Iyisahowin
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Patience in overcoming

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It is late at night and I can hear them fighting again. I can hear my Dad yelling and my Mom crying. I try to drown out the noise of their screams but it's too hard! I pull my little sister closer to comfort her as I hear her soft little whimpers and when she goes back to sleep I leave our bedroom. As I pry open the door, I can see my Dad's empty beer bottles strewn across the floor and coffee tables. There is a cigarette burning in the ashtray. My parents aren't anywhere near there though. My eyes scan around the room and I don't see them but I do hear the thuds of fists hitting skin and the wall. As I turn towards the noise, I can see Dad and Mom. He has her pinned against the wall with his forearm on her neck. In his other hand, he is waving a knife towards her.

Abstract

Trauma, intergenerational trauma, historical trauma has started gaining more popularity amongst professionals in the medical, psychological and educational fields. More professionals are starting to realize that our current practices need to be modernized and updated. In particular, amongst professionals working in an Indigenous context, trauma-informed care and practice is becoming increasingly popular. In the educational field, educators have known that our current practice is not adequately meeting the needs of our students. This paper provides a definition of trauma and intergenerational trauma. In addition to a definition, reasons as to why it is vital for educators to become trauma-informed and how we can continue to build relationships. As a proposed solution to becoming trauma-informed, culturally responsive schools are discussed.

Key words: trauma, intergenerational trauma, trauma-informed, culturally responsive schooling

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this time to thank individuals who have helped me along my educational journey. First of all, I would like to acknowledge the Creator for the many gifts that he has bestowed upon me. Secondly, I would like to thank my family. My husband, Wayne has always been one of my strongest supporters. He has encouraged and supported me through my educational journey. Without his support, the journey would have been even more difficult! My daughters are the biggest sources of inspiration that I have. I believe that my children and my students in our schools need to see people from our community achieving success and realizing their goals! I also feel that I owe it to my students and my staff, I want to be a better leader to them and I know that I need to learn more and expect more of myself if I want more of them!

I would like to thank my parents for their love, encouragement and guidance throughout my life. They instilled a love of learning in me when I was a young girl and they continue to nurture that love. They have been my sounding boards, mentors and greatest sources of knowledge. They have asked me thought provoking questions which have made me question my decisions and have caused me to re-think my findings and conclusions in an incredibly healthy way. My mother was one of the first people to plant the seed that I should and could enroll in the Master's program. Ninanaskomon nikaway ohci. I remember hearing her say, "if you want to keep your job, you should go back to school."

I also want to show my gratitude for my colleagues. A couple of years ago, I had the privilege of attending the Treaty 6 Education Conference where I listened to a good friend of mine give the ending keynote address. After he spoke, I went over to Dr. Sean Lessard and

reconnected. We caught up with each other, our lives and careers and Sean asked me when I was going to start my Masters? Little did he know, that simple question added fuel to my educational fire. In February 2018 I found myself helping our high school students applying to post-secondary programs. We were sitting quietly in the library working on their applications when one of them asked me when I was going to go back to school. I also need to acknowledge my school's leadership team, Jennifer Douglas and Stephen Wood. Our triad has been very supportive of each other, we bounce ideas off each other and without their patience and support this work we undertake and lead in our school would be a daunting challenge. Our strengths complement each other and I am grateful to work with them.

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Location of Self

Tansi! Joline Wood nitisikason, Nipisihkopahk ohci niya maka Leduc niwikiwin. My name is Joline Wood and I am from Samson Cree Nation but I live in Leduc with my family (my husband and my two daughters). It is important for me to locate myself and as such, I want to tell you who I am. My parents are Alvina and Peter Flormann and I am their oldest daughter and child. In the family that I was raised with, I have one younger sister and three younger brothers. Mom met the man I call my Dad when I was six years old. My mother had three children with my biological father and went on to have two more children with my step-father.

Every day I count my lucky stars for the life and job that I have. I am very privileged to work in my home community of Maskwacis. One of my priorities as a First Nations school leader and a leader who comes from the community is to determine how to ensure that my staff are trauma-informed and that my school infuses more Cree culture and language and why is this important to our students and community. Additionally, there is added pressure to regularly graduate students; maintain and retain staff and students from year-to-year; establish a positive school climate where my staff and students feel and my community feels welcome. The response was for me to become more trauma-informed and ultimately, create an environment where the rich culture of Maskwacis Cree is celebrated, honoured, and practiced.

Introduction & Research Methodology

When I first started learning about trauma, I realized that I would need to examine and reflect upon the trauma that I have endured in my upbringing and adult life. In May 2019, trauma informed practices were introduced as a new initiative where I work and as I was reflecting on what the practices were, I knew that this would inevitably bring up my own trauma. I wrote this question in my journal, "am I prepared to revisit my own trauma and how will I deal with it?" Trauma and in particular, intergenerational trauma are gaining more recognition in the medical, psychology and educational fields. In an attempt to understand Post-traumatic Stress Disorder in an Indigenous setting, the term intergenerational, historic, and community trauma are becoming very popular. The leading question that guided my literature review was how culturally responsive schools can respond to intergenerational trauma in an Indigenous setting. It should be noted that this is a preliminary endeavour as I begin to formulate and gather more information to guide further scholarly research. The limitations that I have gathered thus far has been the lack of research conducted in an Indigenous setting. Dr. Shawn Wilson wrote that there is abundance of research conducted on Indigenous people, but there is a lack of research conducted with and for Indigenous people (2003, p.167). As I started gathering information, I was inundated with questions and research questions and projects that I could pursue this topic further and benefit the families in my community. Throughout this paper, I will be discussing the what, who and how intergenerational trauma has impacted our families. I will be addressing reasons why I think it is important for educators to become trauma-informed and what we can do as next steps to help build relationships or wahkohtowin in our communities and educational settings. I will also be discussing how becoming a culturally responsive school is trauma informed.

Mom and I have to go pick up my Dad. It's late at night and I don't have a babysitter. After we picked up my Dad, he wanted to stop to get munchies at the store. My Mom leaves me in the car with him and he's acting weird, kind of silly. We are sitting in the front seat of the truck and he starts singing along with the radio. He leans over me to turn the radio louder and I can smell a different smell coming from his breath. I am uncomfortable but don't know why?

What, Who and How is Intergenerational Trauma Manifested in our Communities?

Maria Yellow Horn Brave Heart (1999, p. 3) argues that "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) fails to adequately represent American Indian trauma (Robin, Chester, & Goldman, 1996)". PTSD is classified as a mental health disorder as it relates to people who suffer from it but in terms, of Indigenous communities, Holocaust survivors, Japanese Internment camp survivors and worldwide, communities who have been exposed to traumatic events, there needed to be a deeper explanation of what they were feeling and experiencing in all facets of their health. Brave Heart (1996, p. 3) notes that "Manson et al. (raise questions about (a) cultural bias in the PTSD criteria and assessment instruments, (b) the possibility of a higher threshold for clinical response due to the pervasiveness and frequency of trauma among American Indians, and (c) culture influencing symptom presentation or the determination of what is pathological.". "[H]istorical trauma is defined as cumulative and collective emotional and psychological injury both over the life span and across generations, resulting from a cataclysmic history of genocide." (Brave Heart, 199, p. 3). Historical or intergenerational trauma can be measured in three different ways, according to Pember, who quotes the work of Michelle M. Sotera who writes that in the initial phase of trauma, events such as colonialism, slavery, war or genocide have been perpetrated on communities (2017, p. 3). In the second phase of trauma, the impacted communities show signs of physical or psychological distress. In the third phase, this distress or response to events are passed on subsequent generations. (Pember, 2017, p. 3). Evans-Campbell elaborates on the work of Pember, Brave Heart and others by categorizing the intergenerational trauma in three separate categories. In the first stage, the events are widespread in Aboriginal

communities and consequently, many people have witnessed the traumatic event. In the second stage, there is a high amount of mourning and distress as a result of the traumatic event. Finally, in the third stage, the traumatic "events are usually perpetrated by outsiders with purposeful and often destructive intent." (Evans-Campbell, 2008, p. 322). These traumatic events are beyond the scope of normal events and also of particular importance, individual responses vary and not everyone experiences a traumatic event in the same way. This is a very important distinction in my mind, as I have seen educators come into our communities with the "saviour" mentality and they may also hold a negative opinion of our students. Not all of our children need to be saved because not all children are living or experiencing traumatic lives!

Whitbeck et al. (2004, p. 120) write that "[m]ost conceptualizations of historical trauma among American Indian are based on reports of the persistent trauma among Holocaust survivors and their families during World War II". William Niederland, a New York based psychiatrist "notice[d] that the survivors he saw had a number of common symptoms: anxiety, chronic depressive states, sleep disturbances and nightmares, problems of memory and cognition, and physical manifestations such as muscle pains, digestive problems, and headaches." (Clifford, 2020, p. 165). These findings were corroborated by Hans Kielson, who studied children survivors in a non-clinical setting in a longitudinal study lasting from 1967-1978. Along with the symptoms described above, Kielsen added divorce and poor performance in school (Clifford, 2020, p.167).

For the Indigenous students in our context of Canada, many of the assimilative policies of the Canadian have had a traumatic effect on their ancestors. The forced relocation of whole communities to make way for settlement and colonization impacted Indigenous communities. "Aboriginal children who attended residential schools were leaving culturally rich societies

where family was central, complex religious beliefs were the basis for numerous ceremonies, and knowledge was passed from one generation to the next through oral traditions; the children had little, if any, exposure to a language outside of the language of their societies." (Barnes et al., 2006, p. 19). The residential school era removed children from their parental homes, banned the speaking of language and practicing culture. These traumatic experiences have had a lasting effect on the people of today, hence the need for intergenerational trauma education.

How does Intergenerational Trauma impact our Indigenous families?

When I first started informing my practice towards trauma-informed practices in schools, I watched the documentary Resilience. Resilience showed that through the years of 1995-1997, the CDC Kaiser-Permanente hospital conducted a study of over seventeen-thousand participants in California. The goal of the study was to determine why these participants were not losing weight. Carrington (2019, p. 77) writes that Dr. Vincent Felitti "observed many of the unsuccessful weight loss participants shared a common experience: they had experienced sexual abuse as a child.". Astounded by this commonality, Felitti and his research partners identified three common categories of abuse (abuse, neglect and household dysfunction). They named their study the Adverse Childhood Experiences study. The ACE test is a simple test to perform, there are 10 questions within it and if you answer yes to any of the questions, you get a point. If your ACE score is higher than a four (out of ten), there are different predictions that could happen to you. You are more likely to be a smoker, have an unplanned teen pregnancy, become involved in violence, use drugs, become incarcerated, or attempt suicide (Carrington, 2019, p. 77). Cavanaugh (2016, p. 41) writes that "roughly 64% of people experienced at least one ACE with 22% of the population experiencing three or more ACE's.". Pember also writes that in addition

to these events, an individual with a higher ACE score could "contribute to mental and physical illness." (2017, p. 3). In addition to these illnesses, high amounts of stress could contribute to the development of a variety of health problems, ie. "addiction, depression, intimate partner violence, suicide, diabetes, liver disease, poor fetal health among others" (Pember, 2017, p. 7). The list goes on and on, Brave Heart (1999, p. 2) notes that "elevated mortality rates and health problems emanating from heart disease, hypertension, alcohol abuse, depression, and suicidal behavior.". Pember (2017, p.2) argues that "[h]istorical trauma, therefore, can be seen as a contributing cause in the development of illnesses such as PTSD, depression and type 2 diabetes.". These are not the only illnesses that can be attributed to historical trauma. Indigenous people have "high rates of addiction, suicide, mental illness, sexual violence" and all of these health malaises can be attributed to historical trauma (Pember, 2017, p.3). Pember goes on to say that Indigenous people have higher ACE scores and health problems (2017, p.4). Pember (2017, p. 3)writes that Indigenous people carry not only the DNA that accounts for our physical make-up but, we also carry the "memories of trauma experienced by our ancestors".

Evans-Campbell offers a further explanation to intergenerational trauma than Pember does. Not only do Indigenous people suffer mental and physical health concerns, there are illnesses at the family and community level. The inability to communicate or impaired communication and loss of parenting skills have been seen at a familial level. Because of the different policies that the Canadian government introduced, Evans-Campbell (2008, p. 328) supposed that Indigenous parents may not feel adequate to raise their children. The parents may "begin to doubt themselves and … their traditional ways of parenting". At the community level, loss of language, culture, and traditional practices have been noted. Evans-Campbell (2008, p. 323) writes that the "loss of traditional rites of passage, high rates of alcoholism...and

internalized racism" are symptoms seen at the community level. "[S]cholars have long suggested that traumatic events have also led to indigenous community-level trauma responses, including social malaise, weakened social structures, and high rates of suicide." (Evans-Campbell, 2008, p. 328). Also, of note, in Evans-Campbell, the Elders in the community have expressed a variety of emotional responses and discomfort around non-Native people. In the Evans-Campbell (2008, p. 325) article, they reported feelings of "shame, loss of concentration, feelings of isolation, rage, feeling that more traumas will happen, and avoidance of places or people that are reminders of the losses".

We are going into town to look at cars. I am so excited because I am going with my Mom and Dad. Living near a town that is known for all of their car dealerships is helpful and we don't have to drive far to look at a lot of cars. We are at the Ford dealership and my Mom and Dad go into the dealership, leaving me in the car. As soon as they are inside the store, I climb into the front seat and start to pretend that I am driving. This is a lot of fun! I know that I saw my Dad pull the lever down and I do the same thing. As soon as I realize that the car is moving backwards, I get scared! When the car crashes into the light pole in the parking lot, a salesperson runs over to the car. I am hiding under the front seat crying and he helps me out of the car, checking me for any injuries. Thankfully, I am ok and he gives me a sucker to stop crying.

What are trauma-informed practices?

Schools need to be trauma-informed. First and foremost, our staff need to be aware of their own trauma and take steps to ensure that this vision does not cloud how we deal with our students. According to Pember (2017, p. 8), "making connections; avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems; accepting change; making goals; taking action; look for opportunities for self-discovery; nurture a positive self-view; keep things in perspective; and take care of yourself". How can we expect the people who are around our students the most and are expected to help our students deal with their trauma when they, themselves aren't healthy? We cannot assume that all adults who are working with our students are healthy and we need to give them space, provide resources to maintain their personal well-being, and encourage their growth and health!

In addition to considering our own trauma, reflecting upon our punitive behavioural responses, reminding ourselves that we thrive on connections, our staff need meaningful professional development. This professional development needs to focus on the true historical consequences of a colonial world. Our educators, according to Ehlers et al (2013, p. 166) need to "receive mandatory, on-going, trauma-informed training to better understand and take action to address the historical and current impacts on Indigenous children and families". One of the most impactful activities that we employed with our staff was the Kairos Blanket Exercise activity. Our staff were divided into two groups, teachers and support staff, and participated in the activity. The debrief circles were powerful, emotional, and I believe, very impactful on our staff. They began to develop an understanding of the impacts of colonialism on our communities and

were a lot more compassionate to our students. We moved from becoming trauma-aware towards more trauma-informed in a matter of three hours. We have endeavored to stay trauma-informed with additional professional development for all staff. Our staff have been involved in a year-long training program to ensure that we are constantly working towards and in the best interests of our students.

Over the course of the past year, I have been introduced to the amazing brain of Dr. Jody Carrington. She was a keynote speaker at our system conference and of the many teachings that I have gleaned from her is the need for connection. According to Dr. Carrington, we are wired for connection. Our students thrive on it, we thrive on it. In this time of COVID-19, this has been one of the most difficult things to maintain. When we are not occupying the same place as our staff and students, teaching becomes that more difficult. Another take-away that I have from Dr. Carrington is a response to the ACE study. She introduced the Benevolent Childhood Experiences Scale. In this scale, factors that can contribute to resilience in our students were listed. Essentially, if one adult through the course of our students' lives makes a concerted effort to build connection and relationship with; provide encouragement and positive reinforcement; and help with communication and advocacy, we can alter the lives of our students who deal with trauma. For me, I was lucky to have someone standing in my corner. My volleyball coach, along with my parents, supported me through junior and senior high school. He passed on life lessons and instilled faith and belief in me. He made a huge difference in my life because he believed in me and thought I was important. I am very lucky to have had in my life because without him, my path may have been different?

Schools can take many pathways to becoming trauma-informed. One of the most effective ways is to understand that traditional approaches to dealing with misbehaviour is too

punitive! Carrington (2019, p. 76) writes that "[c]hildren with a significant history of trauma do not benefit from a traditional 'behavioural' approach where we reward the good behaviour and consequence the bad stuff". When we suspend our children with trauma, we are sending them back into what could be a negative and unsafe environment. This comment was reiterated to me when we were starting one of our first trauma training sessions as a staff group, one of the local community members reinforced this when he asked "what are we taking them back to?". We all know that suspensions and expulsions do not work. Students take this time as extended vacation time and, in most cases, appreciate the time away from school. At our school, we implemented restorative practices as a method of dealing with misbehaviour. We facilitated restorative conversations with our students and staff, we host circles to deal with conflict and help mediate between students and staff as needed. We understand that for some of the students in our community, school is one of the safest places to be.

Cavanaugh (2016, p.42) writes that "[t]trauma-informed practice is focused on practice that 'encourages...providers to approach their clients' personal, mental and relational distress with an informed understanding of the impact can have on the entire human experience" . I am pleased to report that my school employs two full-time counsellors who have a thorough understanding of trauma and its effects on the body. One of my counsellors has training in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy which is designed to help relieve stress and is a respected form of therapy to treat trauma and PTSD (Gotter, 2019). My other counsellor has extensive trauma training and the method of therapy he employs is Brain Spotting. This is therapy that helps clients heal from trauma using "points in the brain that help to access unprocessed trauma in the subcortical brain." (Grand, 2017).

In addition to our counselling team, our organization has taken steps to ensure that our school operates from a trauma-informed approach. In 2015, the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care wrote that organizations that realize, recognize, respond and resist "retraumatization" in their approaches are trauma-informed (in Cavanaugh, 2015, p.42). Cavanaugh identifies multi-tiered strategies that schools can use to help inform their practices. These strategies "include supports for student safety, positive interactions, culturally responsive practices, peer supports, targeted supports, and strategies that support the individualized needs of students." (Cavanaugh, 2016, p.42). With respect to safety, our school practices and follows strict safety procedures to keep our students and staff safe. We pride ourselves on our ability to maintain positive connections within our school community. Prior to the pandemic, our school had teacher advisory groups, flex sessions, school clubs and school spirit teams to encourage students to support each other. In terms of targeted supports, our teachers follow and ascribe to the Collaborative Response Model with tiered interventions. Our staff and students are well aware of the targeted support that students will or can receive. Individualized supports are also happening within our school with students access to individualized & Elders counselling, educational psychologists and their assessment procedures, Individual Program Plans if required. Our school is an active member of the Ermineskin HUB which acts as a wraparound support for families within our school community.

My Dad left. I think my Mom kicked him out because one day he was gone. We were slowly moving on with our lives. My Mom met someone who seems nice. He's a teacher at the local school, he has a beard. He seems shy but friendly. One day, my Dad and two brothers stopped by the house unexpectedly. He saw my Mom's new friend at the house and became super mad! He started beating him up in front of us, we were all screaming and crying. Somehow, they ended up outside in front of our house. My Dad and brothers are all beating on him.

At this point, I knew my relationship with my Dad was over. I couldn't bear to see him. All of the good was erased and all I remembered was the bad. These are the memories that I held on to.

Culturally responsive schooling

Barnes, Brave Heart, Pember and Evans-Campbell all offer great suggestions in order for educators to help our Indigenous students. The first of which is to offer a culturally relevant curriculum. For our Indigenous students, the most effective way to heal is to look within and offer "draw from traditional ways of knowing and spirituality" (Brave Heart in Pember,2017, p. 8). Every day, our staff and students are greeted with smudge. In conversation with our Elder, this ceremony helps to set our intentions for the day; clear our mind and focus on the task at hand; and most importantly, this is our connection to our spirituality. Pre-pandemic, at our school, Ermineskin Junior Senior High, our staff and students gather daily for the flag song and prayer. We eat together twice a day. We also offer daily Cree classes, incorporate land-based teaching including community field trips to the local museum and picking traditional medicines. We have ceremonies for our students to participate in; pipe ceremonies, feasts, round dances and tea dances are all a part of our yearly calendar. Our goal is to have our own sweat lodge for students and staff to utilize regularly. Our school employs Cree staff and most importantly, we have two Elders on staff to offer cultural advice and teachings. We incorporate storytelling, plays, performances into our schedule. I have also tasked my teachers to incorporate Cree ways of knowing and being into their daily lessons. Within our school division, we have system-wide professional development to introduce Cree teachings, cultural practices and language to our new and developing teachers. Schools need to work on "promoting cultural connectedness and identity" (Crooks et al, 2015, p.217). There are a number of ways that Crook et al. have identified, including but not limited to, land-based teaching, cultural activities, language courses, implementation of Indigenous ways of being and knowing into a culturally relevant curriculum.

"Some educators worry that culturally relevant programming will distract students from their academic pursuits. Conversely, an emphasis on bicultural competence suggests that it is through the strengthening of cultural identity in the school setting that students experience enhanced identity and success overall." (Crook et al., 2015, p.226). When our schools have a bicultural focus, our Indigenous students will not only feel welcome, their resistance to school will diminish because they will not view the Western educational system "as oppressive of their Aboriginal identity" (Crooks et al., 2015, p. 217). Touching on the bicultural focus of schools, Mr. Marvin Littlechild stresses the importance of our Indigenous youth to become bicultural. In his words, being bicultural is taking the best of both worlds and making it work for yourself. He has told me that the world is not just ours anymore, we need to learn to live in both. Brave Heart (1999, p.16) writes that "[t]he integration of traditional spirituality and culture enhance protective factors against the development or exacerbation of PTSD (deVries, 1996; Silver & Wilson, 1988), facilitating prevention and treatment.". When we can truly create a safe place for our students to fully embrace all facets of their identity, then they can grow as people, students and realize their full potential. Ehlers et al. (2014, p. 165) write that when schools fail to include Indigenous knowledge, language and culture, students feel "unwanted, unrecognized and invisible". Additionally, Barnes et al. (2006, p.23)write that when a school creates a positive school climate, students will be more successful, have higher self-esteem, exhibit better behaviour and have higher goals. We need to create a school that reflects these ideals and the backgrounds and experiences of our students.

From my perspective, the inclusion of ceremony and language in a culturally responsive school is a necessity. Battiste and Henderson (2009, p. 15) write that "learning IK in schools must be consistent with customary protocols for learning and teaching… [so that] staff can

develop respectful relations in their communities". Our school also has an onsite Elder who helps our teachers with the implementation of Cree content into academic subjects; he has guided our students through traditional teachings in our Cree classes and one-on-one traditional counseling; he participates in restorative circles and for me, is my sounding board and father figure. "Elders, knowledge-keepers, and cultural workers are indispensable to the process of appropriately naturalizing Ik and Aboriginal language education in schools" (Battiste and Henderson, 2009, p. 15). In conversation with my father-in-law, he casually stated that for so long, our schools have worked at dismantling and deconstructing our cultural practices and languages. Maybe now, our schools can be a place where our culture is rebuilt? (Wood, 2020). Agbo (2004, p.13) further emphasizes this with "[i]t was evident that the majority of community people perceived the importance of local culture, language, and tradition in the education of the children". Khalifa et al. (2016, p.1291) also highlight the importance of a culturally responsive school environment and the benefit to this when they write that "[r]ecognizing and nurturing the cultural identity of students, staff, and the community in which the school is located is another culturally responsive leadership approach that has benefited schools particularly in the American Indigenous communities."

In a culturally responsive school, students would be highly encouraged to study mainstream academics in addition to learning about their own cultural backgrounds, language, and knowledge. "None of the research suggests that Indigenous youth should learn tribal cultures and languages at the expense of learning mainstream culture, English and the typical "academic" subjects generally taught in schools" (Brayboy and Castagno, 2009, p. 32). When students learn both their own languages and cultures, not only their achievements within the English or

mainstream subjects are higher but, I believe their self-esteem and self-worth will increase. Success in Hawaiian Aha Punana Leo school founded by William Wilson as demonstrated by the students who are performing better than their peers and they are constantly exposed to language and culture. “What this amounts to is the need and desire for Indigenous youth to become bi/multicultural and the important role of schools in facilitating that process” (Brayboy and Castagno, 2009, p.38). Culturally responsive schools must include culturally relevant material (i.e. textbooks, novels, curriculum). Brayboy and Castagno (2009, p.44) looked into the data compiled in the United States and found that “students’ academic achievement and school performance improves when curriculum and pedagogy are relevant to students’ lives”. In conversations with our cultural advisor, he has further stressed the need for our schools to foster a sense of biculturalism. The world is changing and our students need to be able to thrive in both worlds (Littlechild, 2019).

Within Canada, the dropout rate of First Nations students in high school is astronomical. According to Stats Can, in the years of 2004-2009, the rate of high school graduation for First Nations students was thirty-four percent (Assembly of First Nations, 2012). In 2018, the rate of high school completion increased to forty-four percent (Indigenous Services Canada, 2018). McIntosh et al (2014, p.237) reviewed the national statistics that “show that 60% of Indigenous adults aged 20 to 24 received a high school diploma, as compared with 87% of non-Indigenous Canadians (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009).” Regardless of which statistics are reviewed, it is evident to me that our schools are failing our minoritized students. There is a disconnect between the two. Griner and Stewart (2012, p.586) write that “[m]any researchers posit that a major cause of the underachievement of RCELD students, and the disproportionate

representation of RCELD students in programs serving students with special needs, is the divide between home and school cultures." RCELD stands for racially, culturally, ethnically, linguistically diverse students. Because of the achievement gap between students who self-identify as RCELD, researchers feel that the disconnect can be better served with other initiatives which could include a culturally responsive program. In terms of research, there is little research that applies directly to my context working within a First Nations school. Vavrus (2008, p.51) wrote "[f]urthermore, for African American, Native American Indians, and Latino students, graduation rates hover around 50%, whereas for males in those groups the figure ranges from 43 to 48%."

According to the research that I have reviewed, in order to make schools better for First Nations students, a culturally responsive school needs to become a reality. "Culturally responsive schools have been "described as that which "builds a bridge" between the child's home culture and the school in order to effect improved learning and school achievement" (Brayboy and Castagno, 2009, p. 32). There are a number of strategies/principles/recommendations that must be taken into consideration when administrators are attempting to create a culturally responsive school.

- Culturally responsive schools must include culturally relevant knowledge;
- Educators must learn antiracist and anti-oppressive pedagogy;
- Educational practices must be decolonized;
- Language, cultural practices and ceremonies need to be a part of the norm;
- Finally, the curriculum must be culturally relevant.

Griner and Stewart (2012, p. 589) phrase their strategies of a culturally responsive teaching as the following;

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each other's cultural heritages.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools.

Culturally responsive schools must include culturally relevant material. Based on my own teaching experience, when I taught a lesson, unit or project that incorporated Cree cultural content the level of student engagement was higher. A task that I have assigned to my teaching staff is to incorporate as much Cree content into their lessons. Along with this task, this is also a competency within the Maskwacis Education Schools Commission Teacher Evaluation; the Leadership Quality Standard; and, the Teacher Quality Standard from Alberta Education. When our students see themselves represented in a positive manner, they feel affirmed, respected and are more likely to come to school. Agbo (2004, p. 5) also stresses the importance of a culturally relevant curriculum and how this practice can be difficult to attain especially when "Paquette (1986) contended that, except in a few cases, the curriculum of the First Nations schools does not respond to the realities of the community. Agbo asserts that most First Nations schools tend "to teach provincially mandated curricula without systematic modification to recognize the cultural and linguistic milieu students come from." Our schools also follow the provincial curriculum, we award high school diplomas and certificates, and participate in the provincial testing (i.e. Provincial Achievement Tests and Diploma exams). But, as Stockdale et al. (2013, p. 107) state "'[i]f we are a First Nations school, we must feel like one, look like one, and sound like one".

In a culturally responsive school, educational practices must be decolonized. According to Battiste and Henderson (2009, p. 14), this is a

> process that included raising and legitimizing the collective voices and experiences of Aboriginal people in the curriculum, exposing the injustices in colonial history and deconstructing the past by critically examining the social, political, economic, and historical reasons for silencing Aboriginal voices (past and present).

This process can be difficult to navigate because I believe that when teachers are making a concerted effort to decolonize their practice it causes them to reflect on their assumptions, prejudices and preconceived notions about what it means to teach in a culturally responsive school. It causes discomfort but, during the process, it helps with their professional and personal growth. Vavrus (2008, p. 54) writes "[c]ulturally responsive teachers are well informed about their subject matter and are regularly investigating sources that can increase the multicultural perspective of their teaching disciplines. Teachers also learn about the communities and cultures from which their students originate and try to incorporate those orientations and resources into daily instruction. Culturally responsive teachers are lifelong learners of culture and its implications for teaching and learning in their particular settings." Vavrus (2008, p. 53) also writes that teachers should become learners with their students.

> At a minimum, this can involve culturally responsive teachers learning with and from their students about various cultural communities and backgrounds from which students come. Thus, the idea of praxis reminds culturally responsive teachers that it is not enough to only identify unequal, racist, and undemocratic situations. By means of a pedagogy that is critical and [e]mbedded with the concept of praxis, culturally responsive teachers are theoretically expected to work with their culturally diverse students and communities to help overcome inequities that may exist under mainstream arrangements of schooling.

As an administrator, I would rather have a teacher who is critically reflective of their practice. I also agree with Khalifa et al. (2016, p. 1285) who wrote that it can be "deleterious for students to

have their cultural identities rejected in school and unacknowledged as integral to student learning."

Along with this teaching, our students need to be held to high expectations. Our teachers need to believe that First Nations students are more than capable of learning. Griner and Stewart further emphasized the importance of high expectations that teachers must hold their students accountable to. Griner and Stewart write (2012, p. 238) "consistent, clear, or same expectations" when it came to the topic of academics and discipline". McIntosh et al. (2014, p.238) continue with this theme when they write

> [d]ue to disparities between Indigenous and dominant Western cultures, teachers' expectations of Indigenous students are typically lower than for non-Indigenous students … These low expectations can severely negatively affect student academic outcomes (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Students are often cognizant of these lower expectations and, in turn, this awareness negatively affects teacher–student relationships and engagement in learning.

Etherington (2015, p.56) writes that "[i]f teachers really want to change a deficit view of Aboriginal peoples, Tanaka (2009) suggests that they need to walk deeply along-side.". When educators teach from a growth perspective rather than a deficit mindset, our students will reap the benefits.

In terms of teacher preparation, cultural responsiveness requires an intensive training, professional development, and reflective practice. A well-established mentorship to guide new teachers would be beneficial. Culturally responsive teaching requires five tenets to guide practice. According to Hayes and Juarez (2012, p. 5), culturally responsive teaching requires

1. Centrality of race and racism
2. Valuing experiential knowledge
3. Challenging the dominant perspective
4. Commitment to social justice

5. Being interdisciplinary.

Teachers must be willing to challenge their thoughts and perspectives towards their own privilege. Hayes and Juarez (2012, p. 10) write that "teacher education programs need to understand that racism is an endemic part of American society." The authors go on to write that color-blindness cannot be practiced (Hayes and Juarez, 2012, p.10). Teachers need to recognize that some students will be excluded from success simply because of the color of their skin, it is not enough to work hard. And finally, Hayes and Juarez (2012, p. 10 state that "experiential knowledge" plays an important role in educating students of colour. Teachers are not coming out of university fully prepared to teach *all* students. They must be willing to reflect on their own preconceptions and prejudices. This is not an easy task and is not for all teachers. Khalifa et al. (2016, p.1292) emphasize this

> [b]y refusing to consider culture and race as relevant to student learning and also by denying the existence of White privilege, the teachers and school leaders failed to tap in to the uniqueness of individual student cultures, values, and beliefs as tools for developing culturally relevant pedagogy and leadership that could benefit all students.

Conclusion

Culturally responsive teaching and schooling has been an issue that is near to my heart. I firmly believe that schools fail to adequately meet the needs of our minoritized students. This is extremely frustrating to me as a minoritized student and upon reflection of my schooling experiences, I realize that I was educated in a colonial context. My Cree culture was not taught and when I did learn about Cree people, it was a romanticized version of the "noble savage" or coming from a negative stereotype. Every course within this program has helped me to embrace my identity and I am learning more along with my staff and students. Throughout the course of my Master's program, I have come to realize that I know very little. I want to inspire my staff and students to continue to do great things but I believe that in our current context of COVID, I have to tread very carefully. I am constantly reminded of the need for balance. Teaching is hard and now, it is harder than ever before. Our school prides itself on our abilities to make and maintain relationships with each other and our students. With the current model of education, it is so hard to maintain those relationships virtually. That being said, I believe that through becoming a culturally responsive leader who can guide her staff and students will help our school and community become a better place. Recently, I read the story of Lance Christensen who is a First Nations golfer from Pine Ridge, South Dakota. The article spoke about his journey through the game of golf and how he qualified for the 2020 High School Golf Invitational in Pinehurst, North Carolina. The story talked about how Christensen overcame adversity and obstacles along the way. The line that resonated with me was, ""The goal was never to make it off the 'Rez.' I love my home," Christensen says. "The goal was to show the kids that we are capable of far more than anyone wants to believe we are."" I LOVE this quote and firmly believe that our students are amazing and way more intelligent than we give them credit for!

Being an educator can be a very difficult job. Leading a group of educators and students is demanding, taxing and hard! But, it is so rewarding when we see our students become successful, achieve their goals and realize their potential. To me, this is the definition of miyo pimatisown, a god life. Leading through trauma adds another dimension to our roles and responsibilities. When our schools shift from trauma-aware to trauma-informed practices, the rewards will only grow exponentially. Our educators need to have a thorough education on the real and ugly truth of Canadian history, they need to understand what our families go through on a daily basis, they need to learn about their own trauma and be prepared to help our students manage their crises. We need to shift our practices within our schools to offer culturally relevant material, restorative practices, and build connection with our communities and families. This is true sense of wahkohtowin and maintaining those relationships with our families and our students is worth it! I struggle at times to convey my thoughts, feelings and actions but I will leave you with Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2016, p. 151) eloquent words

> Perhaps, we as indigenous scholars, struggle to find the right terms to use to articulate something we know and care for, respect and remember, and that we seek to engage with, knowing that our ancestors might be looking on, and that the next generations will ask us, "What did you do in your time to ensure that our peoples flourished?

Epilogue

The memories I have of my parents' relationship are not happy or healthy, they are very violent memories as I witnessed a lot of alcoholism and domestic violence. The memories that I share throughout are mine. The memories could be anyone's story, one of our students, a colleague, a community member. As I researched and reviewed literature, and worked through trauma-informed professional development, I was confronted with my own trauma. While my hope was and is to become more trauma-informed, this process of writing has been very therapeutic for me. It was a cathartic experience and when I look back at my journal and can answer the question, how do I deal with this? Throughout this journey, I spoke to my family and colleagues. I participated in ceremony asking for strength. I had to live with my feelings, thoughts and memories until I was ready to move on. Sitting in these moments helped to formulate the title of this paper. Iyisahowin translates to patience in overcoming something. The meaning was related to me as a metaphor. The eagle is one of the most revered birds amongst the Cree and when it can sense that a storm is coming, the eagle rises above the clouds and waits for the storm to pass. This is the true meaning of iyisahowin.

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