

University of Alberta

First Nation Schools Maintaining Control with Indigenous Education Affirms Great Success
Leading Reconciliation

by

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Being Guided By Nistamemahkanak

I am a Cree woman who comes from the Treaty Six Territory. I belong to the Saddle Lake First Nation #125 as a treaty band member. I was born and raised in the community by my mother, father, kokoms, mosoms, aunties, uncles, older cousins and my sister and brother. And currently I am being taught by my children, my spouse, colleagues, friends, and my students including all named above. I bring an abundance of knowledge not only from my family but from my teachers throughout my lifetime because of my respect for relational accountability. Cora Weber-Pillwax is quoted in Shawn Wilson's text "Research is Ceremony" (2008) explains relational accountability as honor to the extended connections we have as spiritual people. I was raised with cultural values that built a strong foundational identity and connections as being proud of who I am, who I came to be and how I intend to carry out my journey. This concept of Cree lifelong learning was taught to me in school and out of school. Besides attending ceremonies and cultural activities throughout my life I was taught in the First Nations schools of Alberta my entire educational experiences including all of my post-secondary education. Particularly Onchaminahos school in Saddle Lake First Nation as I moved on to Kihew Asiniy Education Centre a junior and senior high school in Saddle Lake. During my educational experience I was taught Cree language daily, the importance of ceremony, and the essence of spirit. My lifetime of teachings is abundant but I still know nothing. In my traditional teachings of lifelong learning, it takes a lifetime to learn something, even then as a spiritual elder the first words before they begin to pray, they ask the creator to forgive them for they know nothing asking for guidance in any way possible for the questions being asked. Even then our

grandfathers and grandmothers only provided enough to understand the situation in a personal way allowing us to figure out the situation as a learned experience. Vince Steinhauer says that ““we start as a human being in the ceremony, preparing for it and beginning it, but once that Ceremony starts the spirit takes over””. (2004, p. 33). I truly believe this concept because for me once the songs and drums are heard I feel the spirit take over as I become empowered, proud, and confident in my ways of being. In my lifetime I have never witnessed an Indigenous person being annoyed by the drum. Children sleep through the loudest pow-wow songs, sweat songs, round-dance songs and so on and so forth. It brings comfort to the spirit and allows it to be awakened by feeling proud of our ways of being. Reawakening the spirit in all First Nations people is definitely worth the battle.

Choosing your Parents

Dear Mother,

I want to pay tribute to you and your teachings as they have guided me and continue to guide me in this physical journey we call life. I have been privileged to experience a spiritual life before the physical life because you prayed for me therefore I chose you. I wanted to be your smart, strong, intelligent and independent daughter who continued your respected legacy as a strong-willed leader who practiced traditional methods of education as a kind, humble, bright, generous human being. Many memories flood my human library as I recall living in a house that was torn down soon after I was born. I remember that old mud house as I would be waiting and watching out the west window for my sister to arrive home from school. I would look back from standing at the window and you would be sitting on a rocking chair lifting your shirt up so the soft wind could cool you down. You were pregnant and it would be hot some days, so you would open the window or side door. Sometimes your dad would stop in and I would be playing in the

living room by the bed while you would be serving him drinks and food at the table by the door. I also have many memories of my older sister Bev, you, and I getting up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom in an outhouse because the house did not have a bathroom. I remember that house like I lived in it physically. I always thought that was my earliest memory as a child, thinking that you were pregnant with my little brother who is 18 months younger than me when I looked back from the west window waiting for my sister to get off the bus. It felt like I was special and privileged to be given the full visual view of waiting to be your child. I just want to tell you how much I appreciate your intelligence and honor above all else. You distinguished yourself from anyone else and walked with such confidence that I yearn to develop in my journey. you truly enjoyed your life while being so respectful and helpful to others no matter how much you struggled in life. Constantly doing creator's work while making ends meet at home showed us how important it is to be humble and generous in our ways. Everyday I hope and pray to make you proud of the balance I chose to live with gifts and talents.

Educating to Create Strong Cultural Identities

Introduction

Identity is a key factor in establishing individuals who are comfortable working and interacting within a group, organization or government that accepts them and supports their views. The time has come for Indigenous peoples to be acknowledged for their resilience in survival all these decades. I am called a half-breed Indian from some being half Irish and half Cree but I was raised to view myself First Nation status when I was born. I was registered through my mother who was born and raised on the Saddle Lake First Nation in Treaty Six Territory. She made sure to send my siblings and I to school on reserve our entire elementary and high school and she felt very strongly about her decisions. I always had Cree teachers, mostly

local teachers as my homeroom teachers in school, it was rare that I had a non-indigenous teacher teaching me. Throughout my entire grade school I was taught from a universal point of view, it wasn't until my Grade 12 Social Studies Departmental Exam I experienced identity confusion. I never did question my collective way of thought up until high school but, because I failed the exam 3 times I reevaluated my approach to the written portion of the final. I was an intelligent student who had honors in Math 30 but felt I had different views and understanding when it came to society and how we interact as individuals. I was rarely exposed to “individual thought”, therefore considering my views and opinions in the political mainstream society was next to nil. Absolutely no effort or interest from on-reserve society is given to provincial, and or federal laws and regulations except for school curriculum learning. We have our own Nation, our own laws, rules, and regulations that are followed with the language and the land. We have guidelines and protocols that are honored and practiced. Sometimes these are nowhere to be found in written form. This information is shared through stories, ceremonies, teachings, experiences and dreams guided by ancestors who have prayed for us to still be here. It was very disheartening to know that this intellectual understanding of the world would be the reason I was failing in mainstream thought and in written form of a critical analysis. I found that I didn't utilize the word “I” until I was told my arguments in my Social Studies departmental exam needed to be from my standpoint or positionality. I was literally thinking I should call my mother and ask her what my standpoint is. The exam required me to think in a worldview that was not practiced nor discussed very much. I mean I learned about it in Social Studies class and how right wing and left-wing political views share a space to make decisions for their peoples. But the way I learned the political spectrum was like it is a foreign political government that was across the world. I was never encouraged or forced to choose a federal or provincial political

party and vote. The way I was taught was how we have our own reds and blues on-reserve we need to be concerned about. Sustaining, replenishing, and re-emerging traditional intellectual individuals has always been held at the highest regard by the underground societies ensuring the survival of many ways. These people have recently been able to slowly emerge into mainstream society as doctors, lawyers, teachers, athletes, scientists, nurses, law enforcement, and for me, most importantly treaty advocates and researchers. Creating strong cultural identities will insist on reconsidering goals and or measures as success indicators. According to provincial FNMI strategies, increasing FNMI graduation rates are increasing no matter what data you look at. Provincial achievement tests may indicate if a student is more intelligent than another, but the test itself reflected another culture Indigenous peoples are not much exposed to when living on reserve or being taught the traditional way of ultimate kindness and compassion. Tests cannot expose the intelligence of all individuals. Patsy Steinhauer explains this phenomenon when she wrote *Situated Myself in Research*(2001) as students in her school provided many articulate thinking traditions without needing the elders to guide the process of a sharing circle (Steinhauer 2001). As she tried to dive into studies of how students performed lower on Provincial testing, she was met with overwhelming knowledge of each individual and how they perceived the world. She met true nehiyaw students in her circle, fearlessly moving forward in the world that challenges them daily in all 4 capacities of a human being.

Nehiyo can be defined as one person who has four holistic capacities that speaks about him or herself. Whereas nehiyaw is referring to a speaker who is speaking about a four capacity human being, When we use the word nehiyawak, it is a plural word referring to more than one person who has four capacities. I know this because I understand the basic Cree language. I have heard, seen and studied the Cree language almost everyday for the past 40 years, but sadly I am

not fluent in my mother tongue. The word can be broken down into root words explained to me by a fluent Cree speaker Dr. Jerry Saddleback. I remember learning that “ne” comes from the root word “newo” which means four. The four capacities of an individual. Each individual has a mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical capacity to fill in order to reach your fullest potential in this earth life. “hiyaw” comes from the root word “niyaw” which means “my body”. Therefore “nehiyaw” may have a deeper understanding when knowing the language. You would understand it as “my body has the capacity to fill four strengths as I walk the earth in peace and prayer.” Dr. Jerry teaches the Creation Story I heard growing up. I heard the story throughout my childhood and adolescence while in school and out of school as I understood the meaning of each quarter of life in a different capacity. Currently venturing into my third stage of life, I see the need to apply all my mothers teachings to my way of being and my way of knowing the responsibility. The gifts and talents each person has can be at any stage of life and in any four capacities of humans, therefore it is important for any educator to has the understanding that schools determine mental and physical strength and dismiss the opportunity to create emotionally intelligent or spiritually intelligent people in a world that is in need of hope and prayer.

Walk with a Hole in your Moccasin

Building an education system and dismantling another to benefit the livelihoods of all peoples will take patience and time from the Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples leading the process can increase the measures and successes that sometimes seem to be the only measure of western academic success. Increasing numbers of colonized Indigenous peoples contributing to only one society has always been the hidden agenda. Allowing a vision of walking both worlds is possible and has been the most common practice amongst modern Indigenous peoples. Everyone involved can agree that future generations are worth the blood, sweat and tears in this process. If

ever given the chance to create such a school as nehiyawak educators, then we might be able to see effects in all of society as it would be tremendous to the livelihood of all treaty people.

Walking with a hole in your moccasin refers to the care and attention that is provided to a pregnant mother from the day of conception in Cree Worldview. The belief of that worldview is that the baby is a gift from the creator and the baby needs extra care and attention when a woman is pregnant. In Cree view she is told there are no trimester stages that are explained to us like in western worldview when explaining the development of the child. Every family must provide the love and nurturing nature to the woman the entire nine moons of pregnancy. The most important skill is being developed during the pregnancy stage and as each child is learning physical emotional strength. This strong emotional sense of self is developed thoughtfully before the baby is born in its physical form. Indigenous Education starts at conception for all indigenous peoples who have been taught or are connected with the Cree Creation Story. This story is no myth, legend, or hopeful journey, it was just a simple manual. A manual that taught us how to live on this earth. The Creation Story taught everyone how to live side by side with each other (Roy, 2018).

The Responsibility of Relationships

The more formal education I receive the more I see the need for more change in our First Nations school systems. Language retention, assessment, and cultural awareness are important factors to consider when reviewing the need for change, but we must move as a collective to see the dream of our ancestors. My intention is to be a part of the Indigenous collective change in our Indigenous schools and students. But before I begin my change mission I would first like to introduce myself as an Indigenous scholar. It is important for me to tell you where I come from and why I have the knowledge to talk about change with First Nation Education through

experiences. My experiences come from a nehiyaw world view, therefore I will begin to point out key factors that pertain to the First Nation Education school systems and why my experiences have led me to think change is needed to truly provide the vision of the Nations itself. I would also like to acknowledge being guided by my kokom and mosom Elizabeth Wood and Charlie Cardinal, my mother Rachel Cardinal and father Thomas Keats and his parents Gloria and Frank Keats. I'm also very thankful for the life teachings my husband Nathan Rattlesnake and my children Brittany, Keaton, Jase, and my sweet beautiful Beth have given me throughout my journey. And last but not least my grade school teachers and professors; Gloria McGilvery, Florence Quinn, Sam Cardinal, Julia Cardinal, Evelyn Steinhauer, Patsy Steinhauer, Noella Steinhauer, Vincent Steinhauer, Gary Jackson, Russell Hunter, Martin Halfe, Rena Cardinal, Dale Steinhauer, Charlene Houle-White, Diana Steinhauer, Patricia Makokis, Sheryl Maglione, Janice Makokis, Phyllis Cardinal, Mr. Potrias, Daniel Cardinal, Keith Wood, Claudie Wood, Charlie Wood, Sheri Chisan, Leona Makokis, and Theresa Cardinal . These people all had an opportunity to teach me valuable knowledge that I remember and understand as I move through life offering the best energy I can provide in each situation I encounter. Fearless motivation to accomplish the hopes and dreams of our ancestors as we continue to live side by side in harmony. I have always been encouraged to live a balanced life in tradition and in academia, but I also believe this is the true intent of the treaty. We all learn both indigenous and non-indigenous ways of life to not only ensure we as humans live side by side but also how well we live side by side with wahkohowin and the universal laws they hold.

History of Successful Visions

Creating culturally intelligent educators can enhance and increase the positive impacts for future successes. I observe the urgent need to engage with the federal government of Canada

around visions made by our ancestors as they left for us to live by and leave for future generations. And because I know what it means and have honored it throughout my life I can name many stories and advantages of attending and teaching at First Nation schools. The most memorable attainable skill First Nation schools had for me was the vast knowledge and understanding I have as a member of the Nation, to the land, and with the universe. The vision they have shared to build up the people as successfully dynamic as possible allows all human gifts to be determined. Interchangeable attitudes and decisions could then be easily understood with more culturally appropriate and responsive ways of exchanging steps moving forward. It is important for readers to know where I come from and why I have the knowledge to talk about change through experiences. Evelyn Steinhauer quoted in Shawn Wilson's "Research is Ceremony" book supports my idea that Indigenous scholars are rapidly increasing proudly utilizing research methods that can be used in today's common practice. She goes on to state we can start by respecting and supporting equivalent contributing Indigenous knowledge and giving voice to people who have been oppressed for centuries (2008, pp. 55-56). My experiences come from an Indigenous worldview as I am a First Nation student, parent and teacher and now an administrator for a southern First Nation in Treaty Six Territory. My gifts and talents of leadership provided by the creator were nurtured and challenged by my Indigenous teachers while attending school K-12 in my home community of Saddle Lake First Nation. I was encouraged to follow my path by carrying on to receive a degree in General Studies in Arts and Science moving on to an after degree in Education. I obtained both Degrees at the comfort of my home attending Blue Quills First Nation College, which I am proud to announce its University status as of 2013.

Creating a meaningful review of the literature exposing the need to continue Indigenous led successful pathways in current reconciliation attempts in local education systems is crucial. During my Master's Degree in Educational Policy Studies in Indigenous People's Education, I've learned about finding factual and logical sources of information that you can trust. It has become a personal hobby as I enjoy researching the researcher when collecting, validating and relating data to challenging new thoughts and ideas from various scholars whether they are indigenous or not. I have become very interested in First Nation Education past, present and future. As I studied the history of the education systems designed from the beginning of time, I was curious to study deeper and deeper. I found out quickly that information provided in history about my chapan, kokom and mothers education were missing, unknown or never documented at all. This degree program allowed me to develop a respected pathway to obtain the information I wanted to know about the past. My Indigenous Professors ensured I was properly acknowledging and gifting those before me so I can obtain and take on the responsibility to share the information that was being shared with me through story. They ensured our understanding about perspective and about who wrote the history prior to Indigenous scholars and Elders is being acknowledged. My experience in the program really shows over time how many indigenous peoples have been forced to change ethical values about education, but most recently many have simply just returned to the ones naturally practiced before 1492. My mother's mother's brother Jerry Wood worked for Alberta Education for a very long time and taught in the Edmonton Schools for a number of years teaching about the importance of Cree identity and how it will continue to assist us as we change through time (*Worldviews ~ Walking Together*, n.d.). I agree with my mother's uncle Jerry Wood (2009) in his short video about diversity and adaptability throughout my studies and life observation of research and have presumed humans can be the most adaptable

species, furthermore my studies allowed me to see Indigenous peoples around the world survive cultural segregation, interrogation, assimilation and how we continue to change as humans on this earth. I wanted my research to point out key factors that pertain to the First Nation Education school systems and why my experiences have led me to think change is needed to build strong identities in our students. I try to highlight language retention, teaching styles and explore different assessment strategies, but most importantly inspire them through stories advocating the need to continue our traditional treaties. My ultimate goal is to continue guiding the Cree mind holistically while maintaining a place in the larger society.

Respecting Traditional Protocols While Learning

My vision is to encourage all educators to be mindful of traditional guidelines that need to be respected when delivering indigenous knowledge. It has taken 250 years of education to acknowledge and respect indigenous histories and only 50 years since maintaining control for indigenous peoples to be honored with their truth in history. Pointing out this important fact, we should always research your sources about indigenous knowledge because in this era you will hear, see, and hopefully understand the perspective of indigenous land, language and people of the America's, not told for them, but told from them. We are getting smarter and working together to bridge these misconceptions of educational historical knowledge. Sharing educational platforms that enable all viewpoints to be respected would be a start. The stigma of Indigenous knowledge to be not worthy or not relevant in today's society is an old stereotype that can no longer work on a compassionate society willing to look past generations of greed and domination. It is great to see real change in my time as an educator and student where teachers and or professors are willing to have an open mind on knowledge that they are not familiar with. Greater opportunities for Indigenous knowledge in education have been experienced and

appreciated. As knowledge is being welcomed, we begin to work on other forms of education, language revitalization being one of the top priorities on paper for a lot of Nations. The language in each band or tribe is crucial for its survival, therefore the need to re-evaluate the current curriculum is another way we accomplish stronger identities, hence higher numbers of successes.

Dividing A Diverse Province

The newly revamped curriculum in elementary schools specifically in Alberta creates more divide based on many media opinions, so much it was not adopted by many schools as it launched in the recent years. Many schools have returned to or continued to administer Alberta's old curriculum or better yet create their own based on their universal beliefs and values. It is important to highlight that a few First Nations in Alberta began or completed creating their own Education curriculum, resources, and assessments. Siksika Nation and Maskwacis are just to name a few bands who have taken the initiative in the development of curriculum building, language building strategies and even their own school divisions.

Maskwacis Education Schools Commission (MESC) was developed based on Maskwacis Cree values and focused on the needs of students. Extensive consultation, research, planning and negotiations took place leading up to the inception of MESC. MESC is owned & operated by Ermineskin Cree Nation, Louis Bull Tribe, Montana First Nation and Samson Cree Nation. MESC is the education authority for the Maskwacis Cree. The MESC head office is located in Maskwacis 70 KM South of Edmonton, AB in the Treaty No. 6 Territory. MESC offers Indigenized curriculum, by embedding Cree culture, language, and traditions into 11 Maskwacis schools with emphasis on Îyînîw Mâmitonehickikan, Nehiyawewin, Nehiyaw Pimâtisôwin, and Wâhkôhtowin. (MESC, n.d.)

The indigenous languages and experiences versus the English language education systems and assumed common knowledge has been different for centuries and will continue to be so. Finding commonalities and designing a curriculum that honors both can be a way to have

a piece of the pie for everyone. But this does not give anyone an enriched education about either culture or tradition. We begin to create mediocre intelligent students who are not fully soaked into a gift or talent that they may never have an opportunity to show. A common example is when an athlete or musician can only work on strengths half the day in classes, the other half is spent working on weaknesses that probably causes most students anxiety. Another example could be when a young individual who should be learning from an oral traditional storyteller each day can not because the expectation is to know and graduate from a world that will never apply to a purpose or intention of how one will live their life. One's cultural foundational knowledge comes from inherent rights and responsibilities that may not be allowed to act on until Grade school is completed. The creation of educational pathways to be acknowledged but not documented for the traditional societies coming out from under ground is important to be respected for so many reasons. The preservation and livelihood of the intent of the treaty is at stake and will be very important for many of us moving forward. The understanding of the treaty through an indigenous perspective gives everyone a deeper context of why it affects us all. Those storytellers are important to most if not all the indigenous foundational knowledge systems and hold high significance in the traditional education ways of being. Now is the time to create those answers for many educators who are curious about teaching treaty-making in the classrooms. Creating a diverse and respectable curriculum in today's society is expected in a democratic political government that thrives on the people's vote.

History of Colonization of Indigenous Education

The 1969 White Paper written forty years ago was merely designed to assimilate Indians into the mainstream society and culturally abolish any Indian Treaties or Indian Rights. A newly elected Liberal government wanted to get rid of the Indian problem as said famously by Duncan Campell Scott who was the current Deputy Superintendent of the Residential School expansion

in the early 1900's in Canada. (Leslie,1996). If the 1969 White Paper was passed as law the Indian Departments would have been dismantled in this process, therefore forever eliminating any position Indians may have over their status in citizenship, land claims, education, and health care. (1969 White Paper, n.d.). Indigenous Education has been through an undeniably act of cultural genocide since the beginning of colonization. Residential Schools and Provincial Achievement Exams both started around the same time and I could not find one article or research finding that indicated any residential school even offered the opportunity to measure achievement of intelligence compared to the rest of society in Indian schools (*Standardized Testing in Alberta, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut*, n.d.) But to this very day we are conditioned to measure student numbers and students' knowledge and we still continue to submit these required numbers because of forced assimilation and how we look at old educational patterns. We sometimes forget why things are the way they are and that is the fact we have been assimilated in the residential schools to thinking language is evil. First Nation languages and culture were so badly shamed they continue to be considered not valid when they have been practiced the longest in this part of the world. Pointing out these key factors that pertain to education regarding First Nation students will help government officials, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, parents and community as a whole understand the basics to this idea of change. This trauma and effect of residential schools was not so long ago that these specific stories and experiences still affect our communities, schools and generations to come. For this reason, change needs to begin.

Protecting Treaty

The Treaty was a vision, a vision of the survivors, and vision to keep surviving. The generational aftermath of First Nation Education in Canada is no longer a bitter taste in our mouth or a sad story to tell our children. And most importantly our story is not forgotten nor

hidden from society. Our ancestors left behind a way of life that continues to be practiced today. This way of life has ensured our unique existence apart from others. I do not think our Indigenous leaders have been given the credit they deserve. Designing a treaty to honor the new way of life coming to the Americas was brilliant. Nation to Nation treaty relationship is largely misunderstood due to the lack of understanding the intentions of the ceremony that took place when Treaties were signed. Treaty obligations with regards to education has been mainly a one-sided view. Lack of resources and student success is evident while we continue to teach the same curriculum in the traditional fashion, with very few able to pave a new road for indigenous scholars. The past 50 years have shown creating curriculum, resources and assessments that encourages the heart to be engaged within nehiyaw'atisowin will allow Cree people at any age to reach their full potential. Allowing more discussions about ways to restore, renew and relive the vision of nistamemakanak by developing a curriculum with our history, that includes our ways of being, knowing and doing can and will be a vision for indigenous peoples interested in gaining the knowledge of their survival. All creation stories should be valued and respected and, in this case, the Cree Creation story can show how each stage of life is significant to the development of an individual seeking a gift or talent.

Indigenous Epistemology

It was kiskonohamâsôwin, encouraging critical thinking where children listened, observed and analyzed a task until they felt ready to do it themselves. Oral tradition was highly developed in Cree culture in comparison with European culture, where teaching and learning was based strongly on written material. The written material world I call the white road, a road where we can learn the academia and sciences of western philosophies and methodologies. The elders acknowledged at Treaty making time in the late 1800s, a mutual relationship was being

established. I have been taught in my junior level indigenous courses the intent of the treaties was to ensure both nations entering the treaty developed skills in both ways of doing and being. Both roads have the human nature to reach its highest and fullest potential. The red road is dependent on hope and prayer and involves kindness and compassion to give needlessly. The white road is dependent on stability and desire that involves strength and intelligence to gain financially. I see an opportunity to walk together so that our children and the next generations can live in a world they understand and contribute in any society the Creator intended them to be in. Since the internet is worldwide and runs 24 hours a day, there is no sense in hiding the past anymore.

Providing enriched engaging opportunities in a holistic view of the environment is key when developing critically developed students confident in their own beliefs and values. It is important to allow mentors to demonstrate leadership and talent in a nation is key as it establishes meaningful teaching opportunities with children. Children will increase higher modalities of realism if they see teachers in real life situations away from being a mother or father figure in front of the class. The learning environment should have balance. The learning itself should have balance. As we see it now the learning is separated and meaningless in the minds of most First Nation students, they are simply just not interested or the style of delivery is unappealing. We have subject areas as language being one of them. Mauri studies suggest significant increases in native language speakers and higher test scores in an immersion school that requires all day Indigenous methodologies and pedagogical strategic teaching within their own language and 30 minutes of English class. Remarkable results were announced with increased language use of mother tongue and most importantly an increase of pride and true identity.

This overly talked about trauma and effects of residential schools wasn't long ago that these specific stories and experiences still affect our communities, schools and generations to come. We should not lead from this space, for it has a negative energy to the reconciliation. Even the graves are a bad place to start learning about First Nation Education, for this we need to go way back. For this reason, change needs to happen.

Honoring and appreciating the true meaning of traditional protocol and ceremony is necessary from both the government officials and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Protocol and traditional views are covered with western visions of success therefore the true vision of the mission statement developed by First Nation Education leaders is not being carried out as it should be. The benefits and rights we have with the historical treaties signed with the crown many years ago would be more widely honored and appreciated if specific people knew the importance of ceremony and why those treaties need to be honored and not forgotten. Government standards hold First Nation schools accountable for the limited access of resources and student success but are the national funders for the school and its internal organizational systems that occur on a daily basis. Even though we as parents, teachers, administrators, and community members want qualitative success, our government wants nothing but the quantitative measures of attendance, testing and numbers of graduates. A curriculum that fits the needs of First Nation students is necessary for true Nehiyo success to be accomplished. A traditional value nurturing mother earth and living off the land embracing the true spiritual being within us needs to be honored by all. This perspective needs to be changed within all of us. Living a comfortable lifestyle is not always related to having money but it can also mean living a healthy lifestyle empowered by the four ways of being, feeling the connection to our mother earth, and feeling proud of who you are and where you come from. The most important direction

to consider when deciding a path for Decolonizing Indigenous Education is the vision that was left for us in the “Red Paper” to follow insight, develop new curriculum, learn from the past, and teach children “nehiyo” perspectives for future generations.

Review of Literature

Critics argue that Howard Gardner’s “Theory of Multiple Intelligence” was influential in the school systems but his ideas were never fully accepted as the generalized intelligence factor currently stays standardized across North America and worldwide. According to Gardner “Knowledge is not the same as morality, but we need to understand if we are to avoid past mistakes and move in productive directions. An important part of that understanding is knowing who we are and what we can do... Ultimately, we must synthesize our understandings for ourselves”(Gardner, 1999, pp.180-181). As I begin to paraphrase this statement above, we must look inside ourselves for understanding including the past. Looking inside ourselves brings an overwhelming list of teachings, beliefs, and values taught by the ones closest to heart as First Nation people. Awaking the spirit through language, ceremony, and practicing natural law as an individual will give strength and unity to a Nation excelling for self-determination. The assessment in all areas of life will help discover one’s potential through truth of existence. Through ceremony the creator will provide us guidance in the way to revitalize these lost First Nation languages, systems of belief, traditional protocol painting us a peaceful illustrated living vision given in messages as everyone appreciates their own interpretation of personal understanding. Ermine (2002) states in his writing entitled *The Cree First Nation sweat-lodge* “What this form of knowledge seems to suggest is that each one of us can be an explorer in unknown domains because of our inherent capacities” (p. 195). Language is also crucial to the cultures of Indigenous Peoples’ as it is key to the relationship of the Creation of life. Assessment

is a big word that spells competition, measurement, and judgment and even as an adult that word is filled with intimidation, and intellectual pressure at any given time. The black lettering questions of a test on a white piece of paper enforce these types of feelings on an individual, because of the high expectation of being equally knowledgeable in a society that is immersed in a tyrannical system of intelligence. John Stuart Mill is an excellent example for this idea of higher expectations for higher learning. Mills was educated at a private school for the European geniuses founded by his father James Mill. He was born to believe that the words he spoke of about liberty were truth and right “as there is no room for discussion of natural law or spirituality” for the reason that he was taught by the higher educators. In his work *On Liberty* (1859) he claims the purpose of sharing his beliefs on the topic is to maintain balance within a system of Authority (Top) and the General Public (Bottom) within Society to protect the weak that would otherwise be preyed upon by a dominant force. The balance Mills’ speaks of relates in modern society as the current government we trust to make the best possible decisions for the people of Canada. Every time the government places new curriculum in the agenda of teachers, they request teachers to teach to an even higher standard with the same materials and resources. Different types of statistics show standardized tests that each school works toward every three years get harder and harder for children to pass especially if you come from a minority. First Nation students statistically known do not do well on standardized testing so why the hassle. Two of the goals that should be implemented in all First Nation Schools immediately are stated in the White Paper (1972) as one is the “removal of textbooks and teaching material which are negative, biased, or inaccurate in what concerns Indian History and culture; and eliminating the use of I.Q. and standardized tests for Indian children. It has been shown that these tests truly do not reflect the intelligence of children belonging to minority, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds” (p.

17). Performance task assessment and strategic discussions within society need to be implemented for stronger leaders. Valuing the entire Nations and the qualities everyone brings to the table will enhance the products made available and broaden the mission of revitalizing language wished by so many. Many can only dream of creating a building, or build a building, or manage a building, or clean a building, just the same as not everyone can create a ceremony, or build a ceremony, or run a ceremony, or help a ceremony, therefore we must value each profession gifted by the Creator. At the same time of honoring the seven grandfather teachings, especially the connection to the land, because of the importance of how we treat Mother Earth. Mother Earth is a strong spiritual force who will act upon times of cruelty. The reciprocal actions of the balance of life occur, if we treat mother earth any more badly then we've treated her already, she will come back with the same treatment to the ones who have disrespected her, which is mankind, no matter what.

Gardner (1999) suggests schools have focused on the development of logical and linguistic intelligences, and these intelligences are also focused on through standard IQ Test. According to Gardner, these standardized tests used in the current education system do not measure all of his multiple intelligences, which vary from person to person and thus determine the ways in which each person learns most effectively. Gardner's theory argues that students will be better served by a broader vision of education, wherein teachers use different methodologies, exercises and activities to reach all students, not just those who excel at linguistic and logical intelligence (para. 6)

Decolonizing Indigenous Education awareness to the rest of society in a way that is meaningful and humble. Instead of trying to make the curriculum harder for the children to have an even harder time fitting in, make this the opportunity to enhance the curriculum to identify

First Nation histories and cultures and to include them in daily lessons. Waiting for future generations to get to University to learn the harsh reality of Canada's Secret History would be disheartening to see as a pattern for our own people. A simple vision would be the Government kindly agreeing to implement a law that entitles individuals to make awareness for the rest of the country. The National Indian Brotherhood had thought of this idea when they started long ago "Since this issue needs to be resolved by legislation, all Provinces/Territories should pass effective laws which will ensure Indian representation in all school boards", where aboriginal students are in attendance (1972, p.14) But to enhance this vision made by our great educational leaders but also by the UN DRIP. Making such a law would be another mark in history both cultures could be proud of for the collective approach to the education system such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This type of approach we require for better education on the reserves of Aboriginal Treaty Lands, because it will enhance the ability for many to trust from both thinkers of the sharing circle. Newly revised policies need to be put in place before we lose too many children to the harsh realities of drugs, alcohol, and suicide. The government has taken some responsibility in damaging the spirit of the Aboriginal cultures upon assimilating the liberal acts of authoritarianism. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) had the same concept and aim to the rest of the world. This idea of law making only brings it closer to home with the children knowing the rights of people, and the past struggle to get the right in place of peace in the future. The funding and tuition agreements need to be brought up to par with the rest of the province and country.

ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ (ahkameyimoh) is a Cree term used to describe the determination, perseverance and commitment to any idea moving forward is acknowledged in the heart of self-first and then others with the display of hard work and passion. Creating traditionalists in

teaching indigenous forms of thinking at the highest level of western academic intellectual systems will enhance the critical analysis of higher learning within that context. Developing measurable assessment to nehiyaw'atosiwin and the flow of strength and confidence of being guided by an equal and humble thought process influenced through everything in existence may uncover pure raw active talents yet to be measured. Talents or gifts reaching full potential are almost always nurtured in an influential environment to flourish and grow but it is with experience we determine our purpose. The direction of our purpose usually reflects our experience as we continuously create our story. Individual paths are not determined by choice but by the spirit and intent of creation. Life is about balance with all of creation almost always including an entire being. This encourages whole thoughts of mind, body, heart and spirit. If we are an ant in the eye of the universe, our existence is just as important as a glass of water or a rock forming. If Shawn Wilson (2008) explains ontology in terms of nehiyaw'atisowin (Cree ways of being) then I support his idea that "research is ceremony". If both prove to be true to Cree people then education includes personal purpose as ceremony guides the research. If everything has a place or purpose to teach us something along the way then we are the ones to analyze it until the teaching is understood and transferred as knowledge. If this notion would be considered then age is not considered in the equation of receiving an education. Our purpose is greater than our own as generations and generations of family will be lent to us by the creator. While all our years pass we try hard to reach our goals with a humble heart because it's never to be famous but to be remembered.

The Vision of a Pink Paper

Treaty makers foresee the pink road, one where we as indigenous and non-indigenous peoples can both as individuals and contributing members of their own societies live side by side

in harmony. Immediately after the 11 numbered treaties were established across the north American arctic and plains an Indian Act was implemented upon Indians in Canada. But along the way Indigenous societies were banished and outlawed in order to melt into the global economic fight to be the most powerful nations in the world. The indigenous peoples, especially the ceremonial ones talk of a red road or a traditional life journey that does not include colonial ways of life. That red road can be explained as one who lives in perfect harmony and lives just as the creator intended them to live. The traditional people who walk the red road their entire life do creator's work by sharing their knowledge in the lodges and not in the classrooms. In 1840 the first residential school opened in the western part of what is now Canada to teach and create common social citizens to the First Peoples' but we were not considered citizens throughout the process. In 1867 Indian People were given a conditional right to be enfranchised if they gave up their treaty rights. In 1960 Indian people were allowed to vote and earn a college education without losing the treaty rights. For 200 plus years Indian people were taught how to be citizens in residential/day/provincial/reserve schools but were only allowed to be citizens for the last 58 years. The grandmothers in our current time were all raised by mothers who only knew how to survive on reserve as non-citizens to the land. Those grandmothers raised their children for the first five years and then only got to see your children for 4 weeks out of a year for the next 11 years. My mother was born in 1958 which means she was not considered a citizen until she reached the age of two. For nine years she attended residential school and there was one period of time when she didn't see her mother for 2 years. I couldn't have imagined what that was like because I got to see my mother and father every day. I was born in the early eighties, and by that time education had changed drastically. I represent the first generation of being able to go to school on a bus from preschool to Grade 12. I also surpassed that expectation and received two

undergrad degrees as I write to complete another. I think of my mother and the older generation of First Nations people, even my generation could be included in this group as they struggle to transition from having challenging educational experience to a different yet demanding atmosphere going back to school. As student expectations increase yearly, it gets harder for adults to keep up with the ever-changing world.

Educational Policies for First Nation students on and off reserve need to have success indicators for student success on reserves that are designed by indigenous peoples. Cree curriculum development will provide long-last life skills necessary to survive in both worlds. Our ancestors left behind such a vast life of living information to not only learn but to live. Lifelong learning truly entails a life of pure compassion and truth with all living things. It's amazing to feel the life of the earth grow with you. When the universe works in your favor at any given time it's an invisible blessing from the creator himself.

It must be hard growing up, knowing you live on a poor reservation in Alberta. A reservation plagued with suicide and trauma within all generations living. How are you supposed to know there is hope in the future when we are taught all we do is suffer with the lowest standards of life, especially in education? And all the while of growing up stories were the same as ancestors fought and stood proud for what they believed in as we are today. It is challenging being a part of a culture who are degraded and made fun of or thought lesser than as the days go by. It makes my heart smile knowing there are many initiatives driven by the Truth and Reconciliation (2006) to improve engagements here in Canada. As a child growing up and going to school on-reserve you grow into the norms of daily routine and life, only to grow up and read a book that states statistically you may either end up in jail or line up to receive a welfare check. This inaccurate information is not the case in most of the stronger nations.

How could you begin to articulate a culture without its language let alone a worldview? Understanding the beauty of its essence can only be discovered through language. The First People's understanding of what we call turtle island is geographically embedded in the land. The History of Creation story tells us about the relations we have with all beings and entities within the Universe. These stories reveal the connections from land and water to stars and moons and everything in between.

Providing extensive enriched engaging opportunities to allow mentors to demonstrate leadership and talent in a tribal nation is key in establishing meaningful teaching opportunities with children, especially with most First Nations. Most certainly there has been a small increase of First Nations people receiving the western academic masters or doctorate levels of education in all fields. From my perspective it has increased even more as we are developing the best of both worlds. The most inspiring educational programs here in Alberta started back in the early 1980's as the Morningstar program emerged from Blue Quills First Nation College and Maskwacis Cultural College. The opportunity to enter into a bachelor's degree partnered with a neighboring institution was a special movement initialized by the government according to Ray in his Canada's Native People book. These types of programs were the beginnings of change and new partnerships. This movement occurred because of the backlash from the National Indian Brotherhood, which probably took the federal government by surprise in the early 70's.

The learning environment should have balance. The learning itself should have balance. As we see it now the learning is separated and meaningless in the minds of most First Nation students. We have subject areas as language being one of them. Mauri studies suggest an immersion school that requires all day Indigenous methodologies and pedagogical strategic teaching within their own language and 30 minutes of English class. Remarkable results with

increased language use of mother tongue and most importantly an increase of pride and true identity.

Steinhauer (2004) refers to the people who walk the streets as “Shadow People”. If the stream of education did not fail them, they would all be working with jobs and safe homes to return to instead of surviving from one soup kitchen to the next. Education should be trying to build pathways for all walks of life. Designing the education system for the elite is always the agenda. Ever changing curriculum and increasing student expectations. For instance, how many parks do we see nowadays full of laughter from children. Children are constantly hooked to technology without any real-life experiences. The fast-paced society urges education systems to keep up, forcing children to grow up way earlier than developmental ready for, especially without any real experiences to draw from. Recent studies show the increase of anxiety amongst children and adults and I suggest this aspect of unrealistic educational goals is failing our past and recent generations of student successes.

Modern Indigenous Curriculum

What classifies the proper use of indigenized curriculum? Who decides to measure this and how could grades justify the meaning of learning a way of life from a Cree perspective? There are many different views of the topic and the one I find most surprising is the implementation from the government. We all know they are some very smart people working for the government, but they are smart in the world they work in. We have done this before, as the government sees it. They believe they know best for a nation they have control over at a government level, but grassroots level are well aware of their intentions. A government who decides what indigenous languages will survive is a bit too confident in its agenda, don't you think. The indigenous language declaration legislation announced this past year defines the

unethical engagement it is having with the First Nations people of Canada. How could one declare a language they don't even choose to learn or understand in its entirety? Its entirety walking with the basic knowledge of the first level of understanding the Cree creation story is the dream of nistameymakanak.

As we begin to unfold the hardships past intergenerational drama we begin to uncover the generation amiss. The generation that has been wronged by their natural ways of knowing, doing, and being referred from Manu Myers because of an assimilation agenda as the government wanted all Indians into the political body of Duncan Campbell Scott. Even though there was an attempt from the generations of people who began to fight for their treaty rights, the agenda stood as a hidden agenda for the many years to come. This agenda is confirmed by the many legislations and policies moving forward to abolish the Indian Act. The Indian Act protects the rights promised when the numbered treaties were made in the late 1800's.

Coexistence is happening right this very moment whether we want to believe it or not. Many First Nation members chose to make sovereign acts of motion for the people of their nations. This known fact has many turning in their sleep, talking on social media, and revealing emotions about treaties and the rights of First Nations people. Most people are taught that Indians have always lived off the government handouts and oil royalties, therefore the understanding of how we are true nations living within a successor state according to Sharon Venne an international lawyer.

Discursive analysis begins with looking at the history of education as it pertains to First Nation people. The first question I ask is - Why aren't we there? The right to education was promised through treaties to the original Canadian landowners to be honoured just as the right to breathe air or the right to drink water. But reality is education is an imposed colonial institution

which inherent certain people to be privileged majorities excluding the damaged but still intact minorities. As we discussed in class the minorities are becoming the majorities with numbers climbing to unbelievable heights as First Nations populations jump off the scale. The treaty's hopes and aspirations have been trampled on long enough for First Nations educated people to stand by and watch no longer. More and more First Nations people realize the need to go back and honour those treaties even more as statistical data reminds us of the struggling First Nations students have through the “normal” school system. Speaking on behalf of the Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nation I wish to invite more First Nation individuals to decolonize thoughts and ways of being and to go back to embrace and claim the true essence of our existence. Our freedom to choose will be present in all situations by educating every one of the “unsaid” promises given in trade to share the land. In this process we must not lose the emphasized point of universal progressive knowledge in knowing prominent histories through the lens of First Nations traditional and oral stories carried on for so many generations.

Histories have purpose and that purpose is to provide people with identity, who they are, where they come from, and how they connect to the world they respect as a responsibility to one's self. Providing natural protocol proves these histories and ways of life in the modern world are still very much alive and are humbly given to whole-hearted individuals willing to walk the path of greener pastures. Starting with ceremonies in every aspect of political realms will honour our way of beginning each day, beginning each season, and most importantly beginning each change to Mother Earth. World views will shift for the betterment first and foremost of individual and then of family, extending to the natural family relations we have to each other, the land, and spiritual forces we carry as First Nations people. Creating a Treaty Six First Nation

Education Act will enable an essential collective partnership between all involved to reform a policy using the ideas of the broken protocol made between international relations.

Claiming space and mobilizing all involved parties from students, parents, teachers, principals, superintendent, Chiefs and Councils, AANDC, federal officials as all would be invited to attend awareness to an uprising of ideas as to ways of developing a much-needed Treaty Six First Nation Education Act. Instead of looking inside the institutions for the histories of our First Nation people, we need to look outside the institutions. Resistance to one worldview is essential to secure deeper understandings of another world view connecting us to Natural Law grounding us to live life the way the creator intended us to live. Life-long learning is essential to the First Nations worldview as shown in many First Nation Education visions and philosophies. We learn from each other no matter what age or what credentials we hold as individuals. I have heard many elders from my home community say learning does not stop like it does when you receive a doctor's degree. There is no such thing as an expert, but in the western framework, governments tend to think they are the best people for the job. Appointing the best people for a certain job is exactly what they like to do to make life easy for them, not thinking about the rest of society. For example, I studied the policy request made by Michael Mendelson. He is Senior Scholar at the Caledon Institute of Social Policy. He has held many senior public service positions prior to his appointment to the Caledon Institute. He was the Deputy Secretary (Deputy Minister) of the Cabinet Office in Ontario. He was appointed by the government to write some recent reports and publications: Why We Need a First Nations Education Act, Aboriginal Peoples and Post Secondary Education in Canada, Aboriginal People in Canada's Labour Market, and Aboriginal People In Canada's Labour Market. All written with support of Human Resources Development Canada. Now I ask why we as First Nation people, educated just as

much as Michael, are not appointed to write these articles that mean the world to us and our future generations (Mendelson, 2022). He also wrote a book on universality that shows his frame of mind when thinking about education and First Nations people. A universal view of First Nations is not accepted by all First Nations people because they have differences that are unspokenly respected by everyone. People do things different and we accept that instead of trying to impose an education act that might not fit all. Separating our education acts by jurisdiction might be a good idea based on the notion that was how the treaties were done. We would all agree that what we do not want is to step into the vacuum and create the infrastructure they want to see.

A woman named apihtawikisitan which means half Cree and half white speaks beyond truth when she states:

Aboriginal law is not the study or practice of indigenous legal traditions but rather is the way in which the Canadian state mediates its relationship with native peoples.

Aboriginal law exists squarely within a legal paradigm that is defined solely by the Canadian state. If Canada deigns to include its *interpretation* of aspects of indigenous legal traditions then it will do so according to its own legal principles further warping what is almost always already a poor translation to begin with. (apihtawikosisan, n.d.)

I imagine the Treaty Six First Nation Education Act based on Natural Law encourages the idea of staying true as keepers of the land. I speak of Turtle Island, the beautiful land given to us so we can love, respect, and nurture it. One day I hope to be answered by the government as to why we are not present when there are big decisions to be made based on our own beliefs? I would definitely have more questions and deserve answers because it matters to my daughters, sons and their children that they intend to have in their future.

Thinking outside the box when readings of the old English context is done allows me to understand and try to appreciate the thoughts made by others but to stay firm with the beliefs I have had vision for the next generations. Up and down with liberal thoughts realizing we have been living in a predetermined life for us has me frustrated, but at the same time thinking critically of ways to make awareness for our indigenous people to understand oppression is no longer an option for us to be assimilated. Our children need to be in touch with spirituality traditionally to understand what they are truly missing out on. I understand future leaders must be educated with both western knowledge and practice traditional knowledge in order for a true sovereign nation to occur.

In the school system the framework is designed the same way mentioned above. Teachers are the experts and the students are the ones empty with knowledge. I agree with Njuji when he states that teaching language and literature takes us further away from ourselves and that it also puts us in a world other than our own. We must unite as a team and look for ways to develop a chain reaction of awareness to the parents and community members to take a stand making education an equal opportunity whether on or off reserve.

My hopes are to continue to have reserve schools more rich in culture and education and develop ways for students to develop fluency in the region specific language they live in. Provincial schools seriously get all the money, all the upgrades, all the resources, and great transportation. Only to oppress them to the western ways of thinking and deny them of an identity they should be proud of. One day I will be a part of this change in policy to allow our children to embrace their beautiful culture that they are so missing out on.

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