the process of formulating each. Each movement through the components required checking my motives and intentions as a researcher (principle B) and positioning myself and the work within

an Indigenous epistemology (principles A, C, D, & F), thus ensuring that the research process and product would be transformational for me as researcher, for my research participants, and for the community with which my research is associated.

I have privileged Cree epistemology, ontology, and axiology in this work by revealing and re-establishing the connections between my individual consciousness and the deep underpinnings of Cree ways of knowing and being. These connections were the conduits to gaining new understanding from a Cree perspective. Every choice I made in the process had to align with the whole reality of what it is to be Cree.

Guiding questions. Arriving at a question or set of questions that would enable me to address my concerns with the policy was a highly iterative process. I began by trying to formulate an overarching question and a set of sub-questions to guide my thinking and planning. What I came to realize after completing my review of the literature was that my questions concerned not only the policy's stated intentions but also the assumptions inherent in its logic. The more that I tried to formulate a research question that would address each of these areas, the more difficult the task became. I had to go back and simplify my focus. What I really wanted to know was whether or not infusion policy could positively impact Aboriginal identity development in Indigenous children and consequently improve their academic achievement. The inherent policy assumptions that I wanted to challenge are threefold. First, the policy directive assumes that all teachers have the knowledge, understanding, and ability to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into curriculum. Second, it assumes that having all teachers do so, regardless of context, will positively impact Aboriginal student identity. Finally, it assumes that strengthening Aboriginal identity will positively impact educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The first questions that had to be addressed were around Aboriginal identity. The policy document does not delineate a conceptualization of Aboriginal identity, a theory of how it functions, nor an explanation of what happened to weaken it. In order to evaluate its potential to achieve its stated objectives, I needed to understand what Aboriginal identity is, how it develops and functions, the ways in which it has been weakened, and the outcomes of this damage for Aboriginal people. Secondly, I needed to examine the roles and impacts that teachers and schooling have had on Aboriginal identity and to what extent they could impact its development. Only then could I evaluate the policy's potential efficacy to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal children. In keeping with the tenets of IRM and my research purpose, the concepts and understanding I was seeking had to emerge from a Cree paradigm.

Data sources and collection methods. Indigenous knowledge arises out of Indigenous experience and is located in the knowledge and understandings of Indigenous people. It is passed on through teachings of Elders, healers, and other knowledge holders, and learned through spiritual, emotional, and physical experiences and lessons. In order to access Cree knowledge and understanding about identity and schooling, I had to seek out Cree people who have extensive experience and deep understandings of what it is to develop Cree identity. They also needed to have the experience and understanding to explain the roles and impacts of teachers and schooling on Cree identity development. In keeping with these criteria, the most appropriate sources were Elders and knowledge holders who have been immersed in Cree ways of knowing and being as part of their identity development over a lifetime and who also have significant experience in and understanding of education in Alberta.

In order to identify and select individuals who met my participant criteria, I employed a method that I have termed *relational sampling*. My participant selection process was purposeful

(Merriam, 1998) in that I had a set of criteria that "directly reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases" (pp. 61-62). Because I wanted to "discover, understand, and gain insight" into the issues I was examining, I needed to "select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). It was relational because, in keeping with the principles of IRM, I sought my participants from within my relational sphere. Starting with people I knew and have already learned from was critical to ensuring that the knowledge shared with me was grounded in the same knowledge base that has shaped my worldview. IRM requires the researcher to begin with what and who she knows so that the foundation of the study is grounded in her own understanding of the world. By seeking knowledge and understanding from within the circle of people who have influenced my own knowledge and understanding – my community – I further grounded the study in my particular worldview. In keeping with IRM, relational sampling enabled me to use Cree protocols to identify and approach my participants and invite them to be part of my work rather than cold-calling or other methods that are not based on prior knowledge or relationships.

I identified my first participant from among several Cree knowledge holders as someone to whom I would go under any circumstances to better understand what it is that I wanted to know about identity and education. My second participant was recommended to me as someone who also met my sample criteria by virtue of her upbringing and experiences in both Cree culture and in education. My data collection method was to engage in semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1998) with each participant based on the questions to which I was seeking answers. I spent two hours with each participant and allowed the conversations to develop into discussions of some of the participants' responses in order to clarify my own understanding of what they were sharing.

Because my first two participants were both Cree knowledge holders and, in fact, Elders despite both insisting that they did not consider themselves as such, the knowledge that they each shared with me had to be treated differently than how qualitative data are typically treated. What they shared with me were teachings and lessons grounded in their lifelong experiences as Cree people. It is Indigenous knowledge and therefore cannot be evaluated for its validity in the same ways that Western knowledge is validated through scientific research processes. The processes of ensuring the validity of Indigenous knowledge are much different. They include observing protocols that are in place to ensure both good intentions and reliable results in the work. Observing Cree protocols for receiving teachings from knowledge holders and other sources of Indigenous knowledge was critical to maintaining the integrity of the research. It shifted the level of responsibility for me and my participants by establishing the rules of engagement with what was being shared. This had important implications for data analysis, which I discuss later on.

I identified my third participant in a second phase of data collection after transcribing my conversations with the first two participants and conducting some preliminary analysis of the initial data. This first level of analysis consisted of sorting statements or small data chunks under labels such as identity, teachers, schools, and development, for example. What I found was that what I learned from my first two participants kept reminding me of and connecting to lessons that I had read about in the writings of another Alberta Cree Elder and academic, the late Joseph Couture (2013). I felt so compelled to revisit his work and gather together his ideas on identity and schooling that I realized I had identified my third study participant. There are obviously important differences between conversing with a participant and *conversing* with the written work of someone, differences that I discuss in the next section.

My three participants are or were Cree knowledge holders, educators, and education

scholars, lifelong residents of Alberta, and thoroughly familiar with the history, structures, processes, and outcomes of education for Aboriginal people in Canada. All three are published authors and have been formally recognized for their professional achievements and contributions.

Cora is a Métis woman who has lived and worked in northern Alberta her entire life. She grew up in a Métis family living in close relationship with the land on which many of her Cree and Métis ancestors have also lived. She was a teacher for the majority of her career and is now a teacher-educator and professor in an Indigenous education specialization. Cora's deeply informed knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal identity and education are grounded in her many years of lived experience, her formal education, and her own spiritual journey. I invited her to participate as a widely acknowledged authority on the issues under examination in this study. For these reasons, and as a result of circumstances that arose during my program of study, Cora also became a member of my supervisory committee and assumed responsibility for my work in the later stages of the research.

Leona is a Cree woman who has also lived and worked in northern Alberta all her life. She has a doctorate degree in education and served as president of a Cree university for nearly twenty years. Leona has extensive teaching experience in schools and post-secondary institutions as well as a highly respected degree of knowledge, experience, and understanding in Cree ways. As a survivor of Indian Residential Schools, Leona lived and experienced the assaults on her Cree identity before having the opportunity to relearn Cree ways. I was referred to Leona because of her expertise in the areas that I wanted to explore.

Joe was born and raised in northern Alberta by his French-Canadian father and Cree mother (Couture, 2013). Joe was an Oblate in the early years of his career and it was during this

time that he worked as a principal and teacher in Aboriginal communities (ibid). He went on to become the first Aboriginal person in Canada to earn a doctoral degree, which was in educational psychology (ibid). Joe was an early member of the Indian Association of Alberta and was the primary author of *Citizens Plus*, the response from Alberta chiefs to the Canadian Government's *White Paper* (Canada, 1969) on *Indian* policy. Joe was initiated into Indigenous spiritual practices and teachings and became a highly respected Elder in his later years. Joe passed on to the spirit world in 2007 and in 2013 his wife Ruth published a collection of his essays in *A Metaphoric Mind: Selected Writings of Joseph Couture* (2013). I have used Joe's writing as data in the same way that I used transcripts of my conversations with Cora and Leona to help me understand and explain the answers to my questions. While I could not ask him my questions directly, I found a wealth of answers in his writing. There were in fact times that it felt like he was sitting across the table from me having a conversation.

Treatment and analysis of data. IRM requires all aspects of the research to be grounded in Indigenous knowledge, be based on a foundation of lived experience, and treat language and culture as living processes (principles D, C, & G respectively). The research must also be interconnected, holistic, and relational (principle A), and maintain both personal and community integrity (principle F). Adhering to these principles is nowhere more important than in the treatment and consideration of Indigenous knowledge as *research data*.

Elders and other traditional knowledge holders are the core literature of Cree understanding (Couture, 2013) and, as such, their teachings demand a level of respect that precludes any analysis of their motives or critique of the soundness of their understanding. Each participant in this study is an expert in both fields of knowledge concerning this study: a Cree worldview and Indigenous education. The *data* are much more than just data because of the

degree of understanding and the lifetimes of personal and professional experience that the participants brought to bear on what they shared directly and indirectly with me in response to my questions. This was one area that required my absolute trust that, in seeking the knowledge I needed in order to understand and articulate Cree concepts and perspectives, adhering to Cree ways of being and knowing would generate reliable results. Consequently, I have treated the data as Cree teachings and my analysis of them as what I have learned from what they shared. Any lack of understanding that may be evident is therefore due to the limits of my own understanding and analysis of the teachings rather than any limitations of the knowledge system or the teachings themselves.

The processes of analysis that I applied began with reviewing the conversations that I had with Cora and Leona as I transcribed the recordings into text documents. This was the first step in making the data manageable (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 44). The second step in this process was determining which text was relevant and which was not (ibid). Again, because I treated the data as Indigenous knowledge teachings, I had to consider all of the transcribed conversations as relevant text. The first iteration of coding that I employed was open coding (Oktay, 2012, p. 2), which entailed applying concrete labels identifying the subject matter of each chunk of data in terms of its relevance to my research questions. I had 64 separate labels after coding the two transcripts. In most instances, each portion of text had several labels.

In the second iteration of coding, I compared the data labels to each other to establish any relationships between them and organized them into more abstract themes (Oktay, 2012, p. 2) or conceptual categories that have something in common (Merriam, 1998, p. 179). The results were the following 16 themes: (1) Aboriginal experience; (2) Aboriginal worldview; (3) child development; (4) colonization and oppression; (5) education and Aboriginal children; (6)

educational change; (7) Aboriginal educators' roles; (8) significance of history; (9) identity; (10) Indigenous knowledge; (11) infusion policy; (12) pain, trauma, and healing; (13) policy and governance; (14) non-Aboriginal teachers and infusion; (15) Aboriginal teachers' roles; and (16) valuing and identity development. The most useful aspects of conducting this coding were in the familiarity that I developed with the ideas and understandings contained in each conversation and the organization of them as a whole that it provided when I moved back out of the details and began looking for the answers to my questions from the data as a set.

After completing these three phases of analysis and reviewing the themes that resulted, the next step I took was to return to my questions and determine which themes held answers to each of them. Because Aboriginal identity is at the heart of infusion policy, understanding what it is has to be the foundation on which this research rests. Consequently, the first question that I sought to answer was *what is Aboriginal identity?* It was also at this point that I decided to include Joe as my third participant because the themes and concepts that Cora and Leona shared kept leading my thoughts back to his work.

The published collection of Joe's work comprises nearly three hundred pages so it was not feasible to approach it in the same way that I did my conversations with Cora and Leona. Furthermore, because it is a collection of essays and papers written over many years and for a variety of primary purposes, some teachings and concepts appear repeatedly in several chapters. The first step that I undertook was to review the text in its entirety and determine which chapters would be most relevant to my questions. I then selected pertinent quotations from those chapters, which served as the relevant text for further analysis. I also took advantage of search functions in an electronic version of the book to find all relevant passages on particular concepts or themes as I progressed through the analysis phases and wrote my findings.

During the process of incorporating Joe's work into my data set under the theme headings and thinking about all of the data as a compilation of Cree teachings from which I was learning, I finally began to see a theoretical construct (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 42) of Aboriginal identity emerging. It began as a set of roots, the roots of identity, which all three participants discussed in different ways. My notes during this phase had a rough sketch of a tree trunk labelled *identity* with a full system of roots, each branch of which was identified as *ceremonies*, *language*, and *history*, with the entire system titled *the roots of identity*. Both Cora and Joe referred to roots and groundedness in relation to identity so the soil around the roots is labelled *culture* and the note reads: *culture is the soil —the medium—the ecosystem wherein identity is fed and grows through ceremonies, history, and language.* Figure 5 is a digital replica of those notes as they took shape for me through the analytical process. It shows the emergence of the roots as they developed throughout the remainder of the analysis.

The tree became the framework on which I built my understanding of Aboriginal identity from this point on. For example, looking at the image that I had—a tree with a full root system but no foliage—led me to ask questions about the purpose of identity. What foliage does identity produce and what is its purpose? What is the culmination of a fully developed identity? What does it look like? The understanding that came in response was that our thoughts, behaviours, and interactions with everything are the *expression* of our identity. My tree now had foliage to represent its purpose.

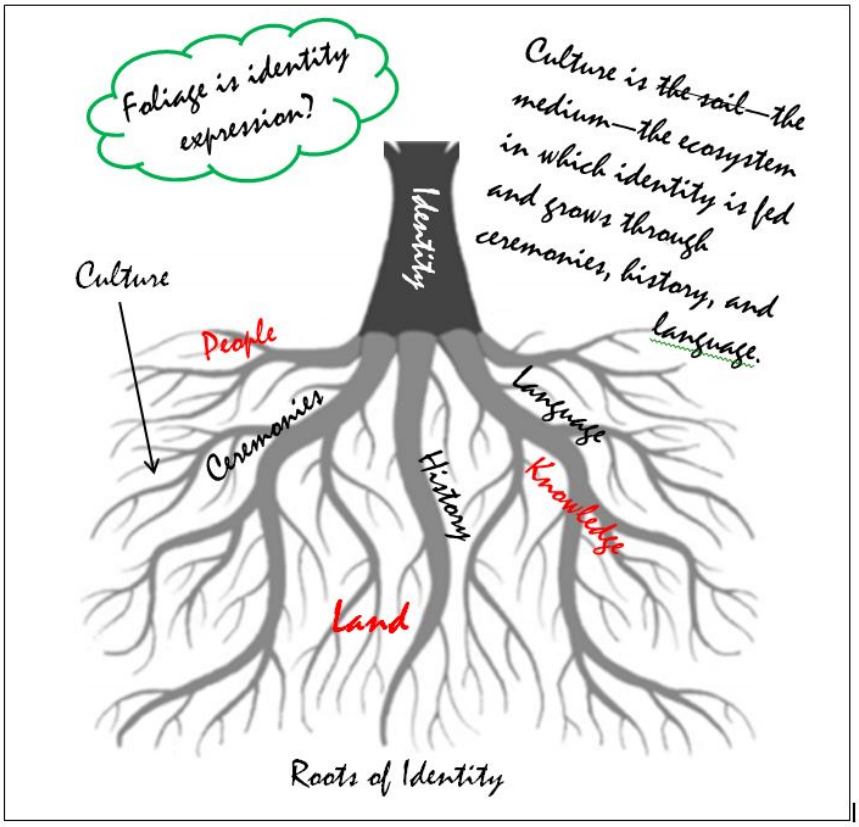

Figure 5: Roots of Identity

I need at this point to talk about the significance for me of coming to understand identity from a Cree perspective such as I did when I saw it represented by a tree. There have been a few times previously in my life when I have come to see something in an instant, some new way of understanding the connections between what were previously loosely or unrelated elements of knowledge or experience. I have always accounted for these experiences as moments of revelation where some entity beyond my conscious mind has spliced together what were irrelevant or disparate or misunderstood pieces of knowledge and events into a slideshow or a complete picture of how things are. Seeing identity as a tree was one of these experiences. As it was occurring, I had an incredible sense of being *plugged in* to something much greater and more powerful than my own mind. I had been immersed in Cree knowledge and understanding

for a sustained period of time and engaging in Cree ways to the best of my understanding and the tree as a metaphor for identity was the Cree result of my seeking. It was the gift for which I had given thanks at the outset of the project and at appropriate times throughout the process. On a personal level, it was the ultimate confirmation for me that I am Cree and therefore I matter.

Once the tree emerged, it became the framework for all subsequent analysis of the data and for presenting my findings. My process was to ask questions about the function of a tree and find an equivalent function for identity and vice versa. It was not exactly the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998, p. 159) that I had intended to use, since the tree was not part of that method. It did however still fit with the methods and purposes of constant comparison. I moved in and out of the data and the categories, themes, or threads of meaning that emerge from the analysis in order to bring units of data together in a meaningful new way that remained consistent both with the smaller units and across them in order to ensure that the abstractive conceptual categories were firmly grounded in the data themselves (Merriam, 1998).

While constant comparison was developed by Glaser and Strauss as a means of developing a grounded theory, Merriam (1998) noted that it has been adopted by many other researchers who are not necessarily interested in developing a grounded theory. Rather, its appeal is that it "is compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research" (ibid). The reason that I chose it as a method of analysis was because of its usefulness in grounding concepts that emerged from the data, in keeping with the understanding that IRM is grounded in Indigenous knowledge (principle G). The constant comparative method of data analysis allows for a tight relationship between the data and the themes that arise from them, and therefore strengthens the validity of the emergent themes or concepts, both from a Western qualitative perspective and an Indigenous research approach.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present the understanding that I developed based on the teachings shared with me on Aboriginal identity, what happened to it, and how it is impacted by teachers and schooling. Rather than presenting everything that the participants said with respect to each question and then providing my understanding subsequently, I have instead written what Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) call theoretical narratives. These narratives contain the participants' words as much as possible within the context of the theoretical constructs of my research questions and according to how I understand what they said.

One of the challenges that I had to address in presenting my findings was how to treat Joe's words. In early drafts, I referenced his work as I would any other text by providing his last name, the publication date, and the page number in parentheses. I received feedback on this draft suggesting that I use the same format for Joe's contributions as I did with Cora's and Leona's, which was to reference them by their first names in parentheses following what they said. What I opted to do was to use his first name followed by the page number from the text, all in parentheses. I think that the result is a more consistent yet still accurately referenced presentation of all of the participants' teachings with fewer distinctions evident.

Another important note to the reader is that I have referenced Joe much more extensively than either Cora or Leona. What I want to make clear is that this is not a reflection in any way of the value of their respective contributions. It is simply a function of having several chapters of Joe's work to reference in comparison to the short time that I spent in conversation with my other participants. It was based on what Cora and Leona shared in my first round of data collection that I sought out further understanding from Joe's work in the second round. What using Joe's writing enabled me to do was to delve more deeply into ideas and areas that Cora and Leona first introduced in our conversations. Part of the iterative process of analyzing the data

was to move in and out of the various teachings that comprised the study data to see how they expanded or solidified my findings.

All research involves interpreting data, which means that the positioning and subjectivity of the researcher bears on the research findings. Part of the purpose of locating myself and my epistemology was to make explicit the fact that I am also a participant in the study by virtue of being its designer, investigator, and interpreter. In my findings chapters, I have presented the data in the context of my interpretations of the teachings. I have also included my understanding as it evolved through my analyses and as I wrote my findings. This allowed both the teachings and my interpretations to stand alongside each other for evaluation to some extent.

Ethical considerations. There were two sets of ethics that I had to consider in conducting this research. The first was to secure ethics approval from the University to work with human subjects. This was a matter of ensuring that my research would not cause harm to anyone involved and that it respected the rights of my participants to withdraw at any time. The second set of ethics that governed every aspect of the study was the seven principles of Indigenous Research Methodology (Weber-Pillwax, 1999) that guided my work. I debated including a separate section delineating the ways in which I adhered to the principles throughout the study, but I opted instead to identify the principles in the context of the decisions I made and methods that I employed throughout this chapter section. I have dedicated a small section to addressing two principles that are inherent in the seven principles that Weber-Pillwax (1999) described but I wanted to pull them out and discuss their importance separately.

Respect and reciprocity. Both of these actions, maintaining respect and enacting reciprocity, are critical features throughout the process of conducting a study using IRM. By adhering to the seven principles of Indigenous research (Weber-Pillwax, 1999), respect was

woven through every component of this process. Respect is so fundamental that, without it, the research methodology would not be Indigenous. For me, respect is an attitude that is demonstrated through action. I have demonstrated my respect for Indigenous knowledge, culture, experience, people, and places by centring Indigenous knowledge and knowing in the study, by privileging the voices of Indigenous people and their individual experiences and understanding, and by following cultural protocols in my relations with people and places.

Reciprocity is a way of demonstrating respect. It implies mutual respect and equal rights in a relationship and often denotes a process of concurrent *give and take*. Again, following Indigenous cultural protocols exemplifies reciprocity in that nothing is simply taken away without offering something in return. As a researcher seeking Indigenous knowledge in order to disseminate it in an academic milieu, however, reciprocity had a much wider scope. In order to reciprocate what I received – knowledge and understanding learned over a lifetime – I had to consider ways of giving back in equal measure. My hope is that part of giving back will be paying it forward as a worthwhile contribution to understanding Indigenous education and providing an impetus for policy change.

Conclusion

This study has been grounded in Cree knowledge and understanding from its inception as a simple yet critical question about Aboriginal education and teacher preparation. IRM was consequently not a choice as a methodology; it was an imperative. This chapter presented my location as a researcher, a rationale and understanding of IRM, and a description of the research design, methods, and considerations that comprised the particular Indigenous methodology that I followed.

Chapters 4 through 6 present findings from the first stage of the study, which was

prerequisite to conducting an Indigenous analysis of infusion policy. This stage was a study embedded within the larger project of analyzing infusion policy from an Indigenous perspective for its potential to strengthen Aboriginal identity. In order to conduct an Indigenous analysis of the policy's goal to strengthen Aboriginal identity and thereby improve the academic performance of Aboriginal students, I first needed to know several things. I needed to understand what identity is; how it develops and operates; what happened to weaken it and make it the object of education policy; and the effects of Canadian schools and teachers on its development and functional performance. Defining these constructs is the subject of this section.

Because this is an Indigenous policy analysis, my understanding of these constructs had to come from an Indigenous knowledge system. The most appropriate Indigenous knowledge system from which to seek this understanding was my own. The knowledge offered in this section is Cree knowledge and it is presented as my understanding of that knowledge as a Cree researcher. I use these Cree concepts as representative of Aboriginal identity in my descriptions of the constructs and in applying those constructs in the policy analysis in Chapter 7.

Chapter 4 describes identity from a Cree perspective, which then becomes a model for Aboriginal identity in order to understand what happened to it and the nature of its relationship to Canadian education. As I explained in the review of the literature on Aboriginal perspectives in Chapter 2, there are core aspects of culture that are common to North American Peoples. Joe also discussed "core culture" by referring to markers within North American cultures that imply a commonly held "inner, underpinning cultural dimension" (p. 164). These are broad "characteristic values and related attitudes" (ibid) regarding being human and relating with the natural world. Cora and Leona also described many concepts in ways that were not limited to Cree people alone but more broadly applicable to North American Peoples.

Chapters 5 and 6 describe the common effects of colonization on identity for Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. There are important variations within and among these commonalities, such as length of contact and interaction with Europeans, the nature of those interactions at various times, and differentiations in how assimilation policies were applied as Canada expanded across the continent. Because of these variations, it is important to keep in mind when reading Chapter 5 that the impacts on Aboriginal identity are neither absolute nor equally experienced by all Aboriginal people. Furthermore, many individuals and communities resisted colonial assimilation by taking their cultural practices underground and out of the reach of Canadian law enforcement. I have heard stories of how this was done in many Aboriginal communities across the continent. They demonstrate that our ancestors knew the importance of identity and culture to our survival and the lengths to which they were willing to go to preserve them for us. Chapter 6 presents my understanding of the participants' knowledge on the relationship between Aboriginal identity and education in Canadian schools.

Chapter 4

Understanding Aboriginal Identity

What is identity? Where does it come from? What is its purpose? How does it develop and function? What is its relationship to culture? Why does identity matter? These are the questions that I needed to explore in order to understand Aboriginal identity and then analyze the relationship between it and education for Aboriginal people.

It was difficult to differentiate between and categorize the various aspects of identity—what it is, how it develops, its cultural ecosystem, and what it looks like in its expression—because they are inherently interconnected in complex, dynamic, and overlapping ways. The metaphor of a tree to represent identity and its elements and a natural ecosystem to represent the roles and operations of Cree culture that were revealed are in keeping with the metaphoric nature of Indigenous thinking where knowledge is "manifest in key metaphors" (Joe, p. 111), which become the substance of Indigenous oral literature. What the tree enabled me to do was to *see* identity as a fully formed construct and to describe it here.

This chapter presents my understanding of identity based on how the participants described it. The first section presents identity as a tree—an organic entity that naturally grows and develops out of a system of cultural roots. Section 2 explains the purposes of identity for Cree people and how it functions to fulfill those objectives. The third section talks about how identity is established and developed in a cultural community. The last section on identity describes the ecosystem that develops as a result of the interactions between identity expression, Cree culture, and the natural world.

Defining Aboriginal Identity

A sapling begins as a seed, grows roots, foliage, and finally fruit in some form in order to

procreate. Similarly, Cree identity is contained in our essence—the seed of our being—at birth. It grows and matures in conditions created specifically for its optimal development, and then spends its life reproducing itself through its fruits, which nourish others in turn. As I asked questions about identity, I looked to the developing model for answers, which inevitably sent me back to the data with additional questions. Thus an analytical process developed of moving from the tree to the data and back again in an ever-deepening circle of understanding as the images began to appear, fill in, and crystallize as appropriate metaphors for identity, culture, aggressive assimilation, and ultimately, as Indigenous policy analysis tools.

What follows are descriptions of the roots and characteristics of Cree identity, how it develops within an ecosystem of culture, and what it looks like when fully expressed within that ecosystem based on the findings of my analysis. I include some discussion in narrative form as well that traces the evolution of my understanding through the various iterations of the tree metaphor images. While perhaps uncommon to present findings in this way, it is important to the principles of Indigenous Research Methodology to relate my new understandings back to their sources, as well as make my methods of analysis explicit. This knowledge and my coming to understand it are gifts and my role is to explain and apply them to the best of my ability.

The roots of Cree identity. The concept of Cree identity being like a tree began with descriptions of identity having *roots*. Cora shared that an individual's history and people are the roots of his or her identity. Joe asserted that developing an understanding of "Native mind and knowledge" requires a multi-dimensional approach and this form of understanding is necessary in order to "discern the roots of Native identity" (p. 109). If identity has roots, then it must function as a living organism. If it functions like an organism, then it must grow, develop, mature, and reproduce, and that organic activity must take place in an environment—a medium

or *culture*—which provides nutrients and homeostasis for optimal development. Joe stated that, according to Aboriginal Elders, "Indian cultural and spiritual heritage is the *ground* out of which Native identity rises" (p. 152, emphasis added). Roots by definition are attached to something, which further develops the metaphor of a tree rooted in a medium that nourishes it. Joe contended that relating with, observing, and listening to Elders "*grounds* and *roots* one in the *living earth of Indian tradition*" (Joe, p. 70, emphasis added). Culture, then—the living earth of Indian tradition as exemplified in Elders—is the soil and environment of identity development; it provides an ideal nutrient-rich medium for identity growth and a stable environment for its root system to develop and function.

If identity has roots, what makes up those roots? Cora stated that our language, our culture and our history comprise the roots of our identity:

> The old people say *we need our language* and *we need our culture*, and embedded in that is *we need our history*. That is kind of implied. In other words, we need what tells us that we have thousands of years of history. That's what we need to keep. So when we talk that way, that's identity. (Cora)

Joe remarked that, in Aboriginal cultures, ancient tradition and history are "lightsome carriers of first principles" (p. 159). Leona's words clarify that history is "our lived experience" (Leona), just as Cora asserted that we are "descendants of those experiences" (Cora). Our history is contained and passed on in our stories and in our ceremonies, which are an integral "part of what we do every day" (Leona). Joe explained that being part of a community is key to understanding identity. We need and receive "a characteristic sense of community, of 'the People,' a collective or communal sense" (Joe, p. 177) of belonging as Aboriginal people. People and community are therefore integral aspects of identity. This means that history, people, language, and ceremonies

are part of the roots of identity for Cree people.

For Leona, identity is “Indigenous knowledge, it’s our language, it’s our ceremonies, it’s all of who we are” (Leona). It means “looking at someone who looks like me; somebody who has the same knowledge as me; somebody who probably knows my parents and grandparents” or has some connection to my life and way of being (Leona). Having the same knowledge system as your ancestors and your relations helps to root you in ancient understandings. It is to understand that “the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the world and ourselves as participants in it” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule in Couture, 2013, p. 112). Indigenous knowledge and knowing have always been “necessary to the survival and enhancement of Native personal and communal identity” and remain so today (Joe, p. 100). Indigenous knowledge and language are also integral to ceremony, which is “the foundation of everything we do” as Cree people; “Everything begins in ceremony” (Leona). According to Joe, “Native ceremonies are the primary oral literature and remain the main traditional source of psychic energy for thinking, for identity development and control, for survival and its enhancement” (p. 104). He explains that Elders hold the lessons about “how the very nature of our being is in at-one-ment with the cosmo-genesis. And so they hold to the land, ceremony, and medicine, linked to the past, in Spirit” (Joe, p. 86). As such, Indigenous knowledge, which is shared, revealed, and acquired in part through ceremonies, is another intrinsic aspect of the roots of identity.

For Cree people, the land is a gift from the Creator and, as such is held sacred (Joe, p. 100). The relationship between the land and identity is primordial, as Leona explained, because to know your identity is to “know that we get life from the land, from Mother Earth” (Leona). When Aboriginal people talk about Mother Earth, they mean that their mothers are the closest

they will ever come to knowing their real mother—the Earth (Joe, p. 47). Just as a human mother loves, nurtures, and protects her child, Mother Earth provides for all of her children, including peoples. Cora believes that we have survived colonization in Canada because of our relationship with this land: "We are alive because this land loves us, because our roots are here. We come from this land. It is the blood and bones of our ancestors" (Cora). The land, our Mother, is the final component of the roots of identity.

It is important to distinguish here that this study is based in Cree knowledge and understanding of identity and, as such, the model is necessarily one of Cree identity, as Figure 6 emphasizes. While it may be applicable to identity among other Peoples, that is not the primary argument at play in this work. There are obvious connections to cultural concepts and principles of other Indigenous North American Peoples, connections that let Joe alternate between pan-Indian terms like *Indian* and *Native* and his own culture, Cree. Nonetheless, the context of this study is Cree, which means that the roots of identity presented here are Cree history, Cree people, Cree knowledge, Cree language, Cree ceremonies, and our Mother, the land, to which Cree people belong.

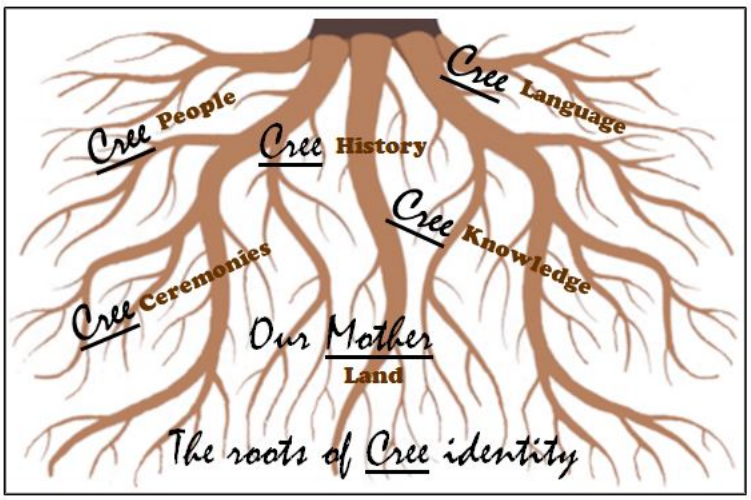

Figure 6: Roots of Cree Identity

The four aspects of identity. Identity is also intrinsically connected to spirit and existence because of their interrelated primordial status. In Cora's words, "You cannot be *alive* without an identity. Without the spirit, you *are* not—*are* being the key word" (Cora). Your being is identity and is spirit. Therefore, when you attack the spirit of a person, you also attack their identity (Cora). This inseparability of identity from spirit and physical existence led me to think about the relationship between identity and the four aspects of a Cree person: spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional being. If identity is as primordial as spirit and existence, then it must comprise the same elements as the person, as Figure 7 illustrates.

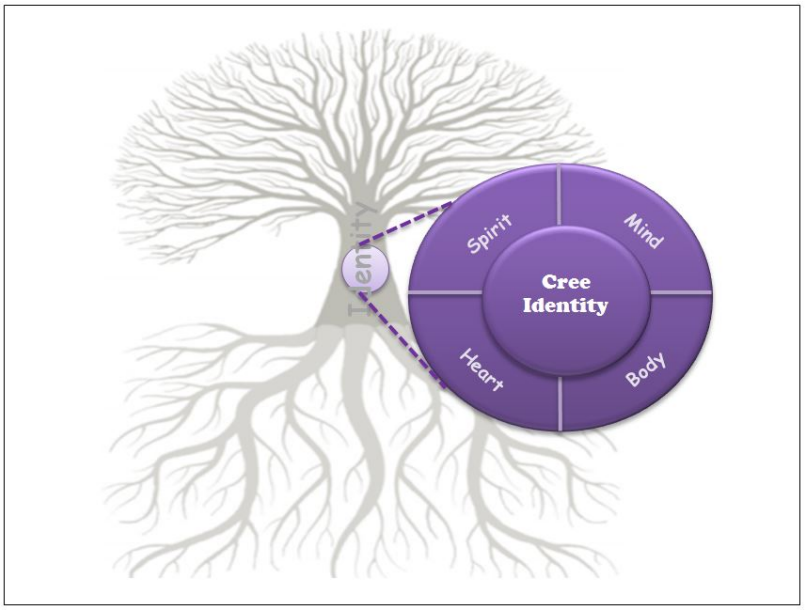

Figure 7: Four Aspects of Cree Identity

Joe explained the four-part person by referring to the "Energy within, manifesting itself on four levels or dimensions, that is, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual" (p. 37). This energy, "a Great Spirit, a Creator, a Life Force" (ibid), expresses itself and induces changes within the four dimensions of being, and "this same Energy at the same time is without, everywhere active and manifest" (ibid). Joe's description of Aboriginal identity as "being a state of mind, as it were, centred in the heart" (p. 79) connects both the mind and heart to identity, so

it would hold from a Cree perspective of holism that spirit, mind, and heart require physical characteristics as well. As such, identity is comprised of spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional characteristics, all of which are connected *as one* in the roots of Cree identity and interact with those roots through all four aspects of human being.

The purposes of identity. What is the purpose of a particular species of tree? Some produce fruit, some produce nuts, but all of them *bear fruit* in some form in order to reproduce. They all provide shelter for other plants and animals, they participate directly in the ecosystem in a variety of essential ways, and they all function in similar ways, differing primarily in the details in terms of appearance, function, and habitat. The purpose of a birch tree is to be the best birch tree it possibly can be, expressing itself through its unique appearance and particular functions in an environment that provides the nourishment that a birch requires to develop, mature, and reproduce. No one has to tell the birch tree that it's a birch in order for it to develop into one. It gets that information from its DNA. Before anyone else knows what kind of tree it will be, the tree knows and is already being/becoming a birch tree. So long as it remains attached to its roots and located within an environment that provides the nutrients and conditions necessary for its growth and maturation, it will become a birch tree regardless of what anyone else labels it or wants it to be.

For us as people, we come to understand our identity (or not) based on the connections that we have to our roots and the feedback we receive from our interactions with our physical, social, and spiritual environments. Joe maintained that "it is axiomatic that to achieve 'health' the focus must first be on identity development: 'You've got to know who you are'" (p. 265). Knowing your identity as a Cree person locates or *names* what kind of person you are being/becoming so that you can remain connected to your roots and located within the

environment best suited to your development. Knowing who you are and where you belong also provides protection in the form of inoculation against certain kinds of harm that your people have fought against for generations. Most importantly, your identity is your guide to the pursuit of the life you are meant to live.

Locating yourself. Knowing your identity at a conscious level is what grounds you as a human being; it locates your spirit within the sphere of the history of your people (Cora). In other words, when you understand that your spirit has a source and that source is your identity—rooted in your people, history, ceremonies, knowledge, language, and the land—you become grounded because you are connected to something infinitely greater than yourself. Knowing *who you are*, which necessarily means knowing *who your people are*, roots you (Cora). It provides you with "something to hang onto that is not just you" (Cora). Believing that you are just you and not a part of a greater, spiritually interconnected reality that is also part of you leaves you with nothing to hang onto because "you can't hang onto yourself" (Cora). To know your identity is also to understand that Cree knowledge is knowledge for living (Leona). It provides direction, meaning, and purpose. As Cora explains, knowing who your people are, where they are from, and what they have experienced are all fundamental to understanding, and thereby developing, your identity:

> When we think about people knowing their identity, it's actually knowing their history, where they are located in that timeline of history, but also where they are located in place and as a people. Where are your people? All of those things are part of identity. You can't have an identity without those connections. So when we ask people about identity that is where they go. From our thousands of years, we have come away understanding identity to be *knowing all that*. (Cora)

Knowing your identity involves layers of understanding (Cora). At the most fundamental level, your identity precedes you and exists outside of your conscious knowing: "*It's not what we believe; it's what is*" (Cora). We are born with an identity and, in order for that identity to develop, we need to be connected to its roots. Our identity is the roadmap we follow to achieve our purpose.

You can know what your identity is at a surface level, as in *I am Cree*, without knowing what that means in terms of living out your purpose. Knowing what your identity is without having an understanding of how to live it can result in what Cora referred to as going through the motions of being Indian: "Going through the motions can get you everything you want. You can be the top notch Indian all the way through and never have a sense of it. But knowing your identity, now, that's a whole different ball game" (Cora). Without being connected to the origins of our identity, our roots, we do not get that understanding. Cora contended that an individual eventually comes to a point where identity matters, which is where the path to understanding identity begins.

Protective factors. In the context of being colonized, for young Aboriginal people to know who they are and where they belong provides them with protective factors as they learn about the truth of Aboriginal experience in Canadian history: "They're going to be taught their own history. They need a way to deal with that" (Cora). These protective factors are also important for Aboriginal children as they deal with their current context and present reality as colonized and oppressed people:

> What's happening at home and in the communities is as, if not more, significant to that child than what's going on at school. Certainly we expect the school to support the child in what's going on at home. Not to be going on its own trail and leaving 6 year olds as

> though they are each some Marco Polo on his own journey. They're not on their own journeys! They're walking with all kinds of people. And if you treat them like they're on their own, then you're creating a problem. (Cora)

Treating them like they are on their own disconnects them from their roots, leaving them without a roadmap for living and without the strength their identity provides them.

Cora a her own strength in the face of oppression as a developing adolescent came from knowing at a deep level who she was as an Aboriginal person and what that meant in terms of how she behaved in the world. Cora used the European practice of baiting caged bears for entertainment as a metaphor to describe the experience of entering a White mainstream world from an Indigenous home and community. She talked about feeling like the bear being poked with sticks through the bars of a cage when she had to leave home. She used the purpose of going to school as an example of how she was taught to survive these experiences:

> How we react today, after the generations of being poked through the bars, is dependent on how we were brought up. If I look at my mother, my mother was poked just like everyone else. But she didn't treat us or present the world as if we were in a cage. And she didn't operate a home that was like a cage. Nobody poked sticks at us when we were there. When we were sent to school, we were not told, *you will like the teacher*. We were told we were going to school for a reason, and the reason was we understood that home was where we belonged. The school was outside of our home. We went there to get something and then we came home. We were supposed to fit in at home, not at school. That's how we were taught. That's how we were raised. (Cora)

Cora attributed her strength and her survival through mainstream education to being raised this way. The principle here, she stated, is that everyone needs to know *how* they are strong, the basis

of their strength, otherwise "when that *how* starts to get wobbly and doesn't exist for some people," they have no guide for living: "They have nothing there. There is no *how*. It's a complete drifting, aimlessly, There's nothing" (Cora). At the heart of Cora's understanding of identity and its purpose is spirit. She believed that knowing and connecting with your spiritual identity "can be the one thing that carries [Aboriginal youth] through everything, no matter how negative it is" (Cora). Spirituality is also a critical link to a child's history, people, language, ceremonies, and culture: "Without your spirit, or the spiritual aspect of your life, you don't understand these things. It's very simple to me" (Cora).

Guidance. The purpose of life for a Cree person is to develop a frame of mind that is a wholesome, fulfilling, and nourishing gestalt, at the centre of which is "the Light, the Law, the Spirit" (Joe, p. 14). This "Indian Way" (p. 13) of living is achieved through ceremonies, fasting, and prayer, processes by which "the Law becomes one's Life" (ibid). The responsibility of "an individualized self on the Path" toward the centre—the Light—is compliance with the Laws of Nature. The laws of nature or *cosmic laws* are "the 'signs' of the God Creator manifesting … For an Indian, these [laws] are the Right Things, with which one strives to relate to in a Right Way" (Joe, p. 10). Natural law, as a manifestation of the Life Force in the cosmos, is therefore a thing of its own kind, which is discerned through "direct, personal experience—an intuiting of the ground or basis of all existence, that is, that by which all things are" (ibid). Our purpose in life is not something for which we need to go searching outside of ourselves. It is within us when we come into the physical world and understanding it is a spiritual enterprise.

The goal for the individual in terms of understanding what *being* Cree means is to live a good life in accordance with the laws of nature: "Finding and following one's Path is a characteristic Indian enterprise that leads to or makes for the attainment of inner and outer

balance" (Joe, p. 69). Finding this inner and outer harmony is necessary because, as oral tradition teaches us, "when certain values or laws are upheld and observed, the People survive" (Joe, p. 176). In other words, knowing who you are locates you and gives you access to your roots, which in turn provide you with knowledge for living and strength against harm. Joe described the *doing* that characterizes the "Indian Way" as a means of "*Being/Becoming* a unique person, one fully responsible for one's own life and actions" (p. 84). His explanation of the traditional perspective of the purpose of life and the role of identity in that purpose further clarifies the concept of Being/Becoming:

> Within the traditional perspective, the human person is experienced and perceived as unique, a being-becoming-in-community-in-a-place-in-the-world, unfolding in a process of growth leading to a Way of Life. This individualized path roots one in an essential "core" reality, one that plays out and along as an organizing principle, an enabler of a "good life." As the Old People say, it is a Path to Wisdom. (p. 253)

Joe revealed that "the 'constants' for 'living a good life' are carried by a timeless traditional reflection, continuously renewed down through the ages. What-is-carried, in its essence, manifests itself in processes such as spiritual awareness and values development" (p. 159), expressed in the underlying principles of Indigenous Peoples across the continent as paramount to life. This ancient knowledge and understanding of balance and harmony provide us with patterns for relating to "self, others, family, community, and the cosmos" (p. 159), patterns that provide sure footing for "the necessary walk into and through contemporary dilemmas" (ibid). Couture characterized this "stuff" of relationships as "the 'ground' to Aboriginal being and becoming" (ibid) because of the balance people attain from relating to each other and the world in right ways according to cosmic laws.

Without knowing who we are, we have no way of developing connections with our people, history, ceremonies, language, knowledge, or land. We have no ancient armour with which to protect ourselves, and we have no idea what we are meant to become or how to become anything in particular. Knowing that you are Cree and what that means is the essential first step in being/becoming the best Cree person you can possibly be.

Aboriginal Identity Development

Knowing that you are Cree is only the first step in being and becoming who you are meant to be. What is important about knowing your identity is that it also attaches you to the roots of your identity, provides a path for your identity to develop, and connects you to examples of fully expressed Cree identity in the form of Elders and others on the same path to being/becoming Cree. As Figure 8 illustrates, Cree identity development is contained within an ecosystem of culture that includes the roots of Cree identity—Cree people, history, ceremonies, knowledge, language, and land—as well as the nutrients, conditions, and laws necessary for optimal identity development. Identity develops by interacting with its roots through its four aspects of being.

In the proper environment, each of the four aspects of identity develops in concert with the others. This means that your spirit, mind, heart, and body are all involved in the growth and maintenance of your identity. According to Joe, there "is no difference between mental and spiritual activity and development—they are two sides of the same, transparent coin. Both constitute an arduous and complex development over time" (p. 111). This is characteristic of a holistic perspective of life and living where all aspects of being are intertwined and interdependent within an ecosystem of culture. Because Cree life revolves around and is intrinsically tied to the spiritual realm, developing your identity as a four-part person is also an

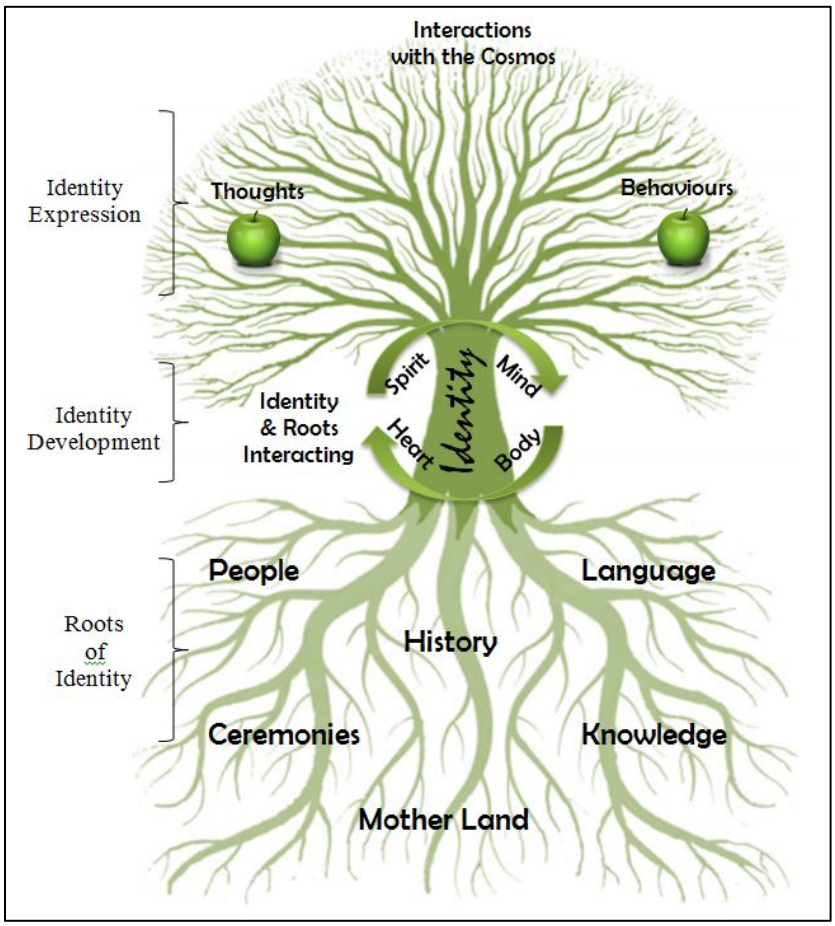

Figure 8: Ecosystem of Identity Development

inherently spiritual enterprise.

Inheriting identity. Given that children are born with their identity, identity development must begin before a child is born. A child necessarily comes into the world physically resembling his or her parents, relatives, and ancestors as a result of a common pool of genetic traits. Appearance, stature, ability, health factors, mannerisms, and dispositions are all impacted to some degree by genetic makeup and expression. These similarities between children and their family members are important indicators of a feeling of belonging, which is critical for maintaining connections with their people, one of the six roots of identity. As Leona stated, identity is "looking at someone who looks like me; somebody who has the same knowledge as me; somebody who probably knows my parents and grandparents" (Leona). In addition to

passing on biological characteristics, genes also transmit knowledge, experiences, and emotions from one generation to the next (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2014). This genetic information and experiences are the beginnings of two other roots of identity: knowledge and history.

Children are also born with their spirits so their spiritual development must also begin before birth. As Cora stated, "the spirit is your being. Without the spirit, you *are* not" (Cora). Leona explained that Cree people "believe that children are gifted with information when they come here and they choose to be here…. Our children choose their parents, our children choose the physical and spiritual experience that they will have" (Leona). In other words, they choose their identity and each of its four aspects: spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional. They choose to be Cree. Being born with your spirit and identity means that existence, spirit, and identity all start to develop at some point before a child enters the world. Because "children are born with gifts and purpose in their lives," it is up to their community to help them identify those gifts and to find within them their purpose for living (Leona). The community draws on its culture to fulfill this task by continuously connecting children to the roots of their identity. Because "a child is like a plant… a living thing that responds" (Cora), it responds with a strong sense of belonging both to its roots and to its environment as it develops into its full expression of itself. Children contain the seeds of their identity when they arrive here and it is the responsibility of their families and communities to guide them in its development.

Stages of development. There are seven stages of development according to Cree understanding. They are stages marked by the physical, social/emotional, cognitive, and spiritual characteristics of human growth, at the core of which is identity development. Leona first shared the teaching of the seven stages with me by relating it to the Sweatlodge. She explained that the

lodge has seven willows as part of its structure and that each of these willows relates to one of the seven stages of development. She also talked about the pre-birth stage, explaining that we bring our belief system with us from the spiritual realm. Another version of the teachings on these stages, Cree Elder, Mike Steinhauer's (cited in Couture, 2013, pp. 266-271) account, helped me understand it further. What follows is my understanding of this teaching based on knowledge from all three of my informants. Joe provides a full written account of Elder Steinhauer's version, which serves as the primary source in the following explanation.

In his introduction to his teachings on the stages of development, Elder Steinhauer cautioned that sharing his understanding of the knowledge is not an attempt "to say that there is only one way of understanding the Seven Stages" (p. 266). What he believed is important to attend to is that love and understanding—also described collectively as kind living—honesty, and perseverance are inseparable principles on which Cree life is based. Leona described these as values, stating that they are "the four natural laws of love, honesty, sharing, and determination" (Leona). Joe explained that "love, honesty, sharing, determination, and perseverance are foundational process principles, inseparable one from the other, together forming ideal outcomes" (p. 202). These five principles, values, or laws form the foundation on which Cree identity forms through the seven stages of development.

The first stage is called *Happy Time*, the stage of childhood beginning at birth and ending at puberty. This stage is where we "begin by experiencing the care, protection, and love of mother and father. All our needs are met; we are taught right from wrong; we learn to share with siblings; we learn the meaning of kindness and honesty" (cited in Couture, 2013, p. 267). It is a prescriptive time during which we "are taught to follow the ways of our parents: we see how they are to each other, how they treat each other in kindness and respect, and how they settle

differences. They are our first role models" (ibid). This first stage of life is where our identity begins to grow.

Puberty marks the beginning of Stage Two, which is called *Confusion Time*. It is the period of flux between childhood and young adulthood during which children begin to resist parental direction but still require their nurturing, kindness, and understanding. It is at this time that, as a child you "start thinking about yourself thinking, becoming conscious of yourself as a separate entity" (Cora). It is at this point that children "are not just *who they are*, they *think about* who they are" (Cora). Prior to this age, children do not self-evaluate. Their value is based solely on "how they have been treated by the people who are their caregivers, the people who they have bonded with: the life givers" (Cora). They know who they are based on their experiences to that point. From this point on, children play an active role in their own identity development.

Stage Three, *Searching Time*, is where our parents "begin introducing us to spiritual ways" (Joe, p. 268). During this stage, significant adults other than our parents enter our lives "to help with the discovery of what we can expect of life and to help with the preparation for it" (ibid). *Truth Time* is the fourth stage of development where we begin to discover "how serious life is and the kind of effort and motivation that are required" (ibid). It is a time of initiation into ceremonies, learning protocol, and understanding "the processes of the 'right ways'" (ibid). During this stage you will choose an Elder as a mentor for your apprenticeship "in terms of spiritual matters and in terms of your responsibilities as a man or woman. It is at this time that the importance, the nature and requirements, of balance in life are taught" (ibid). Elder Steinhauer described this as a very critical stage of development: "What we learn and practice now, guided by the teachings, will determine the spiritual and moral direction and quality of the rest of our life" (ibid). While the description of these stages does not correlate them specifically

to age, this stage seems to complete the transition into adulthood as well as marking a critical phase in our identity development.

Once we have learned how to live a balanced life and where to seek strength in maintaining it, we come to Stage Five, *Decision Time*. It is during this stage that we begin to work for a living, choose a spouse, and begin to fulfill our roles as adults. Joe summarized the focus of this stage as "living a balanced way of life, in harmony with others as equals" (p. 202). As we have children, we move into Stage Six, *Planting Time*. Our parents continue to guide and support us as young parents learning how to meet the needs of our children "so as to give them a good chance at life" (p. 270). With our parents' assistance, we help our children through the stages of development, always mindful of our duty as their role models and as their primary teachers. As parents, it is our responsibility to balance the influences on our children as they move into the larger world, teaching them as much at home "as they are taught at school: that is our responsibility" (ibid). We have planted our seeds and now we must put tremendous effort into providing the right nutrients and conditions for them to grow and mature as we have.

The final stage of development as a Cree person is Stage Seven, where we move firmly into our ultimate role as Elders in our family and community. *Teacher/Advisor/Healer Time* is where we take on more responsibilities in the identity development of our children and grandchildren. As Elders, we become living embodiments of what living a life balanced between the physical and spiritual and the mental and emotional, in relationship with all elements of the cosmos in life-giving and life-sustaining ways. This is how we fulfill our purpose in life according to our identity as Cree people.

Learning from Elders. Being immersed among your People is critical to developing your identity as a Cree person. This includes your parents, grandparents, extended family, and

community. It is essential to "live with, cry with, laugh with, and rejoice with Indians in an extended family setting and remain rooted in an Indian sense of life and vision" (Joe, p. 74) in order to see the world in a Cree way. Through proximity and continual interaction with others in your community, your identity is shaped by your experiences. You learn from others through observation, activities, stories, songs, ceremonies, and discussion. Teaching "through traditional stories, legends, and history" (Joe, p. 266) is essential. "There are so many teachings involved in who we are" (Leona). The stories contain and are part of a much larger story:

> a Story that shows the Way or the direction to give one's life, revealing practical conditions for getting on with the process of being/becoming who one is, of discovering and establishing a sense of identity rooted in a rich, vital personal and collective history that is constantly unfolding. (Joe, p. 266)

Parents and family are important elements of identity development, but other members of the community also take on critical roles.

Elders play a significant role in understanding how, why, and what it means to be Cree. They carry the blueprints for Cree life as well as the manual for living it and their role among the people is to guide others to that understanding. As Couture noted: "Oral tradition teaches that when certain values or laws are upheld and observed, the People survive: it devolves to Elders to provide these precepts" (p. 176). As individuals who have progressed through the first six stages of life and into the final one, Elders represent what a fully expressed Cree identity looks like and their lives demonstrate the outcomes of living a balanced, holistic, spiritually attuned life. Joe characterized Elders as "superb embodiments of highly developed human potential. They exemplify the kind of person that a traditional, culturally based learning environment can and does form and mould" (p. 69). Their relationship with the natural world is a "Story that has never

ceased and that carries the dream of the earth as our way into the future. In a sense, this Story holds the 'genetic and psychic encoding' needed by humankind for survival" (p. 87). In other words, Elders hold the DNA to our identity as Cree people both in the physical traits and information they pass on and in the knowledge that they receive, acquire and transmit to succeeding generations through teaching, mentorship, and example.

Elders are "those people who are seers, prophets, teachers, holy men and women who, like the Medicine People of all ages, affirm that they become acquainted with the Creator through prayer and fasting, who expresses to them in the spirit of their minds" (p. 13). These "true" Elders "who have gone through painful encounter with spiritual realities" (p. 89) are viewed by the People as "intermediaries between their respective cultural communities and the spiritual forces of the universe" (ibid). Elders are seen as the "defenders of the community's psychic integrity. They are those who have enacted and sustained a personal relationship with Nature" (ibid). As Joe asserted, they are essential to identity development for Aboriginal people: "one must frequent Elders, regardless of whether one was raised in an Indian culture or not" (p. 13). Elders are exemplars of the purpose of Cree life and, as such, are essential models, resources, and guides in the identity development of others.

Learning from Elders usually occurs through apprenticeship with one Elder for a number of years but will certainly involve interactions with others as well (Joe). This process is experiential—it requires "learning-by-doing" (p. 13) facilitated by Elders who are experienced in the ways and means of spiritual development. Characteristic of experiential learning, direction is provided "only when it becomes clear that you aren't able to figure things out for yourself" (p. 14). Direct instruction is offered only when necessary and not through lecturing or preaching. As Joe explains, their teaching "is always brief and concise, and is relative to the nature of what one

experiences" (pp. 13-14). One relates to Elders by carefully observing and listening in order to understand the procedures, processes, and motivations for "behaviours that ground or root one, so to speak, in the living Earth of Native Tradition" (p. 85). Apprenticing with Elders is a thorough education in the foundations of Cree traditions—protocol:

> "Protocol" denotes values, attitudes, behaviours, skills, and insights. It is the "right way," connoting a "line" past which the uninitiated are not tolerated, largely because of the high risk of misperceiving and/or misunderstanding, if not of outright cognitively distorting, protocol. Ritual, as a specific instance of protocol, is a reassuring constant. (Joe, p. 216)

Understanding protocol is so important because everything is done in ceremony, where knowledge, understanding, orientation, and process are critical.

Learning in ceremony. Because life for Aboriginal people is inherently spiritual, ceremonies are integral to learning who you are and who you are becoming. Every day, every activity, every teaching begins in ceremony: "the foundation of everything we do is ceremony" (Leona). Joe stated "that the Indian mind experiences a ground of existence as the ground of consciousness…. a ground from which all thoughts spring but which itself cannot be thought" (p. 12). He explained that one experiences this Truth, being both "knower and known" (p. 12), being an expression of the Creator, in ceremony. This fundamental position that ceremony holds in the Cree way of life makes it a central aspect of identity development as well: "Native ceremonies are the primary oral literature and remain the main traditional source of psychic energy for thinking, for identity development and control, for survival and its enhancement" (p. 104). In ceremony, all aspects of the world are expressed and encountered. Joe called this the primal experience:

> The primal "experience" embraces the inner and outer worlds. In Native cognition, these

> are together and are equally real and functional. The sense world, as well as the spiritual world: each has something to reveal that only it can express. The spiritual and the physical are both acknowledged as inseparable and recognized as belonging centrally to the sphere of Native, human knowing. It follows that such primal experience is the basis, as well, of traditional Native culture. (p. 105)

Ceremony, because of its primal connection to all that is and can be experienced, is life-giving and life-maintaining, teacher and lesson, knowledge and knowing, Creator and Creation.

If Elders are the facilitators of growth and development, ceremonies are the arena and the spirits the teachers. Ceremonies "are the moments that bring insight, the beginning and deepening of increasingly sharper and stronger awareness" (Joe, p. 39). As Leona shared, it is in ceremony where we interact with and learn from the spirits:

> That's what happens in our Sundances and our night lodges and sweats, they do come to visit us, they do share that knowledge and information with us in the ceremonies. Some experience it through visions in their dreams, some see it physically, and others are guided. You're guided and you just accept that. These are the people that should be in my path; this is the teaching I'm learning from this person—always accepting whatever comes to you because you're being guided. And you're kept there to be on track, and if you're off track, you're just knocked in there in different ways. (Leona)

Leona's description of how one learns from and is guided by spiritual forces demonstrates that the lessons and guidance are not limited to the ceremonies themselves. Rather, the ceremonies are ways of relating to the spiritual realm and it is through ceremony that spiritual relationships are maintained. These relationships are not contained by or confined to ceremony; they are nurtured, developed, and sustained in ceremony. The gifts of these relationships, in the form of

knowledge, direction, or assistance, are often realized beyond the parameters of the ceremony itself.

Rites of passage ceremonies are important aspects of personal development because they mark entry into new levels of responsibility and provide the teachings necessary to assume them. Leona's description of a ceremony marking the beginning of puberty demonstrates how pedagogy and ceremony are integrated into an all-encompassing, holistic, experiential learning process:

> The rites of passage for girls when they get their first moon time, it's a big celebration! You have this four days and four nights when you have kokums and aunties coming in and teaching you, sewing and relationships, your relationships with men, your responsibilities, the importance of keeping yourself in terms of physically, emotionally in a good state because you are preparing this body for the next generation and of course the ceremony is involved in that. (Leona)

These teachings and the support that Elders provide to younger generations continue beyond the parameters of the ceremony itself in the form of lifelong guidance: "Your Elder guides and directs you on the Path of the rest of your life. He or she does this by focusing on the four aspects of wellness: spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental" (Joe, p. 269).

The fundamental importance of ceremony to learning and development speaks to the centrality of spirituality in Cree epistemology and ontology. Ceremonies are conduits to the source of life. The more one engages in ceremony and other spiritual traditions, "the more one perceives their worldview concepts and values as foundational, holding a power to incite and guide the resolution of the full continuum of Aboriginal development and learning needs" (Joe, p. 159). Learning in these ways — through the application of and adherence to natural principles

— teaches people how to think with their whole beings rather than just their minds:

> Traditional learning modalities eventually bring one to "think intuitively," to "think with the heart," to "think Circles," to understand and utilize dream, metaphor, and symbol. In due time, one also begins to experience, understand, and live in harmony according to Natural Law, that is, the Laws of the Life Energy in its myriad forms. This growing sense of the Circle becomes a "reality principle," that is, a grounded sense of one's being that is instilled through ceremonies, spiritual ways, and internalization of teachings. (Joe, pp. 209-210)

If the principle of the Circle, internalized through spiritual practices and cultural teachings, is *a grounded sense of one's being*, then the Circle is Cree identity fully developed and expressed. Because Cree identity is essentially a reflection of the natural world and being Cree means operating according to natural laws, the Circle must also represent nature and natural order; that is, order that is sacred and balanced. Fully realized Cree identity is a replication of nature as well as an intrinsic aspect of natural order: Cree identity develops and functions within the natural ecosystem of Cree culture, where its expression plays a fundamental role in maintaining the system for the perpetuation of Cree being.

Cree identity develops within an ecosystem that develops as individuals interact with the roots of their identity. We are born with our identity, inherited from our parents and other ancestors, and developed through our connections to our people's roots. We learn about who we are from interacting with our people, our history, our ceremonies, our knowledge, our language, and our land. Elders are critical aspects of this developmental ecosystem as exemplars of identity development and expression, and as primary sources of the teachings required for optimal development. Ceremonies are also integral to Cree identity development by connecting us to

other beings and other sources of knowledge and power. Developing holistically requires methods and means that enable us to develop physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually in accordance with the natural laws that govern all relationships.

Identity Expression in a Cultural Ecosystem

Identity expression is culture enacted. As Cree people express their identities through their thoughts and actions, and in relation to each other and the natural world, they are recreating the ecosystem for Cree identity development in others. It is the interactions between individuals and between individuals and the natural world that define Cree culture as an ecosystem. Both Cree culture and the natural world are governed by the same laws, working to maintain optimal balance within and between each system. The ecosystem of Cree culture functions in very similar ways to the natural ecosystem because it is modeled after it. The continual expression of identity by individuals, between individuals, and with the natural world maintains and recreates the cultural ecosystem of Cree identity.

Identity expression. Like a tree, human identity is fulfilling its function and purpose when it has developed to the extent that it can interact with other elements in its environment and with the ecosystem as a whole in mutually life-sustaining, reciprocal ways. A tree expresses its identity through its form and its function. A fully formed White Birch, for example, is a small to medium-sized deciduous tree that can reach seventy to eighty feet in height at maturity, with a white paper-like bark, dentilated leaves, and sweet, non-sucrose sap (“Blue Planet Biomes”, 2010). It grows best in sunlight and is therefore among the first trees to grow back after fire or clearcutting (ibid). It produces both male and female flowers called catkins, which in turn produce fruit that have wings in order to disperse the seeds away from the parent tree to reduce competition for nutrients (ibid). During its one hundred and forty year lifespan, the White Birch

plays a multitude of roles as it fulfills its primary purpose of reproducing itself in a new generation. Through its basic functions as a plant, it participates in Earth's ecosystem through absorption and transpiration of water, exchange of oxygen for carbon dioxide, and by capturing and storing energy. In carrying out these primal functions, the Birch serves as a source of food, medicine, building material, and shelter for a variety of creatures, including humans. It also supports other organisms such as fungi and other plants that require a host on which to grow. Even after it dies, the Birch continues to participate in the ecosystem as its nutrients return back to and through the ecosystem to promote and sustain other life. We know that it is a White Birch by its form, its function, and the produce it generates.

Human identity is similarly expressed through our attitudes and behaviours and in the produce of our thoughts and actions. If it is a Cree identity, ideally it will express itself in Cree ways according to its knowledge and understanding of what it means to be Cree. It will ultimately endeavor to reproduce itself as part of a system and an element of an ecosystem. An analogy that helped me understand identity expression was to think about what it means to be Christian. When someone professes to be Christian, what does that mean? A Christian identity aligns you with a set of beliefs, principles, and tenets, a history of people, places, and events, and a particular orientation to the world and how people should function within it. That is what it means to *be* Christian. That is identity. Being *a* Christian is how that alignment and orientation manifests in your attitudes, behaviours, and relationships. How does one demonstrate being Christian? That is identity expression.

Expressing your identity involves understanding the roots of your identity and acting according to that understanding in your relationships with and in the world. Using Christian identity again as an example, a Christian must understand the history, knowledge, people,

ceremonies, language, and land of Judaism, as well as the life of Christ and the evolution of Christianity, including its people, history, language, knowledge, land, and ceremonies. It entails engaging in particular activities and practices, using a particular language, interacting with others (or not) in certain ways, and cultivating ways of thinking and being that align with your understanding of being Christian. A Christian needs to interact with other Christians in fellowship and ceremony to strengthen his Christian identity and its roots, Christianity. The more immersed one becomes in a Christian environment, the greater the opportunities are to express that identity and the stronger it becomes as a result. Understanding your roots comes as a result of interacting with them in an environment tailored specifically to your identity that supports those roots and the development and reproduction of identities attached to them, and allows for free and full identity expression within it. It is through such fellowship, ceremony, and service that a Christian demonstrates his understanding of and relationship with Christianity.

As identity develops and matures within the equilibrium provided by a balanced cultural ecosystem, its expression is as integral to maintaining its place in the system as are its roots. As part of their basic function, trees also reciprocate with the environment. They engage in photosynthesis, which converts light energy and water into carbohydrates and oxygen. The carbohydrates and oxygen in turn sustain other beings within the ecosystem and provide nutrients back to the soil, and ultimately their own roots, through decomposition. Water is also returned to the environment through transpiration. Trees provide physical stability to the soil as well as protection and building materials for other vegetation and creatures, including us. They also communicate with each other through the use of pheromones to warn each other about certain dangers such as disease or infestation. Ultimately, trees return to the soil themselves as they decompose and feed a new generation of trees and other organisms. In similar ways,

identity functions reciprocally with its environment and with its roots.

Cree identity expression. In the same way, expressing your identity as a Cree person is to think and act according to Cree beliefs, principles, and tenets; to understand the history of your people, their experiences, and the land; and a particular orientation to the world and how people should function within it. Expressing your identity is a lifelong pursuit of interpreting what it means to be Cree in terms of how you live every day and how you understand other beings, nature, spirit, and the cosmos. The Cree word for identity is *nēhiýāwiwin,* which literally translates into English as *being Cree* (Wolvengrey, 2001). In other words, my identity is who I *am*. Who I am means *being that*. I *am* Cree. I am *being* Cree. Whatever I am doing is an expression of *being Cree* according to my understanding of what that means. This changes according to environmental factors but the foundation of what I *am* is Cree. Therefore, my *identity* is my *being* and my *being* is my *identity*. My life is an exercise in interpreting my understanding of the roots of my identity and translating that understanding into how I am in the world. My life—my being in the world—is the expression of my identity as a Cree person. How well my expression aligns with my identity depends on what I know about being Cree.

It is through the continual expression of Cree identity—comprised of the four aspects of being—that identity participates in reciprocal relationships with the cosmos, as Figure 10 illustrates. Like the tree receives light energy from the sun and converts it into food energy, identity receives spiritual energy from its source through prayer, ceremony, and relationships. The fruits of that intake of spiritual energy are gifts back to the spiritual world, gifts to the roots to sustain them, gifts to the ecosystem to keep it functioning, and gifts to everything contained in the cosmos: the natural world (land, atmosphere, and vegetation); the spiritual world; the social world (all beings); and the cultural world. Those are the spiritual contributions of identity.

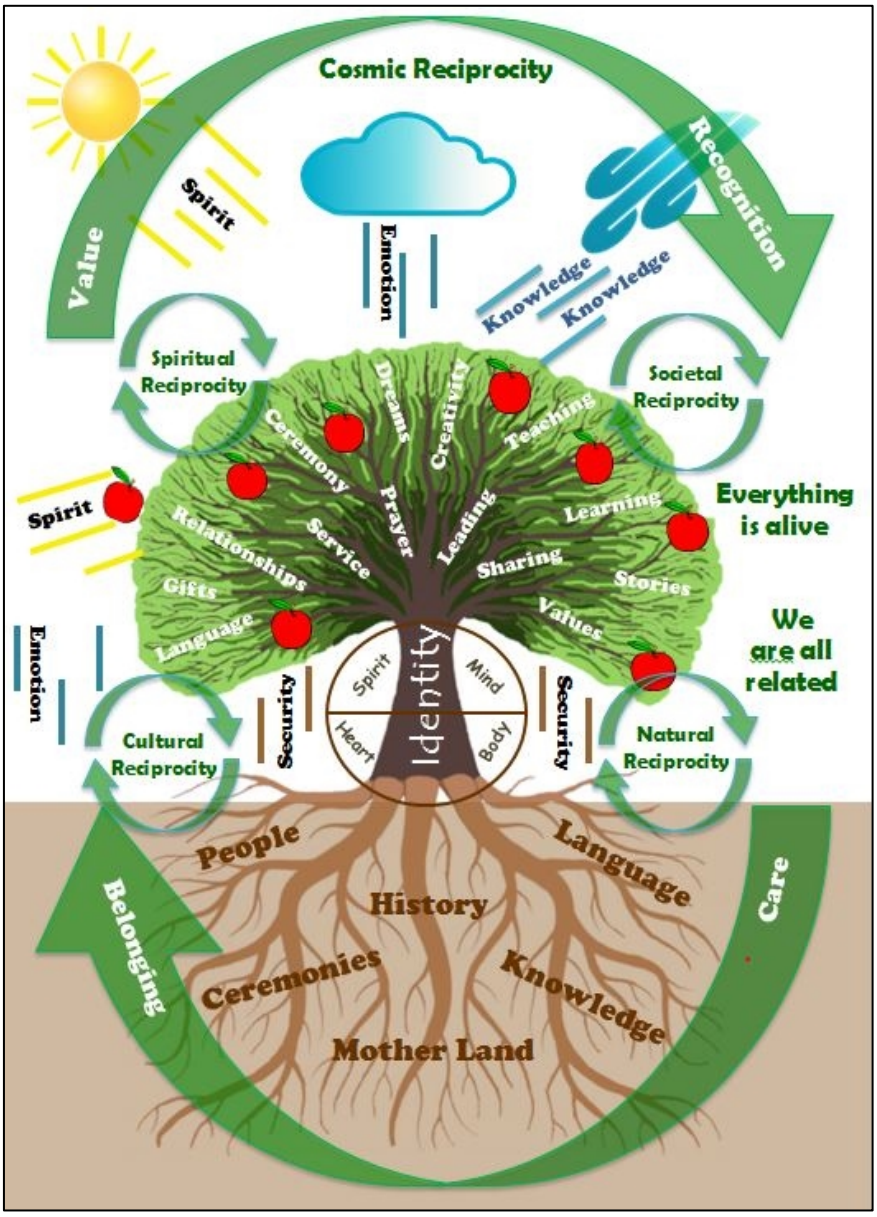

Figure 9: Identity Expression in a Cultural Ecosystem

The mental aspect of identity produces gifts to exchange as well in the form of knowledge and understanding. These gifts form the basis of Cree identity's interaction—its give and take—with the natural, spiritual, social, and cultural realms. Identity produces physical gifts as well in the produce of labour that grows out of the physical aspect of identity expression. This includes works of art, structures, tools, prepared foods, clothing, toys, decorations, harvests, and

at times physical deprivation, all of which are gifts that can be given to the earth, the spirits, our relations, and back to our own culture to strengthen and maintain the roots of our identity, which are a part of identity itself. Love is the realm of the emotional aspect of identity. To love your culture is to love your identity. To love your identity is to love yourself. Just as trees do, identity feeds itself and, ultimately, a new generation of identities as it cycles back through the ecosystem to provide spiritual sustenance to future generations. Its purpose is to maintain the ties necessary for its survival, growth, and procreation. The gifts of the heart are also received as energy and turned into acts of love that are given back to all four realms of the ecosystem of Cree identity. These are the functions of identity through its expression and fruition.

Exemplars of Cree identity. Cree identity expression is best represented by the people to whom we refer today as Elders. Joe characterized Elders as exemplars of Cree culture, explaining the level of development that people who develop over a lifetime immersed in Cree ways of being and knowing:

> Elders are evidence that Indians know a way to high human development to a degree greater than generally observable in prevailing Western society. Their qualities of mind (intuition, intellect, memory, imagination) and emotion, their profound and refined moral sense, together with a high level of spiritual and psychic attainment, are perceived as clear behavioural indicators deserving careful attention and possible emulation. (p. 69)

This higher state of being, according to Cora, was not reserved only to Elders in the not-too-distant past, but was emulated by everyone:

> Thinking about hundreds of years back, I can see the people who lived then. They lived a different life. Their traditional way of being was a higher state of being. We say it was a more advanced state of being. You read people like Joe Couture and his writing about

> Elders. Everybody was like that. It was a natural way of living and being in the world. That's how human *being* was hundreds of years ago here in this part of the country. (Cora)

Joe also described these highly developed and sought-after characteristics as universal among the people in the past, rather than just exhibited by Elders:

> Traditional means effectively taught Indians how to become and be unique expressions of human potential. These same traditional processes also developed a strong sense of responsibility towards self and, equally, towards the community, which phenomenon indicates how the general Indian community resolved that long-standing human paradox of how to be simultaneously both individualistic and communal. This Native achievement constitutes an extraordinary and perhaps unparalleled event in the context of known history. (p. 68)

That does not mean, however, that traditional ways of being are no longer relevant in the present context. What it does reflect is the extent of the damage of colonialism on Cree identity development and expression.

The term *knowledge holder* is sometimes more appropriate than *Elder* to refer to someone today who has developed in traditional Cree ways. *Elder* implies an advanced age, which is not necessarily connected to advanced traditional knowledge in the present colonial context. As Leona explained,

> knowledge holders don't have to be old. Some people have been groomed from when they were babies and they're in their 30s and 40s and they have more knowledge about that than some of us who have been institutionalized through residential schools and through mainstream education. (Leona)

Joe described one's high self as an arena in which one experiences oneself as an expression of the creative Life Force where existence and consciousness are one and the same. He refers to this arena as "Merton's *point vierge*—a point at which, in Christian terms, one experiences oneself as an expression of God, as being in His 'image and likeness'" (p. 12). Understanding and experiencing oneself as inherently a part of all that is, as interconnected with and through the Life Force, indicates that higher state of being toward which traditionally-developed Elders and other knowledge holders strive, attain, and demonstrate for others on the same path.

Culture as an ecosystem. A system is a group of individual items that regularly interact or are interdependent with each other, which together form a unified whole ("Merriam Webster", 2017). A system can be: a group of bodies that interact according to the influence of associated forces; a group of substances that seek equilibrium; a set of organs that work together to perform specific functions; a group of similar, interrelated, or interconnected natural objects or forces; or a set of objects or devices that are organized into a network for distribution, connection, or communication (ibid). An ecosystem develops when a group of interconnected elements forms as a result of the interactions between a community of organisms and their environment (ibid). An ecosystem includes various groups or systems forming a macro-system of relationships as they interact with each other and their shared environment. What is common to both systems and ecosystems is that they are defined by how the bodies within them relate to each other; ecosystems result from the interactions between several systems functioning together and their environment.

Cree culture is an ecosystem for Cree identity in that it is comprised of the relationships between the Life Force, the natural world, Cree identity, being, and itself, as Figure 11 illustrates. The Life Force is the centre of all that exists. It is the cosmic source of energy that is

necessary to all life. To be alive is to be in relation with and part of this force. As such, it is the source of energy for all existence within the ecosystem of the natural world, including the spiritual realm. Everything that is subject to the life force is alive and a part of the force itself. This is the foundation of the natural law, *everything is alive*. The natural world of course has its own ecosystems created by its various systems acting in relation to each other.

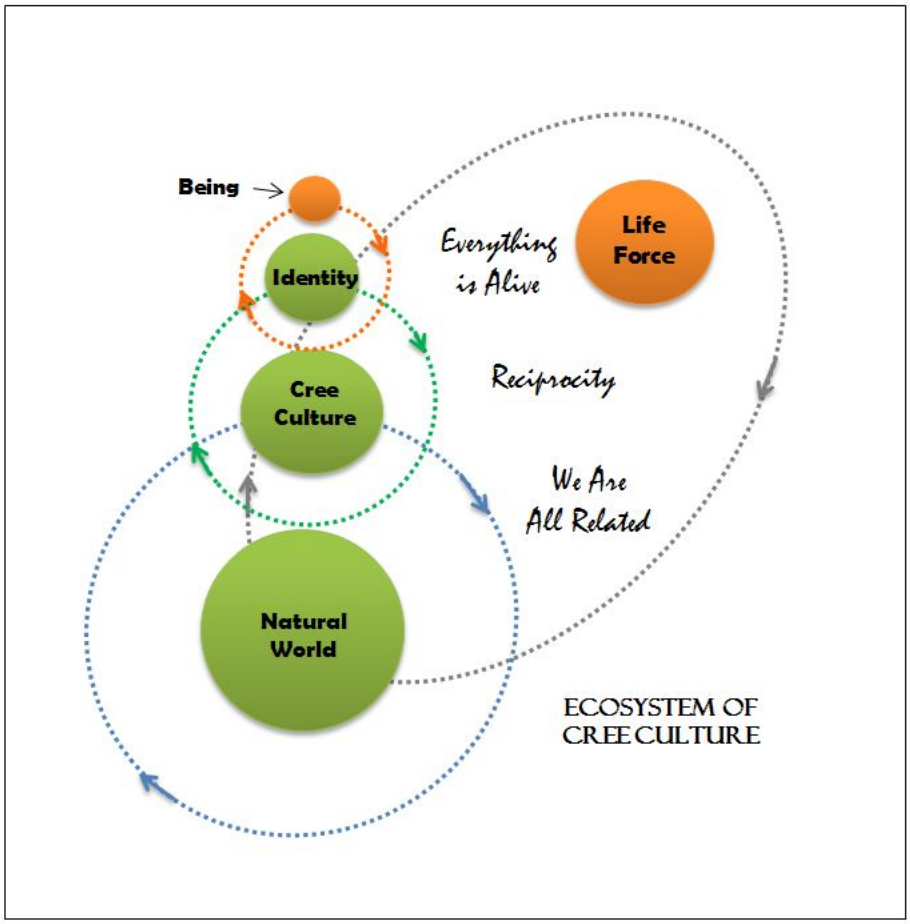

Figure 10: Ecosystem of Cree Culture

As human beings and a part of the natural world, we are elements in this ecosystem, and any force that we exert within the system creates a reaction of equal force in response. Under the physical classification of natural phenomena, we form a species of beings. Because we are also social beings, we have systems of social organization based on criteria such as geographic

location, genetic makeup, social affiliation, and numerous sub-categories and classifications. These groups function together as a system, and their interactions with their physical and social environments create an ecosystem: that is, a *social ecosystem* of forces that impact all systems within the ecosystem and the ecosystem itself. This is an example of *synergy*, in that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It is our relationships—how we relate to each other and to all other aspects of the natural world—that create forces which impact both of our environments: our social ecosystem as human beings and the natural ecosystem of the cosmos. The foundations of our social and physical ecosystems are how we relate to all other elements within them. This explains the second natural law, *we are all related* (Joe, p. 83).

Cree culture is a system functioning within both the greater human social ecosystem and within the natural ecosystem. It is a system because it consists of interacting and interdependent organisms functioning together as a unified whole. The organisms that make up Cree culture are not, however, confined to human beings. They include everything within the social and natural worlds unified by a common purpose and orientation: to sustain life and reproduce. It is also an ecosystem in itself because of the synergy created when its elements and their systems interact with their social/physical environments. Cree culture is greater than the sum of its parts because of the dynamic nature of the flow of energy created by these relationships; a force that acts and reacts to other forces within the system in ways that impact all the other elements. The single unifying purpose of Cree culture is to provide a means by which people can function in concert with and according to nature and natural laws; that is, to relate to everything within the ecosystem in ways that maintain balance and equilibrium between the various forces contained within it (Joe, p. 16). Figure 12 illustrates the interactions and relationships between the Life Force at the centre of all existence, the natural world, and Cree culture.

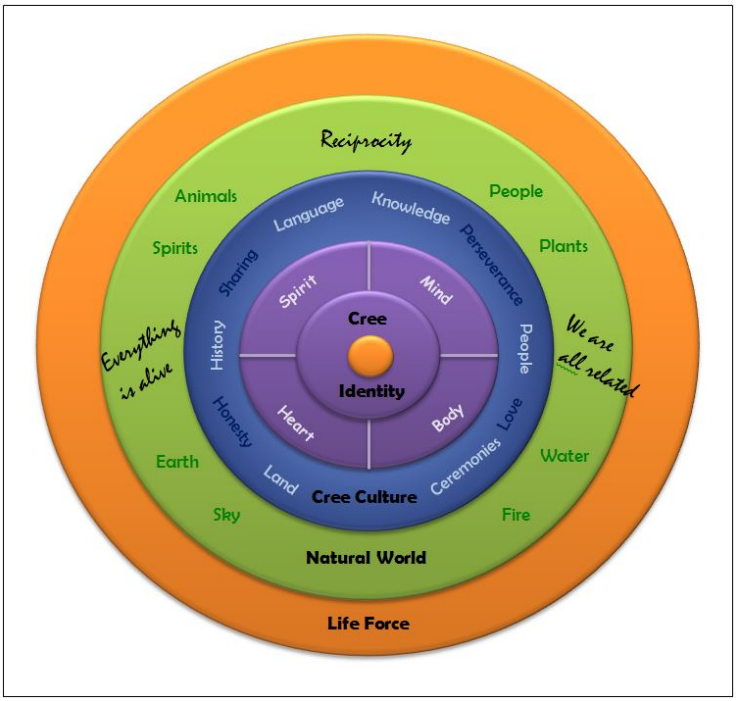

Figure 11: Nested View of Cultural Ecosystem

Balance in a system results when interacting elements apply forces equal to the magnitude of their opposing forces. Balance is the result of give and take in equal measures, or *reciprocity*. Because we (all Earthly and spiritual elements and beings) are all alive—that is, connected to the Great Spirit as the source of life—we are also all related through those same primal connections: "The Great Spirit in this context is the Source of universality and unity, that within which individuals in their diversity upon the earth find their reciprocal linkage" (Joe, p. 14). As living, relating, physical and spiritual entities within the same ecosystem as all other living, relating, physical and spiritual entities, our interactions are shaped by forces of "reciprocal allurement and attraction" (Joe, p. 48). Our relationality is honoured and maintained when we interact with other elements of the ecosystem according to the principle or of *reciprocity*. Our relatedness to all other living aspects of the cosmos "connotes myriad inter-acting and interdependent ecosystems, processes of multi-dimensional mutualities, of

connections, and reciprocities" (pp. 225-226). *Maintaining balance through reciprocity* applies to both the natural and social ecosystems we inhabit and is the third natural law governing the ecosystem of Cree culture.

Cree culture is modelled on the structure and function of the natural order. It is the template and the milieu for Cree identity development. Culture grows and reproduces itself through the development and expression of Cree identity. As such, identity is both the product and the genesis of Cree culture and therefore plays an integral role in maintaining the cultural ecosystem. As Cree people learn about who they are, what their purpose is, and how to fulfill that purpose in Cree ways, their participation in Cree culture is, in accordance with natural law, governed by reciprocity. Cree culture is the critical connection between individuals and the natural world. It functions as moderator, translator, and liaison between people, nature, and the energy source of life. Developing and expressing your identity as a Cree person is how you participate in Cree culture. Your identity is the pattern for how you are to *be* in the world. Your *being* revolves around who you are: your identity.

While Figure 11 showed the interactions between the systems of the natural world, culture, identity, being, and the Life Force, in the ecosystem of Cree culture, Figure 12 depicted the relationships between these elements in another way. Here they were nested within each other to illustrate how being Cree is located at the centre of life surrounded by Cree identity, which is embedded in Cree culture, which is modelled on and part of the natural world or cosmos, which is subject to the laws of the ecosystem created by the Life Force: everything is alive, we are all related, and balance through reciprocity governs our interactions. Developing as a Cree person requires being in relationship with your roots—people, ceremonies, history, knowledge, language, and your land—through all four aspects of your being, within the

ecosystem of Cree culture, which includes the natural world and the Life Force. How you relate to the world is an expression of your Cree identity. Cree identity expression is both a product and an integral element of its cultural ecosystem.

Just as the tree knows its essence, humans also inherit this knowledge of themselves from their ancestors but they cannot become what they are without being rooted in the proper medium in order to develop under appropriate environmental conditions. For identity, culture is that medium. Culture refers to the system of identity as a whole as well as to each of its elements: culture is identity; culture is identity development; culture is the ecosystem of identity; and culture is identity expression. Culture creates identity and identity, in turn, recreates culture. Joe defined culture as comprising "differentiated, characteristic behaviours, that is, ways of doing, relating, perceiving, and thinking" (p. 37).

Culture, then, includes ontological, sociological, axiological, and epistemological tenets—"a total 'way of life'" (p. 161)—that is meant to guide all aspects of human being. Identity is the manifestation of a culture in its people, individually and collectively, which requires both individual and collective understanding of that culture. Leona stated that it is in individuals learning about culture in deep and meaningful ways together that builds community. Shared experiences are central to notions of community and culture. It is this sense of community, being part of a collective consciousness, the "mind of the people—the meanings deriving from tradition, from shared political, social, and economic circumstance" (Joe, p. 150), that creates the sense that "We all go ahead together" (ibid) as one people.

Relationships within the ecosystem: Defining the good life. The essential element of understanding and experiencing one's primal connection to the cosmos is direct knowing through

spiritual experience. Joe referred to this as "a sense-rooted thinking that knows the world as a spiritual reality" (p. 107). He explained that *knowing* is a spiritual experience:

> He who "knows" experiences a spiritual nature in the perceived world. Reality is experienced by entering deeply into the inner being of the mind, not by attempting to break through the outer world to a beyond. This positions the Native person in "communion," within the living reality of all things. His "communion" is his experience of the ideas within, concentric with reality without. Thus, to "know," to "cognize," is experiential, direct knowing. (ibid)

Joe related Fox's description of this *knowing*: "the essence of the mystical experience is the way we are altered to see everything from its life-filled axis, to feel the mysteries of life as they are present within and around us" (cited in Couture, 2013, p. 91). Joe demonstrated clearly that Fox's perspective aligns with Cree epistemology and ontology by following the previous quotation with the declaration, "*That's Indian!"* (ibid). In this way of knowing, "Elders and Tradition are primal givens. Our perceptions and grasp of the first principles of this traditional way of knowing can shape our response to twentieth-century realities. Importantly, this knowledge elicits an ethical attitude in response" (p. 164) by maintaining a "right" vision and adhering to a "right" way (ibid). This is how traditional understanding and being remain relevant in the present context.

Developing and maintaining a right vision and right way requires a response from within: "an upholding and embracing cultural, philosophical, spiritual, and mythical dynamic" (p. 215), characteristic of Elders and other knowledge holders, whose "mind space is one that carries forward an Ancient Story and experience of the world carried down through the eons. They have discovered and knowingly grounded themselves in that Story, aware that it is one in which all

humans can find themselves" (pp. 215-216). Being/becoming part of this Story of holism and personalism "is rooted in a relationship with Father Sky, the cosmos, and with Mother Earth, the land" (p. 84); a personalized and personal relationship based on trust and respect, which result from "a direct and sustained experience of the oneness of all reality, of the livingness of the land" (ibid). This posture of being/becoming "requires trust of self and others, a non-manipulative relatedness, and a sense of oneness with all dimensions of the environment—components that, without exception, are experienced and perceived as possessing a life energy of their own" (pp. 177-178). Fundamental to this way of life is to understand that, as human beings, we are "subject to relationships" (p. 178) and, like other ecosystems, both we and our relationships "exist in a dynamic process of being/becoming" (ibid). Being/becoming in relationship captures the complex nature of identity and its dynamic relationship to culture.

Relationships, as in both *relating to* and *being related* as family, are what make Cree culture an ecosystem and they are therefore central to Cree being/becoming through identity expression. Joe stated that "being in relationships is the manifest spiritual ground of Native being" because "nothing exists in isolation; everything is relative to every other being or thing" (p. 105). It is "a world of persons in relationship, and not of perceiving egos and objects, a relationality not of detached, juxtaposed persons but of kin" (p. 52). Relationships extend beyond humanity as well to incorporate the Earth, the Cosmos, and all that is contained within them, based on mutuality:

> Mutuality of relationship means "knowing" the larger community of life as the primary referent in terms of reality and value, as primary economic reality, primary educator, primary governance, primary healer, primary presence of the sacred, and primary moral value. Thus, as Thomas Berry states, all species are granted "their habitat, their freedom,

> and their range of life expression." (Joe, p. 53)

The "Original People" understand the rights of other beings to exist unmolested and the importance of reciprocity in all of their relationships: "They know the process of mutuality and what can be derived from relationships, together with what must be given or returned to relationships" (ibid). Relational reciprocity applies not to just human relationships but also includes relating and being related to all existence.

Being in right relationships in a Cree way of life extends beyond the human social realm. It encompasses the entire cosmos and requires a form of seeing beyond the physical or social realities of existence. It is a "habit to be fully alive in the present, without fear of self and others, non-compulsively and non-addictively in full relationship to all that is—in relationship with the "is"-ness of a self-organizing ecology, a cosmic community of "all my relations" (Joe, p. 48). The natural world, which in Cree thinking extends to the Cosmos, is both our community as well as the source of our existence. Joe believed that Elders would agree with Berry's conceptualization of the paradox inherent in our relationship with the natural world:

> The natural world is subject as well as object. The natural world is the maternal source of our being as earthlings and the life-giving nourishment of our physical, emotional, aesthetic, moral, and religious existence. The natural world is the larger sacred community to which we belong. To be alienated from this community is to become destitute in all that makes us human. To damage this community is to diminish our own existence. (cited in Couture, 2013, p. 54)

Avoiding alienation from and damage to our cosmic community involves trust, respect, and balance.

Joe contended that the relationship between the individual and Nature must be personal,

"essentially one of trust and respect deriving from a direct and sustained experience of the "one-ness" of all reality, of the aliveness of the Land" (p. 69). Living a "good life" is being in balance with the Earth (p. 46). It requires internal balance and maturity based on both our analytical and intuitive abilities: "The analytical approach by itself is incomplete, 'half-brained.' It needs to be complemented by the intuitive faculty. Both are needed: the head and the heart" (p. 73). This way of being in the world is the result of direct knowing, of "consciously experienced process" (p. 105) rather than being based on an authoritative assertion of its truth, a point that distinguishes it from a belief: "This personal-experience-within-a-community-of-beings-and-cosmos, subtle and elusive in quality, is not the same as the concept of 'belief,' for it does not derive from a declarative authority" (ibid). Consequently, to fall out of balance with the natural world is to be in the *wrong* as in going against the natural order rather than *wrong* as in against the laws of a belief system. It causes a state of "self-consciousness, which causes a sense of shame, which is not entirely identical to Western guilt" (ibid). This imbalance leads to dis-ease, a precursor to illness and dysfunction.

Developing and expressing your identity as a Cree person is what it means to be Cree. Through processes of being and becoming, identity develops within and simultaneously creates a cultural ecosystem that nurtures and fosters the growth and development of Cree identity. Elders are examples of the high human development that results from being immersed in a cultural ecosystem as your identity develops. The cultural ecosystem of Cree identity is defined by the relationships that exist within it and with the natural environment in which it exists, both of which are governed by the laws of nature.

Conclusion

The metaphor of the tree, its roots, and its ecosystem to represent what Cree identity is

and how it develops, functions, and reproduces itself provides a framework for understanding the elements of Cree identity and how they must interact for its natural development. Identity is intrinsically connected to and encoded in our physical/mental/emotional/spiritual being. We are born with identity inherited from our parents and ancestors. In order for identity to develop, it must be connected to its roots, which are its people, history, ceremonies, knowledge, language, and land. These six roots comprise both identity and culture in a reciprocal, reflexive relationship with each other, providing a course of human development that is governed by three natural laws: 1) everything is alive; 2) everything is related; and 3) balance is achieved through reciprocal cosmic relationality.

The purpose of Cree identity is threefold. First, it locates the individual as a member of a people, providing a fertile ground for development as a human being. Identity's second function is to protect the individual on her journey of development by connecting her to and through the roots of her culture, thereby establishing individual belonging with group recognition. The third and perhaps ultimate purpose of Cree identity is to provide guidance for the individual in fulfilling his human journey through the Good Life—a balanced existence within the Cosmos based on the three laws of nature.

Cree identity develops within the ecosystem of Cree culture. The ecosystem is created by the reflexive and reciprocal relationships between individual identity (the tree) and collective culture (the forest) and within the relations of all physical and spiritual existence (the natural world). Ceremonies are an essential aspect of identity development because they integrate the four aspects of being, the entire root system of identity, and everything within the Cosmos into a human experience, making everything accessible and knowable to the individual and the community. Being immersed in Cree community is also vital to identity development. As all

members of the community develop and express their Cree identity through the stages of development, they recreate the ecosystem of culture and serve as examples, supports, and guides for others. The people whom we call Elders today are individuals who have been able to develop their Cree identity in these ways, the expression of which becomes the ecosystem for identity development in other individuals.

Identity expression is determined individually, collectively, and naturally because of the reflexive relationship between individual and community, identity and culture, and culture and the natural world. The person "is experienced and perceived as unique, a being-becoming-in-community-in-a-place-in-the-world, unfolding in a process of growth leading to a Way of Life" (Joe, p. 253). This way of life is an individualized path which "roots one in an essential 'core' reality, one that plays out and along as an organizing principle, an enabler of a 'good life.' As the Old People say, it is a Path to Wisdom" (ibid). Communal identity expression creates the experiences of community that shape individual identity development.

An individual who is unable to develop her Cree identity experiences internal alienation from herself and external alienation from her community (the social and natural world), creating an imbalance between her and the natural order. When entire communities are unable to develop or express their identity, the ecosystem becomes unbalanced and unsustainable on a large scale. As the habitat for identity fragments and shrinks, identity can only develop in small pockets where there is enough expression to maintain balance and sustain the ecosystem in order to nurture future generations of development. For both the individual and the community, falling out of balance with the natural world and its laws is unnatural, the consequences of which are self-consciousness and dis-ease, precursors to mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual dysfunction. The next chapter makes evident the ways in which Aboriginal identity has been

systematically attacked and details the impacts this assault on identity has on the lives of Aboriginal people.

Chapter 5

Colonial Assault of Aboriginal Identity

What happened to weaken Aboriginal identity and what differences has that made for Aboriginal people in Canada? This chapter presents my understanding of the answers to these questions based on what the participants shared. It is organized into 3 sections. The first section describes what happened to Aboriginal identity to weaken it and make it the object of education policy. It demonstrates that Aboriginal identity was invaded and attacked by Europeans as part of their agenda to colonize North America. Europeans justified their systematic assault of Aboriginal identity by positioning it as inferior to European identity and therefore undesirable. Cultural differences were recast as human deficiencies, a perspective that became the justification for aggressive assimilation policies aimed at eradicating Aboriginal cultures and identity. This illusion of superiority has evolved into Canadian ethnocentrism as power functions to produce further evidence of its reality. The direct effects of this assault have naturally been major distortions to how Aboriginal people understand and value their identity. This has resulted in identity under-development problems including identity diffusion, acculturation stress, and severe trauma.

The second section explains how Aboriginal people's identity expression has been affected as a result of the prolonged assault. Disruptions to identity development for Aboriginal people have led to dysfunctional identity expression and dis-ease in individuals and communities. Identity stress, trauma, and dysfunction create a cycle of survival accommodations that re-create stressors, re-traumatize individuals, and reproduce dysfunctional expression in succeeding generations. Impaired identity development has left Aboriginal people vulnerable to ascribing to false images of Aboriginal identity or rejecting their identity altogether as alien and

worthless in the context of Canada. In the final section of this chapter, I use the identity tree metaphor to illustrate and explain my understanding of the effects of colonization on Aboriginal identity development and expression.

Identity Invasion and Assault

Understanding what happened to Aboriginal identity begins with understanding the ideology on which colonization in North America was founded. Joe used the term *invasion* to characterize the arrival of European Peoples in North America that culminated in their possession and control of the continent and the dispossession of its Indigenous Peoples. Invasion also aptly describes how the basic principles of colonization impacted Aboriginal identity by casting it as inferior and of no value to a colonial society. Invading the land required first invading Aboriginal identity, the initial step of which was to establish the religious and cultural inferiority of Indigenous Peoples by reclassifying differing cultural practices as evidence of less evolved human development.

Cultural Differences as Human Deficiencies

An important theme that emerged from the participants' perspectives on Aboriginal identity development and Canadian education was that Aboriginal Peoples and cultures have been devalued through the processes of colonization. The *Indian* that evolved out of the European imperial imagination in the 15th century, as described in the literature review, bore little resemblance to the North American Peoples who were assigned this label but it served colonization by positioning Indigenous people as culturally inferior to and less human than Western Europeans. This is the essential belief underlying Eurocentrism and cognitive imperialism. Rather than viewing all Peoples as having intrinsic value as fellow human beings, Europeans saw Indigenous North Americans as less human than themselves and therefore

unworthy of any form of sovereignty over themselves or their lands. This was the ideology that supported and justified the European invasions of the Americas.

The first Europeans in North America brought these beliefs about Indigenous inferiority with them, which created fundamental problems in how they perceived North Americans. This perception of Indigenous Peoples as subhuman, pagan, uncivilized, and therefore inferior beings lay the foundation on which nations like Canada and the United States were built and has therefore defined all aspects of the subjugation of North America's Peoples. Joe explained that this religious/cultural prejudice prevented most Europeans from seeing Indigenous Peoples in any other way: "Starting with the Puritans, the non-Indian has rarely, if ever, 'seen' the Indian. The Puritans, for example, never conceived of the Indian in the least save as an unformed Puritan" (p. 9). As non-Christians, Aboriginal Peoples' expressions of their identities—their ways of being—were considered inferior to Euro-Christian identity expression in all ways and they were in need of religious salvation and cultural civilization, humanizing gifts that only Christian tutelage and European governance could provide.

Regardless of how or why Christian Europeans came to believe that only they were fully evolved human beings, the consequences of that premise on Indigenous Peoples have been devastating. As Joe stated, despite the "immorality of such a perception, the inhumanity, the brutalizing effect on Indian minds" (p. 10), Christians never suspected themselves of such wrongdoing. The dogged persistence of this inability to see this fundamental perception of relative or exclusive human value as the problem underlying Indigenous experience makes it one of the most persistently damaging elements of Canadian society on Aboriginal identity.

Through the lens of cognitive imperialism, Europeans saw Indigenous knowledge systems and cultures as primitive forms of human development compared to their own: "Western

culture tends to regard intuitive knowledge as ‘primitive’ and therefore as unsophisticated and less ‘valuable’ than so-called objective modes of knowing” (Joe, pp. 110-111). Joe explained that Indigenous spiritual practices have been condemned as pagan, animistic, and evil, and Indigenous knowledge systems and practices as unevolved. He clarified that the characteristic Western reliance on *rationalism*, *objectivity*, *mastery*, and *having* are actually obstacles to learning Indigenous ways of knowing and being such as *intuition*, *relating*, and *doing* in the process of *being/becoming* oneself. Thus, the goals of human *being* are very different in Aboriginal cultures than in Western societies.

Joe outlined the differences between the Western concept of individual purpose and the Aboriginal “concept of being that is primarily concerned with the process of an individual’s being and becoming a unique person, responsible for his or her own life and actions in the context of significant group situations” (p. 178). Joe characterized a Western approach to living as an individual focus on having, manipulating, and objectifying, and as a stark contrast to the concept of *being/becoming*. The only aspects of Aboriginal cultures that have any value in Canadian society are those “selected aspects of Native cultures” (p. 178), primarily “aesthetic and folkloric elements" (ibid) that are reified and incorporated into the “national heritage” (ibid) of the country. The proliferation of Canadian gift shops selling dreamcatchers, *inuksuit*, soapstone and cedar carvings, moccasins, model canoes, and other assorted reifications of Indigenous cultural products and knowledge are evidence of this practice.

The underlying motivation for continuing to elevate Canadian identity above Aboriginal identity stems from what Joe called “a Canadian ethnocentrism” (p. 181). He characterized it as “a kind of cultural addiction that holds tenaciously to its ideas about knowing and knowledge and about the disadvantaged, education, segregation, ethnicity, and Native ‘problems’” (ibid).

The pervasiveness of Canadian ethnocentrism determines the parameters of the experiences Aboriginal people can have in Canadian society:

> This state of mind steadfastly prizes middle-class individualism, private ownership of property, aggressive "getting ahead," and an attitude of competitiveness and engenders a patronizing, colonizing, custodial mentality towards Natives, especially in the case of those in positions of power (for example, teachers, missionaries, bureaucrats, guards, business and industrial development people). The dominant system is hierarchical, perennially and unilaterally imposing decisions, whereas traditional Native systems are based on consensual decision making and respect for the individual. (ibid)

This illusion of superiority requires maintenance and that is where the power to define what is knowable comes into play in Canadian education. This is the realm of educational policy.

Leona believed that the education system is ultimately designed to "just do what it normally does" (Leona) by reproducing the same attitudes through the same processes and with the same information. She characterized curriculum changes like infusion as minor tweaks that do not change the structures themselves. Changing what Canadian society knows about Aboriginal Peoples and the damage it has inflicted in its pursuit to exist would be a major shift that "would really shake up Canadian society. Really. If they have that information, that knowledge" (Leona). Instead, the structures endeavour to "keep it where it's at, keep people comfortable" (Leona).

For Cora, maintaining the status quo means maintaining the illusion of Indigenous inferiority: "For us the valuing/devaluing, the efforts of the system are to keep us there, always valuing/devaluing ourselves. Fighting them is fighting the devaluing, but as long as we are valuing/devaluing, we are caught in that trap" (Cora). We are fighting against a system that

perhaps *cannot* value Aboriginal identity because to do so would undermine the very premise of Canadian existence. It would require accepting its history as it happened, which would deliver a lethal blow to the Canadian story of peaceful settlement, coexistence, and paternal benevolence toward Indigenous Peoples. As Cora stated, "the system wants to survive just as much as we want to survive as People" (Cora). Schools, as one of the main institutional structures of Canadian society, ensure the survival, maintenance, and perpetuation of the official narrative of Canada's past and present.

Identity Diffusion, Stress, and Trauma

The distinctions between Aboriginal identity and the Canadian ideal offer what Joe considered points of entry into understanding the complexities of Aboriginal behaviour. He compared Canadian and Aboriginal perspectives on the nature of identity, identifying three areas of difference that contribute to the stress on Aboriginal peoples' identity: concepts of self in Aboriginal and Western cultures, acculturation stress in subordinate cultural groups, and trauma both as a symptom of acculturation stress and as a source of further traumatization. The results of this stress and trauma are

> diffused identity issues such as a developmentally under-structured self, in a culturally determined socio-centric context—for what is traumatized is the process of development of relationships with self and self-objects, that is, others (family, community, Nation), Nature, and the Cosmos. (Joe, p. 245)

Diffused identity refers specifically to under-development of identity and the consequent difficulties in relating to the world for the individual.

Joe posited that self-concept boundaries can vary across cultures, supporting this contention by contrasting Western and Aboriginal concepts of self. The Western view sees the

individual as an autonomous solitary identity with exclusive responsibility for self (p. 229). The two fundamental qualities the individual requires are internal control and personal responsibility (ibid). In contrast, Aboriginal concepts see the individual as "an 'embedded, enfolded, socio-centric self'" (ibid) where the "interactive boundaries between self and other persons in an extended family, in clans, and in communities provide context and meaning" (p. 230). These interactions are what create the cultural ecosystem in which the self develops. Figure 12 represented this concept with individual *being* nested within layers of identity, culture, Nature, and the Life Force.

What has happened to this embedded self as a result of colonization is that it has developed "a relentless focus on self as alien, disquieting, undesirable, or unnecessary" (p. 229) to Canadian society. This alienation has led to what Joe termed "confused identity development" (ibid), aspects of which include: "low self-esteem, rage, hatred, negative identification, socio-cultural and economic conditions, racial bias, absence of positive role models, and the need to be bicultural" (ibid). These elements of confused identity development in Aboriginal people exacerbate the normal developmental trauma associated with maturation stages. They are also factors in the development of survival accommodations such as "hiding one's thoughts and feelings, becoming extra-sensitive to the non-verbal cues of others, revealing one's 'true self' only to fellow Natives and a 'dissociated self' to meet the expectations of prejudiced non-Natives" (p. 229).

Aboriginal family structure has to be considered as a part of self-concept because of the permeability of the boundaries between the individual and the extended family and community. Joe indicated that contemporary research across Aboriginal cultures demonstrated the resiliency and durability of the traditional Aboriginal family structure "despite prolonged and complex

post-Contact experiences, manifest in the encompassing and debilitating effects of socio-political, educational, and economic stresses" (pp. 229-230). Again, the boundaries of family are permeable in that the family unit embraces three or more generations vertically and relatives at least twice-removed horizontally, as well as formally and informally adopted members (p. 230). This inclusiveness, as Joe described it, extends *belonging* and *relationship* far beyond the Euro-Canadian nuclear family and is therefore an integral element of the cultural ecosystem of identity development.

The expression of self for Aboriginal people has been altered by Post-Contact conflict and crisis and has manifest itself into what some research has determined are "three broad categories of present-day identity adaptations: traditional, bicultural, and assimilated" (ibid). On one end of the spectrum, traditional families primarily follow culturally-defined models of living while assimilated families are often "engaged in discovery and/or reclaiming roots and heritage to arrive at a more meaningful and authentic culture-based lifestyle" (ibid). Somewhere in the middle, bicultural families are those that have synthesized aspects of both Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian cultural values and practices.

Bicultural identity (ibid) is another manifestation of colonial trauma and subsequent adaptation in self-expression in the individual as a result of the "effort to survive under a directing society" (ibid). Couture described the bicultural identity as "an existential double-bind in which Native peoples are enmeshed [which] often results in a distorted, stigmatized identity that can and does make for an altered perception of reality" (ibid). Characteristic of the adoption of a bicultural identity is the internalization of "systems of meaning in such a way as to justify stereotypical attributions (for example, of innate badness, of being a 'dumb, lazy, drunken Indian')" (pp. 230-31). The logic these stereotypes invoke is something like *I am [lazy, stupid,*

drunk] because I am an Indian. As mentioned earlier, fulfilling stereotypes can also garner societal approval as acceptable forms of identity expression, such as *I am [wiser about the environment, spiritual, generous, communitarian, artistic, stoic, etcetera] because I am an Indian*. What they have in common is that they are defined not by Aboriginal cultural perspectives of self but by a Euro-Canadian construction of what it means to be Aboriginal.

Aboriginal identity was the target of a centuries-long campaign to first suppress and then supplant it with a Canadian version. By invading the systems, processes, and relationships that develop Aboriginal identity, Canadian policy has also invaded identity. The most common and pervasive avenue of this assault has been through schooling. Public education has taken the place of natural identity development for most Aboriginal people, leading to conflated concepts of identity and stereotypical constructs in place of identity expression. The diffused identity that has developed has resulted in generations of individuals and communities that are dominated by social problems as dysfunction takes hold.

Dysfunctional Expression and Dis-ease

I have chosen to use the word *dysfunction* to refer to the full complex of attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and circumstances of Aboriginal people that are the result of identity diffusion. This includes myriad issues related to poverty, prejudice, discrimination, and cultural disruption. The definition I am applying is *impaired or abnormal functioning* (Merriam-Webster, 2017) because I think it best describes the extensive fallout of the sustained assault on Aboriginal identity that plagues Aboriginal people's lives. The damage that Aboriginal identity has sustained has resulted in impaired identity development which, in turn, has left Aboriginal people without a roadmap for living. Difficulty in life—impaired functioning—is a natural result.

Underlying all of these issues is a fundamental identity problem. Joe described the

problem as “the savaged and degraded soil of the Native psyche” (p. 169). He identified some of the effects of this degradation, noting that “the sense of male and female personhood, styles of interpersonal relating, and child-rearing practices are markedly altered by schooling and decades of welfare in virtually all Aboriginal communities” (ibid). It is important to understand that, “at the deepest levels, one needs to perceive the degree and extent of consequent trauma and dysfunction” (ibid) while traditional identity development begins to take its place. He considered factors “such as concepts of self, of acculturation, and of trauma, as interacting sub-processes that bear on virtually all Aboriginal behaviour” (p. 228) and points of entry into understanding the “impressive complexities of present-day Aboriginal living” (p. 229). In his summation of the dysfunction in Aboriginal people’s lives and communities, Joe emphasized both the universality of the experience of colonization among Aboriginal people and the extent of its consequences:

> There is a common Aboriginal perception, a shared experience of pervasive, coercive control, at once political, economic, and psychological, that is imposed onto Aboriginal culture from without and that manifests itself in impoverished rural communities, reserve life, residential schools, many incarcerations, violent family life, justice systems, and federal and provincial systems of control. All are contributing factors to the contradictions between Natives’ reality and the Canadian legal definitions of that same reality. As a result, Natives have commonly found themselves isolated and invisible. The effects of this historical process have been extreme and are observable in many individual and community instances. (p. 226)

He cautioned that “there is no room for attributing blame to Aboriginal persons and communities, for their dysfunction clearly is not endemic to traditional culture” (p. 227). Instead, Joe attributed it to the historical and contemporary victimization of Aboriginal Peoples, a stance

"predicated upon decades of oppressive colonial control and damaging manipulations, compounded by overt and covert systemic racism" (p. 227).

The identity problem for Aboriginal people is twofold. The first problem is that we have been prevented from developing our identities in the ecosystems designed for their optimal development and expression. This under-development has left people more vulnerable to seeking identity through valuation because they do not know that their worth is inherent in their existence. A second and closely related problem is that the ideal identity is that of the dominant culture. It is Euro-Canadian identity that is nurtured and developed through all forms of societal media and institutions, particularly in schools. From speaking English or French and learning about human evolution to having the school calendar scheduled around Christian holidays and being ruled by the clock, school is an alien cultural environment for Aboriginal people. Canadian society is also hostile because it perceives itself as the ideal to which Aboriginal people should conform, if not willingly adopt. It insists that Birch trees should want to be the best Spruce trees they can be. This distorted image of what Aboriginal identity should be and how it should express itself has manifest in various degrees of dysfunctional living among individuals and communities.

Manifestations of stress-induced dysfunction. One of the difficulties with presenting the range of dysfunction that has resulted from persistent identity stress is the temptation to see them all fully manifest in the individual. It is important to emphasize that there are a complete range and variety of responses among Aboriginal people to the sustained stresses on Aboriginal identity. This is not to say that these dysfunctional manifestations of diffused identity are not pervasive and debilitating. Rather, that they should not paint a monstrous stereotype by which all Aboriginal people are cast. Assuming a bicultural identity as a "modulation of self" (p. 231) can

lead to the individual both internalizing and producing "regressive feelings of rage and revenge fantasies, the full range of avoidance behaviours, violent acting out under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and physical and sexual abuse" (ibid). The consequence can be internal conflict, "a debased and an exalted self" (ibid), as the individual struggles to integrate and express two contradictory identities.

In any examination of the impacts of colonization on Aboriginal identity, it is also essential to understand that the effects are neither complete nor universal. Joe asserted that, while the stark reality is that the majority of Aboriginal people struggle as they "are daily bombarded by what can be referred to as inclusive and pervasive acculturation stresses" (ibid) on their identity, there have always been exceptions: "There has never been, at any time, a total absence of fully functioning Native persons, who have a healthy ability to cope with life events and to solve problems relating to survival, adaptation, and personal well-being" (ibid). This is evidence that an intact and naturally developed Aboriginal identity can and does protect itself against the onslaught of colonization.

Acculturation stress is the result of unrelenting pressure by a dominant culture on a minority group to conform to the norms and expectations of the majority group (p. 231). The degree or severity of the stress would correlate to the forms and extent of the pressure exerted. In the case of Aboriginal Peoples, the forms of pressure were legislated, militarized, and institutionalized over centuries, making the magnitude enormous. Acculturation stress under these prolonged unequal conditions is oppression, which is much different than the peer pressure that neighbouring independent peoples might exert on one another or than what immigrants feel when they willingly migrate to a new country. As Joe emphasized, acculturation can be and often is beneficial, even mutually so, when it occurs on consensual terms. It is the power of one group

over another to force acculturation that causes stress to identity and the behavioural patterns which develop as a result (p. 231). These patterns include high rates of homicide, suicide, family violence, and substance abuse, which exist alongside characteristic Aboriginal "value orientations such as time, relationship with the natural world, social relationships (consensus and collaterality), being/doing/becoming, non-interference as a way of being, and traditional family organization" (ibid). Acculturation stress over such a prolonged period has resulted in extensive trauma for Aboriginal people, both individually and communally, trauma that is reified in those communities through a self-perpetuating bipolar process characteristic of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Joe noted that "disempowerment and disconnection, the constitutive elements of post-traumatic stress disorder" (p. 232), are behaviours associated with trauma from the worst forms of acculturation stress.

The trauma and other effects associated with the "degradation of identity and relational life of the culturally different" (p. 233) impact both individual and communal identity because of the interdependent relationships between self and others in Aboriginal cultures. The impact to communal identity is critical to individual identity development:

> As a consequence of acculturation pressures, Aboriginal communities present, in many cases, a damaged collective self, which reverberates through the community and its component families, through to individual-in-family. What affects the structuring of the individual self, and what impinges on the systems of attachment and meaning that link the individual to family and community have importance. These factors include being alienated from and being alien to Anglo-Canadian culture and/or being alienated from Aboriginal culture. (ibid)

Joe referred to the fundamental importance of attachment and connection to personality

development, noting it these primary attachments—family, friendship, love, and community—that are all under assault. Factors that are central to a developing sense of self through these relationships are "a caretaker's benign use of power" (p. 235) and respect for the individual:

> Regard for individuality and dignity elicits feelings of being valued and respected, making for the development of self-esteem, self-reliance, and social competence within relationships and a sense of one's own separateness or autonomy within relationships, both individual and collective. (ibid)

The trauma to and resulting breakdown of the relationships fundamental to Aboriginal identity development and expression have had and continue to have compounding impacts on subsequent generations.

There are several manifestations of dysfunctional thoughts and behaviours that Joe presented under constructs used to assess Canadian inmates. He introduced what he called tentative thoughts on these constructs to discuss their manifestations in Aboriginal individuals. The categories of dysfunctional expression are: powerlessness/hopelessness; shame and doubt; self-injury and suicide; dangerousness and violence; anger; addiction; victims and victimization; religion-related behaviours; and anti-social behaviour. Each of these categories of dysfunction has its roots in survival responses to threats. What is difficult but, as Couture noted, may become possible is to "distinguish adaptive behaviours to a hostile environment, for example, from pathological defence structures" (p. 244). What happens instead is a social propensity to blame the victim by assuming an underlying pathology is at fault, which is rarely true (p. 240). Understanding acculturation impacts could aid in treatment because attempts to apply Western diagnostic constructs "often results at best in partial understandings and fragmented approaches to treatment" (p. 244). It could also negate the foundations of the tendency to blame Aboriginal

people for the damage colonization has wrought on identity and the inevitable outcomes of that devastation.

A fuller understanding of diffusion, acculturation stress, trauma, and responses to them could bring focus to the factors contributing to stymied identity development and dysfunctional identity expression underlying it all, as Figure 13 illustrates. These "diffused identity issues such as a developmentally under-structured self, in a culturally determined socio-centric context" (p. 245) plague individual and communal Aboriginal identity. What is traumatized is "the process of development of relationships with self and self-objects, that is, others (family, community, Nation), Nature, and the Cosmos" (ibid), resulting in impaired identity development, expression, and function. Identity development in childhood needs to occur in a safe and supporting context in order to develop those critical relationships and a sense of personal responsibility (p. 265).

Instead, children are learning a foreign culture without the protective factors of their own identity. Joe considered this disastrous: "The *greatest failure* is children learning a second culture without the involvement of their parents and family, causing significant impact on cognitive functioning, self-esteem, confidence, and social competence" (p. 291, emphasis in original). The states and behaviours described here are symptomatic of the deeper reality: "a shaky, weakened, shame-riddled identity" (p. 262) that, nevertheless, tenaciously struggles to survive in the face of great odds.

Dysfunctional identity expression is the outcome of a damaged concept of self as a result of diffusion, acculturation stress, and trauma. The universality of the colonization experience among Aboriginal people has created similar results to varying degrees in all Aboriginal communities. The complexities of living evident among Aboriginal people are in no way a reflection of Indigenous cultures. Rather, they are the result of an under-developed identity that

has left Aboriginal people vulnerable to the effects of a distorted self-concept that struggles to understand self-value in the face of social devaluation. Canadian identity continues to be elevated as a superior ideal with which to replace Aboriginal identity. This often creates an overpowering sense of yearning in Aboriginal people to overcome their Aboriginal identity and become Canadian, as elusive and unattainable a goal that may be, as a means of seeking relief from the alienation and hostility of Canadian society toward Aboriginal identity.

Identity dysfunction manifests in a variety of inter-related thought and behaviour patterns in response to acculturation stress from the dominant culture. Because aggressive assimilation

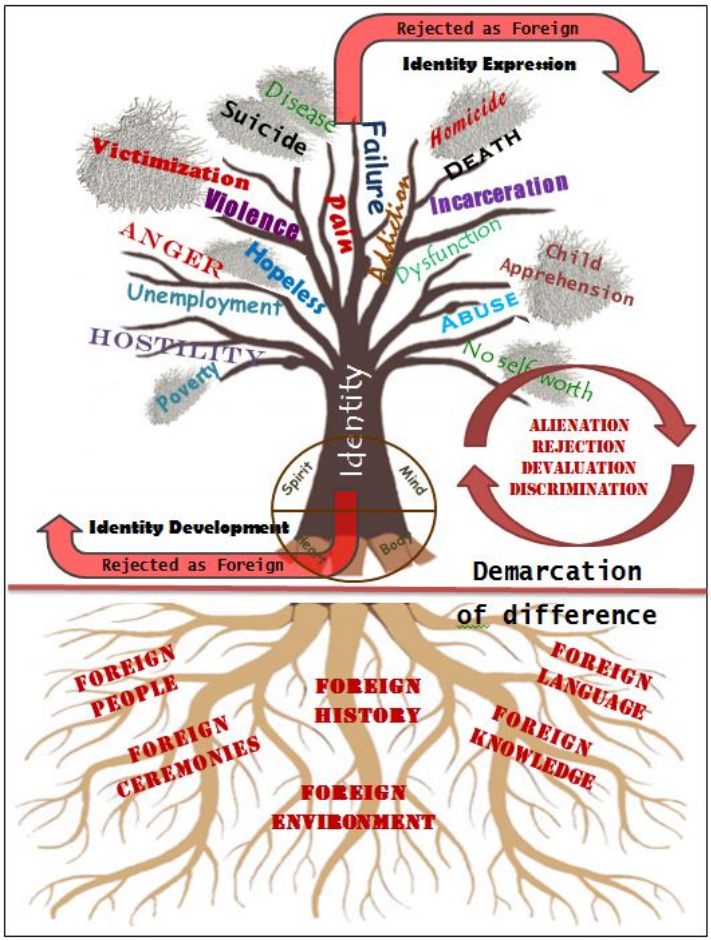

Figure 12: Diffused Identity and Dysfunction

was legislated, institutionalized, and enforced over generations, the extent of the damage is widespread. Some of the behavior patterns include high rates of homicide, suicide, violence, and addiction as individuals and communities struggle with disempowerment and disconnection from the roots of their identity. Children are left vulnerable and alone as they attempt to navigate through a foreign culture without the grounding, protection, or guidance of their identity to assist them.

Uprooted: Applying the Metaphor

In order to understand what happened to Aboriginal identity, it is helpful to go back to the Identity Tree in its full expression within its cultural ecosystem. Aboriginal identity was like a young sapling growing in the forest along with generations of trees just like itself. Under aggressive assimilation policies it was cut off from its roots, taken out of its natural environment, and placed into a foreign system where it was expected to attach itself to foreign roots and express foreign identity traits because its own natural expression was deemed inferior and undesirable. The new environment was hostile to Aboriginal identity because it was alien and dangerous. They were Birch trees that were now expected to look and function like Spruce trees under the premise that they would be better off for it. They were expected to do all of this based on a forced artificial relationship to foreign roots in a hostile, alien environment. As Cora explained, any individual or People undergoing these assaults on their identity would have been impacted in similar ways. Figure 14 provides a graphic representation of the first step of the process, removing Aboriginal identity from its ecosystem, and Figure 15 depicts step two, where identity is placed in a foreign environment. What the Identity Tree framework helped me to understand is how impossible a feat it is to trade in your identity for another one. No matter what you do to a Birch tree, it will never become a Spruce.

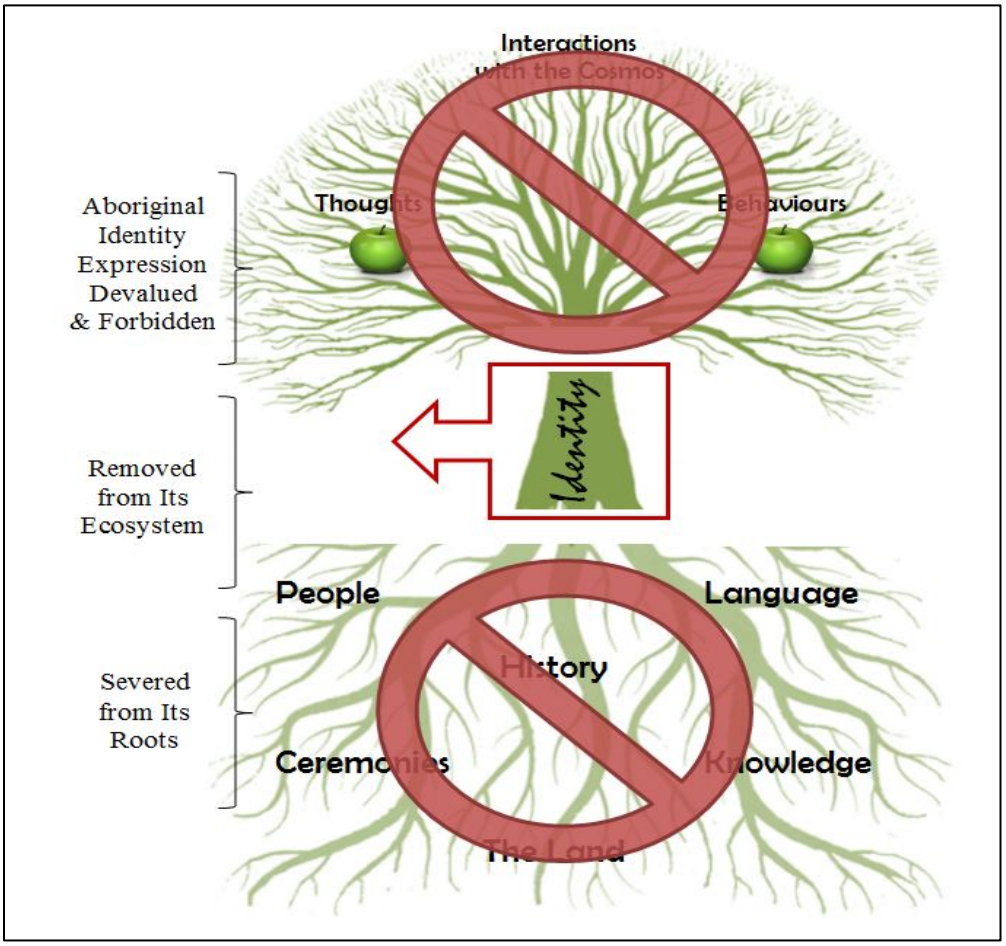

Figure 13: Identity Uprooted

A Birch tree is a Birch from the time it develops as a seed on the parent tree until it has fully decayed and returned to the soil in its maturity. At no point is it just a generic *tree* without any defining characteristics. Its identity was defined through its creation and nothing that you could do to it could make it into any other species of tree. One could transplant it to a new environment, try to graft new branches onto it from different tree species, or even call it by another name. None of these factors will change the fact that it is a Birch tree. It grows best in an environment that has maximum exposure to the sun and is often the first species to grow back after a forest fire, along with a host of other deciduous trees and other complimentary plants that require the same environment.

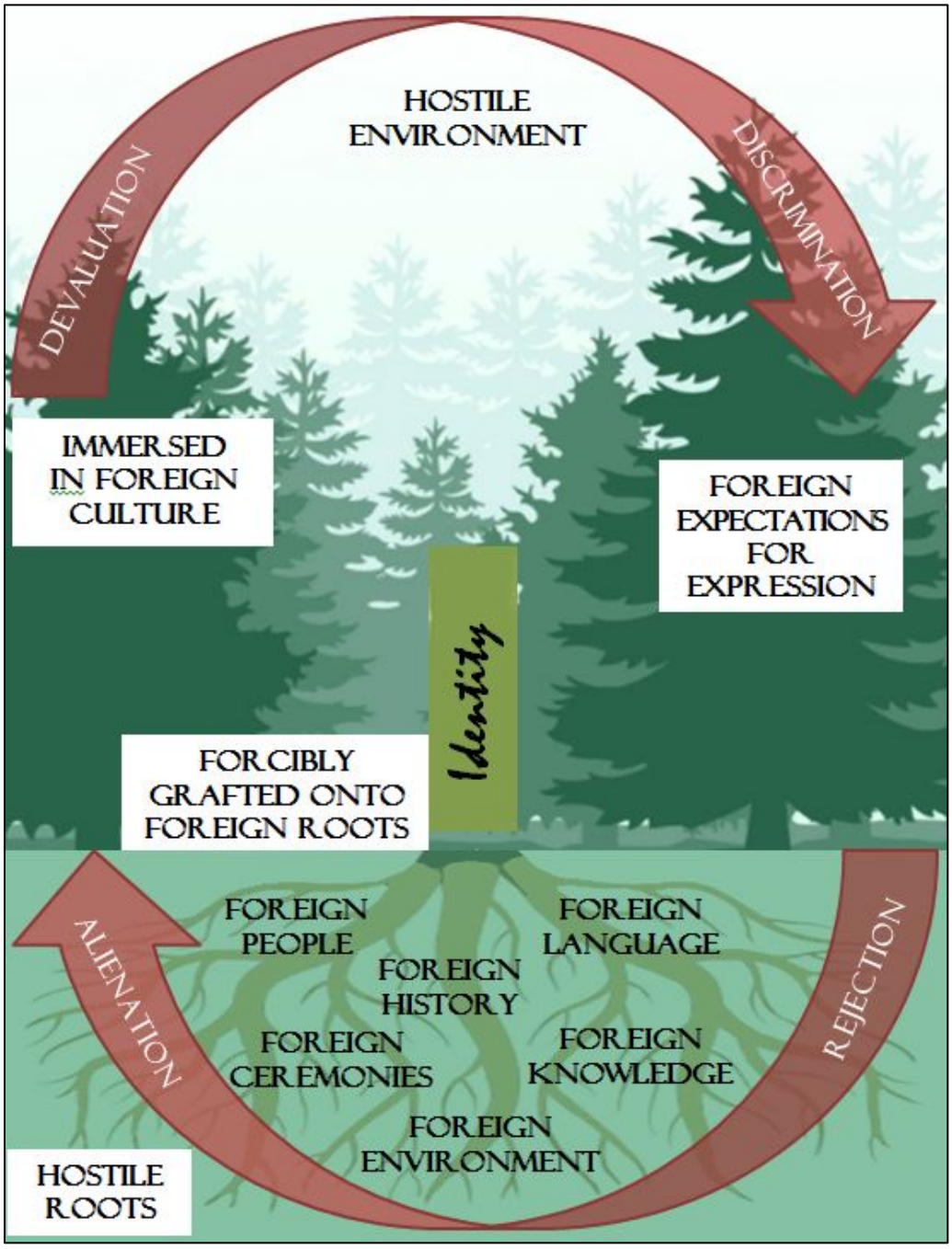

Figure 14: Immersed in Foreign Cultural System

When you look at a forest from above, you can see swaths of light green deciduous trees throughout the darker green of the coniferous trees. You will often also find sunny glades surrounded by or dotted with deciduous trees of various types where the evergreens have either been removed or have not grown tall enough to block the sun or spread widely enough to impact

the acidity of the soil. It is no coincidence that different types of trees require different conditions and therefore often grow alongside each other in a commonly appropriate environment with similar nutrients and conditions.

When the neighbourhood I live in was first developed, Weeping Birch trees were planted throughout the area. When you drive through the community today, all that is left are the remnants of a species whose natural habitat is a humid swamp where its roots are surrounded by water. The remains are at various stages of dying and some, like the one depicted in Figure 16, have been severely pruned. As any horticulturist knows, a plant requires a very specific set of conditions in order to develop, mature, and fulfill its purpose, and trying to re-create artificially what Nature has been doing forever is a tricky business. Without adequate knowledge of the proper conditions, nutrients, and expression of a plant, successfully getting it to grow is, at best, a game of chance.

Figure 15: Weeping Birch

What I have come to understand is that, in contrast to the notion that identity is fluid and ever changing, identity is static: we are who we are. What is fluid and always evolving is our understanding of that identity and how we express it in the world. Knowing who we are and the processes through which we come to know that are integral to identity developing into a healthy functioning expression of itself. Identity is damaged when these processes are removed and replaced with foreign roots and measured with foreign constructs of what identity is, what it should look like, and how it functions. When the foreign environment is also hostile to the alien identity, the damage is extensive, eventually becoming self-perpetuating as generation after generation suffers under the assault.

Chapter 6

Canadian Education, Teachers, and Aboriginal Identity

This chapter contains the participants' perspectives on the roles of Canadian education and teachers in Aboriginal identity development. The first section begins by tracing the relationship between education and Aboriginal identity as one grounded in a history of aggressive assimilation. Schooling was the primary weapon employed by Canada to destroy Aboriginal identity and Canadian identity was held up as the ideal. The participants explained that education is failing Aboriginal people by continuing to uphold an image of inferiority in place of Aboriginal identity and refusing to see its own complicity in the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. Schools do not offer hope to Aboriginal children because they were not designed to meet their needs. The education of Aboriginal people in Canada has been designed to serve the needs of Canadians instead. The inferior value that Canada assigned to Aboriginal identity through colonization continues to be the source of the problems that education creates for Aboriginal people today.

The second section discusses the impacts that Canadian teachers can have on Aboriginal identity development. In order to offer Aboriginal perspectives in their teaching, they first need to understand the history of Canada's colonization of Aboriginal people and how it affects Aboriginal experiences. They also need to learn about Aboriginal cultures by participating in cultural experiences and learning from Aboriginal people. This raises issues of appropriateness, the limitations of learning as an outsider, and the ability to create places within teacher education for this to occur. Other factors that the participants discussed regarding the role of teachers in identity development centred on issues of cultural incongruity between teachers and Aboriginal students. These included the degree of value that individual teachers place on Aboriginal people

and Aboriginal identity; the differences between the goals and developmental needs of Canadian identity and those of Aboriginal identity; and the roles of ceremony, Elders, and healers in healing Aboriginal identity.

The Relationship Between Education and Aboriginal Identity

The causes and effects of identity diffusion, acculturation stress, and trauma on Aboriginal identity, as explained in Chapter 5, are widespread and far-reaching, with multi-generational consequences for individuals, families, and communities. It is easy to see how Canada's aggressive assimilation policies and practices toward Aboriginal people, particularly the Indian Residential Schools system, diffused, assaulted, and traumatized Aboriginal identity. What has been more difficult to illustrate is how deeply the root causes of trauma and dysfunction are still embedded in Canadian society. As the primary reproducers of Canadian society, schools play a critical role in reproducing its essential *substance* in subsequent generations, including the perceived value of Aboriginal Peoples to that society.

This section examines the relationship between Aboriginal identity and education. It traces the relationship from education's role in the colonial assault on Aboriginal identity to the ways in which schools continue to fail Aboriginal Peoples today. The first part presents the participants' experiences and understanding of aggressive assimilation through education. The second part presents their perspectives on the continued failure of education to meet the needs of Aboriginal people. Together they demonstrate that education is still a traumatic experience for Aboriginal children and youth because teachers and schools are still alienating Aboriginal Peoples, cultures, and identities as inferior. Canadian schools are designed and operated to develop Canadian identity to the detriment of Aboriginal identity.

Aggressive assimilation and Aboriginal education. The assault waged on Aboriginal identity through aggressive assimilation policies and practices, based on a core belief in Indigenous inferiority, has had devastating effects on the lived experiences of Aboriginal people. The significance of the relationship between Aboriginal identity and education in Canada is evident in the fact that schooling was the primary weapon used to eradicate Aboriginal identity. The Indian Residential Schools system was, without question, the most extreme example of the concerted assault on Aboriginal identity. This section presents the participants' perspectives on the continuity of this assault from the IRS to contemporary education. They offer both personal and professional examples of assimilation-driven education and describe the effects on Aboriginal students.

Leona talked about her personal experiences in Residential School and the lessons she learned about what it was to be Cree. She related what she was taught about herself and her people in school and the fact that she did not have the understanding to offer a defense:

> They might think, silly people! That was my learning when I was going to school here: You people, your grandparents, and parents, are worshiping a false god. They call the sun a god, the lightning a god, the mountains and rocks are gods, and that's how they would talk to us and shame us. Or try to shame us about that. I never understood why we call them that though because that only came in my later years when I got involved in ceremony. (Leona)

She also talked about how ashamed and embarrassed she was to have to go through puberty in such a foreign setting guided by people whose beliefs and practices were so different from her own People's ways. Ultimately, life was a difficult experience for Leona simply because of the identity she was born with:

> I realize that it was very painful to be Native, to be Cree, I knew that, but somehow I never rejected that. I don't know what it was. I never rejected being a Cree woman, but I acknowledged that, darn it, it's so damned hard to be an Indian! But I never said I don't want to be an Indian! (Leona)

Her refusal to contemplate being anything other than Cree attests to the perseverance, tenacity, and intrinsic nature of identity.

Despite twenty four years of public education and her years in Residential School, Leona was able to maintain a connection to some of the roots of her identity and, in adulthood, gradually learn more about who she was from her people and their knowledge, their language, their ceremonies, their history, and their homeland. Like so many other Indigenous adults, Leona did all of this while also continuing her Canadian education. She had to learn part of her history—the painful part—in university, which was another difficult experience: "I felt so ashamed because there was a lot of stuff they were teaching me that I didn't know about. I didn't know what the *Indian Act* was, who created it, why it was created. I didn't know all of those policies that they had and what that meant" (Leona). She characterized her experiences as being institutionalized through the Residential Schools and through public education like so many generations of Aboriginal people rather than being able to learn about who they are and what their roles are in the world in "a natural state in community and learning from parents" (Leona) through traditional teaching methods and media. One of the effects of institutionalization is not having "rites of passage to introduce us into our next responsibility" (Leona) as children or adults.

Leona also sees other contemporary effects of public education policy on young Aboriginal children such as her grandson. Because so many Canadians, including many

Aboriginal people, do not know the history of colonization, they "buy into what is being taught to us without stepping back and being critical" (Leona). "The myths have been so way out about us!" (Leona). Consequently, we have teachers and schools that continue to see Aboriginal people as the problem and conformity to Canadian norms as the solution. Leona cites lack of accurate information, different pedagogical approaches, conflicting religious beliefs and spiritual practices, and bureaucratic policies and regulations as examples of the ways in which Indigenous *being* is blocked: "There are all sorts of those policies that stop us from being" (Leona). Not being able to express one's Aboriginal identity in school is a significant barrier to attendance, participation, and, ultimately, learning. Schools operate in ways completely foreign to the cultural ecosystems in which Aboriginal identity can develop and flourish.

The real crux of the problem is that Canadian schools and curricula were not designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal people and they remain so today: "I don't see any of the schools creating space. Because the foundation of what we do is ceremony. I don't see any of the schools creating space for a smudge ceremony. Ceremonial space. Most schools don't allow even the smell of smoke" (Leona). For Aboriginal people, this means checking your identity at the door in order to just *be* in school. There is also the "need to stop and do some healing work and some listening because that's part of our history. We have been in pain" (Leona). Healing requires ceremony, which means that it cannot take place in public education unless schools make room for Indigenous being/becoming.

Cora describes the issues around learning in school about a painful history for Aboriginal people as

> not having been given the opportunity to have the information in the proper environment, in a supportive, free environment so they were free to take it and work with it and they

> were supported in their efforts to work with it. That's what school is supposed to be. They do not have that opportunity. (Cora)

Public education policy in general continues to threaten the identities of Aboriginal Peoples by not allowing Aboriginal identity expression in schools. Furthermore, the pain associated with learning about a dark colonial history that culminated in one's own subjugation is like a fresh assault on Aboriginal identity during its crucial early developmental stages and, ultimately, a renewed attack on Aboriginal being.

Cora sees supporting children as they learn their history as critical to their wellbeing both at school and at home:

> Children, we expect them to know their own history. They're going to be taught their own history. They need a way to deal with that stuff. They're going to have to be assisted because they're children. The impacts don't just come up in the classroom. They come up in the home, in the communities. What's happening at home and in the communities is as, if not more, significant to that child than what's going on at school. (Cora)

What children are missing is the knowledge that they are not alone. They need something greater than themselves to hang onto as they experience and learn about the world and their place in it:

> We are not just us and I am not just me. When I am left with just that, I have nothing. And that's what we've done. That's what we've allowed. As the generations moving forward, we have forgotten that piece for our upcoming generations. (Cora)

For Cora, treating children as though they are on their own as they journey through life is problematic: "They're not on their own journey! They're walking with all kinds of people. And if you treat them like they're on their own, then you're creating a problem" (Cora). To teach children that they are completely autonomous goes against Cree understanding:

> Traditionally, as part of who we are, we are not just ourselves, we are not one, we are not just ourselves. That's arrogant. That's really sacrilegious. It's totally wrong. It's setting yourself above God. Even if you don't believe in God, you're setting yourself above whatever. That's not even possible. I really have always liked that expression, *it's not what we believe; it's what is*. (Cora)

Not understanding that you are part of something greater than yourself leaves you vulnerable, "drifting aimlessly. There's nothing… You can't hang onto yourself" (Cora). Cora believes this plays a central role in people taking their own lives. *What is* is our identity; what we have been taught to believe is that our identity has no value. Not being able to develop their identity leaves Aboriginal children to find their own way without the location, guidance, or protection it was meant to provide.

The facts about Canada's systematic efforts to remove all traces of Aboriginal identity from Canadian society by removing it from its roots and placing it into an environment designed to destroy it has been front and centre in Canadian public policy discussion since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's findings in 2015. Joe summed up this colonial project and its consequences succinctly:

> It is a matter of record that Canadian society imposed an educational philosophy and system to which Natives were forced to submit. Natives had no control or say over this, and it led to a loss of dignity, decades of miseducation, and a weakening of parental and group responsibility for their children. (p. 181)

As part of the historical record now, it is not necessary to present the details of the horrors that took place within these institutions. What is important to emphasize here is the continuity in the approaches to Aboriginal education in Canada as it transitioned from Indian Residential Schools

to provincial integration and the similarities in the results for Aboriginal people despite these outwardly major policy shifts in the last few decades.

The historical traumas caused by the colonial assault on Aboriginal identity are recreated in the contemporary education system as Aboriginal children are forced to learn about that history and their position of inferiority within it. They learn that their people were unevolved and therefore inherently responsible for the treatment they received. The result is a painful existential struggle between believing in their own and their people's human inferiority as the cause of their societal failures and knowing that they are complete beings despite what they learn through their education.

Education is failing Aboriginal people. Academic completion rates for Aboriginal people in the twenty-first century have continued to fall further and further below the rates of all other Canadians, regardless of both major and minor policy changes over the years. This fact has become an important driver behind Aboriginal education policy changes, as the literature on infusion in Chapter 2 made evident. What the participants discuss in this section are the ways in which viewing the problem as Aboriginal student failure are in fact erroneous. They contend that the real problem is the reverse: Canadian education is failing Aboriginal people. Education for Aboriginal people has been designed to serve the needs of Canadian identity at the expense of Aboriginal identity. This is evident in the continued focus on the effects of colonization on Aboriginal people as the problem rather than on the continuation of colonization as the actual problem in need of redress.

Joe described the Canadian approach to Aboriginal education as "a dismal failure" (p.182) because it was not designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal people. Rather, its function has been to reproduce the dominant society and reinforce *power over* instead of *power for*

Indigenous Peoples:

> Many of the school related practices that reinforce societal inequalities have occurred and endure precisely because they serve certain economic and political interests. All the good will in the world among educators will not then suffice to eradicate such practices, for that requires a more profound change in the distribution of power in society and the goals which power is made to serve. (p. 209)

He argued that the education system has nothing to offer Aboriginal youth, particularly not the hope of success in Canadian society: "Why shouldn't youth drop out? They have nothing to work for. Give them financial 'hope.' Everything else comes from that" (p. 289). Financial hope could at least create optimism for some measure of future self-sufficiency and self-determination for Aboriginal youth.

Cora tied educational failure for Aboriginal people directly to Canadian society's failure to meet the basic needs of Aboriginal people as Canadian citizens. Cora characterized the policy of infusion as an ineffective political solution to a deeply rooted societal problem:

> It was brought forward as a political response to a really serious public problem, and that problem still is that Aboriginal people and Aboriginal students are both being failed by the education system. So that failure to serve the needs of Aboriginal people, Aboriginal students, the society at large in relation to how Aboriginal people fit into that society, or how they relate with that society, those are a total failure of society to meet its own obligations. Society is represented by the government that we put in place. No government, not even the one that made the policy, has met that requirement yet—to meet the needs of Aboriginal people in education. That hasn't happened and the policy hasn't made a difference in my view. No it hasn't made a difference. In some ways, I

would say it probably has made things worse. (Cora)

Policies that address Aboriginal student failure do not address the root of problem and therefore have no positive impact on the educational experiences of Aboriginal people. It is Canadian society that has failed to ensure the human rights of its Indigenous citizens to be and become who they are in ways defined by their identity.

In not addressing the fundamental issue, policies like infusion instead contribute to the problem and possibly even create greater negative effects for Aboriginal students, while the real source is further obfuscated:

> It just looks like, when you take away all the fuzz and leaves, everything is written up nicely but nothing is happening. Kids are still failing. They are not being retained in schools; they don't want to be in schools. The jails are full; you get into the ugly picture socially. Nobody's being held accountable. There's lots of blame. Parents are being blamed, Residential Schools are being blamed, PTSD, pretty soon health is going to be blamed. These are all indicators that back there somewhere, somebody failed somebody. … The children were failed by the education system. (Cora)

Instead, what the policies actually accomplish is to further hide the real problems by focusing policy on the symptoms instead. The effects of Canada's approaches to education for Aboriginal people are held up as the actual policy problems that policy needs to address. Any policies that do not address the root causes of trauma, diffusion, and dysfunction for Aboriginal people will continue to invade Aboriginal identity and recreate the trauma that invasion induces.

The objective of Canadian education is to develop Canadian identity. It was never designed to serve Aboriginal Peoples so it does not have to be accountable for its failure to do so. As Joe explained, Canada unapologetically affirmed its view that to be *Indian* is to be inferior

and its agenda to continue its efforts to eradicate Aboriginal identity in its 1969 *White Paper* on Indian policy. Its proposed policy to eliminate the "special treatment" that "has made of the Indians a community disadvantaged and apart" (Canada, 1969, p. 2), served as a catalyst for Aboriginal Peoples to focus on cultural identity development as the appropriate source of empowerment to fight for the right to exist as distinct Peoples. Joe related an Elder's statement that reflects this period of awakening: "We didn't know for a long time that we were equal. Now we know, and there's no stopping us anymore. We had forgotten our Story. Now we're starting to understand" (p. 162).

During this time, many Aboriginal people began seeking out their cultural knowledge and history in order to combat the "gross and pervasive destructiveness of the Invasion and the period since that time" (p. 168). As a collective response to the White Paper, the National Indian Brotherhood (1972) prepared a treatise on the importance of identity development for Aboriginal people to their potential for success as Canadian citizens. The focus of the statement was on education and it described the goals, objectives, methods, personnel, and governance required to design a system of education that would provide the appropriate means for Aboriginal identity development, Aboriginal student success, and Aboriginal participation in Canadian society. Both the problem with education for Aboriginal people and the solution to it were clearly articulated by Aboriginal leaders in 1972. Despite this, education policy continues to identify the effects that the policies themselves are having on Aboriginal lives as the issue rather than see Canadian education as the real problem.

In my conversations with Cora, we discussed the prongs of aggressive assimilation, which included attacks on spiritual and existential beliefs and practices, languages, and sociopolitical structures and customs, in addition to the various physical assaults waged through

war, disease, displacement, subjugation, and starvation. It appears to be no coincidence that the first wave of the assault was a spiritual attack led by missionaries. Cora tied this aggression toward the spirit of Indigenous Peoples to its fallout on identity. She contended that, by killing the spirit, you extinguish the language, the culture, and the history, and, "by doing so, you destroy the identity of that person" (Cora).

For Cora, the failure is unequivocally on the part of the people who have designed and operated the schools and systems: "The educational systems that our people were forced into were not managed by us so the accountability can't rest at our door. That to me is pretty cut and dried" (Cora). Despite the all-too-common tendency to blame Aboriginal people for the conditions under which they have lived since the invasion, they are the same as they would be for any other Peoples under the same treatment:

> We know what happens when the rats are put in cages. What happens when you confine, limit people, and you put them in a cage and poke sharp sticks at them. Well that's who we are. We are the rats who have been in these cages for hundreds of years now and we have had the sharp sticks deliberately poking at us, generation after generation … It's straight common sense when you go back and you put yourself a hundred years ago. You see what people were like then, and you watch and review what happened over the years, and you are exactly where logically any human being would end up. The miracle is the number of people who are not like that. And that's because we were here before those hundreds of years. (Cora)

Cora believes that the idea of Aboriginal people being deficient is "a very deliberate misrepresentation that has happened in our schools" (Cora), one that does not rest on the facts of colonization. "We are descendants of those experiences" (Cora) —those attacks on our identity,

the essence of who we are—and we have inherited the consequent individual and communal disease and dysfunction as well, without the opportunity to understand their origins or see our identity as the solution.

The continuity in the assault on Aboriginal identity from various Canadian institutions is evident through the continually growing negative outcomes Aboriginal people experience in Canadian society. Canadian education has been the primary arena for this societal assault and the resulting dysfunction ensures that other institutions like justice, health, social services, and child welfare take up where education leaves off in the attack:

> This spectacle displays a disintegration of many of the traditional ways used by Aboriginal peoples to maintain physical, mental, and spiritual health. Cumulating over several centuries, these effects are now evident as blatant, barren residuals that are a mere reminiscence of what was. The bleak outcomes are manifest in the high degree of social, emotional, and physical disorder visible in poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, crime, and augmenting rates of violence and sexual abuse. Not surprisingly, the past two decades are now witness to an unrelenting aftermath, which is that of the dismaying rise in the incarceration rate of Aboriginal men and women and the inhibiting, if not debilitating, influences brought to bear on these faceless persons. (Joe, p. 255)

Schooling has been the primary weapon used in the assault on Aboriginal identity, and it remains so because it continues to create the same outcomes for Aboriginal people.

The problem with education for Aboriginal people is that the inferior value placed on Aboriginal identity within Canadian society has been reproduced and reinforced over generations, to the point that it has become the *truth* that is woven into the fabric of Canada. The inferiority of Indigenous Peoples in Western societies like Canada continues to justify

discrimination at all levels of society. Indigenous inferiority as *fact* is not only reproduced in schools, it also defines the kind of experience that Aboriginal people can have in Canadian society and in the schools that replicate it. Canadian schools are microcosms of Canadian society, as well as the purveyors and exemplars for new generations of Canadians. The goals of education, the processes involved, and the people in charge of it are all committed to and serve this primary reproductive purpose of schools. Canadian society and its institutions continue to position Aboriginal identity as inferior and in need of remediation. The concept of the *Indian problem* is still the organizing theme.

Teachers and Aboriginal Identity

Teachers play a critical role in identity development, in part because of the sheer number of hours children spend under their tutelage but also because that is an important aspect of a teacher's responsibility. This section presents the participants' perspectives on what teachers need to understand in order to positively impact Aboriginal identity development, how teachers can influence self-worth in Aboriginal students, and the ways in which the needs of Aboriginal identity development differ from those of Canadian identity. In order to heal the damage that colonization has wrought, identity healing must be the focus of Aboriginal education.

Teachers' understanding of Aboriginal perspectives. The primary consideration that the participants conveyed about teachers providing Aboriginal perspectives, which include Aboriginal experiences and understanding of colonization and Aboriginal cultures, was that teachers first need to understand those perspectives. Non-Aboriginal teachers need to be willing to learn and understand the extent to which colonization has impacted the lived experiences of Aboriginal people. They would need to come to grips with the relationship between their own identity as Canadians and how Aboriginal identity has been portrayed to support that identity.

The second task for teachers is to understand Indigenous cultures to the degree necessary to accurately teach others what they know. Issues that arise with respect to teachers learning what they need to include both having the desire to do so in the ways required and having a place in which to learn.

Leona had mixed feelings about the idea of Canadian teachers teaching Aboriginal perspectives. She admitted that while there are many things that Canadian teachers are good at, she was concerned about their ability to do this, concluding that "maybe it's better if they didn't" (Leona). Her concerns were that teachers may not understand or believe the history of Aboriginal Peoples' colonization or that their own emotions might interfere:

> And I can't see teachers taking that prehistory of who we are and believing it, presenting it to students, I can't see them taking that horrific history of the government's policies on Residential Schools, the 60s Scoop, the Pass System, all those policies and introducing it to the kids in a way that they can because, first of all, maybe they don't believe it. Secondly, they may have a sense of guilt. (Leona)

She talked about how their feelings impact their ability to even learn about the history of colonization or try to understand it: "I think as it is right now, it's difficult for them to accept what is being taught and that's information, that's history, that's colonial process" (Leona). Trying to understand that the privileges you enjoy in a new country on *new* land came to you at a huge cost to the original Peoples of that land is a difficult undertaking, especially when you learn about it from Aboriginal Peoples' first-hand perspectives.

The second task in teaching Aboriginal perspectives is teaching about Aboriginal cultures, including worldviews, knowledge systems, beliefs, and practices. While a completely different kind of knowledge to teach, the same obstacle arises for Canadian teachers in trying to

carry it out: “They are from different places right” (Leona)? They have not been raised in Indigenous cultures among Indigenous people where they could learn experientially and develop the understanding necessary to teach others. For Leona, the fact that “we come from a different worldview” (Leona) limits what non-Aboriginal teachers can know about Aboriginal cultures. She wondered if they would be willing or able to understand Aboriginal perspectives: “Are people willing to truly understand the meaning of *Wahkotowin*, relationships? … Can they truly understand when we say our grandfather the Sun? What does that mean to us? To them” (Leona)? What teachers have previously learned about Aboriginal Peoples and cultures would certainly affect their interpretations of Indigenous beliefs and practices.

A related issue is how and where Canadian teachers might learn Aboriginal cultural perspectives. Whether or not Indigenous knowing and being can be taught like subject matter in teacher education programs is an important factor to consider: “It is a standing question as to whether Native ways of knowing can be fostered in a university environment” (Joe, p. 112). Leona did not believe that teachers would be able to learn what they needed to know in teacher education: “I don’t think they are going to get that [knowledge] from mainstream universities” (Leona). As “obvious purveyors of culture” (Joe, p. 111), universities play a central role in the Canadian education system. They are responsible for preparing people to teach the next generation what they need to know about being Canadian. Including instruction and development in Indigenous ways would require methods and means that Couture considered not well-suited to a university program:

> … in my view, oral tradition should be a central concern in program and course development. But that requires faculty members who have a developed sense of oral tradition and a prolonged experience in ceremonies. That challenge is in turn

> compounded by the forces of traditional university intellectualism versus Native intuition, of academic versus colloquial languages, of elitism versus people-in-communities, of knowledge of the professional versus knowledge of the People, of direct knowledge versus indirect knowledge, and of written tradition versus oral tradition. (Joe, p. 112)

Joe talked about the huge challenge that learning Indigenous ways through Indigenous means poses for university-educated Canadians as a process of unlearning and letting go: "The professional has to learn arational behaviour, which at first glance is unreasonable! The necessary letting go of one's conceptual paradigm can be of quantum leap proportions" (p. 73). The problem is that universities, as the generators of the *stuff* of Canadian education, also serve Canadian identity development, which is a very different process through different means with different objectives.

What was evident from understanding how Aboriginal identity develops is that it is a predominantly experiential, deeply spiritual, apprenticeship-based, long-term process. To understand it enough to help develop it in others requires no less than going through it first. As Leona stated, it requires a total process to understand it to the degree necessary to be an integral part of it:

> I think teachers need to be really, really immersed in what culture means, in what history means, and the impacts of those today, and our belief systems about when a child comes into the world. It might be different than their own religious beliefs. (Leona)

Identity development is such a culturally-embedded enterprise that to expect Canadian teachers to be able to be primary facilitators of it for Aboriginal children is not feasible. Nor is it feasible to offer teaching of this nature within a university devoted to the goals of a different culture.

Whether learning about Aboriginal worldviews or colonization and its outcomes, teachers' personal experiences determine the degree to which they can understand what they are studying without having had any similar experience. The difference between knowing about and really understanding what took place through colonization and how it impacted Aboriginal Peoples without having experienced oppression concerned Leona:

> I think it's hard for them to understand that unless they have been a part of our journey, and how many of them are willing to be a part of that? There's very few. And those who are I think are awesome! They are welcoming, they are willing to learn, and I keep saying, people out there don't know what they don't know and it's up to us to open those doors to give them a different view, our worldview and what it is. (Leona)

Her concern is that, for the majority, it is just information to pass on and the experiences of it are not considered: "I'm afraid that if it's just information then it's just an academic exercise. Oh I know that information! I've heard it. But really what did that do to give you critical thought or empathy even" (Leona)? For Canadian teachers, understanding Aboriginal colonial experiences requires much more than just knowing about them. Not having experienced oppression and not knowing what was really lost are major impediments:

> They haven't been taught in the way we have been taught, and why we are in the trauma that is taking place. All of the suicides, that comes from that root and you face it every day, the deaths in the communities, and the ongoing grief or unresolved grief and it goes on to the next generation and the next generation. (Leona)

Lack of opportunities to learn about Aboriginal experiences and cultures limits teachers' ability to understand them: "They don't know. They don't know what they don't know" (Leona). A fundamental hindrance to learning about colonization for many Canadian teachers is that,

because they have not experienced oppression and in fact have often experienced great privilege instead, they have no idea where to begin their learning.

Without having developed an understanding of Aboriginal Peoples' cultures and experiences from within Indigenous experience, being able to accurately interpret what they know and have undergone and effectively model Aboriginal identity expression is a challenge that may be insurmountable for non-Aboriginal teachers. Teachers who share the same culture and experiences as their students are best positioned to teach Aboriginal students about what it means to be Aboriginal. Leona talked about the importance for students to recognize the teacher as someone like themselves who has had similar experiences and knows who the students are:

> Because identity for me is looking at someone who looks like me. Somebody who has the same knowledge as me. Somebody who probably knows my parents and grandparents, or some connection to some activity. It's always some relationship that is built outside of that school setting. (Leona)

Teaching involves more than just knowing about a subject. It is more than just an intellectual exercise unless the content you are teaching is outside of your experience:

> … [then] you're just some being passing this information on and I don't think you can pass that information just intellectually, it's got to be emotionally, spiritually, and physically, and a lot of experiential learning on the land. (Leona)

This relates back to Couture's (2013) position that the methods of identity development are vastly different in Aboriginal cultures than in Canadian culture.

Cora talked about the importance of intuition and sensitivity in how teachers relate to Aboriginal students. She contended that being raised within Indigenous traditions develops ways of knowing and relating to others that are required to effectively teach Aboriginal students about

who they are and what that means:

> My sense of the person is what I trust. If it is something, I will remember it. That's operating at another level of communication. Sensing. It's that sensitivity that we don't lose because of the way we are brought up. There is a sensitivity there, and I said earlier that teachers need to have that sensitivity and sensibility to relate to their students. It's not just because I'm Aboriginal, I don't think. It's because I was raised like that … (Cora)

What Leona and Cora both emphasized was the importance of being able to *relate to* and *relate with* students. Being raised in a different culture with emphasis on developing different abilities is a hindrance to effectively developing Aboriginal identity.

Teachers' understanding of Aboriginal perspectives is dependent upon their knowledge about and interactions with Aboriginal experiences and cultures. Cultural congruity is an important factor because Aboriginal teachers are best positioned to understand Aboriginal students' contexts and to participate in their identity development as facilitators, interpreters, and models.

Teachers and student self-value. Not having a shared culture between teachers and students has the potential to negatively affect how Aboriginal children value themselves. Cora brought up a concept that I had never considered before in relation to identity and school: valuing as a substitute for identity. This process of valuation has its roots in the early stages of cognitive development when children value themselves according to how others value them rather than according to their own evaluation of their worth: "The very young child doesn't do that evaluation of self. They go by how they have been treated by the people who are their caregivers, the people who they have bonded with: the life givers" (Cora). How a child has been treated during this stage of development is therefore critical to their self-value as they enter

school: “The people and the things, environments, all of those parts of what gave me life, how those valued me, that’s how I come to school. That’s what I bring. It’s directly related” (Cora). Once a child enters school, the teacher becomes a major factor in that child’s self-value:

> The child who comes in with no value at 5 years old, it’s a reflection of what they’ve had. Then the teacher becomes another entity. Because of the hours you spend in that environment, that environment is going to be critical in terms of where that goes. In that sense, the school is really, really significant, and the teacher, being a human, can direct that experience actually in a very powerful way. (Cora)

Cora believes that the most significant aspect of the teacher during this stage is whether or not she values the child, which is where teachers’ perspectives play a critical role in children’s self-value. When the teacher and the child share the same worldview and have experienced similar treatment by others in terms of their value, they identify with each other’s familiarity and the child does not have to assess whether or not she is valued by the teacher based on who she is.

When the child and the teacher do not share common worldviews or experiences, as is the case for the majority of Aboriginal students, how the teacher values the child’s identity has a major impact on the child’s experiences and consequent self-value: the child continues to value herself according to how she is valued by the teacher. Once the Aboriginal child moves into the next stage of cognitive development and becomes aware of herself as a separate entity capable of self-evaluation—someone “who is conscious of self as consciousness” (Cora)—she begins to critically evaluate how the teacher values her identity:

> [T]hat child is hearing critically. They are hearing a non-Aboriginal teacher talk about Aboriginal perspectives. They know they are Aboriginal but they are hearing it in valuing/non-valuing. They are not hearing it as Aboriginal. They are thinking about it as

> a non-Aboriginal teacher talking about Aboriginal perspectives, as in I'm Aboriginal: I am valued/not valued. That's the one that counts. So if the non-Aboriginal teacher is talking about Aboriginal stuff, they will listen as *is it valued/not valued?* That's all they are hearing. They are not hearing anything else. They are judging, what does this teacher know? She's not Aboriginal. But they are hearing valuing. (Cora)

Regardless of the stage of cognitive development the child is at, how others value her can matter. What changes is the degree of importance she assigns to other people's evaluation of her.

In assessing her own value in the eyes of the teacher, the Aboriginal child is unaware that she is basing her decision primarily on whether or not the teacher is Aboriginal. What she is aware of by this point is the *different value society assigns to Aboriginal identity*: "they know they're Aboriginal, they know this from day one. And if they don't know the word, they know from the way they are treated, very shortly. They sometimes associate it with colour" (Cora). This is where value becomes mistaken for identity: "The valuing carries that identity so that's why it's easy to slide from the valuing into identity. That's how it gets blurred" (Cora). The more aware the child is of her identity—her people, history, ceremonies, knowledge, language, and land—the less likely she will be to mistake her relative value in the eyes of others for the inherent value of her identity. It is important to articulate the distinctions between notions of value and identity so that young people understand the difference between *who they are* and *what others think of them*. When Aboriginal youth reject their identity, their location within a line of history, knowledge, experiences, and ways of being, what they are really rejecting is the *value* that Canadian society has attached to being Aboriginal, which is erroneously perceived as a rejection of their identity.

Cora stated that, at some point, Aboriginal people who have not had the opportunity to

learn about their identity will either seek it out or deal with the dysfunction that accompanies not knowing who you are:

> What are you going to say to these kids when they are in their 40s and they come around and say, *who are my people?* Do you not think they are ever going to get there? … I'm already answering, most of them will get there, and if they don't get there and they don't get answers, then alcoholism, drug addiction, and suicide can make sense. (Cora)

Another pitfall for Aboriginal people in conflating value and identity is what Cora calls *going through the motions*. I understand this point as superficially living out someone else's caricature, or at times our own stereotypes, of our identity rather than actually living out who we are. *Going through the motions* involves participating in societally recognized forms of identity expression without having a deeper understanding of the meanings or purposes of those expressions. Cora's point included the fact that discernment is always required in respecting personal identity. Although an individual's actions may in fact be carried out in a way that is intended to acquire acceptance from Canadian society, the foundations or bases of the person's actions will not always be discernible to another person. Given that, it is impossible to judge from the outside whether or not an individual is living out his or her identity through superficial expressions aimed at societal acceptance. Going through the motions is the best that many Aboriginal people can do because we get stuck on valuing ourselves according to Canadian perceptions of our value rather than according to our inherent worth:

> I wish that it went along with other things but it doesn't because, exactly because, the system wants to survive just as much as we want to survive as people. For us, in the valuing and/or devaluing processes, we need to know that the efforts of the (Canadian society) system are to keep us there, always valuing and devaluing ourselves according to

> its standards. Fighting this system is fighting the devaluing of ourselves, but as long as we are valuing and devaluing by these standards, we are caught in that trap. (Cora)

This is a trap because it keeps us caught up in valuing ourselves through the eyes of others and prevents us from moving beyond our relative value to Canadian society; we are prevented from entering into the realm of existence where both our value and the value of our identity are inherent and uncontested. We are valuable because we exist.

A final point on identity and value relates to Aboriginal people who say that they have no identity. For Cora, this is a devaluing of self that has become part of many Aboriginal people's self-evaluation narrative: "I am my own story. That's where that starts to take shape so that I start to look at who I am and say, *I'm this*, *I'm that*. And that is impacted by what other people are saying to me, or not [saying], because it's *me*" (Cora). Because we are born with our identity, to not have one is to not exist: "That's got nothing to do with valuing/no valuing. You have an identity" (Cora). Unfortunately, many Aboriginal people do not know this because they have never had the opportunity to learn it: "To me that is a premise that we don't say that to kids. One, we don't have an opportunity to say it. We don't give them an opportunity to look at it and say it either. We let that stand the way it is" (Cora). Instead, they are left to function in an alien culture with which they are unable to identify and therefore unable to *belong*, believing that not belonging and not knowing their roots means that they are devoid of identity.

Cora believes that "when we say we don't have an identity, a part of what we learn in the Western intellectual system of schooling and education is that, without an identity, there is no value. That's added to our sense of no value" (Cora). The result is a lose-lose proposition: that we have no identity because we have no value and we have no value because we have no identity. This is where *going through the motions* serves as an attempt to develop the identity we

think people expect us to express or, contrarily, an identity that is the exact opposite of those expectations for just that reason. It is a choice between a negative and a positive stereotype; the problem is that they are both stereotypes, not identities. So long as *being Canadian* is the goal and the measure of our self-worth, we will continue to seek our value in Canadian society rather than through the inherent value of our identity.

Cultural difference between Aboriginal students and their teachers can have serious effects on the students' self-worth. Whether or not children value their identity and culture can be impacted by how their teachers value them. Aboriginal children learn very early in their schooling that being Aboriginal has a different social value than being Canadian. This can affect how Aboriginal children evaluate what they are learning. It can also help determine whether or not they embrace or reject their identity, depending on what they associate with being Aboriginal. Getting caught up in seeking value according to Canadian measures can lead Aboriginal people into trying to live up to or defy stereotypical images of who they are. Not knowing your identity, rejecting your identity as inferior, and going through the motions in place of identity all have disastrous and tragic results. Children who have not learned the value and significance of their identity are left to find their way alone in an alien culture that does not value them.

Differing needs for Aboriginal identity development. To what extent cultural differences in thought and behaviour patterns are genetically encoded or the result of identity development principles and means is debateable. What matters is that Aboriginal identity expression requires Aboriginal identity development methods based on Aboriginal principles. Joe believed that "traditional Native patterns of learning" (p. 183) were important to any Aboriginal educational planning discussion. He asserted that Aboriginal identity development

involves both analytical left-brain conditioning and intuitive right-brain training, whereas Canadian education focuses primarily on the former to the detriment of the latter. He insisted that teachers need to "learn how to develop affective and cognitive capacities, intuitive or metaphoric abilities, and analytical thinking in their students" (ibid). He also believed that the methods of identity development were as critical to the process as were the intended outcomes: "More concretely, 'experiential learning' or 'learning-by-doing' models have much to offer … Such strategies are in tune with the demands of identity development, human relations, cross-cultural communications, and holistic development" (p. 184). Joe felt that being able to develop both sides of the brain using methods designed for those purposes would enable education to meet the developmental needs of both Canadian and Aboriginal students.

The methods and goals of identity development differ from culture to culture—shaped by each culture's history in the world—but each culture has them and endeavors to reproduce both the means and ends in each generation. Joe saw differentiating between these unique histories as critical to designing the means for reproducing culturally determined ends in identity expression:

> The profound, shaping influences of cultural factors are universal: all humankind is so affected. Nonetheless, this experience varies and is distinct from one to the other around the world because of the life histories of each population. It is this dimension that "appropriate" response must address. (p. 214)

These differences arise out of "fundamentally different assumptions about self and identity, about life, health, and justice" (ibid) and play out in institutions as hindrances to meeting the developmental needs of Aboriginal identity, "mostly owing to contrasting, if not conflicting, perspectives" (ibid) between Indigenous cultures and Canadian society. The focus in Canadian school systems on developing intellectual analysis, linear thinking, and language use has left

intuitive abilities that require metaphorical and symbolic perception "curiously neglected" (p. 71) in Western society. The result, our inability to use these abilities, means "that we are incomplete" (ibid). From a holistic perspective, we are underdeveloped human beings.

Holistic development requires developing the mental, physical, and emotional aspects of identity, all three of which schools target to varying degrees through curriculum goals and modelling. However, developing the spiritual aspect of Aboriginal being is also critical to the overall development of Aboriginal identity, and it is also integral to developing the other three aspects. One of the primary obstacles that Aboriginal spiritual development faces in Canadian schools is the ability of teachers to facilitate it. Joe saw this as part of an inevitable larger problem for Aboriginal education in Canada: "Balancing the tension between dominant-society interests and culture-specific hopes is a fundamental and inescapable challenge" (p. 186). He insisted that the purpose of Aboriginal education must be "to provide a *different* education, the objective of which is to develop knowledge, skills, and values rooted in centuries-old tradition in order that students can contribute to the betterment of their community and their People" (p. 187, emphasis original). These ancient traditions and the knowledge on which they are based are contained in Indigenous ceremonies and spiritual practices and are exemplified and developed through Elders in a lifelong process of initiation into *being/becoming*.

The need to be immersed in culture *enacted*—that is, among your people learning your history, ceremonies, knowledge, and language on the land to which you belong according to your culture's ways—is integral to Aboriginal identity development. Developing *in community* in an Aboriginal sense includes more than just being among your people, however. It also refers to "those perennial determinants in the shaping of the individual such as the need for socio-centric identity, a sense of personal and social responsibility, that is, self-with-self, self-with-others

(family, community, the People), and self-with-Nature/Cosmos" (p. 256). It means being part of the cultural ecosystem that evolved specifically to develop Aboriginal identity where you can learn to live out the principles that its maintenance requires.

Because of the degree, duration, and ubiquity of the trauma that colonization has and continues to inflict on Aboriginal identity, what would be identity *development* under natural circumstances has become "identity healing" (Joe, p. 214) instead. Healing identity requires engaging in "learning activities" (p. 209), which are "basic, fluid opportunities to connect with cultural heritage, with traditional concepts and methods—doorways to sought-after and needed personal changes" (ibid). These activities "'process' the person through immersion in the Circle of Life at the centre of which, positioned as facilitators of the 'process' and teachers of knowledge, stand traditional Elders/Healers" (ibid). Elders and healers have the knowledge and skills to facilitate identity healing because they have developed their identity by appropriate methods through "an extended guided immersion in an experiential-learning modality" (Joe, p. 252).

Identity healing is an inherently spiritually-guided process and ceremony is the primary arena in which it needs to unfold. Those who lead the process are "rooted in a higher order" (p. 215) than others who have not developed the same degree of skill or understanding. Learning that focuses on spiritual development demands different methods and produces different results than Western modes of understanding: "a profound reworking, a radical shift sometimes, is required in the direction of inductive learning methods that address and are rooted in the phenomenological, the empirical" (p. 38). Trust in both the process and the healer must take the place of rationality, as the experiences create new impulses that "produce life, strength, and animation where inertia and impotence, *dis*-ease, were the dominant condition" (p. 16). The

focus of this healing process is learning about and understanding one's identity: "The eye of healing stays 'fixed' on identity definition as the overriding need—on the issue of who one is within a dynamic historical and cultural context" (p. 260). Trauma has a history, but so does identity.

In order for schools to provide the opportunities to develop and heal the wounds inflicted on Aboriginal identity, Joe insisted that it "behooves the larger society to learn to appreciate and honestly accept the validity and reliability of ancient knowledge and approaches to healing" (p. 255). Canadian schools cannot help develop Aboriginal identity until Canadian society can accept it as a valid and equal form of human identity and understand that its full development and expression are its only natural outcomes and therefore must be the target of education for Aboriginal people.

There are a number of requirements that teachers must meet in order to be able to accurately present Aboriginal perspectives in schools. It requires a willingness to engage with a controversial history and to engage in an Aboriginal culture for an extended period of time. Teachers who are best positioned to positively impact Aboriginal identity development are Aboriginal teachers because they share the same perspectives as Aboriginal students. This gives them the degree of knowing that understanding demands. It also enables them to model Aboriginal identity expression and create a cultural ecosystem in which Aboriginal student identity can grow. The only appropriate facilitators of Aboriginal spiritual development are those who have been initiated into and are further along in the developmental process themselves than those they teach. They must experience Aboriginal culture and identity development from within a cultural ecosystem in order to initiate others into it. Identity development is necessarily identity healing because of the trauma of colonization and therefore requires Elders and healers to

facilitate these learning/healing processes.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the study participants' perspectives on education policy and practice in relation to Aboriginal identity development and my understanding of them. The differences between Aboriginal Peoples' perspectives and Canadian perspectives are the result of both major cultural differences and the result of vastly different experiences of colonization. These cultural and colonial differences and the attitudes of each group to them constitute a major gap between groups that, combined with the loss of Indigenous self-determination to the other as a "Director Society" (Joe, p. 215), have created the conditions under which Aboriginal identity has suffered continuous assaults.

The continued existence and growth of trauma and dysfunction evident among Aboriginal Peoples today demonstrate that acculturation stress did not disappear with the closure of the Residential Schools. Canadian education continues to produce outcomes similar to those of the Residential Schools for Aboriginal people because it was not designed to develop Aboriginal identity. As the primary site of Canadian cultural reproduction, Canadian education continues to be a major source of acculturation stress. Neither Canadian teachers nor Canadian schools are currently prepared to heal Aboriginal identity because identity development is inherently a function of prolonged immersion in culture. Furthermore, the damage that Aboriginal identity has sustained as the result of Canadian society's portrayal of Aboriginal Peoples as inferior expressions of humanity was inflicted in large part through Canadian education. If education is to be a part of the healing then schools will have to embrace and accommodate the ceremonial processes involved.

The result is a dichotomy between success according to Canadian societal standards or

success in terms of Aboriginal identity development and expression. What became clear in the previous chapter was that success for Aboriginal people—living the good life—is contingent upon being able to develop one's identity as an Aboriginal person in an environment and through means intended specifically for its ideal development and expression. When identity development takes place in a system that inherently devalues Aboriginal people, dysfunctional expression results. Dysfunctional identity expression, evident in the thoughts and behaviours of individuals and in the prevailing ideals and norms of communities, is symptomatic of the damage done to Aboriginal identity. While the damage is neither complete nor universal, it is widespread and self-perpetuating as survival mechanisms gradually become dysfunctional ideals and norms that affect succeeding generations.

The targeted and prolonged invasion that Canada has carried out on Aboriginal identity has purposefully damaged the structures and processes of identity development, primarily through mandatory schooling in a Canadian curriculum. The attempts to supplant Aboriginal identity with Canadian identity through schools and other forms of acculturation stressors have had disastrous results for many Aboriginal people, individually and collectively, in how they see themselves and how they function. A distorted, diffused identity is the natural result of these efforts to suppress and supplant Aboriginal cultures and Peoples. The hostility toward a fragile underdeveloped Aboriginal identity as alien and unwelcome in Canadian society often leads Aboriginal people into a trap of seeking Canadian and Aboriginal social value by assuming accepted negative or positive stereotypes. These stereotypes are acted out as *Aboriginal identity* but cannot replace the process of being/becoming that takes place when identity is allowed to develop within its natural cultural ecosystem.

Despite having our right to educate our own children in our own ways conceded to by the

Canadian Government in 1972, education systems continue to fail Aboriginal children, failure that is repackaged as failure on the part of Aboriginal people rather than on the systems themselves. Canadian identity expression cannot be the model or the measure of identity development for Aboriginal people. As long as it continues to be, Aboriginal identity will remain vulnerable and dysfunctional expression will endure as the outcome. Identity is immutable. It is set at our conception and whether it develops into a healthy expression of itself or not depends on how it is nurtured during development. Identity is to culture what the individual is to the group. One is indistinguishable without the other, creating a reciprocal, generative, inherent relationship between them. Aboriginal culture reproduces Aboriginal identity and Aboriginal identity reproduces Aboriginal culture. The strength, protection, and guidance that a naturally developed identity offers are what Aboriginal children need in order to succeed in the dominant Canadian society.

Chapter 7

Infusion Policy and Aboriginal Identity

In order to analyze the potential of infusion policy to achieve its goal to strengthen Aboriginal identity from an Aboriginal perspective, I first needed to seek out an Aboriginal conceptualization of identity in order to understand what a fully developed identity looks like, how it develops and functions, and how its strength can be determined. Next, I needed an Aboriginal understanding of what happened to weaken that identity and how this has impacted Aboriginal Peoples' educational experiences and achievement. The final piece required in order to answer my questions about infusion was to understand the relationship between education and Aboriginal identity and the problems that may arise from infusion. In this chapter, I provide a review of infusion policy and summaries of my research findings on Aboriginal identity, the nature and outcomes of its assault, and the effects of teachers and schools on its value and development. I then apply the findings to an analysis of infusion policy and its assumptions in order to evaluate its appropriateness and potential effects on Aboriginal students.

Review of Infusion Policy Goals

The purpose of this study has been to examine the Alberta Education policy directive that requires all teachers in the province to infuse Aboriginal perspectives, specifically Aboriginal worldviews and histories, into the K-12 curriculum in order to best support Aboriginal students (Alberta Learning, 2002). I presented the details of the larger Policy Framework that mandates infusion in Chapter 1 so here I have summarized the relevant goals, objectives, and outcomes of infusion from the Framework into a more direct policy statement:

> *All teachers in the province are required to infuse Aboriginal perspectives, specifically Aboriginal worldviews and histories, into the K-12 curriculum in order to best support*

> *Aboriginal students. Increasing the quantity and quality of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit curriculum, language, learning and teaching resources will provide high quality learning opportunities that are responsive, flexible, accessible, and affordable to the learner. Doing so will help: 1) Provide First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners with access to culturally relevant learning opportunities and quality support services; 2) Improve First Nations, Métis and Inuit learner success in Early Childhood Services to Grade 12 and in postsecondary education; 3) Identify and reduce barriers preventing First Nations, Métis and Inuit learner and community access and success; 4) Strengthen the use, sharing, recognition and value of indigenous knowledge and languages; 5) Increase and strengthen knowledge and understanding among all Albertans of First Nations, Métis and Inuit governance, history, treaty and Aboriginal rights, lands, cultures, and languages; and 6) Foster a greater appreciation and understanding by all Albertans of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people.*

The two overarching aims of the Policy Framework and infusion are to improve Aboriginal students' educational experiences and outcomes and to increase Albertans' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of Aboriginal Peoples and their histories, cultures, and rights. The focus of this analysis is on the potential for infusion to positively impact education for Aboriginal students. What the Policy Framework documents do not provide is a rationale for infusion as the appropriate policy solution to the problems Aboriginal students encounter in their education. In order to find the connections between infusion and schooling for Aboriginal students, I needed to review the literature. I wanted to understand the ways in which infusion can address the needs of Aboriginal students and improve their academic outcomes. What I found was that the literature revealed the same two primary goals for infusion as those in

the Policy Framework—one aimed at Aboriginal students and the other directed at Canadian students.

The rationale for using infusion to improve the academic experiences and outcomes for Aboriginal students according to the literature is that providing students with culturally relevant learning opportunities will positively impact Aboriginal student achievement, which will consequently help alleviate their poverty and societal marginalization. The specific benefits of infusion proposed in the literature are to transform Aboriginal students' image of themselves from inferiority to equality as they see their identity positively reflected in the curriculum and to create cultural continuity between home and school. This will in turn improve the economic and social participation of Aboriginal people in Canadian society.

As I explained in Chapter 3, implementing infusion as a policy solution to the educational problems Aboriginal students experience assumes that: 1) all Canadian teachers have the knowledge, understanding, and ability to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into curriculum; 2) having all teachers do so will positively impact Aboriginal student identity; and 3) a strengthened Aboriginal identity will positively impact educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

What I have designed this study to examine is not the proposed rationale for infusion but these three underlying assumptions about its implementation and outcomes. These assumptions form the basis of the primary questions that I have sought to answer. In order to answer these questions, I needed to know what Aboriginal identity is, what happened to weaken it, and the impacts of teachers and schools on its development. Because these questions are about *Aboriginal* identity, my understanding of the answers had to be grounded in Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous experience. The next section contains summaries of my findings from chapters 4, 5, and 6 in preparation for applying them in the policy analysis.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to first seek Indigenous knowledge and perspectives of Aboriginal identity, the effects of colonization on its development, and its relationship to teachers and schooling. This section provides summaries of my understanding of these perspectives before applying them to analyze infusion for its ability to achieve its objectives.

What is Aboriginal identity? Aboriginal identity is an organic element of the self that is biologically determined at conception. Much like a tree, identity grows and develops in relationship with its natural environment comprised of its roots and the natural world. The roots of Aboriginal identity are the individual's People and their history, knowledge, language, ceremonies, and land of origin. Aboriginal identity is an inherent aspect of the person. It is our identity when we arrive in the world and it remains our identity for our lifetime. As an intrinsic, genetically encoded element of the person, Aboriginal identity shares the four aspects of personhood: physical, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional being. Identity is the source of spirit located within the individual and coming to know that source involves layers of understanding. Identity is who a person *is* and *is becoming* at once. Knowing your identity involves mutual recognition of individual belonging by the collective and recognition of collective belonging for the individual. The person is a being-becoming-in-community-in-a-place-in-the-world.

The purposes of identity are to locate us as belonging to a People, to protect us as we progress through vulnerable stages of our development, and to guide us in our basic purpose of living the *Good Life*. Aboriginal identity is modeled after the natural world so living the *Good Life* means living in balance with the natural world by relating within it according to natural laws. The laws of nature that govern Aboriginal identity are based on the knowledge that: everything within the Cosmos is alive (has spiritual energy); everything in the Cosmos is

physically and spiritually related; and reciprocal physical and spiritual relationships maintain balance within the Cosmos. Identity development provides us with an evolving roadmap to follow, a dynamic set of skills to employ, and a clear purpose for living. Identity development establishes patterns for relating to self, family, community, and the natural world. Elders are exemplars of the high human development potential of Aboriginal identity development. They have engaged in tried and true methods and practices that have developed over thousands of years of relationship with the land, each other, and the Cosmos. They provide a blueprint for development and hold both the physical and spiritual DNA of culture.

Aboriginal identity develops through the person's relationships with family, Elders, the greater community, and the natural (physical and spiritual) world. As individuals express their identity through their thoughts and behaviours, identity becomes culture *enacted*. Identity and culture have a reciprocal relationship where expressing identity recreates the cultural ecosystem in which identity can develop in younger generations and mature in older generations. This identity/culture ecosystem provides a safe, supportive, nurturing, experiential environment in which identity can grow, mature, and develop the gifts it has to offer. Apprenticeship and the primal experiences of ceremony are two main processes of identity development. Learning the protocols and rituals of these processes and their importance to proper development constitutes an important aspect of Aboriginal identity development. Ceremony contains the primary literature for learning and is the source of spiritual energy for growth.

Identity development consists of stages that are marked by the physical, social/emotional, cognitive, and spiritual characteristics of human growth. Each stage is characterized by differentiations between the overriding developmental purpose of each phase of human maturation. Both mental development and spiritual development occur in tandem. Like two sides

of a coin, one does not exist without the other. Feedback from the environment is crucial to development and an intrinsic aspect of Aboriginal identity's cultural ecosystem. The development processes of Aboriginal identity are arduous and complex. The foundational principles of identity expression are love, honesty, sharing, determination, and perseverance. Together these form ideal outcomes for Aboriginal identity expression.

What happened to Aboriginal identity under colonization? Canada was created through an extensive process of colonization that was not only an invasion of the land but also an invasion of Aboriginal identity. The European Peoples who invaded North America viewed Indigenous Peoples as part of the flora and fauna of the continent now at their disposal. Like the other natural resources, Indigenous Peoples were assessed based on their utility to the colonial enterprise. This European perception of sub-human inferiority framed what Europeans wanted to know about Indigenous Peoples and limited what they could know from within this perspective. The colonizers' inability and/or unwillingness to see Indigenous Peoples as human beings with all of the rights of humanity to survival on their land, self-determination over their lives, and co-existence as part of the natural world was the initiation of the assault on Aboriginal identity. Indigenous cultural differences were framed as human deficiencies according to European understanding. Indigenous Peoples were viewed as subject to and objects of European cultural superiority and human supremacy rather than self-determining human beings. Because it was counter to the needs of European colonial identity, Aboriginal identity was deemed a worthless hindrance to full human development.

The assault on Aboriginal identity had two purposes: to delegitimize Aboriginal Peoples and to legitimize Canada's existence. It was institutionalized from the very beginning of colonization through the exercise of church and military power. As Canada established its

legislative power as a colony, the attack was further legitimized through colonial laws and goals aimed at the outright eradication of Aboriginal identity through processes of aggressive assimilation largely carried out through education. The Indian Residential Schools system was the primary tool of aggressive assimilation.

During their 165 years of operation, Indian Residential Schools were charged with instilling in Aboriginal children a false, negative image of their identity as *Indians*, teaching them the inferiority of their peoples' ways, the ways in which their cultures and traditions were wrong, and how these *facts* were hindering their human potential. Residential schools endeavored to train Aboriginal children how to overcome their natural inferiority by becoming *Canadian Indians* instead. The purpose of this pre-fabricated identity was to offer a way for Indians to serve the Canadian state as a servant social class. The schools targeted children specifically because they were in the earliest stages of identity development. They removed children from their families and communities in order to deliberately disrupt their Aboriginal identity development and divert it instead to processes of becoming *Canadian Indians*. The schools provided children with only the rudimentary aspects of Canadian education, enough to take up their place at the bottom of society. Aboriginal children were also targeted in the hope that their re-education would follow them home and spread through their communities, leading adults to follow their children's lead and assume the identity of a *Canadian Indian*, too. The Canadian Indian was intended to be a useful replacement for Aboriginal identity in realizing the ultimate goal of colonization: the destruction of any remaining evidence of pre-existing Peoples on the continent. No Indigenous identity, no Indigenous cultures, no Indigenous Peoples, no Indigenous problem.

Colonization has characterized Aboriginal identity as a terminal affliction that must be

overcome, which has caused psychic, emotional, physical, and spiritual distress for Aboriginal people. This existential crisis results from knowing at heart that we are human but also knowing that we are still not valued as such by Canadian society. It is a bi-polar effect characteristic of post-traumatic stress disorder. Instead of learning their inherent value through identity development, Aboriginal people often seek value according to Canadian society's terms instead. Without a naturally developed identity, Aboriginal people are left without a road map for living, a guide for relating to the world, or the certainty that comes from knowing that they belong.

The impacts of the invasion and assault on Aboriginal identity are what play out in the individual and collective lives of Indigenous people every day. Identity development is impaired by identity diffusion, acculturation stressors, developmental trauma, and the cycles of self-perpetuating internal and external trauma that result from dysfunctional thinking and living. Not only is Aboriginal identity unable to develop in natural ways, it attempts to develop instead according to a Canadian conceptualization of it as alien, hostile, debilitating, and worthless. Dysfunctional thoughts and behaviours that are characteristic of an under-developed identity in many Aboriginal people result in impaired relationships between the individual and: self, family, community, society, and the natural world. Impaired relationships live out as dysfunctional behaviours that can be classified under the following categories: powerlessness and hopelessness; shame and doubt; self-injury and suicide; dangerousness and violence; anger; addiction; victims and victimization; religion-related behaviours; and anti-social behaviours. Dysfunctional behaviour leads to illness, addiction, family breakdown, community discord, suicide, homicide, incarceration and death.

The forms and degrees of dysfunction and its consequences in Aboriginal lives are the outcomes of the assault European colonizers waged on Aboriginal identity. They are a direct

consequence of the impairment of Aboriginal identity and resulting damage to Aboriginal cultures and are in no way a product of either. Aboriginal Peoples' concept of self has been deliberately damaged, resulting in a "shaky, weakened, shame-riddled identity" instead. Despite this reality, the problems Aboriginal people experience as a result of colonization are still framed as Aboriginal problems. An example of this, as the next section illustrates, is that Canadian institutions such as schools are still asking *why Aboriginal people are failing in Canadian society* rather than asking *why Canadian society is still failing Aboriginal people.*

What are the effects of schools and teachers on Aboriginal identity development?

The relationship between education and Aboriginal identity is rooted in the Indian Residential Schools system, the sole purpose of which was to attack and destroy Aboriginal identity and replace it with a *Canadian Indian* identity. Now that the truths about them are surfacing on a nation-wide scale, how residential schools degraded, assaulted, and traumatized generations of Indigenous children is readily apparent. Residential schools were designed to meet the needs of Canadian society by destroying Aboriginal identity and removing it as an obstacle to Canadian legitimacy. What is more difficult to see are the ways in which provincial education has continued to degrade, assault, and traumatize Indigenous children by remaining hostile to Aboriginal identity.

Aboriginal children enter school ignorant of the facts of colonization but well acquainted with its consequences on their lives. An under-developed identity leaves them vulnerable as they learn about the devastating history of colonization, the inferiority of their people, and the ways in which they are expected to change in order to achieve success in Canadian society. Education becomes a collection of shameful, painful, alienating experiences as Aboriginal children learn about what it means to be *Indian* according to Canadian society's definition. As Canadian

schools fulfill their task of reproducing Canadian identity, they also reproduce the image of the *Canadian Indian* that they desire Aboriginal people to be.

When the high financial costs of running a separate Indian school system initiated the closure of residential schools, this responsibility was transferred to the provinces under a new policy of integration. This jurisdictional shift did not change the Canadian goals of Aboriginal education. It was made for economic reasons and was not accompanied by changes to the structures, functions, processes, or goals of education. Instead, it simply transferred the responsibility for Aboriginal assimilation to the provinces, effectively embedding the goals of assimilation into the entire Canadian education system. Canadian schools did not suddenly reinvent or revise their purpose within Canadian society and begin to concern themselves with developing Aboriginal identity.

In their function of reproducing Canadian society, provincial schools have continued to reinforce the justification for Canada's existence: the inferiority of the first Peoples of the land it now claims as its own. This has contributed to the normalization of Indigenous inferiority in Canadian society. The consequences of Canada's degradation of Aboriginal identity on Aboriginal lives have continued to grow despite the end of the residential school era because Aboriginal children continue to learn the ways in which they are *Indian* and that becoming like a Canadian is the only remedy. The dysfunction and trauma that have resulted from the assaults on Aboriginal identity and people are then recast as evidence of Indigenous inferiority and so the cycle perpetuates itself.

The inferior image of the *Indian* and Canadian society's hostility towards it are both perpetuated through provincial education. Aboriginal children are forced into a foreign environment to learn the painful history of their peoples and their sub-standard position in

society. As they learn to believe in their inherent Indian-ness, they often begin to seek value according to *Canadian Indian* stereotypes because they have not learned their intrinsic human value through developing their identity. Historical traumas are re-created in contemporary education as Aboriginal children are forced to find their way in a foreign and hostile culture without a developed identity to ground, protect, or guide them. As they come to understand that Canada still perceives them as alien, hostile remnants on the land without the counter-balance of a strong identity and ecosystem to anchor them, most children and youth begin to fail, drop-out, act out, and otherwise resist their education.

Policies that continue to frame Aboriginal student failure as the problem are evidence of the continued propensity to lay the responsibility for their failure on the Aboriginal people. Aboriginal children are characterized as deficient in the knowledge and skills required to succeed. *Success* is not qualified as a Canadian conceptualization. Left unqualified in this way, it becomes the only measure of success, leaving no room for Indigenous alternatives. Educational achievement is defined by and for Canadian identity. Schools serve the interests of the state and in reproducing society they also reproduce and reinforce the social inequities that serve state economic and political gain. Schools remain relatively unchanged in that their goals, structure, and measures of success are designed to meet the needs of Canadian identity. They reproduce Canadian society, which continues to see Aboriginal people as *Indians*.

Policies like infusion have little or no accountability measures or enforcement attached to their implementation because Canadian education is not designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal identity. The absence of accountability mechanisms means that no one is held accountable when Aboriginal education policies fail. The accountability for the continued, systemic failure of Canadian education to meet the needs of Aboriginal people clearly rests with

the Government of Canada as the architect of Aboriginal education for assimilation. The illegal (supra-legal) transfer of jurisdiction over Aboriginal education to provinces under policies of integration also transferred assimilation as the primary goal of educating Aboriginal people.

Education for assimilation continues through provincial schools as education systems struggle to understand their responsibility toward Aboriginal students. While provincial education is arguably not as outwardly aggressive as the Indian Residential Schools system, assimilation remains the goal for Aboriginal people. Schools continue to elevate Euro-Canadian identity as a model of ideal human development to which Indigenous people must aspire in order to be valuable to Canadian society. The effect of this on Canadian identity is an addictive ethnocentrism that has to maintain its position of cultural and human superiority in order to maintain the rationale for its existence.

Focusing policy changes on the ways in which Aboriginal people are deficient is a deliberate misrepresentation meant to distract attention from any consideration of the ways in which education continues to fail Aboriginal people. The relationship between education and Aboriginal identity continues to be defined by assimilation. The consequences of this relationship on Aboriginal people have become self-perpetuating and often self-inflicted trauma through addiction, disease, and suicide.

Canadian teachers and Aboriginal students function within the parameters of the colonial relationship between education and Aboriginal identity. The assimilative foundation of this relationship has determined the limits of what Canadian teachers can experience, know, or understand about Aboriginal Peoples. Before teachers can begin to learn about Aboriginal Peoples, their perspectives, and their experiences of colonization, they first need to be willing, which requires being open to learning about the limited and erroneous nature of what they have

already previously learned. Their attitudes toward Aboriginal Peoples, cultures, and histories may be disbelieving, judgmental, or detached, making it difficult for them to teach about Aboriginal perspectives without also conveying their attitudes toward them. Teachers are members of Canadian society and as such have had the same opportunities to learn about *Indians* as other Canadians have. They are products of Canadian education and they carry many of the deliberate misrepresentations of Indigenous people their education produced into their classrooms and offer them to a new generation of Canadians.

Canada's colonial history seems to be especially challenging for teachers, given how much of it has remained untaught for so long. Most Canadian teachers only know about colonization from their perspectives as the colonizers. They have been taught to believe in Indigenous inferiority as the justification for Canada's establishment as a society more deserving of the land and its resources than their Indigenous predecessors. Many teachers, like other Canadians, dispute Indigeneity altogether and claim a right to the land based on superior social and technological advancement. Their dominant social position as Euro-Canadians means that the majority of teachers have never experienced cultural oppression. Instead, they have learned in school that Aboriginal people's problems are the result of their own cultural inferiority and that assuming a Canadian identity is the only remedy.

Teachers' attitudes toward Aboriginal perspectives can have tremendous impacts on Aboriginal children's self-perceptions. Aboriginal children know that they are seen as *Indians* by how they are treated. This is especially important in the relationships they have with teachers. When teachers discuss Aboriginal subjects, Aboriginal children focus on the value that the teachers exhibit toward the subject matter. The value that children see assigned to Aboriginal topics by the teacher becomes part of how the children value themselves. Seeking value

according to Canadian standards of an *acceptable Indian* often becomes part of the false image by which Aboriginal children measure themselves. The stereotypes of good or bad *Indians* become the developmental models to which young people ascribe as they go through the motions of what they believe is being *Indian*. Conversely, many youth either reject their Aboriginal identity as worthless or determine that they do not have an identity at all. When teachers view Aboriginal people as *Indians* and treat them accordingly, Aboriginal children apply the same worth to themselves.

Aboriginal identity development has very different goals, methods, related abilities, and outcomes than Canadian identity development and therefore has very different needs. The differences between Aboriginal and Canadian identity development arise out of essentially different, contrasting or conflicting perspectives about self, identity, life, health, and justice. The traumas and assaults that Aboriginal identity has endured mean that its development will require a focus on identity healing first. This demands a holistic approach to identity development that is grounded in ceremony, which means that it must be directed by skilled, practiced Elders and healers. Developing the abilities necessary to help heal Aboriginal identity takes the better part of a lifetime of cultural immersion. It cannot be accomplished in the span of a university course or perhaps even in an entire program. To ask Canadian teachers to engage in a process of immersion in an Indigenous culture to the extent necessary to heal and develop Aboriginal identity in others seems highly unrealistic.

Cultural congruity between teachers and Aboriginal students offers the best chance for Aboriginal identity healing and development in children. Shared cultural perspectives and common experiences of colonization position Indigenous teachers as the most appropriate guides, interpreters, and models of Aboriginal identity development and expression. They are a

natural part of the ecosystem of identity development. As such, Aboriginal children do not need to determine whether or not they are human beings or *Indians* in the eyes of the teacher. Asking Indigenous teachers to engage in processes of identity development as part of their teacher preparation would provide them with their own healing opportunities if they have not already done so or to continue in the processes if they have. There are no valid substitutes for the ancient knowledge and practices in Aboriginal identity healing and development.

These summaries are the research findings on Aboriginal identity that were required in order to carry out an Indigenous analysis of infusion policy. The next section is an application of these findings to the policy and its assumptions in order to evaluate its ability to achieve its objectives.

Infusion Policy Analysis

In this section, I present an analysis of the underlying assumptions of infusion policy summarized earlier in the chapter. The questions that guide my analysis are the following: (1) Does a strong Aboriginal identity help improve educational experiences and contribute to academic success for Aboriginal people? (2) Do all Canadian teachers have the knowledge, understanding and ability to appropriately and effectively infuse Aboriginal perspectives into curriculum and practice? and (3) Can infusing Aboriginal perspectives into Alberta's school curriculum help develop Aboriginal identity? My analysis consists of answering these questions in order in the next three sub-sections.

Aboriginal identity and academic success. The correlation between a developed Aboriginal identity and achieving the academic outcomes of Canadian education is muddled by the historic relationship between education and Aboriginal identity. The two basic problems in Canadian education for Aboriginal people are rooted in the motivations behind the assault on

Aboriginal identity and in that education is the primary avenue through which the attack has been carried out. The motives behind the targeted destruction of Aboriginal identity are grounded in the ideologies of colonization. The European construction of Indigenous inferiority justified the invasion of North America and constituted an invasion of Aboriginal identity as well. From its inception as a British colony, aggressively assimilating Indigenous Peoples has been Canadian policy and education has served as assimilation's principal vehicle. In its quest for a solution to its *Indian problem*, Canadian society instituted the deliberate destruction of Aboriginal identity by preventing its development. The societal perception of Indigenous inferiority and its reinforcement through public and Aboriginal education have created the problems that plague Aboriginal people's lives in Canada.

These findings agree with both the literature on infusion and the Alberta Education policy framework in identifying the two main problems underlying the issues that affect Aboriginal people's educational experiences and performance. As a result of aggressive assimilation policies and practices, Aboriginal identity development has suffered a prolonged and direct assault that has caused major existential and social problems related to an under-developed identity for many Aboriginal people. These problems have been compounded by the degradation of Aboriginal identity and Peoples in Canadian society and its institutions. Canadian education has been complicit in creating and sustaining both the direct and indirect attacks on Aboriginal identity. This complicity confounds the ways in which education can now help correct the problems and ameliorate the damage it has caused to Aboriginal people.

The problem of Canadian hostility toward Indigenous Peoples and Aboriginal identity is mirrored in schools and recreated in society through them. Eliminating this hostility will require reversing the processes of colonization and ending the war on Aboriginal identity. This would

mean reviewing policy and practice at all levels of government to determine the ways in which they are still structured to denigrate Aboriginal identity and undermine its development. Canadian society and its institutions would need to embark on a path of unlearning and relearning the history of Canadian colonization, who Indigenous Peoples were prior to the invasion, and the ways in which the damage to Indigenous lives is a result of the attack on Aboriginal identity. Canadians need to reconsider and redefine Canadian identity in ways that do not require it to be in opposition to Aboriginal identity.

Canadian education can and should play a significant role in changing societal attitudes toward Indigenous Peoples and cultures. As the primary structures of societal propagation, schools have a responsibility to address the historical and contemporary wrongs Canada has committed in its quest to survive and expand as a colony and develop as a nation. Schools can lead the way by making deliberate changes to policy and practice so that they no longer vilify Indigeneity but welcome it instead. Schools would need to make space for Aboriginal identity expression, redefine educational success to include the goals of Aboriginal identity development, and tie accountability measures to policies aimed at changing Canadian attitudes toward and treatment of Indigenous people. Both Canadian society and schools must re-evaluate their perceptions of Indigenous Peoples and revise policies and practices that maintain Canadian hostility toward Aboriginal identity. They need to also understand the impacts of their misperceptions on Indigenous lives and that there are no connections between Indigenous cultures and the dysfunction that characterizes much of Indigenous experience in Canada.

In order to reverse the role of education in the destruction of Aboriginal identity and its development, education policy must be inverted as well. Aboriginal education needs to be reinvented according to a new purpose: healing Aboriginal identity. The deliberate destruction of

Aboriginal identity development processes and the societal inferiority assigned to Aboriginal identity must be countered by new educational goals and practices aimed at the full development of Aboriginal identity as the means of ensuring success for Aboriginal people. For this to happen, schools would need to become part of the ecosystem for Aboriginal identity development. They would need to enable children to be immersed in culture and interacting with their peoples, histories, ceremonies, knowledges, languages, and lands through experiential learning processes that develop the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the individual-in-community-in-a-place-in-the-Cosmos. Just as aggressive assimilation through education caused identity diffusion, stress, and trauma, reversing the goal of Aboriginal education to achieving full Aboriginal identity development is the solution.

Reconciling the relationship between Aboriginal people and education will require reversing the processes of colonization by targeting both Aboriginal identity healing and development and correcting Canadian perceptions of Indigenous inferiority. Both are necessary to restoring the humanity of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and enabling optimal identity development and expression. Whether or not Canadian education can accomplish these goals is the subject of the remainder of this analysis.

Teachers and Aboriginal identity development. Canadian teachers are not just members of Canadian society; they are also the chief agents in its maintenance and reproduction. They are both products and producers of society. As such, they have been inducted into the belief structure of Canadian identity by learning a whitewashed version of history that obscures and manipulates the true nature of Indigenous Peoples as fully developed, self-determined human beings with all of the rights accompanying their humanity. They have learned that their own identity is superior to Aboriginal identity and that their role in Aboriginal education is to teach

Aboriginal children to also see Canadian identity as their developmental goal. In their task as societal reproducers, teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and ignorance perpetuate Aboriginal identity under-development and traumatization and contribute to the ongoing difficulties with which Aboriginal people struggle individually, communally, and societally.

In order for Canadian teachers to participate in changing Canadian perceptions of Aboriginal Peoples, they must first understand the origins and purposes of those perceptions. They need to examine how their knowledge, understanding, and attitudes toward Canada's colonial history are limited by their own miseducation. The first step is recognizing that they do not know what they do not know and the ways in which that limits their understanding of Canadian history and Indigenous Peoples' perspectives. Undoing their perceptions of Indigenous inferiority means understanding colonization as their source and purpose. Until teachers can learn to see the value and necessity of Aboriginal identity and its development for Aboriginal people, their participation in its development will remain limited at best. Teachers who are unable or unwilling to relearn and review history will continue to negatively impact Aboriginal children's self-worth and developmental potential by teaching a new generation of children, Canadian and Aboriginal, the superiority of Canadian identity and how the historical evidence supports it.

Aboriginal teachers are best positioned to facilitate identity healing for Aboriginal students because of their shared cultural perspectives and colonial experiences. Because the goals and processes of Aboriginal identity development differ greatly from those of Canadian identity, it seems unrealistic to expect Canadian teachers to apprentice in Indigenous development to the degree necessary to facilitate development in others. Interpreting, modeling, and facilitating Aboriginal identity development for others must take place within an Aboriginal

cultural ecosystem. Aboriginal people are essential agents in reproducing Aboriginal culture as the medium in which identity can develop. Their perspectives on history, their knowledge and languages, their ceremonies, and their relationships to the land must be the sources of their identity development. Enabling Aboriginal teachers to engage in their own identity development as part of their teacher preparation would allow opportunities for their own healing as well.

Aboriginal teachers can also help reverse the negative effects that Canadian teachers' perceptions of Aboriginal people have on Aboriginal children's identity development. Cultural congruency between teachers and students provides a sense of recognition and belonging, enables shared understanding of culture and experience, and provides exemplars for Aboriginal identity development. Because healing must be the goal, Elders and ceremony are integral to the processes. Canadian teachers have been complicit in the assault on Aboriginal identity through a colonial education system. They remain one of the constants of the colonial educational experience for Aboriginal people and, like Canadian schools, cannot simply be repurposed to now serve Aboriginal identity development instead. As agents of Canadian education and social reproduction, teachers too must re-examine history and come to understand the impacts of their perceptions on Aboriginal lives.

Infusion and Aboriginal identity development. While the Alberta Education policy framework correctly identifies the causes of the problems Aboriginal students have in education, infusion is not a feasible solution to those problems under the present conditions. Canadian teachers do not have the requisite knowledge, understanding, or experience to address either Canadian perceptions of Indigenous Peoples or Aboriginal identity development. Canadian schools continue to reflect Canadian societal hostility toward Aboriginal identity that has characterized the relationship between education and Aboriginal people. Assimilation is still the

goal and definition of success for Aboriginal students despite the call for infusion. The hope for infusing Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum is that it will help Aboriginal students perform better in the Canadian education system, the goals of which are still Canadian identity development.

Canadian schools and teachers, as critical elements of social development, remain part of a colonial education system designed to elevate Canadian identity as the developmental ideal and eliminate Aboriginal identity as alien and hostile to the colonial enterprise. As colonial institutions, Canadian schools were designed to develop a colonial identity. In order to justify its existence, Canadian identity has developed as a replacement for its inferior predecessor on the land, Aboriginal identity. Infusion assumes that schools and teachers can now simply reverse the effects of colonization by systematically incorporating their colonial perspectives of Aboriginal Peoples, their cultures, and their experiences of colonization into the Canadian curriculum. This has been the case in Aboriginal education since its very beginnings. To assume that Canadian perspectives of Aboriginal Peoples suddenly changed when infusion became policy, and that teachers and schools were able to change the course of Canadian education without first understanding what they were being asked to change, seems highly unrealistic and unreflective of what has actually taken place in Alberta over the last sixteen years.

What infusion has been in practice is a mandate without the tools, directions, or clarity of purpose to achieve it. Nothing magical happened when infusion became policy. The same teachers with the same knowledge, experiences, and perceptions of Aboriginal Peoples were now required to infuse what could only be their perceptions into the curriculum. Changes in mainstream teacher education programs have been slow to happen and limited as Aboriginal perspectives have had to compete with other subjects for dedicated space in a finite program.

Professional development has been largely voluntary for in-service teachers, which is a significant problem in any attempts to change societal attitudes. Alberta Education is only now revamping the knowledge, skills, and aptitudes requirements for teachers to address infusion, despite the policy being in place since 2002. Without any accountability on schools or teachers to meet the expectations of infusion, it is not surprising that little has changed in terms of Aboriginal student outcomes in that time.

An entire generation of Alberta students has been educated under the policy of infusion and yet they still come into post-secondary education very ignorant of the details of Canada's colonial history and often with incredibly negative perceptions of Aboriginal Peoples that are fueled and supported by Canadian society and its institutions. It is still okay to kill Indians in Canada and in some regions it's still expected. Aboriginal perspectives are not being infused into the curriculum because most teachers have no idea what they are or why they are important. If teachers are addressing Aboriginal content or issues in schools, they are infusing that content with their own colonial perspectives but presenting them as Aboriginal perspectives. They can only interpret subject matter based on their own limited understanding because very little has changed in the system to ensure otherwise. The result is not Aboriginal identity development. It is a re-imagination of the *Indian* in 21st century terminology: *Aboriginal* is simply the new *Indian* in policy and infusion is still colonization in practice.

Conclusion

Decolonizing Canadian education will require a systemic analysis of the ways in which education from Kindergarten to post-secondary education continues to serve a colonial agenda. If Aboriginal identity is to be welcomed in Canadian society, then colonial conceptualizations of Canadian identity must be re-evaluated to make room for Aboriginal identity expression as a

measure of success in Canadian society. The image of the *Indian* has to be deconstructed in the minds of Canadians and replaced with real Peoples with inherent value. Achieving this will end the assault on Aboriginal identity in Canadian society and schools, which will in turn increase Aboriginal people's participation in education on their own terms and in pursuit of their own developmental goals. Ending the traumatization that education has inflicted on Aboriginal Peoples will remove the most significant barrier to their success in the system and in Canadian society. A decolonized education system would allow Aboriginal people to teach Aboriginal perspectives in schools rather than continuing to perpetuate Canadian versions of Aboriginal perspectives.

Aboriginal identity development will require a system that is dedicated to its processes, goals, and outcomes. Aboriginal people are essential elements of its cultural ecosystem and ceremonies are the primary source of learning and development. A system dedicated to Aboriginal identity development must be designed by Aboriginal people, developed by Aboriginal people, and implemented by Aboriginal people who are developing their own identities through cultural participation. Elders are integral to Aboriginal identity development as healers, guides, interpreters, and models of identity expression. Colonial education attempted to destroy Aboriginal identity by removing it from its ecosystem, cutting it off from its roots, and immersing it in a foreign and hostile environment. Reversing the damage this caused requires reversing the processes it entailed. In order for Aboriginal identity to heal and develop, it must be taken out of the foreign, hostile environment, reattached to its roots, and re-immersed in its cultural ecosystem. Anything less than this will be another bandage applied to hold the broken branches together rather than refocusing on the roots for the solution.

Chapter 8

Policy Discussion and Conclusion

In order for education policy to begin to address the needs of Aboriginal people in Canada, policy makers need to adjust their focus from the symptoms to the causes of the damage that Aboriginal identity has sustained under colonization. Policies that focus on improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students without making changes to the structures, processes, and goals of Canadian education will continue to result in band-aid remedies applied to fundamental problems. Identity development is a basic human right that has been systematically denied to Indigenous people in Canada. Canadian society continues to view Aboriginal Peoples as sub-human and culturally inferior, the consequences of which have included continued social alienation and marginalization. The assault on Aboriginal identity continues through Canadian education and the negative outcomes for Aboriginal Peoples are reaching epidemic proportions. Reversing this trend will require a new policy focus on the roots of the problems in order for change to begin to take effect.

Policies That Continue to Serve Colonization

Infusion policy is characteristic of the ways in which Canada continues to apply band aid remedies to the problems that arise from systemic discrimination against Indigenous people. It focuses on the symptoms and outcomes of colonization as the sources of the problems rather than on their deep colonial roots. As Figure 17 illustrates, focusing on the dis-ease and dysfunction that aggressive assimilation and other features of colonization have created among Indigenous Peoples does not resolve the underlying colonial framework that continues to serve Canada's existential justification. Focusing on the symptoms of colonization in education policy rather than focusing on the ways in which education continues to systematically discriminate

against Aboriginal people frames the issues as Indigenous failures rather than as systemic racism and oppression.

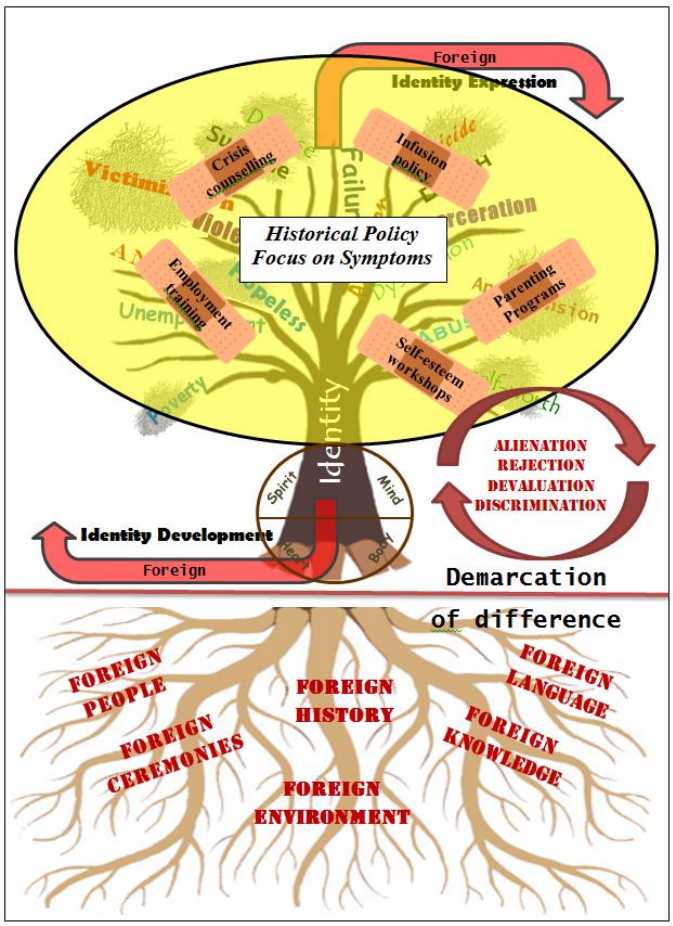

Figure 16: Historical Policy Solutions

The failures of Canadian society to meet the most basic needs of all of its citizens are recast as Aboriginal people's failure, on all fronts, to be successful Canadians. The alienation of Aboriginal identity from Canadian society and the hostility that maintains its alienation remain the norms by which Aboriginal people are evaluated for their Canadian-ness. Policies that target Aboriginal people as the source of their own education problems, such as *Aboriginal students need to see themselves reflected in the curriculum in order to be successful in school*, for example, snip away at the branches but never address the actual roots of the problem. The

underlying question that remains unasked is: *Why do Aboriginal perspectives have to be added to the Canadian curriculum in the twenty-first century when Aboriginal Peoples have existed for far longer than Canada has?*

Policies like this actually contribute more to the problem by reinforcing the perception of Indigenous inferiority than provide any solutions. Understanding how and why Aboriginal Peoples' perspectives have been excluded from the Canadian story in the first place continues to remain outside of the policy arena and the problems that Aboriginal people face continue to compound. Without profound changes to the foundations of Canadian society, power will remain unequal and Canadian institutions like the education will continue to fail Aboriginal Peoples.

Effective change in Aboriginal education requires a policy focus on the roots of the problems that plague Aboriginal people as a result of colonial policies and perceptions. The damage that has been done to Aboriginal identity through aggressive assimilation and other colonial policies aimed at removing Indigenous Peoples from the Canadian landscape can only be remedied by changing the focus to the ways in which education policy is still rooted in colonial perceptions and ideology, as Figure 18 demonstrates. In order for education to contribute to healing Aboriginal identity rather than continuing its colonial assault on it, Aboriginal education policies must be uprooted and decolonized.

The work of providing the means to develop Indigenous identity from Indigenous perspectives and through Indigenous ways has to be vested with Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous identity development will require Indigenous people who have been provided opportunities to develop aspects of their Indigenous identity in Indigenous contexts in order to create the cultural ecosystem necessary to develop Indigenous identity in others. I do not see how Canadian education could be *indiginized* to the degree necessary, if at all, to become an ecosystem for

Indigenous identity. The goals of Canadian education have to come second to Indigenous identity development because of the threat they pose to the survival of Indigenous identity and therefore the survival of Indigenous Peoples.

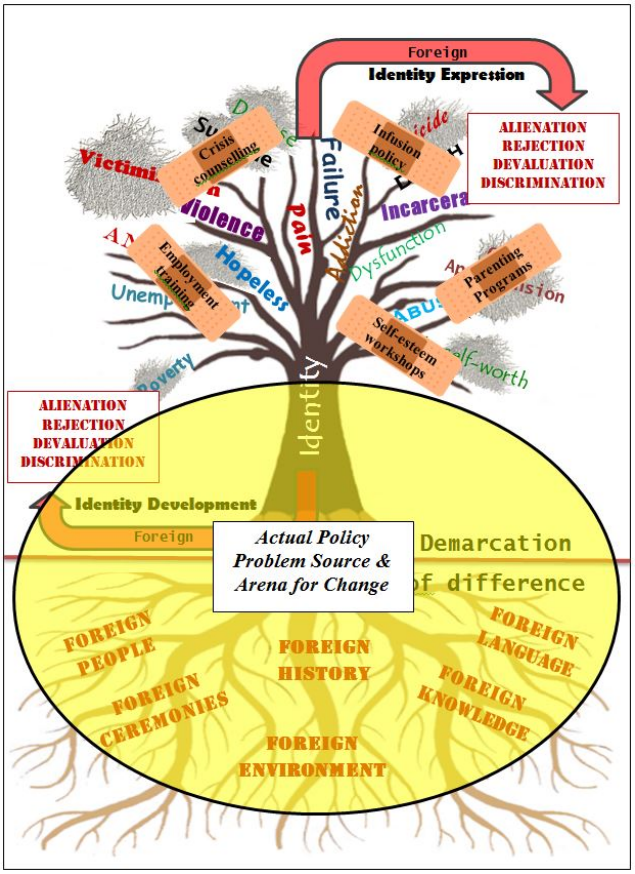

Figure 17: Actual Policy Change Arena

Identity Development as a Human Right

Developing one's identity is a basic aspect of being human that has been denied to Indigenous Peoples around the world through colonization. International efforts to counter the effects of colonization on Indigenous Peoples around the world have culminated in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations General Assembly, 2007). After nearly a decade of the Conservative Government of Canada refusing to adopt the *Declaration*, the new Liberal Government did so unconditionally in May 2016. The Declaration

affirms the humanity and equality of Indigenous Peoples and declares the urgency of the need for States to respect and promote their inherent rights as distinct Peoples. Among the rights addressed are the right of Indigenous families and communities to raise, educate, and provide for the well-being of their children. The Declaration affirms the fundamental human right to self-determination, including political, economic, social, and cultural development and participation. It states that Indigenous people are entitled to enjoy all internationally-recognized human rights without discrimination and that Indigenous Peoples have collective rights that are necessary for their existence, well-being, and development as Peoples. Education is addressed in at least four of the forty-six Articles of the Declaration.

The Declaration addresses aggressive assimilation policies and practices in Article 8 which specifically declares the right of Indigenous Peoples to not be forced to assimilate or otherwise destroy Indigenous cultures and the responsibility of States to prevent and provide redress for any actions which have as their aim or effect on Indigenous Peoples of: depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities; dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources; forcing population transfer and violating or undermining any of their rights; forcing assimilation or integration; or designing and promoting propaganda to incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them.

The rights of Indigenous Peoples to be culturally distinct and to education their children according to their traditions are addressed repeatedly. Article 13 affirms Indigenous Peoples' "right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons" (p. 7). Article 14 affirms the right to establish and control Indigenous education systems and institutions that use Indigenous languages and

culturally appropriate pedagogies at all levels and in all forms of education without discrimination. It further establishes the State's responsibility to take effective measures to ensure that Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have access to education in their own cultures and languages, including those who live outside of their Indigenous communities. Article 15 affirms the right to cultural diversity and the dignity of their traditions, histories, and aspirations and to have them reflected appropriately in education and society. States are called on to effectively combat prejudice and discrimination and promote understanding, tolerance, and good relations between Indigenous Peoples and all members of society.

Now that the Canadian Government has adopted the Declaration that recognizes and demands respect for the humanity of Indigenous Peoples, perhaps they will now consider returning Aboriginal Peoples right to culturally-defined self-determination. This would allow Aboriginal communities to redefine education, success, and the purposes of being human according to their cultural definitions, practices, and desired outcomes.

After Canada's adoption in principle of *Indian Control of Indian Education* (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972) as policy in 1972, the concept of band-controlled schools offered hope for Aboriginal education to focus on the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal Peoples. What they largely became instead were federally-funded replicas of provincial schools located on reserves with Canadian teachers and administrators delivering provincial curriculum on a provincial timetable in an official Canadian language. Band schools have operated for nearly half a century with grossly insufficient funds to even offer an adequate provincial curriculum.

Underfunding has also severely impeded many communities' ability to provide locally-derived curriculum, as has the imposition of provincial education requirements. As chronically underfunded one-off schools, they rarely measure up to provincial standards in student

performance in Alberta. Their status as *Indian* schools and therefore *inferior* affects the makeup of administration and teaching staff and it can also affect which families send their children there. Communities have had control in name only because their federal education funding is dependent on providing a provincial education in their schools. This is a continuation of colonial policy and practice that has saved the Government of Canada a great deal of money since they began to close the chronically underfunded Indian Residential Schools. Provincial integration is a financial win for many rural schools whose doors remain open due to their large numbers of federally-funded Indigenous students.

Reversing the processes and effects of the colonial assault on Aboriginal identity will require no less than restoring to Aboriginal Peoples the right to determine their own paths, their participation in Canadian society, and the basic human right to know, develop, and express their identities and pass on both the right and the knowledge to their children. The different nature and developmental needs of Aboriginal identity require schools dedicated to identity healing and expression. They need to be grounded in the cultural ecosystem of each community's identity. Immersion in an education system that is a natural extension of the ecosystem would not only provide students the opportunities to develop, it would also provide them a safe environment in which to heal from the trauma they have suffered in Canadian schools and society.

In a conference address in 2016, Kevin Lamoureaux from the University of Winnipeg shared his view of what education should be for Aboriginal children by relating it to the buffalo. He said that when a buffalo herd is threatened, the adults form a circle around the calves and face out toward the danger. This image has remained with me since then and I have gone back to it regularly as an important part of the purpose of education. I picture the young calves encircled by family members and the greater herd whose horns are facing the enemy while their flanks are

protected from attack by the circle as well. They engage their best tools as they follow their most basic instinct to protect the next generation and, in doing so, teach them how to protect themselves and ensure the survival of the herd.

As creatures too, our basic human instincts are to learn to survive, to procreate, and to teach our progeny how to do the same. This means that teaching our children to be like us (passing on identity) is one of the three basic instincts of humanity. It also means that to learn to live like our parents do (developing identity) so that we can survive like they have is our foremost instinct. To be denied the ability to fulfill two of these three essential natural functions is inhumane and the statistics continue to bear witness to the consequences of denying such fundamental human needs.

Rather than attempt to redefine the purpose of Canadian education or even to redefine Canadian identity in relation to Indigenous Peoples, it behooves us as Indigenous educators to recreate Indigenous systems of education, the primary goal of which would be Indigenous identity development, where children can be immersed in their own cultural ecosystems and develop according to who and what they are. Children could learn who they are and how that makes them strong before being introduced to the foreign knowledge of Canadian curriculum and learning about the colonial history of their Peoples.

Restoring the rights of Indigenous Peoples to educate their own children will require systems and spaces dedicated to preparing communities for the task. Teacher education has to be at the forefront of change rather than trying to catch up to policy from behind. A change of this magnitude will need teachers who are prepared to participate in healing and developing Aboriginal identity in their students. Aboriginal pre-service teachers will need their own healing and development in order to replace the colonial image of the *Indian* as their developmental

potential with understanding who they are and why that matters. It is our basic human right to learn about ourselves through our own cultural perspectives with and through our own peoples and practices. An education system centred on Indigenous identity development will enable Aboriginal education to meet what Yupiak educator Oscar Kawagley defined as its sole purpose for Indigenous Peoples: "to produce a human being" (cited in Marker, 2016, p. 480).

Truth and Reconciliation in Education

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was established as part of the *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement* that came into effect in September 2007 to settle the largest class action suit to date in Canada. The TRC published its final report in 2015, including 94 Calls to Action "to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation" (TRC, 2015, p. 319). Among the calls are 7 that address education for Aboriginal students specifically and 5 related to education for reconciliation. The issues that the education calls respond to include: corporal punishment in schools; discrepancies in federal funding for on-reserve education; achievement and funding reporting and comparisons with public education; post-secondary student funding backlogs; culturally appropriate early childhood education programs; and new Aboriginal education legislation to be drafted with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples along with sufficient funding.

The Commission provided a set of principles to incorporate into new federal Aboriginal education policy in order to advance reconciliation in Canada. It called on the federal government to create legislation that would:

- provide sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation;
- improve education attainment levels and success rates;

- develop culturally appropriate curricula;
- protect the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses;
- enable parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems;
- enable parents to fully participate in the education of their children; and
- respect and honour Treaty relationships. (p. 321)

These Calls are addressed to the federal government because education for Status *Indians* is a federal jurisdiction. One exception is the call for culturally appropriate early childhood education, which is addressed to federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments. This raises questions about the needs of the many Aboriginal children in Canada who are either not *Indians* and/or do not attend school on reserve. Policy and legislation for Aboriginal students who attend public schools remains the purview of provincial education authorities.

The TRC Calls to Action under the heading *Education for reconciliation* are aimed at educating Canadians about Indigenous Peoples and incorporating Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy into Aboriginal education curricula and practice. Call 62 asks federal, provincial, and territorial governments to collaborate with IRS survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators to achieve the following goals:

- 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.
- Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.

- Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
- Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education. (p. 331)

The Commission also asks on the Canadian Council of Ministers of Education, in Call 63, to commit to the following:

- Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools;
- Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history;
- Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect; and
- Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above. (ibid)

The two main purposes of these Calls to Action are to educate Canadians about Aboriginal Peoples, worldviews, and histories and to provide culturally appropriate curriculum and pedagogy to Aboriginal students by integrating Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy into education. These are the same goals as the policy of infusion and they raise similar questions about the feasibility of achieving them.

At present, neither the various levels of government in Canada nor educators have the capacity to develop or provide culturally appropriate education for Aboriginal children on the scale required to effectively transform their educational experiences and outcomes. Nor is there the capacity to accurately represent in curriculum Indigenous Peoples, knowledge, worldviews,

and experiences in order to transform the perspectives of the majority of Canadians about Aboriginal Peoples. Creating the necessary conditions for these goals to be fulfilled will require a period of preparation to develop the capacity of educators, including teachers, to accurately and effectively integrate Aboriginal perspectives into schooling experiences.

Preparing Canadian educators to understand and then effectively teach Canadian students about Aboriginal Peoples requires first undoing the perception of Indigenous inferiority. This means tackling the colonial foundations of Canada's existence. It also means examining the ways in which Canadians have historically benefited from the oppression of Indigenous Peoples, and how they continue to profit from Indigenous marginalization and devaluation in Canadian society. This knowledge is critical to the understanding of all Canadian students. It requires deconstructing the purposes and processes of education in Canada and reconstructing them according to the principles of reconciliation. Commitment and sustained action on the parts of provincial governments, teacher associations, and teacher education programs will be necessary in decolonizing education policy, curriculum, and practice. To compel decolonizing processes to transform the Canadian education system would acknowledge the inhumanity of colonization, appreciate the effects of dehumanization on Aboriginal Peoples, and actively work to ensure that all traces of colonial ideologies and perspectives are eliminated from the goals, content, and processes of Canadian education.

Preparing educators and education to positively contribute to identity development in Aboriginal children also requires fundamental changes to education policy and practice. Mass hiring of Aboriginal teachers and faculty, as has been the case since the release of the TRC's final report, will not create the fundamental changes necessary to address the colonial foundations of Canadian education. Indigenous teachers and faculty are absolutely essential to

the project of transforming educational outcomes for Indigenous people. However, they too are products of a Canadian education and as such they also need to learn the truth of Canadian history, confront its impacts on them as Indigenous people and as teachers, and have the necessary opportunities to develop their own identities in culturally appropriate ways before being able to assist their Indigenous students to do the same. Without fundamental changes to the underlying principles, aims, and processes of education, hiring Indigenous teachers and faculty to address the Calls to Action becomes nothing more than a casting call for *Indians* to take up, legitimize, and offer EuroCanadian perspectives on Indigenous inferiority.

Over the last few years, Indigenous people have been hired in unprecedented numbers to fulfill government and institutional commitments to reconciliation put forward in the Calls to Action. Funding for these positions was provided to primarily non-Indigenous decision makers to take action on implementing education for reconciliation. While I think it is entirely appropriate to engage Indigenous educators in transforming education for and about Indigenous Peoples, I do not believe that simply hiring Indigenous people *en masse* is enough to change the cultural fabric of Canadian institutions and the society that they serve. Transforming education from a colonial enterprise aimed at justifying Canadian existence on Indigenous lands to a system that recognizes and affirms the humanity and equality of Indigenous Peoples cannot be the sole responsibility of the too few Indigenous educators currently engaged in the effort. Not only does this place unrealistic expectations on Indigenous individuals and communities, it also places the responsibility of reconciliation firmly on the backs of Indigenous Peoples.

It is unrealistic to expect Indigenous people to suddenly be fully cognizant of the impacts of colonization on their lives, nor to understand how to counter the multigenerational negative effects of the colonial assault on their identities. Indigenous people will require time, space, and

opportunities on their own lands to revive and remember their knowledge systems and acquire the understanding and capabilities that come from sustained immersion in their own Indigenous ecosystems. For example, Indigenous teachers and educators must be prepared for and able to understand that Canadian education will expect them to simply take up the colonizer's tools and perpetuate the falseness and discrimination that truth and reconciliation are supposed to overcome. Hiring Indigenous faculty and teachers can be only one part of the process of taking up the Calls to Action. It must be done in the context and for the purposes of changing the relationship between Canadian educators and Aboriginal Peoples by transforming the culture of Canadian education.

Changing Canadian Perceptions

I think it is fully reasonable and necessary for the Canadian education system, in its entirety, to deconstruct the colonial image of Indigenous Peoples as *Indians* and in doing so make room for Indigenous Peoples to teach Canadians about who they really are. I see deconstructing this image as an integral aspect of the work of decolonizing Canadian education, and I see this decolonization as a Canadian responsibility. I believe that it is incumbent upon Canadian teachers to first learn for themselves and then teach their students how, why, and in what ways Aboriginal identity was unjustly, inhumanely, and systemically attacked, the consequences of this sustained assault, and the ways in which the attack can be halted and reversed.

Again, teacher education must take a leading role in preparing teachers for this task. Decolonizing education must start with providing teachers with the knowledge, understanding, and ability to see how colonization has operated to define Indigenous lives and the ways in which it continues to do so through education and other societal institutions. Understanding how

and why Aboriginal identity has been attacked through colonization may better enable Canadian teachers to learn about Aboriginal perspectives from Aboriginal people.

Defining the nature of Canadian identity is an elusive task. As an invention of a colonial state, Canadian identity seems to suffer from a legitimacy problem. As usurpers of the land, Canadians are not Indigenous to it, which has resulted in the need for continued justification for Canada's existence as a nation on Indigenous land. Part of this justification has been to manufacture the superiority of Canadian identity over Indigenous identity as people more deserving of the bounty the land offers. As a colonial state, Canada has used power over Indigenous Peoples to sustain its elevation as a superior culture and people. The conundrum in colonial states recognizing and affirming Indigenous rights is that it delegitimizes their claim to the land and power over its Indigenous Peoples. Without the land, what is Canada? Where would Canadians exist if not on the lands of Indigenous Peoples? Canadian identity needs to be redefined in order to end its hostile relationship with Aboriginal identity. Decolonization requires poking holes in the fabric of Canada that has attempted to obliterate Indigenous existence. Europeans reimagined themselves as Canadian. Can Canadians now reimagine an identity that can co-exist with Aboriginal identity?

Urgency of the Need for Change

The statistics on educational achievement, health, incarceration, addiction, murder, and suicide for Aboriginal people in Canada all speak to the systemic failure of Canadian-governed institutions and systems to meet the needs of Indigenous people. The legal evidence of this failure is building as agreements and decisions like the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (2006), the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (2016), legislation like Jordan's Principle (CBC, 2016), and inquiries like the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Inquiry

(Canada, 2016) read into the public record the damages that colonization continues to have on Indigenous people in Canada today. This is a contemporary problem with a long-hidden history, rather than a historical problem with contemporary legacies. Colonization is an ongoing assault and therefore requires a defensive response.

The effects of the attack on Aboriginal identity have led to both reification and self-perpetuation of the trauma as Aboriginal children learn to see themselves as *Indian*. They have no hope for success through education because they are still *Indian*. Children are killing themselves in epidemic numbers and communities are struggling with addiction, violence, and family breakdown. This leads to involvement from child welfare, justice, and health care, which are a continuation of the institutionalized assaults that Aboriginal people endure in Canadian society. The statistics for all indicators of well-being for Aboriginal people are well below those for Canadians. If such grossly disproportionate numbers represented Canadians rather than Aboriginal people, I doubt they would be tolerated. Aboriginal people are still *Indians* according to Canadians and are still treated accordingly. Cases like Colten Boushie and Tina Fontaine demonstrate that it is still okay to kill *Indians* in Canada. We do not need an inquiry to explain why Indigenous women and girls are murdered in such alarming numbers. We only need to watch the news.

Reconciliation in Canada will be complete when Indigenous Peoples' rights are fully restored. It is not a two-way street, as I have heard some pre-service teachers insist. To think this way is to justify the treatment of Aboriginal people as somehow deserved. It is to continue to justify colonization by blaming its victims for their own demise. The onus for achieving reconciliation cannot rest on the shoulders of Aboriginal people. It is Canada's responsibility to set right the deep wrongs it has committed in its quest to exist. The only responsibility for

Aboriginal people to take up is to learn the importance of their identity and to seek ways to develop it in themselves and others. The fact that we still exist despite all efforts to the contrary is a testament to the strength and endurance of our ancestors and ourselves, our identities and spirits, and our relationships with the land and each other.

Conclusion

Aboriginal identity was deliberately attacked by the application of enforced assimilation based on the premise of Indigenous inferiority. The goals, processes, and agents of the program of assimilation have always been Canadian and education has always been its primary vehicle. It therefore seems unrealistic to expect the Canadian education system to now invert its goal of eliminating Aboriginal identity and make Aboriginal identity development its new priority. Given what will be required to first deconstruct the colonial image of Indigenous inferiority and then reconstruct Indigenous identity for children according to and through their own Peoples' epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies, Canadian schools are not equipped with the knowledge, skills, or people necessary to accomplish this.

More than one hundred and sixty years of history have demonstrated that Aboriginal identity cannot develop normally in a system designed to develop a Canadian identity, an identity that owes its existence to the suppression of Aboriginal Peoples. They are mutually exclusive because one was established at the expense of the other's survival. Attempts in recent years to provide opportunities and spaces in education for Aboriginal identity development and for developing better understanding of Aboriginal Peoples among Canadians have actually triggered an increase rather than a decrease in the assaults on Aboriginal identity in Canadian society and its institutions. The vehemence and violence characteristic of many of these assaults indicate the depths of the belief in and attachment to the fundamental inferiority of Indigenous

Peoples. These aggressive responses to including Aboriginal Peoples and perspectives in Canadian education are recent evidence of the hostility inherent in the system and in the society it serves.

Canadian education, in all of its provincial variations, is a system designed to perpetuate Canadian society by reproducing Canadian identity in new generations. This is the inherent problem with education for Aboriginal people. Education is controlled by and therefore designed to replicate Canadian society by shaping identity development according to Canadian norms. This is highly problematic for Aboriginal people because it is a system that remains at its core hostile to Aboriginal identity development by alienating Aboriginal identity as inferior and unnecessary to Canadian society. As the TRC (2015) made clear, this is a Canadian issue:

> Getting to the truth was hard, but getting to reconciliation will be harder. It requires that the paternalistic and racist foundations of the residential school system be rejected as the basis for an ongoing relationship. Reconciliation requires that a new vision, based on a commitment to mutual respect, be developed. It also requires an understanding that the most harmful impacts of residential schools have been the loss of pride and self-respect of Aboriginal people, and the lack of respect that non-Aboriginal people have been raised to have for their Aboriginal neighbours. Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one. Virtually all aspects of Canadian society may need to be reconsidered. (p. vi)

Generations of Canadians have learned and passed on an identity that owes its existence to a mutually exclusive dichotomy that frames colonial/Indigenous being: Indigenous inferiority. As the organizing philosophical principle on which Canada was founded, the belief in Indigenous inferiority has proven difficult to overcome. Instead, it continues to perpetuate itself through

Canadian education systems and frames what is knowable and therefore what is possible for Aboriginal people in Canadian society. It is the essence of the *blame-the-victim* perception of the problems Aboriginal people face in a colonial context. Changing the direction and outcomes of Aboriginal education policy requires changing the focus from the symptoms to the root causes of the issues.

Epilogue

What has been knowable to me about myself has been defined by Canada. I did not learned about my people, my history, my ceremonies, my knowledge, my language, or my land because I was cut off from the roots of my identity through the colonization of my Peoples. What I learned instead was that, *as I am*, I have no worth. What I am, who I am, is of no value to Canada, the country that claims me as its citizen. The best that I could hope for under these conditions was to be *seen as* something worthy despite who/what I am by pretending to be something/someone I am not. As a pretender, perfection seemed to be the only way to succeed. Perfection as a pretender would mean that I had overcome myself completely. This has created a cycle of dysfunction in my life that makes living a series of painful, traumatic, stress-filled, frightening loops of existential distress as the world in which I live continually reinforces my lack of worth according to Canadian values.

Regardless of the successes that I have managed to achieve in this odyssey toward societal acceptance, the essence of who I am has not changed. Neither has the value that Canada places on my existence. Instead, my identity has become more deeply buried under the lies that were applied to it long before I was even born and reiterated with each succeeding generation of Canada's existence. These lies—that I am less-than-human, stupid, lazy, weak, ugly, morally bereft, damned, and destined to fail because of my own essential inferiority—have become the image that has taken the place of my identity in my development. I have developed according to a lethal view of myself and my purpose rather than according to who/what I really am and how I am supposed to relate to the world in accordance with my identity. The consequence of this has (naturally) been *discordance* in every area of my being as I have put all of my effort into trying to be something that I am not. Every success has been tempered by the reality that I am still me

and I still have no value. I have viewed my failures as confirmation of my terminal inferiority and my successes as the result of lucky breaks that were given to me despite my inherent flaws.

My belief in my own inferiority created and sustained a life-threatening existential crisis that confined me to living in survival mode for most of my life. What I learned through the course of this research and my experiences while carrying it out is a new truth: *I matter because I exist*. All else follows from this understanding. I am not my worst enemy. Rather, the lies about my worth have been my undoing. *I am what I am* and learning how to live accordingly is what matters now. This is my reconciliation.

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