

**Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into Teaching and the Academy**

by

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**Abstract**

Since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action (Canada, 2015), there has been a movement to include Indigenous voices, epistemologies, and ontologies into institutions and systems to support Indigenization. The goal of the research is to gain insight into the practices of Indigenous scholars incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the academy, learning from the highlights, struggles, and challenges along the way. The research objectives are to: 1) capture the story of each Indigenous scholar's journey in finding their own identity and coming to know Indigenous knowledge, 2) capture the ways Indigenous scholars foster environments that encourages learning about relationality, culture, Indigenous knowledge and identities, and 3) reflect on the ways that their stories are shaping/informing my understanding of Indigenous identities and knowledge within the academy. Using TribalCrit theory and critical ethnography, Indigenous scholars' stories, including my own, explore challenges, success and strategies for incorporating Indigenous knowledge. Interviews were conducted with five participants, all holding academic appointments at the same post-secondary institution at the time. Transcripts were analyzed using latent content analysis. The iterative process of data collection, transcription and coding led to codes, sub-categories, and categories, as well as excerpts that supported each. After interviews were complete, I developed the themes and conclusions from the data analysis. Emerging themes include the journey to the academy; enacting TribaCrit through small acts of self-determination and sovereignty; and strategies for TribalCrit practitioners in the academy. Strategies adopted by Indigenous scholars that pave the way for future scholars include creating a safe and welcoming space for Indigenous students; following the path and breaking new ground; and community and reciprocity. In conclusion, TribaCrit practitioners are motivated to transform the academy to be more welcoming to

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Indigenous students; many are making strides to realize this transformation instead of it being only a hope.

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**Preface**

This thesis is an original work by Elliott Young. Research ethics approval for the research project, of which this thesis is a part, was received from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, No. 0010509, January 19, 2021.

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**Dedication**

To my community and family. Without either of them, this would not have been possible.

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### Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action (Canada, 2015), there has been a movement to include Indigenous voices, epistemologies, and ontologies into institutions and systems to support Indigenization. This movement has seen researchers and educators exploring how the sophisticated knowledge of Indigenous Peoples can co-exist with euro-Canadian knowledge systems. The first step in this work is to define what is meant by Indigenous knowledge. For me, Indigenous knowledge is both traditional and fluid. Traditional in that there are many people who practice ceremony, language, hunting, and gathering; and fluid, in that many people are finding ways to revitalize and incorporate these practices into their lives. Nonetheless, the following definition of Indigenous Knowledge is offered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). “Local and Indigenous knowledge refers to the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. For rural and Indigenous Peoples, local knowledge informs decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life” (UNESCO, 2018). Another important concept of Indigenous knowledge is relationality. According to Moreton-Robinson (2017), relationality “is grounded in a holistic conception of the interconnectedness and inter-substantiation between and among all living things and the earth, which is inhabited by a world of ancestors and creator beings” (p. 71).

This exploration of Indigenous scholars’ experiences and reflections on my own experiences as an Indigenous scholar provide insight into the interconnectedness of relationality and Indigenous knowledge and the ways they may be incorporated into academia.

The goal of the research is to gain insight into the practices of Indigenous scholars incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the academy, learning from the highlights, struggles,

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and challenges along the way. As a current Indigenous graduate student, it is important to document and share the path lit by the efforts of Indigenous scholars so that scholars like myself may know what has been done, what can be incorporated into our own practices, and where we can break the glass ceiling wide open. The information and knowledge gained through this research will add to the important research done by many Indigenous scholars.

### **Research Goal and Objectives**

How do Indigenous scholars understand and incorporate Indigenous knowledge into their teaching and the academy?

#### ***Research Objectives:***

- To capture the story of each Indigenous scholar's journey in finding their own identity and coming to know Indigenous knowledge
- To capture the ways Indigenous scholars foster an environment in their classroom that encourages all students to learn about relationality, culture, Indigenous knowledge and identities.
- To reflect on the ways that the stories of Indigenous scholars are shaping/informing my understanding of Indigenous identities and knowledge within the academy.

### **Positionality and Personal Narratives**

Stories and narratives will be an important part of my research. Sharing my own experiences and stories will be a conduit into how Indigenous knowledge has shaped my journey and Indigeneity. Throughout my thesis, I will be sharing narratives about my teachings, my journey growing up, and how I have been able to ground my work in Indigenous knowledge. To do this, I will be using an autoethnographic approach, italicizing the portions of the thesis that reflect my personal narratives.

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*The way my thesis proposal has come together was not the way I intended when I began my graduate program. I was going to focus on youth in-care and how engagement has impacted their aging out, but after much thought on ethics, I found that this wouldn't be appropriate for a master's thesis. Then I thought about connecting it to my community service learning experience, but that quickly got too complex and cumbersome. I found myself lost. Around this time, I started to think more about the project I was a Research Assistant on. It was a passion of mine as it brought ceremony, Indigenous knowledge, and relationship building all together to explore how instructors are working towards the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The more I reflected on this, the more I wanted to explore how Indigenous scholars are incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the academy. I wanted to know because this is something I see myself doing if I become a scholar and I would like to contribute to the existing literature on decolonization, Indigenization, and resurgence within the academy. I found it. I found the topic for my thesis.*

*Before I go further in this thesis, it is important I place myself. I am a member of Ermineskin Cree Nation, which is one of the First Nations that make up a community called Maskwacis in Alberta. I have family in the Louis Bull Tribe and Tsuut'ina Nation. I have been living in Edmonton for the last 16 years and it is where I have built my career and family. My wife and I have two amazing children. I grew up surrounded by Nehiyaw (Cree) teachings and this is the perspective I have with this work. When I reference Nêhiyawêwin (the Cree Language), it is through the teachings I have received from the Knowledge Keepers and Elders in my life. As I am still learning my own culture and language, my understanding of the Nehiyaw concepts discussed in this paper will expand and evolve.*

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My research will also build upon the findings of Absolon (2011), who explored how Indigenous graduate students incorporate Indigenous knowledge into their thesis and how they came to understand Indigenous Research Methodologies. Absolon found that many Indigenous graduate students struggled with their theses until they realized their Indigenous knowledge and epistemology did not fit within a western theory or paradigm, but rather its foundation was within Indigeneity and relationality. Absolon's participants also reflected on how their research contributed to their own cultural identity navigation. My research will take this a step further in that I will explore the ways that Indigenous scholars' experiences as educators inform the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into the classroom.

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### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In the following literature review, the following topics will be discussed: theoretical foundations; self-determination, sovereignty and nationhood; Indigenization; and Indigenous scholars' experiences of Indigenization in the academy. Each of these topics have framed my approach and understanding of the phenomenon. First, I will provide an overview of the theoretical foundations that have framed my research. Second, I will dive into research about self-determination, sovereignty, and nationhood to better understand how Indigenous scholars can exercise these in the academy. Third, I look at how Indigenization is being defined by Indigenous scholars and implemented by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars. Finally, I explore the work of Indigenous scholars who are transforming the academy through Indigenization.

#### **Theoretical Foundations**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has its roots in Critical Legal Studies (CLS). In 1972, when scholars in the legal profession were critiquing law in America, African American legal scholars involved in this critique pointed out that these discussions and dialogues were excluding a racial lens. Brown and Jackson (2013) wrote that “CRT emerged out of a sense that, while CLS had developed some very significant insights about how the legal process worked, the movement did not adequately address the struggles of people of color, particularly blacks” (p. 13). Specifically, the law engages with black and people of color differently and CRT critiques the need to include these voices. CRT challenges the white lens applied in law and encourages the intersection of race to be integrated. According to Bell (1995). The work of CRT is “often disruptive because its commitment to anti-racism goes well beyond civil rights, integration, affirmative action, and other liberal measures” (p. 899).

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CRT has inspired movement in other areas, including the ways it may support addressing the complicated relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the state through the lens of race, law, and politics. Brayboy (2005) explored how Indigeneity can be used as the primary intersection to view Critical Race Theory; which led to the development of Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit). According to Brayboy, TribalCrit:

endeavors to expose the inconsistencies in structural systems and institutions—like colleges and universities—and make the situation better for Indigenous students. TribalCrit practitioners take part in the process of self-determination and in making institutions of formal education more understandable to Indigenous students and Indigenous students more understandable to the institutions. (p. 441)

This lens is well-suited to my research as my topic looks beyond the hiring of Indigenous scholars and aims to foster anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices through the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge.

As themes emerged during preliminary analysis, it became apparent that Indigenous scholars were often talking directly or indirectly about sovereignty and self-determination. Nationhood was also threaded throughout many of the conversations. The literature review focuses on self-determination, sovereignty and nationhood, Indigenization, and Indigenous scholars' experiences of Indigenization in the academy.

### **Self-determination, Sovereignty and Nationhood**

While TribalCrit focuses on the roles of race in structural and systemic oppression, there are many other intersections that Indigenous Peoples need to take into consideration. One that stands out is the concept of sovereignty and nationhood. Alfred (2009) explores sovereignty and nationhood from three perspectives. First is peace, unattainable due to materialism and capitalism, but nevertheless being pursued by taking up the responsibility of ancestors. Alfred speaks about the Great Law of Peace of the Iroquois Confederacy and how that has framed his

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understanding of peace in relation to how First Nations came together to form an elaborate system of governance. This traditional perspective of peace and its influence on governance is not unattainable today because of the impact of capitalism and the competing priorities and interests of First Nation leadership today. The second perspective of sovereignty and nationhood is power. Indigenous leaders today struggle with power that may corrupt them. By power, I mean authority through western or colonial governance structures that have been imposed on Indigenous Peoples by the Indian Act. The struggle is balancing the commitment these Indigenous leaders have to their community while also exercising their authority as articulated by the Indian Act. However, there are leaders that push back against state sovereignty to implement Indigenous knowledge. Alfred is critical of Indigenous leaders who have gained the title of leader through colonial systems instead of being recognized as a leader through the traditions of Indigenous autonomy. Indigenous leadership has an accountability to community and Indigenous knowledge and, so, should be their focus. The third perspective of sovereignty and nationhood is righteousness, which is the pursuit of being kind, honest, and fair in leadership which is seen as highly aspirational with the hope that future generations will learn to lead in this way. Righteousness, defined this way, is a manifestation of being in good relations with community and with Indigenous knowledge, ensuring, as a leader, that you are moving forward in a good way. This isn't far from the situation that Indigenous scholars find themselves in when working within post-secondary institutions. Indigenous scholars will never have peace within an institution that has been violent against Indigenous Peoples; power imbalances within these institutions may lead Indigenous scholars down a path towards unintentionally enforcing ongoing oppression, and there is a hope the next group of Indigenous scholars are able to push even further against the oppression of the institution. With this lens, seeing TribalCrit through

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sovereignty and nationhood is important as it provides a glimpse into how Indigenous scholars consistently reflect on how they resist oppressive powers within post-secondaries while being responsible to our ancestors, being kind, humble, and honest.

Other scholars of sovereignty and nationhood, such as Corntassel (2008), explore the concept of a sustainable self-determination that “offers a new global benchmark for the praxis of Indigenous livelihoods, food security, community governance, and relationships to the natural world and ceremonial life that enables the transmission of these cultural practices to future generations” (p. 124). This approach encourages a rejuvenated approach to include Indigenous knowledge when communities are restoring sustainable relationships. Through his work, Corntassel explores the concept of treaty making and how that shows a path towards relationship building. Specifically, there is an accountability and responsibility that comes with Treaty that needs to be renewed each year through ceremony, which could look very similar to the relationship between a post-secondary and the Indigenous community, both within the institution and those external. This relationship comes with an expectation for nurturing and accountability, especially to honor treaty relationships. Organizing an annual ceremony to honor this treaty relationship and the relationship between the post-secondary institute and Indigenous community is a first step.

It is also important to recognize when working within colonial institutions, such as a post-secondary institution, that many opportunities and initiatives perceived to contribute to decolonization and Indigenization may in fact reinforce historical oppression of people and knowledge. Nadasdy (2003) examines the use of power by the state that is more subtle and infused in bureaucracy, making it more difficult to identify how the state continues to oppress Indigenous Peoples. Two examples of these more subtle methods to oppress self-determination

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or sovereignty through processes such as co-management and land claim negotiations. This false and misleading approach can also be applied to post-secondaries as the institution has been historically violent to Indigenous Peoples. Framing decolonization or Indigenization in a way that reinforces the power within the system is no better than the Canadian government putting a mask on colonization with co-management and land claim negotiations. Indigenous scholars that work in a post-secondary need to be constantly critical about what strategies the institution moves forward in this work or they risk being in support of the same type of oppression just branded in a different name. Scholars in academia are contributing to the academic literature as a step in resisting these new methods of oppression. Some of this literature focuses on defining what is meant by Indigenization.

### **Indigenization**

Indigenization is a complex process and has many definitions including, but not limited to: a multi-staged institutional initiative that supports societal reconciliation (Saskatchewan, n.d.), or indigenization is the incorporation of Indigenous elements and concepts into an institution, that moves beyond tokenistic gestures of recognition or inclusion to meaningfully change practices and structures (Attas, n.d.). Gaudry (2018) writes that Indigenous scholars envision an “[I]ndigenization that provokes a foundational, intellectual, and structural shift in the academy, requiring the wholesale overhaul of academic norms to better reflect a more meaningful relationship with Indigenous nations” (p. 218). Key factors to consider in discussions of Indigenization are relationality, Indigenous knowledge transmission and protection, and decolonization. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

Relationality has been explored in depth over the past decade by Wilson (2008), who states “that [a] relational way of being [is] at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous” (p. 80).

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Kovach (2009) aligns relationality within an Indigenous epistemology that “lives within a web of relationality and that all aspects of that epistemology must be understood from that vantage point” (p. 57), and Moreton-Robinson (2017) explores the importance of relationality in Indigenous Research Methodology. Relationality refers to the relationship and accountability that everyone has with each other, the land, the animals, the spirits, and medicine. Wilson (2008) emphasizes the importance of ceremony for understanding the complex interconnectedness of topics we may explore. Learning and research that values and respects the relationships between people, the environment/land, the cosmos, and ideas, is done in ceremony; hence research is ceremony. The embeddedness of ceremony in research requires a closer look at the protection and transmission of IK. This relational approach to sharing knowledge has implications for the Indigenization of learning spaces. One example is the interconnectedness of ceremony and Elders in Indigenous knowledge transmission.

During research and ceremony, there are many teachings passed along by Elders or Knowledge Keepers. It is important to ensure the proper protocols are followed when sharing these teachings in a classroom. Some stories are not ours to share, or some people are not far enough along their cultural journey to be given the authority to share the teachings. There must be constant consideration given to the authority to share, protection of knowledge, and the importance of making Indigenous knowledge accessible to communities who have been forcibly disconnected for so many years. Wemigwans (2018) has explored the importance of protecting Indigenous knowledge on the internet and how it can be used by Indigenous Peoples to reclaim their Indigeneity or Indigenous identity. More importantly, it provides a path for Indigenous Peoples to access Indigenous knowledge online that is supported by Indigenous communities’ which is especially important for Indigenous Peoples not connected to an Indigenous community

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or their culture. Examples of open-source materials include McMahon et al. (2019) who use digital media to share Indigenous stories or a video developed by Dr. Pat Makokis (2019) with late Elder Vincent Steinhauer, explaining the importance of relationality and its connection to the spirit and intent of Treaties. It should be noted that Dr. Makokis, late Vincent Steinhauer, Dr. Diana Steinhauer, and others from Saddle Lake Cree Nation were influential in the development of the project associated with Dr. McMahon. Each of these resources emphasize the importance of Elder and/or Knowledge Keeper teachings through the practice of land-based or experiential learning. With access to IK comes a responsibility for and accountability to ensuring it is used to transform the academy through either decolonization or Indigenization.

While reviewing publications on decolonization and Indigenization, two themes emerged: first, the focus on Indigenous led initiatives and Indigenous written publications, and second, literature written for and by non-Indigenous allies. I will focus on the first theme. Gaudry (2018) has identified the emergence of reconciliation efforts in Canadian academia and found that many institutions are on the path of Indigenous inclusion as opposed to Indigenization; with Indigenization being the path for transformative work. Johnson (2016) emphasizes the need for Indigenous scholars to work within their community's epistemologies and consider how this may be incorporated into academia. Johnson focuses on anthropology, but I feel her insights can be applied to several fields. Along with a strategic approach, there are important aspects of Indigenizing and decolonizing curriculum as can be seen by the following scholars. Kato (2018) incorporated the Indigenous concept of kulena (shared responsibility) into their classroom. The assignments were structured to reflect on the concept of kulena and to understand more fully the students' and educators' shared responsibility to the earth. Kato shares student reflections that portray the transformative potential of learning about Indigenous knowledge and how everything

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is interconnected. Wilson and Nelson-Moody (2019) describe how the potlatch methodology, based on a traditional ceremony, can be used to transform the classroom (at a micro level) and the academy (at a macro level). Specifically, they state that the “potlatch methodology seeks to reframe internalized shame into internalized abundance by integrating spiritual and wholistic learning for maximum transformative benefit—a role everyone must seek to change” (p. 53). There has been insightful literature developed by Indigenous scholars, but there have also been insightful articles written by non-Indigenous allies that show how to move toward Indigenization and decolonization.

As stated earlier, McMahon et al. (2019) have explored augmented reality and digital storytelling to share Indigenous knowledge. Schmidt (2019) provides their reflection on the role of an Indigenous ally working towards Indigenization and decolonization in psychology. Schmidt shares the need for discomfort and anxiousness that an ally would feel that aligns with the insights shared by Tuck and Yang (2012). Specifically, there is a “need to critically examine our own (allies) minds (as we are not innocent bystanders but rather benefactors and products of the exploitative colonial system) and work toward our own decolonization” (p. 62). Yeo et al. (2019) go a step further in bringing non-Indigenous scholars together to explore their role in Indigenization. The authors summarize the importance of the research by stating that “organizers [of Indigenization] must therefore remain diligent to ensure that the work of Indigenization remains a site of unsettlement for settlers and of empowerment for Indigenous Peoples and communities” (p. 39). Lange (2018) explores how to move transformative learning even further through the concept of relationality; specifically the ontology of relationality. Lange shares their story of learning about relationality and how it has the potential to bridge the scientific worlds of

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physics and Indigenous ontologies; specifically, this potential can lead to more “socially just and ecologically regenerative societies” (p. 298).

The next section will now share how Indigenous scholars have begun to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into their work. Essentially, it will share how Indigenous scholars are moving towards Indigenization in the Academy.

### **Indigenous Scholars Experiences of Indigenization in the Academy**

Indigenization has received increased attention at post-secondary institutions since the release of the TRC Calls to Action in 2015; specifically, with Call to Action 62. ii.: “Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms” (7). The conversations in the academy began with reconciliation, but soon it became clear that reconciliation was coming before the ‘truth’ of Canada’s oppressive and assimilation policies (Stein, 2020). At this point, reconciliation has led to engagement fatigue for Indigenous scholars who are feeling that reconciliation contributes to ongoing colonization within the institution. Stein states that until settlers within the academy are willing to face the wrongdoings in the academy, along with their own complacency, reconciliation is impossible. Daigle (2019) adds that “a move from hollow performances to the aforementioned systemic changes is a good start; however, in and of itself, this remains inadequate if universities are to truly reckon with their role in reproducing colonial dispossession and violence in the present” (p. 714). Reconciliation is a good starting point, but to move towards transforming the academy, Indigenous and, especially, non-Indigenous scholars need to be accountable and responsible to Indigenous knowledge and the international law, such as the Treaties, and the Natural laws of the land.

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There has been some work by non-Indigenous scholars that is founded in reconciliation. Schmidt (2019) shares that, even as a non-Indigenous scholar, doing something that moves beyond Eurocentric pedagogy is better than nothing “provided that the necessary partnerships of mutual respect can be established with local Indigenous communities, Elders, and traditional knowledge holders, then a commitment to lifelong learning ... and the “heavy sledge work” of Two-Eye Seeing are what follows” (p. 70). It is important that non-Indigenous scholars work towards understanding Indigenous knowledge more and how it can be applied, but as I will explore later, there is a risk of diluting and exploiting Indigenous knowledge if it is not done correctly. Morcom and Freeman (2018) reiterate the need for non-Indigenous scholars to be critically self-reflective: “Fulfillment of the goals set out by the TRC will improve life for Canada as a whole and certainly for Indigenous Peoples, but it would be disingenuous to claim that this can be done at no cost to Euro-Canadians. As we have seen in our institution, individual reconciliation, guided by Indigenous teachings and done in love, is the only thing that will result in systemic reconciliation” (p. 830). These are important steps for non-Indigenous scholars, but there is an important difference in the language used for this work that differs to Indigenous scholars. Indigenization and, even more so, decolonization is what Indigenous scholars are striving to achieve.

For Indigenous scholars, reconciliation does not go far enough as reconciliation will be tied solely to the impacts of residential schools. Although this is important work, Indigenization and decolonization move toward the responsibility and accountability that everyone has to relationships, land, environment, and other living beings. It is work that is based in relationality. The work of Indigenization and decolonization is tied to the dispossession of land experienced

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by Indigenous Peoples and the loss of self-determination and sovereignty tied to that. Peach et al. (2020) shares that the

[d]ispossession of land, and its resulting inaccessibility, is the core wound inflicted by colonization ... therefore, the academy needs to consider aligning itself in efforts grounded in decolonial indigenization that work to reclaim Indigenous land and life through appropriate forms of self-determination and partnerships with Indigenous communities where Indigenous traditional livelihoods can be practiced freely. (p. 125)

Decolonial Indigenization pushes past reconciliation to restoration and resurgence of Indigenous knowledge systems and land repossession. A challenge to this, identified by McGowan et al. (2020), is dominionization which is “a process that intentionally minimizes meaningful system disruption by othering Indigenous knowledges and knowledge holders” (p. 301). As much as there is work towards reconciliation, Indigenization, decolonization, and decolonial Indigenization, there will always be systemic and institutional barriers that will make it difficult for Indigenous scholars to transform the academy. Each Indigenous scholar is creating space and developing ways to move towards decolonial Indigenization, which I am enthusiastic to share in this research.

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**Chapter 3: Methodology**

I chose to approach this research from a transformative paradigm. The transformative paradigm has an axiology based on respecting cultural norms, an ontology that rejects cultural relativism, and an epistemology based on the need to address issues of power and trust (Mertens, 2019). The transformative paradigm allowed me to “consciously and explicitly position [myself] side by side with [participants] in a joint effort to bring about social transformation” (p. 21). Positioning myself alongside participants, I engaged participants in conversations to imagine the social transformation that is required to create space for Indigenous scholars to come. The approach I take for this social transformation is supported and enhanced with Tribal Crit theory as it is focused on transforming institutions to make them more welcoming to Indigenous students, staff, and faculty. TribalCrit theory provides an anti-oppressive and anti-racist lens for incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the academy. Building on TribalCrit and Indigenous Research Methods (IRM) with a focus on the work of Absolon (2011), Wilson (2008), Kovach (2009), and Archibald (2008), I focused on relationality and how that has impacted incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the academy.

Using the foundation of IRM and relationality, I chose to take a critical ethnography approach. Although there is more to IRM than just relationality; there is a responsibility, accountability, and reciprocity to working with Indigenous Peoples, communities, and knowledge systems. This is done by listening to stories (Archibald, 2008; Archibald et al. 2019) so they can be shared and having a reciprocal and accountable relationship through visiting (Gaudet, 2018). The more you dive into this responsibility, accountability, and reciprocity, the more you realize that stories are connected to people, communities, land, environment, animals, and non-living beings (such as spirits). These stories are Indigenous knowledge systems, they are

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the relationships between people, and they are the connection to our ancestors and future generations. In short, relationality is a responsibility, accountability, and reciprocity that has grounded my approach in this research. The values of IRM and the concept of relationality, prompted me to include my own experiences of being an Indigenous scholar within the academy who is committed to setting the expectations for IK inclusion. This is why I have chosen critical ethnography as my method.

Mertens (2019) states that critical ethnography “includes the examination of social structures, including economic, political, social, historical, and cultural institutions and norms that support discriminatory practices that constrain the agency of individuals or groups and the strategies of resistance employed by those who are oppressed” (p. 251). Additionally, Mayan (2009) states “critical ethnography requires us to link participants’ experiences to broader structures of social power and control and explain how these structures reinforce existing social images of our participants” (p. 39). Ethnography also allows for the inclusion of narrative and personal stories to research, which can be seen by Abram (1996), who combines storytelling, personal narratives, and scholarly research to explain the importance of ethnography to the academy. IRM, TribalCrit and critical ethnography were chosen to ensure this research project was based in Indigenous knowledge. I felt confident that the values and beliefs inherent in these approaches would ensure that I moved forward in a good way.

*I remember sitting at the kitchen table listening to nohkom (my grandmother), my mother, and my aunts tell stories, tease each other, and share teachings. Each was woven into a blanket of conversation that warmed my childhood. It wasn't until I was older that I realized the importance of sitting at that kitchen table. Many of my teachings are from that table, along with some of my fondest memories of nohkom. The pride I have in being Nehiyaw, a First Nation, and*

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*an Indigenous person is tied to my experience being at that kitchen table. My understanding of Indigenous knowledge is founded in sitting on a chair, on a lap or underneath that table. With nohkom gone, the table is still there, but the stories aren't the same. It has come to a point where I need to build my own table and reach out to my family to start sitting at their tables. It's important not only to sustain stories, teasing, and teachings, but to ensure my children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren are learning their culture. It's this imperative that motivates me to focus my research on the topic of how Indigenous knowledge is being incorporated into the academy.*

I was fortunate to have nohkom at the kitchen table, however, not all post-secondary Indigenous students will have the same fortune. This leads me to wonder how a post-secondary institute can create the same atmosphere as a kitchen table to teach Indigenous knowledge. My experience is my own, and each student will come with different teachings and community connections, such as being Dene, Blackfoot, etc. As a result, incorporating Indigenous knowledge isn't as easy as bringing in a local Elder who may be either Metis or First Nation. Each student will have their own experience of growing up with or without Indigenous knowledge. My point is that incorporating Indigenous knowledge is not simple, but rather a complex objective that needs to be planned for with each course or initiative. The objective of this research is to gather information from Indigenous scholars who are currently incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the academy, to be able to share some insights for future Indigenous scholars.

### **Methodology**

Stories and narratives are important in my research, and I needed a method that aligns with this. Using qualitative methods aligned well with stories and narratives, as I would be able

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to use semi-structured interviews. My goal in this research is to understand a phenomenon and all its messiness, as stated by Mayan (2009). “Qualitative researchers aim not to limit a phenomenon - make it neat, tidy, and comfortable - but to break it open, unfasten, or interrupt it so that description of the phenomenon, in all of its contradictions, messiness, and depth, is (re)presented” (p. 11). I want the participants in my research to share the successes along with the messiness of working in the academy. Additionally, I need an approach that gives me the opportunity to hear their stories and reflect on them to inspire the sharing of my own narratives. Mertens (2020) shares that interviews require reflexivity to ensure there is a power balance, that the researched are protected, and there is no harm done (p. 267). However, with my research, these are still important, but reflexivity plays an important role in exploring myself within this research. As I moved through this work, I practiced reflexivity to consistently reflect on my own journey when reviewing the interviews. As the stories of Indigenous scholars are not extensively documented, qualitative methodologies using semi-structured interviews create a space that allows participants to share their unique stories. Specifically, semi-structured interviews are developed in a way to explore a phenomenon that the researcher has a fairly good understanding about, but not enough to predict answers (Mayan, p. 267). As an Indigenous scholar embarking on an academic career, I have some knowledge of my participants' journey to the academy, but there is no way for me to predict some of the answers about their own journey and how they are incorporating Indigenous knowledge into their teaching and the academy. I did know that they are doing it in some way as they are working at the University of Alberta and are being innovative in their research.

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### **Participant Recruitment**

Indigenous scholars with academic appointments at the University of Alberta were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. These scholars were chosen based on their personal experiences of incorporating Indigenous knowledge into their teaching and the academy. This purposive sampling aligns well with the research goals and objectives as I am looking for participants who can provide the best information about the topic and they will be active members with the academy (Mayan, 2009, p. 62).

My sample consisted of five semi-structured interviews. There were three initial interviews that were used as secondary data for analysis, which were then used to inform the two follow up interviews with two new participants. After conducting these interviews and developing the literature review, saturation was reached as the participants began providing information that connected with and reinforced the themes that emerged from the literature. Additionally, when I look back at my research question, I asked myself what Mayan (2009) asks about saturation: “[H]ave you answered it to the best of your ability; not whether you have it ‘right’ but whether you have something important to say, to contribute, or to problematize[?]”. Given the information from participants and the literature, I am confident I have findings that make an important contribution to the existing literature.

I recruited five Indigenous scholars. I have informal relationships with 4 of the scholars; so, I reached out to them through email. The fifth participant has a relationship with my supervisor, Dr. Fletcher, who reached out to them to participate in my research. Three Indigenous scholars were recruited from a project on Indigenous knowledge collaboration and inclusion on which I currently work as a Research Assistant. They were contacted for permission, through a consent form, to use the data collected for secondary analysis to complete

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my thesis. With the interviews being conducted through video conference, I read out the consent form, while also sending an electronic copy for them to sign. I ensured they were signed properly afterward the interview. This required due diligence on my part as I did additional follow up with each participant to ensure they signed the consent form. I also feel I have the support of the community stakeholders, as this research project is an extension of the research project I am involved in; which received a Kule Institute for Advanced Scholarship (KIAS)<sup>1</sup> research grant for its continuation.

### **Data Generation**

I chose interviews as they allowed for an open discussion and organic transitions into other topics. I ensured the conversation stayed on topic by using a semi-structured interview. The interview questions explored how Indigenous scholars came to know Indigenous knowledge, either through teachings with Elders or other means, to understand how they have experienced Indigenous knowledge inclusion in the classroom or academy as a student or scholar, and, finally, to gather their insights into how they incorporate Indigenous knowledge in their classroom or the academy. These questions encouraged my participants to think about what constitutes Indigenous knowledge, how they have experienced it, and how they are using it in their practice. The following questions were asked during the initial interviews.:

1. Can you tell me about your experiences here at the UofA in attempting to understand, integrate, and privilege Indigenous knowledges?
  - i. Courses

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<sup>1</sup> The McCalla/KIAS funded research project was based on the premise that we cannot succeed in addressing the calls to action without first deepening individual and collective understandings of our historical and present relationships and realities. Drawing on transformative scenario planning, the research explored how individuals teaching and learning across the academy may deepen their understanding and build their capacity to participate in collaborative teaching, research and service.

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- ii. Programs
  - iii. Events
  - iv. Other
- a. What have been the tribulations?
  - b. What have been the triumphs?
2. What are your hopes and fears for the future with regard to our ability to work collectively and collaboratively to bring IKSs into the university?
  3. Can you tell me about your experiences as you came to know Indigenous knowledge?
    - a. What were your experiences of Indigenous knowledge growing up?
    - b. What was your first introduction to Indigenous knowledge?
  4. How would you define Indigenous knowledge?
  5. What concepts of Indigenous knowledge have you incorporated into your teaching and research?
    - a. Relationality?
    - b. Land-based/experiential learning?
    - c. Ceremony?
    - d. Concepts that they identified in their definition of Indigenous knowledge.
  6. As an Indigenous scholar, can you tell me about the challenges and successes of incorporating Indigenous knowledge into teaching and the academy?
    - a. Answer either one first and come back to the other after (teaching or academy).

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Specifically, there were three interviews used from KIAS research project that informed the interview questions for the two follow up interviews. Transcripts were analyzed using latent content analysis, which “is the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data” (Mertens, 2019, p. 94). The process of latent content analysis worked well as I was able to code and categorize the data as I was conducting interviews. After each interview, I completed an initial coding to determine if any adjustments were needed during the following interviews. The iterative process of data collection, transcription and coding led to codes, sub-categories, and categories, as well as excerpts that supported each. After all of the interviews were completed, I developed the themes and conclusions from the data analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Three of the five first round interviews were completed as part of another research project on Indigenous knowledge inclusion at the University of Alberta. In order to use this data, the ethics application for this research included the process of getting consent from those participants to use their interviews as secondary data. The opportunity to work as a Research Assistant on this project gave me the opportunity to develop relationships with the three participants, which ultimately led to them feeling more comfortable with my use of their interviews. To use the existing data, I applied for secondary analysis and included the new interviews as part of that application. I also confirmed consent from the two participants to use their interviews for my research. The next step in acknowledging ethical issues when conducting research with Indigenous communities and peoples is the tri-council policy statement on research involving the First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples of Canada. This statement specifically “marks a step toward establishing an ethical space for dialogue on common interests and points of difference between researchers and Indigenous communities engaged in research” (Canada,

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2019). Even as an Indigenous person, I have to ensure I follow the guidelines of the Tri-council Policy Statement, not only so I followed the proper steps and ensured I didn't unknowingly cause harm to my own community.

Along with research done on Indigenous Peoples, there are ethical issues with how I engage and use Indigenous knowledge. Wemigwans (2019) explored the use of Indigenous knowledge in the digital age. Wemigwans shares important aspects and considerations when using Indigenous knowledge through digital technology that contributes to self-determination, nation building, and resurgence. It provides an ethical common ground that identifies Indigenous knowledge as sacred, even in a space as open as online digital stories, websites, or videos. It is a way to harness and exercise sovereignty in modern ways that pay homage to protocol.

Protocol is the other ethical issue in this project. I ensured this research project was based in ceremony and protocol. Originally, my plan was to organize a pipe ceremony to start the project in a good way and incorporate ceremony in the interviews when participants agreed. I wasn't able to do this, but I did smudge the day of the interviews; which was with my family at the end of the day. Gathering in ceremony ended my day in a good way and doing it with my family continues the dissemination of Indigenous knowledge to my children. At the conclusion of the project, I wanted to honor the process with a pipe ceremony and a feast. Given the current pandemic and social distancing, a pipe ceremony and starting interviews in ceremony was not possible. My hope is that with reduced public restrictions, I will be able to host a pipe ceremony after the completion of my program. Putting priority in ceremony and protocol aligns this project with relationality; which I think allows for greater methodological coherence. For my methods, I am using interviews, reflexivity, and personal narratives which align with ceremony and IRM as well as my responsibility as a Nehiyaw (Cree person). Additionally, ceremony provides the

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opportunity for me to engage more deeply with narratives, also in line with critical ethnography and my ability to walk along with my participants in exploring this phenomenon.

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### Chapter 4: Research Findings

Analysis was informed by the literature and the findings have been organized and presented with the priority purpose being the sharing of Indigenous scholars' stories with future Indigenous scholars and students.

To place myself in each of the subthemes, each subtheme will begin with my story. This story will share the insights and results of practicing reflexivity, drawing on my own experiences. This is followed by the stories of Indigenous scholars, which are the inspiration of my own self-reflection. As noted previously, the italicized sections are my stories.

In the following sections, I will be describing the themes and subthemes coming from my data collection and analysis. The first theme is The Journey to the Academy, which will describe how the Indigenous scholars came to understand Indigenous Knowledge and how that has impacted their role as a scholar. This section explores the passion driving these scholars in their work, how they have come to know Indigenous knowledge, and how this journey has shaped their identity. The second theme is Enacting TribalCrit through Small Acts of Self Determination and Sovereignty, which explores the ways that Indigenous scholars are transforming the way they teach to align with TribalCrit. This section will discuss the following topics: creating space, placing self and knowledge in relation to Elders and the academy, and incorporating Indigenous knowledge in the academy, both best practices and risks. The third and last theme is Leading the Way, which describes recommendations for scholars and institutions to advance Indigenous knowledge inclusion. This section covers the sub themes of relationality, visiting, reciprocity, and nationhood and collectivism.

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### **Theme 1: The Journey to the Academy**

*Going to post-secondary was always a dream for me. One that didn't feel real or attainable. Once I made the decision in high school that I was going to apply, the only place I applied to was with the University of Alberta because of the Transition Year Program (TYP). TYP is an alternative entrance program for Indigenous students. It was a struggle to get in as I didn't have the right English requirement. I had to take English two more times after applying to meet the minimum grade requirement. The only reason why I met the requirement was due to a mistake in my provincial exam letter stating where and when my exam was being held. I ended up showing up a day late and panicked when a math test sat in front of me in one of the hundreds of desks in a Red Deer high school. Luckily, I had the letter with me that showed the wrong date and time. It was decided that my class grade would be my final grade without my provincial exam. Creator must have written that letter. Ironically, I ended up with a B+ in my first-year English course at the University of Alberta; while I struggled through three English 30 classes to get above a 65% grade. All this to say that post-secondary was a dream, but I decided to put work into it. This motivation was due to my upbringing in my community, Ermineskin Cree Nation. I've seen what poverty, alcoholism, family violence, and other issues plaguing reserves can do and the trauma it can inflict. Little did I know how postsecondary was going to change my understanding of why those exist in my community.*

Each person has unique experiences and stories that shape who they are today and the decisions they made along the way. The teachings and learnings each person experiences along the way shape their epistemology and ontology. For the Indigenous scholars I spoke with, their personal or professional experiences meld together as they take the spirit of Indigenous ways of being in relationship into the academy. For Indigenous scholars, this means working within the

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academy, as one of the participants states, “it is almost a life as opposed to just a job” (SJ). The decision to move forward into higher scholarship, to become an Indigenous scholar and professor, is heavily influenced by the Indigenous person’s journey up to and in post-secondary institutions. This theme focuses on those life experiences leading up to their post-secondary experience. The only theme is Indigenous Identity and IK; which describes each of the scholars’ experiences in learning about IK and how the academy encouraged them to dive deeper in understanding IK.

### *Indigenous Identity and IK*

The journey of Indigenous Peoples leading up to post-secondary participation is diverse, but this is to be expected with the diversity of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Some will have grown up in a First Nation community, others in a Metis Settlement, others in an urban area. None of these indicate a connection or lack of connection to cultural identity, but rather that each Indigenous student has their own lived experience. The commonality amongst the participants was how a post-secondary education or career path gave them the opportunity to explore their own identity either in their own traditional territory or visiting another traditional territory. These experiences encouraged Indigenous participants to either build on the teachings they had learned in their community or explore different Indigenous cultures and history. The following section will explore how the participants began to find their identity through culture.

Ceremony can mean many things for Indigenous Peoples, such as smudging with medicine, sweats, Sun Dances, Tea Dances, powwows, pipe ceremonies, and much more. Some Indigenous scholars have learned about Indigenous knowledge systems, beliefs and values through ceremony. Different ceremonial paths and experiences impact the development of each

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person's identity. Furthermore, experiencing ceremony leads to understanding other aspects of Indigenous knowledge, including governance and leadership as one participant shares below.

So one way to enter [into Indigenous knowledge systems] would be through the ceremonial activities that like our families participated in, which is not as traditional as some people in terms of like, say ... sweats or you're not going to see different spiritual people for different activities. I think of it more as ... funerals [or] wakes. And funerals ... are kind of like the big activities ... that everyone participates in ... and especially ... feasts ... [for the] one year and the four year anniversary of the people passing and doing those feasts to make sure that people [are sent] off. So that would certainly be the main one. And then .. you know smudging was always ... part of people's daily activities in life. [My] Indigenous knowledge is probably around leadership, and government's, and ... when did I start to learn about that ... I don't even know ... in some ways, it was always there. But ... that's where Indigenous knowledge comes from, and you have to have grown up [with it]. (Participant #1)

In contrast to the story above, the journey of Indigenous scholars is not always about teachings and ceremony, but rather a lived experience that is impacted by colonization. Indigenous communities have experienced and continue to experience trauma that is deep within individuals and families. Land displacement, residential schools, and the sixties scoop are only a few examples of how colonization and assimilation has inflicted trauma on Indigenous Peoples and communities. For some, this trauma was seen in the community they grew up in. The following participant is intentional about sharing her experience with these systems of colonization when telling their story on learning Indigenous knowledge.

I guess maybe what I'll do is I'll tell you a little bit of my journey as a Métis scholar, as an Indigenous scholar, but one who is disconnected from her community growing up because of child welfare systems, Sixties Scoop, and a lot of those dynamics. So growing up knowing we were Indigenous but not really knowing anything about what that was or what that meant. (Participant #3)

When individuals were not disconnected from community, the community gatherings were sometimes tainted by the fractures of settler colonialism. Community still gathered, but there was an unspoken acknowledgement that the area has a history of settler violence and

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attempts of Indigenous erasure. This colonial history doesn't stop communities from gathering, but there are scars on the land that individuals, families, and communities feel. One participant shares their experience with community and the impact of settler colonialism.

I grew up in [the] Baton Rouge area, which is a really important Metis site. But it also carries a lot of settler violence and a lot of trans-generational trauma for community. And for our cousins [and] all of our relations really, I see it as [growing] up in a fragmented sort of environment, fragmented geography. [As kids] we just run, run, run, we eat candy and like, have the best time so it was like an amazing visiting place where everyone would [visit and] all that fragmentation would just be just washed away. And this would all happen would all come together from beardies, duck lake or narrow, Bellevue, you know, P[rince] A[lbert], like everyone from the region would come together and be there together. So for me that had a huge impact on how I would understand myself without the language of understanding why this was meeting, or why this was right. This was relational, right? (Participant #2)

These scars from assimilation and colonization continue to impact Indigenous Peoples in different ways. The most tragic examples of this can be seen in the high levels of Indigenous children in the child welfare system and homelessness in Canada. For child welfare, “in Canada, 52.2% of children in foster care are Indigenous, but account for only 7.7% of the child population according to Census 2016. This means 14,970 out of 28,665 foster children in private homes under the age of 15 are Indigenous” (Canada G. o., Reducing the number of Indigenous children in care, 2021) and the over-representation of Indigenous Peoples in the homeless sector in Canada. Regarding homelessness, according to Belanger (2013), 1 in 15 Indigenous Peoples in urban centres are homeless compared to 1 in 128 for the general population, which means that Urban Indigenous Peoples are 8 times more likely to experience homelessness. There are also more subtle impacts on Indigenous People's mental health and wellness including how success is measured and achieved in the academy. One participant spoke of the addictions, including workaholism.

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Well, one of the things I've been thinking through the last year is ... intergenerational trauma, and seeing addictions in my own family, and thinking through that, and then thinking through for Indigenous People that are seen as really successful in whatever career they're doing, just becoming cognizant of workaholism, and the belief in something that you're passionate about and doing good things, but how that could be a response to dealing with intergenerational trauma that is seen as really successful and productive and good, and you're given accolades, but actually is ... could be seen on the spectrum of addictions and needing to be more self sustainable and more healing. (Participant #5)

There is a constant struggle to strive for success, to improve oneself and their community, but not often do they reflect on what success looks like. Success could be a pursuit for affirmations that is a result of trauma felt in their family or community. It can be easy to lose the source of motivation that Indigenous Peoples have when pursuing post-secondary and, even more so, into graduate school. The awards, accolades, grades, and other achievements that are measures of success in Euro-Canadian culture can blind you to teachings of your family, culture, and community. Another participant shares how their graduate school research gave them the opportunity to reconnect with the stories they heard growing up and experience them with a new perspective.

Part of my doctoral work was, again, I use a lot of my own stories, because I understand my ancestors are guiding me to undertake this work. When I first started my doctoral work, an ancestral story of mine, when I was still a raging teenager, not really paying attention to anything, my dad told me this story of our ancestors from [name of place]. This story, I never thought about, for all of my late teenage years, all of my 20s into my 30s. Then as I started thinking about my doctoral work, this story came to me like a flash. It was like a lightning bolt. Kim Anderson talks about this as the seeds of understanding that were planted long ago, but now the seed within me was growing and it was through my research that the seed began to grow. (Participant #4)

When listening to the participants speak about their journeys to understanding Indigenous knowledge and how it influenced their journey through academia, it was amazing to see how each of them interacted differently with Indigenous knowledge systems but ended in similar positions in their careers. It became clear that I was beyond privileged to be able to hear their

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stories and witness their perseverance in becoming leaders in their fields. As an emerging Indigenous scholar, they have provided a glimpse into what I could potentially achieve in my career and what I could look forward to. They shared the successes and challenges they faced as graduate students and, currently, as Indigenous scholars. Through these stories, I could see how they were practicing self-determination and sovereignty through their work. These acts of self-determination and sovereignty leads us to our second theme that shares the findings of how Indigenous scholars created small acts that led them to being TribalCrit practitioners.

### **Theme 2: Enacting TribalCrit Through Small Acts of Self Determination and Sovereignty**

*I was fortunate to be part of the Transition Year Program at the University of Alberta with other Indigenous students, but where I felt at home and welcomed as an Indigenous person was at the Aboriginal Student Council (ASC). The ASC was located in the heart of the university and was a gathering space. It was an actual physical space, but it provided a space for Indigenous students to build relationships and community. It's where I developed life-long friendships, connected with my culture, and started to understand my leadership capacity. I was successfully voted in as Vice-President External the first time I ran for the council, and the following year, I was voted in as President. By no means did I know what it was like to lead, but it gave me a glimpse into the interpersonal responsibilities a leader has within a community. Even though this was volunteer work, it never felt like work because it felt like visiting with relations, sharing stories, and building a community. ASC created a space where Indigenous students laughed, cried, talked about family, shared challenges, celebrated successes, and gave opportunities to develop as a student and a person.*

Some of the most humble and modest people I know are Indigenous, this includes Indigenous scholars, which means that you won't find many Indigenous scholars who say that

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they are finished learning. They may become experts within their fields, but they will be hesitant and reluctant to say they are experts within Indigenous knowledge. Even Elders, who you would think would see themselves as experts in Indigenous knowledge, would not refer to themselves as experts and would actually say they are still learning. This isn't to say that there will never be experts in Indigenous knowledge but rather Indigenous Peoples are on a constant journey of learning and self-reflection.

In addition to believing in lifelong learning, there is an understanding that there is much to learn within each Indigenous culture and that some teachings come to us only when we are ready. This means that you will continue learning well after the community recognizes you as an Elder. For TribalCrit Practitioners, this translates into a practice of always learning from other Indigenous scholars and TribalCrit practitioners. This theme explores strategies TribalCrit practitioners use to foster learning in this way. The first subtheme describes the need for creating space. This space is for Indigenous scholars to visit, to tell stories, and to share their successes and failures. It is a space to grow as a community. The second subtheme shares ways you can start including Elders and Knowledge Keepers into your teaching. The last subtheme provides a glimpse into some of the risks with incorporating Indigenous knowledge into teaching.

### *Creating Space*

Many participants spoke about the importance of creating a space, not necessarily a physical space, but a space for Indigenous scholars and students to gather, visit, and share stories. Most of the participants spoke about the importance of Indigenous scholars and students being given the opportunity to gather in a space. This is an extension of visiting, but this space makes it more embedded in policy and procedures. Recognizing and embedding visiting and the intentional creation of visiting spaces in the academy shows a commitment from the academy or

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institution to prioritize Indigenous ways of being and knowing, while also supporting it through resourcing these visits with funds to buy food, drinks, and potentially honorariums if Knowledge Keepers or Elders are invited to participate. Along with transforming institutional policy and procedures, creating a space would encourage Indigenous scholars to push back or resist the systemic barriers within the university. This may include speaking up within a space where Indigenous Peoples and scholars did not historically have authority or a voice. One participant shares the story of a non-Indigenous colleague reflecting on their own privilege and stepping up to speak about systemic racism when Indigenous colleagues' voices were being dismissed.

But it took the work of their conversation, and that this non-Indigenous woman scholar, having those relationships and doing the work enough over 15 years to realize there's systemic reasons why this is happening, and so we need to have this talk so that the Indigenous scholar didn't have to be the one to be the Debbie Downer and be the one fighting for space that she was shielded from. (Participant #5)

Creating a space like this is more than just a step to building relationships, it fills some Indigenous scholars with an immense amount of optimism about the potential for knowledge dissemination, partnerships, and dialogues about transforming the university. Creating a space that is focused on relationality, reciprocity, and visiting not only has the potential to transform the academy but has the potential to provide a way to heal from intergenerational trauma and support Indigenous scholars and colleagues when current issues open old wounds. One participant shares their enthusiasm about creating these spaces:

Can you imagine the work that we would get done together if we could co-create this space where it's loving, it's kind, it's empowering, it automatically is infused with all of the ethics that we carry from our research in and amongst each other ... I have that small pocket of colleagues, ... we do carve out that space, but it's always tempered with a million other things that we have going on. We are so overwhelmed with the work that we have to do. When we do create that time together, it's precious for us, because we recognize we finally got together, because we're so busy with other things ... In terms of thinking about transforming our institutions, give us space to visit, give us space to co-

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collaborate, give us space to create those pockets of love for each other, of humility, working together, of being able to be like, "Okay, this is a struggle I'm dealing with. Can you help me?" That would be wonderful. (Participant #5)

When creating a space like this within an institution, the knowledge dissemination creates ripples into teaching. Creating space also contributes to the collectivity of Indigenous values as well as a humbleness to ask for help. Furthermore, consistent visiting practices encourage trust and vulnerability and provide a place to ask for help within the academy. Discussions within classrooms begin to change. This change in teaching plants seeds for change as Indigenous scholars conduct research that incorporates aspects of relationality and reciprocity. This led one participant to explore how to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into archeology, which eventually led to a new heart-centered archeology. It's an approach that centers relationality so that students begin to think about archeology as a process that connects what they are learning to their heart, not only their mind. The participant shares how this approach is starting to change the way students view archeology and begin to work respectfully with Indigenous communities and peoples.

[w]hen I basically framed that for my students, a lot of them had those, oh my goodness, I never even thought about [heart shaped archeology], they had those ... those moments. (Participant #3)

Creating space for Indigenous scholars and students to visit goes beyond relationship building. It provides a space of knowledge dissemination, deepening understanding of relationality, sharing successes and failures, and knowing the responsibility each of them has to their ancestors and to future generations. This space builds understanding of sovereignty and nationhood. By creating this space there is a collective understanding of the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples and communities. By developing this space, scholars are creating an incubator for systemic

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transformation of the academy and pedagogy. An important aspect of this space is to ensure Indigenous knowledge is infused which leads us to the second subtheme of placing self and knowledge in relation to Elders and academy.

### *Placing self and knowledge in relation to elders and academy*

There is an acknowledgement that Indigenous knowledge is usually found in communities through Elders, Knowledge Keepers, lodge holders, pipe carriers, and other community leaders. As Indigenous scholars, there is a need to bring your knowledge into teaching and the academy, but also the community members that have the Indigenous knowledge. None of the participants saw themselves as holders of Indigenous knowledge or culture despite being seen as experts within their fields. This was evident with one participant who was very intentional about their practice of self-reflection during their career. They knew that if they wanted to move forward a program they felt was important to future generations, they would need to work towards a PhD, but they were honest about their capacity as a Knowledge Keeper, or lack thereof:

So for me, I came in at a Master's level and did the work for a couple years and kind of realized that if I wanted to *move the program forward (italics added)*, I needed to get a PhD. And so, then I went and got a PhD and came back as an assistant prof in 2012. So, for me, I almost see myself as being situated to be able to jump through the university hoops and get a PhD, but I'm not the person that is a lodge holder or has gone through the cultural and societal education to be steeped in the density of some of the Indigenous knowledges. (Participant #5)

The stories and teachings shared by Knowledge Keepers and Elders have a way of reappearing when the need for them is the greatest. Indigenous knowledge is based in relationality and the understanding that everything is connected. Along with relationality, there are other methods of incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the classroom which include community service learning, inviting Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and land-based learning.

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Inviting Elders or Knowledge Keepers into a classroom to speak on their specific knowledge area is important, but also speaks to the importance of Indigenous scholar's relationships with the Indigenous community and peoples. To know the specific knowledge of Elders or Knowledge Keepers requires spending time in Indigenous communities and building relationships. Building trust with the community leads to being introduced and hearing Elders and Knowledge Keepers speak. When you participate in ceremony and attend community events with them, you hear them share stories while eating bannock and drinking tea, and you hear them share their knowledge and experience. All of this contributes to your ability to have them participate in your classroom and feel comfortable and safe sharing their expertise and knowledge with your students. Once participant shares their ability to bring in certain Elders and Knowledge Keepers in their classroom depending on the topic:

And in other classes, I bring elders in at different times, or knowledge holders I bring in to share specific things that they are knowledgeable about, and sometimes they're lodge holders or sometimes they're knowledge holders in different areas. (Participant #5)

The academy is starting to recognize the authority that Indigenous knowledge has, and the amount of time and resources invested by Elders and Knowledge Keepers to have earned the respect of the community, other Elders, and scholars. The best way to describe it is that they are experts in Indigenous knowledge, but they will never say that they are. One of the teachings is to practice humility and modesty, which many Elders do. Once Elders and Knowledge Keepers began to be welcomed into the academy and the classroom, their important role in Indigenization and decolonization was recognized. One participant shares their experience of being in discussions about recognizing this authority and "expertise" through honorary doctorate degrees and professorships:

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I was at an event last month and they were talking about giving honorary doctorates to people that are steeped in knowledge, and so that would do the work. There's other examples across Canada where elders are given professorships. (Participant #5)

Recognizing the authority and “expertise” of Elders and Knowledge Keepers is a great first step, but it should come as no surprise that Elders and Knowledge Keepers did not learn in western post-secondary classrooms. The land, environment, animals, living beings, and non-living beings were their classroom and teachers. More post-secondary programs are including land-based learning courses that are focused on learning on the land and being guided by Elders and Knowledge Keepers, such as the new Indigenous Studies Diploma program at NorQuest College in Edmonton, Alberta. There is a growing appetite for Indigenous scholars to start thinking about how to incorporate land more into their classroom and they are excited about students potentially learning in a new way. One participant shares their enthusiasm for land-based learning:

This is what the land based could be. What if we allow them to feel all the things you feel when you're in a place. So I think about my students. Instead of just teaching them how to dig a nice square hole, what if I encourage them to listen to the sound of the wind, or to go and touch the plants, or to go and sit upon that knoll for a minute and just close your eyes. What do you smell? What do you hear? What do you feel? How different would that be? (Participant #3)

Incorporating Indigenous knowledge relies on those who have the Indigenous knowledge to share; hence the importance of inviting Elders and Knowledge Keepers to be involved in the academy and classrooms. Although they may not see themselves as experts, Elders and Knowledge Keepers need to be engaged as experts with the respect that their authority deserves. There is protocol and processes that need to be followed to ensure that the knowledge and experience that is being asked to share is respected. There is accountability and responsibility that is expected when Elders and Knowledge Keepers share their knowledge and teachings.

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When the knowledge and teachings are not respected, this is when there is potential for Indigenous knowledge to be appropriated, diluted, and misused. The next subtheme explores some of the potential risks associated with incorporating Indigenous knowledge in the academy.

### *Risk of Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge in the Academy*

#### **Dilution**

Once a teaching is shared and an Elder or Knowledge Keeper, there is a risk of this teaching being unintentionally altered when it is shared in a classroom. This leads to a type of dilution of the meaning of the teaching, and it becomes more diluted once it is shared from students to others. It is important to understand that when a teaching is shared within a group or to an individual by an Elder or Knowledge Keeper, the intent and meaning of that teaching was specific to that specific experience. Sharing that teaching out of context could dilute the meaning of the teaching, as well, depending on how the teaching is shared, it could instill a pan-Indigenous approach. Using universalities to describe Indigenous knowledge, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous scholars, can lead to the academy diluting the diversity and expansiveness of Indigenous knowledge. One participant shares their experience of being approached through a pan-Indigenous perspective and the need for others and Indigenous scholars to be self-reflective:

There's often this pan-Indigenous type of thinking where, because an Indigenous scholar is Indigenous, they therefore would act in certain ways. That's not necessarily the case, as we both know. It really depends upon people's personal critical self reflection of [not only] who they are but what they do in their scholarship. (Participant #4)

As emphasized by this participant, critical self-reflection is important to ensure all scholars, including Indigenous scholars, don't share Indigenous knowledge in a way that

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promotes a pan-Indigenous approach. Collectively, scholars need to be critical about what they share in their classrooms and when they should be inviting Elders, Knowledge Keepers, or community leaders into their classroom to present Indigenous knowledge. Nonetheless, Indigenous scholars feel an immense amount of responsibility and accountability in respecting Indigenous knowledge and creating space within their classroom that promotes appropriate knowledge dissemination. This responsibility and accountability can be overwhelming for Indigenous scholars at times; which can lead to a constant feeling that they are not providing a respectful, appropriate, and safe space to share Indigenous knowledge. One participant shares their concerns about being understood when sharing Indigenous knowledge.

I'm always scared that people don't understand what I'm talking about. I think that also has to do with being in a community or collectivity, in a space of communication between people. That's the challenge I have as a teacher, and as a researcher, and as a community member, is [that] constantly making time and place for people to meet, and to speak with each other, and to speak for themselves, to stand with each other. That's my constant struggle. (Participant #2)

Although there are times when Indigenous scholars question how they share Indigenous knowledge effectively and respectfully, there is a consistent need to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into the academy and teaching as it aligns with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action. Post-secondary institutions as a system are increasingly moving towards establishing initiatives on reconciliation. This move towards reconciliation has many non-Indigenous scholars reaching out to their Indigenous colleagues to build relationships and discuss what they could do to move forward with reconciliation. This approach has the risk of being superficial unless non-Indigenous scholars practice reflexivity to determine how to incorporate these relationships and knowledge into their work and teaching. One participant shares their concern about non-Indigenous scholars not moving past the stage of relationship building:

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My experiences with other faculties are more limited, but I definitely see through the TRC final report that there's more of an appetite across the university [that wants] to do this, and [wants to] do it in a good way. And probably, as your research shows the need, there's just a lot of misunderstandings of how to do that and not a lot of relationships with Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous communities to help navigate that ... it is about relationships and really developing relationships with Indigenous Peoples, but if it just ends there then you're missing something - and that's turning the knowledge into action. (Participant #5)

There is a risk with moving towards reconciliation through initiatives that do not truly transform systems, but rather take the approach of adding onto the existing system. It begins to feel like Indigenous knowledge and reconciliation are more of a checkbox for curriculum instead of changing the pedagogy. The use of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous scholars as momentary injections of Indigenous knowledge simply adds it to an already marginalizing curriculum as a tertiary topic demands discussion at single points in time. There is so much diversity in Indigenous communities and knowledge that attempting to capture it all in a guest lecture can do more harm than good. One participant shares this concern with having Indigenous knowledge as an “add-on” in teaching:

I think for me, one of my concerns is about a dilution, I think, of these concepts and ideas so that they become an add-on as opposed to an integrated part of everything. So the sense of, let's just add in some more things into a system and ... that it ends up both siloed and also not transforming. So that a lot of [non-Indigenous] people would see it as not my work. Not my work, not my work, doesn't have anything to do with me, doesn't have anything to do with me, or I'll bring in a speaker to my lectures on physics for this one class, talk about something cool, and then we'll forget ... nothing else will happen ... I also think we have to understand the diversity of Indigenous knowledges, that there's no one Indigenous knowledge. In a place like Edmonton, there's a deep history of a lot of different knowledges encountering this place. (Participant #3)

Dilution of Indigenous knowledge can take the form of a teaching or story being shared by multiple people to the point that the original intention has been lost or that there is a pan-Indigenous approach to Indigenous knowledge or that Indigenous knowledge is seen as a check

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box. All of these examples give caution to non-Indigenous scholars to engage and share Indigenous knowledge respectfully and ethically. In the next subtheme, I explore a more harmful consequence of engaging Indigenous knowledge in a wrong way.

### **Extraction, Exploitation, and Appropriation**

Arguably, the most traumatic, dangerous, and violent risk of sharing Indigenous knowledge is if it is extracted (the action of taking out something, especially using effort or force), exploited (use a person in an unfair or selfish way), or appropriated (take something for one's own use, typically without the owner's permission) by non-Indigenous Peoples to further their own career. These aren't exclusive concepts, but rather they are intertwined. When Indigenous knowledge is shared, there is an underlying responsibility and accountability to the origin and use of that knowledge. This includes who has the right to pass along teachings and stories and who does not. For Indigenous scholars, there is a risk that their students will expect to learn about Indigenous knowledge and that, after hearing teachings, they can then share those teachings in other contexts. Students may think that because there is an Indigenous scholar teaching that they will learn about Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous knowledge. One participant shares their concern about students making this assumption:

But I also don't want to set up a classroom where students think that what's happening is they're going to come learn about Indigenous Peoples and how Indigenous Peoples think. I think there's actually a real danger in that because that, to me, it's really easy to slip into, like an extractivism, or like an appropriation where what Indigenous classrooms become is like people coming to learn about how native people think, to benefit themselves. (Participant #1)

This risk not only applies to individuals but to the system of post-secondary institutions. As a system founded in colonization and a settler colonial presence, there are processes and expectations that align more with Euro-Canadian culture than Indigenous knowledge. In the

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academy, the pursuit of tenure and the expectations of acquiring and disseminating knowledge goes against what Indigenous knowledge teaches. Unless the expectations and processes for attaining tenure change, there will always be an impediment to junior scholars committing to working effectively and respectfully with Indigenous communities and peoples. One participant shares their concern about the process of securing tenure as being antithetical to Indigenous knowledge:

Well, I guess the biggest fear always is, and that you hear, is exploitation. People have been saying, 'nothing about us without us'. And the way academics are disciplined in getting PhDs, and getting through the system, and getting tenure, is antithetical to being in good relationships and to giving space to Indigenous Peoples and communities to be the ones of the holders of that knowledge. And so, I think that will always be a challenge. (Participant #5)

There are some scholars working towards negating the threat of extraction and appropriation within the classroom. There is resistance in this though because current classrooms and pedagogy promote the possession of knowledge and expertise in their field. Post-secondary institutions, as a system, strive to produce expertise which is, as one participant states, antithetical to Indigenous knowledge. Elders and Knowledge Keepers do not see themselves as experts and are continually learning. In the academy, there is a pursuit of truth and a possessiveness of that truth and knowledge. Again, this is antithetical to Indigenous knowledge as Elders and Knowledge Keepers do not possess knowledge or truth, but rather have the responsibility of sharing this knowledge and stories with their families and communities. One participant talks about their challenge of creating space that pushes against the institution's expectations of possessing truth and pursuing expertise:

It's really difficult because these institutions are a specific culture of truth, possessiveness of truth, possessing people's bodies, possessing people's ideas, and all these things. That's what really is [a different] part of the native studies or a disciplinary approach to is that we're not about possessing knowledge, we're about situating our knowledges and situating our relationships. Which is another

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challenge to the institutions because institutions are always about possessing and categorizing knowledge constantly. So, for me, in my teaching, a really important value that I hold is not to extract things like that; but that's the hardest thing to do. Because people want answers and they want you to be an expert or some crap like that. (Participant #2)

This demand for claiming knowledge and expertise lead to non-Indigenous scholars and students using Indigenous knowledge to further their careers and research. As much as there are initiatives, attempts, and progress made in ensuring Indigenous knowledge is not extracted, exploited, or appropriated, there are still stories of the devastating trauma that these actions can have. Even if the use of Indigenous knowledge is done with the greatest of intention, if it is not done respectfully and ethically, it can be harmful. One participant shares their experience of hearing a story they shared in a classroom then being appropriated and exploited to further another student's research:

“In one line of thinking, settlers need to do their own work amongst each other. I feel that this is very valuable. But here's the thing. It can't be done in isolation from Indigenous community. It's not our responsibility to change you and I just told that to my students the other day, "It's not your responsibility to change this person," because it's not our responsibility, but when there is an invitation, again, based on generosity and love and kindness after you've done the hard work or as you're going through the hard work, when you're committing to it. That's when you can invite Indigenous community members in, because it shouldn't be done in isolation. Because when it's done in isolation, you'll have settlers who will create ideas and run with them without connecting with Indigenous community members, right? ... I use this term to help guide my research with urban Indigenous women through physical activity and critical consciousness raising groups. This is the term that I use to help me think through this process. Here's this gift she presents me and it's titled [Wesokotatuin]. I'm reading this poem. In it is this reiteration of my ancestral story, but it's set all wrong. It's enwrapped with this term from my [Kachuenen], [Wesokotatuin] and it's all mixed up. ... That's my fear, when I share my knowledge in this system, my fear is that it's going to be taken by people who don't have permission to take it. It's going to be, for lack of a better word, bastardized or I don't know what the word is, in ways that it's not meant to. (Participant #4)

This harm and trauma could be avoided if non-Indigenous scholars and students learn how to respectfully engage and build relationships with Indigenous Peoples. That researcher

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would have known that using a story is only appropriate if they ask that storyteller for the right to use it. Even with that approval, there is a commitment to continue that relationship with that Indigenous person so you understand how that Indigenous person came to know that knowledge and how it has impacted their worldview. Nonetheless, there is hope that Indigenous knowledge can be shared within the institution in ways that don't result in trauma. Even though there are amazing teachings and stories shared by Elders and Knowledge Keepers, some of these are not appropriate or may not be appropriately shared in the classroom or academy. One participant reflects on their responsibility as an Indigenous scholar and parent to pass along stories and teachings, but that some stories and teachings shouldn't be shared in the classroom:

This is speaking from a person who, I'm Métis, Cree, Mohawk on my dad's side and British as British comes on my mom's. And so I sort of sit oftentimes somewhere in the middle of all this in trying to work my way through what that means, but if I think about the future for my daughter, and I think about the future for our students, there have to be ways where we can all stick with these knowledges, and learn from these knowledges in the ways that are appropriate to those systems, right. So not all Indigenous knowledge should be taught in an academy. (Participant #3)

The misuse of Indigenous knowledge through extraction, exploitation, and appropriation can have some real damaging effects; however, there is still value in sharing Indigenous knowledge in classrooms and the academy. There is a lot for non-Indigenous and Indigenous students and scholars to learn about relationality, visiting, relationship building, and reciprocity that could exponentially improve the way they engage with Indigenous communities and peoples. Indigenous scholars share Indigenous knowledge due to the potential to transform people's epistemology and ontology, and ultimately transform the Academy. The next sub theme explores how Indigenous scholars are facing challenges and barriers in their pursuit to transform the academy or system.

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### **Inability to change the system**

Being an Indigenous scholar can be an isolating experience as they could be the only Indigenous person within a faculty or have very little contact with Indigenous colleagues. Most Indigenous scholars have a desire to change a system and institution that has historically oppressed Indigenous Peoples. Post-secondary institutions have been around for more than 100 years and this oppression has built itself into the policies, procedures, culture, infrastructure, and governance. So much so, that it feels like a struggle to survive that system, let alone try to transform it. One participant shares their experience of having a non-Indigenous scholar be their ally by identifying the systemic barriers and subsequently set up and remove themselves from proposed research so that the Indigenous scholar could take their rightful place:

[at that time], it was non-Indigenous scholars that were the people that would have been the PI [Principal Investigator] and the co-applicant. And so the senior, non-Indigenous scholar said, no I'll just take my name out and that Indigenous person should take that place. And so, those are, for me, some examples of allowing Indigenous Peoples to be able to survive the system. (Participant #5)

The system can be a daunting place to be part of as an Indigenous scholar. Even when Indigenous scholars take a step forward in transforming the system, something happens that takes the progress two steps back; such as funding cuts, a newly elected government with a different mandate, micro-aggressions from colleagues and leadership, and more. Transforming the institution requires constant work, resistance, and perseverance by Indigenous scholars. The need for perseverance against strongly ingrained oppression can be a struggle.

There is also an expectation that Indigenous scholars provide resources and capacity to support Indigenous scholars learn about Indigenous Peoples and work with them while they learn. Although there is some benefit to this, this expectation can be overwhelming and take a lot of the limited resources that Indigenous scholars have. Additionally, this expectation to walk

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alongside non-Indigenous scholars can take Indigenous scholars away from their research, teaching, and strategic work that is moving to transform the academy. It takes them away from their capacity to be accountable to their communities and the commitments they have in addressing issues identified by communities. One participant shares their thoughts about the labour and the fear that all this work leads to nothing:

The question would be in terms of creating this collegial environment amongst Indigenous scholars. What scholars? You know what I mean? If you want to build a consortium of scholars who are aligned with Indigenous understandings of research, Indigenous methodologies, Indigenous approaches to these ethical parameters I'm describing, then that would be one thing. But to kind of pile everybody into the same room and mix, that might not work either, because it would put a lot of labor on the Indigenous scholars who do commit to this very accountable process of research to then teach everybody else and advise, so there's a lot of labor put on Indigenous scholars who [do] scholarship in this way to then teach others ... To make sense of that stuff, I've turned to these types of scholars to help me do that. When we think about bringing people together to create the space, we have to be very mindful of white fragility, white supremacy, settler colonial logics of erasure, and how those are created in everyday occurrences. A lot of people think that colonialism is done. There's ongoing settler colonial logics for sure, but it doesn't exist between you and I. It doesn't exist in this room right now. Meanwhile, it does. The hard work is to figure out how to see it, to name it, to sit with it, to then work through it together. For the most part, Indigenous folks want to create opportunities to work together. We want to create relationships. We understand we're in a relationship. There's this yearning in us to want to help. The way I describe the last few minutes of our conversation is how I feel like we can help, by creating these brave spaces, by having these uncomfortable conversations [and then] in order to share our knowledge. My fear is that nothing happens, it stays the same, people continue to be isolated and facing these battles seemingly on our own. I also have a healthy fear of this institution myself. What are my responsibilities as an Anishinaabe researcher and respecting my own knowledge systems? How much do I bring in here? (Participant #4)

Transforming the system isn't something Indigenous scholars do for awards, accolades, or recognition. It is an accountability and responsibility as well as the foundation of TribalCrit; make the institution a welcoming space for Indigenous students, be intentional, make academia a

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space where Indigenous students can see themselves succeeding and contributing to the transformation of the institution.

### **Theme 3: Leading the Way**

*Growing up on-reserve, my family didn't have a lot and we lived in poverty for most of my childhood and adolescence. For most of that time, I felt that I had very little control over my life and I didn't have options. I don't remember exactly when, but sometime during high school, I decided I would change my situation to be able to have choice and control. The way I would do this was through education. During high school, I didn't have the language to name what I wanted, but I would soon find out through my first Native Studies classes in university that what I sought was self-determination. More specifically, I realized I had agency and I had to exercise it. Self-determination for Indigenous communities is focused on the collective, which I knew was important and I could see it being applied in my community, but I was always drawn to the self-determination of an individual. Each time I read about self-determination and even sovereignty, I thought about my own childhood and how much I wanted to be in a situation where I had choices and agency. Understanding now that I sought self-determination, I have built my career on the principle of creating space for people that have traditionally been left out of spaces of decision making. It's why I have focused my education on community engagement, so I can continue to amplify voices in the community and create space. The ultimate goal is to transform systems through Indigenization and decolonization so that instead of including marginalized voices within the system, those systems are now transformed to be built on different worldviews.*

As Indigenous scholars, simply being in the academy as a teacher, researcher, and mentor is an act of self-determination and sovereignty. For example, this research was conducted at a university that doesn't have many Indigenous scholars outside of two faculties; those two

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faculties have many Indigenous scholars. At a macro-level the university has more work to do to make the institution a welcoming place for Indigenous students, but at a micro-level, in these two faculties, Indigenous students feel welcomed as they see Indigenous scholars in their classroom. The more Indigenous scholars that are employed in the academy, the more their presence is an act of self-determination and sovereignty as it can motivate more Indigenous people to be successful in post-secondary and, potentially, move into graduate studies and become scholars themselves. It is an active role, taking up space and influencing others in a place and within a system that has been historically oppressive to Indigenous Peoples. The way Indigenous scholars use their position and space is how they align with TribalCrit. This doesn't mean that each Indigenous scholar is required to create significant contributions to the academy that transforms the current landscape. Rather it is the consistent effort from Indigenous scholars to develop small acts of self-determination and sovereignty within a collaborative space to take steps and the occasional leap in transforming the academy. One participant shares how the collective of students in their classroom can make this leap to transforming the academy:

One of the courses I taught this term, all of the students worked for one community, and so that's one way [for] me to think through [giving back to community]. Are we giving something that's actually tangible and of benefit to the community, more so than they're giving to the university? (Participant #5)

In Nehiyaw (Cree) culture, it isn't expected that one person has all the answers or does all the work. Nehiyaw people expect different people in the community to play different roles that contribute to the well-being of the community. This reflects the value of collective relations versus the academy's value of an individual's contribution. This same approach should be used with Indigenous scholars as a community in maintaining the well-being of the community of Indigenous scholars and students, but to also have a collective and collaborative space to transform the academy. The third and last theme is Leading the Way, which focuses on how

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Indigenous scholars are leaving the way for those who will follow in their tracks by: 1) incorporating relationality, 2) visiting, and 3) reciprocity. The first subtheme is about relationality and how each of the Indigenous scholars are incorporating relationality within their teaching. The second subtheme explores how visiting is used to change teaching practices and becomes an act of relationality. The third subtheme is reciprocity which describes how the academy and Indigenous scholars are creating reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities. The last theme is exploring how nationhood and collectivism is being incorporated into teaching and academy by Indigenous scholars.

### *Understanding Relationality*

Relationality is about relationships between people, which is also a Cree concept of Wahkohtowin (we are all related). In its simplest form, it is kinship and interpersonal relationship building. Not just good relationship building, but also relationship maintenance. Relationships need to be nurtured and require other things like patience, empathy, and understanding. These are important as relationships are not always easy. All you need to do is reflect on some of your own relationships to realize that relationships have happy, joyful moments, along with difficult and emotionally taxing moments. This is all part of being in good relationships with each other. This is all about practicing Wahkohtowin. As one participant states:

Relationships are hard, they're difficult ... You don't get to be part of relationships, where there's not even the possibility, but probably the inevitability of being hurt, of having your feelings hurt, or, you know, things being difficult, or frustrations or anger, all these emotions are all part of relationships. (Participant #1)

For other aspects of relationship building, there is a need to be vulnerable. To build trust, we have to become vulnerable. We have to explore the messiness and discomfort of relationship

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building and this takes vulnerability. We have to understand that we are not experts in everything and building relationships with community is necessary for us to see issues from different perspectives and knowledge systems. To learn from our mistakes and to continue to grow in these relationships, we need to be vulnerable. As one participant put it, vulnerability is important to transform institutions, including the academy:

A lot of the time, these strong emotions, as a way to protect oneself, will come out, whether that be guilt, again this applied to everybody, guilt, shame. I've actually been reading a lot of Brené Brown's work around vulnerability, and it's really helped me piece this stuff together. In order to change, we have to lean into the vulnerability. This is what Brené Brown says, you have to become vulnerable. That piece is key, because if we're not willing to be vulnerable and to be brave in these spaces, then transformation will not occur. To create that sweet spot at the end where we're all creating loving, generous, reciprocal relationships, vulnerability is key and to know that it's okay to make mistakes. I tell this to my students. I tell it to myself even. (Participant #4)

When Indigenous scholars go from graduate school to a formal professorship position, this understanding of relationality is important to conducting research with Indigenous communities. Of course, there is the tri-council policy (Canada, 2019) on conducting research involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada, however understanding the resources needed to build and maintain relationships with Indigenous communities is crucial. Understanding relationships is an introduction to relationality, but this can be moved forward through classroom discussions on how research and pedagogy are connected. During these classroom discussions and how courses are developed, focusing on relationships with Indigenous communities is important. The course should be seen as a continuation of this relationship and the assignments and assessments should be focused on the long-term relationship with the community beyond just the one course. One participant shares their intentionality of working with the Indigenous community over the duration of several courses to maintain that long-term relationship and commitment:

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And for me, the other piece is that I see the teaching, the research, and the thinking about pedagogy as all connected. And so I try ... so for example with the community that had the whole class, this is a long term project where students are doing ... they did one little piece, but that's not the end of the relationship. We're taking that, what they did and building on it and making it more beneficial. And so, in that way I see them as 20 year relationships, or 25 year projects, not just a one off. (Participant #5)

Other Indigenous scholars take a more direct approach in teaching relationality in their classrooms. They make it a module in their class and dedicate time into discussing relationality. Understanding relationality, and Wahkohtowin, takes time to know how all things are interconnected and feed into each other, so dedicating this time to relationality is important. One participant shares their intention to ground their religion course in relationality before touching on other topics within the course:

The first module is just talking about relationality. So I spend time talking about epistemology and ontology. I talk about nationhood and peoplehood. And then I talk about kinscapes, and social geographies. So everything that has nothing to do really with religion, but everything to do with Indigenous thought, and nationhood, and then land, you know, like, to really center my thinking, and the thinking of our students in these really important concepts of relationality. Right, in all its different ways, and asking the students to position themselves in relationships or not. So then the students are operationalizing these ideas, they're centering relationality instead of settler colonial possessiveness. (Participant #2)

Wahkohtowin or relationality is an important topic for Indigenous scholars to incorporate into their teaching and a way for them to ground their work in Indigenous knowledge systems. One way for Indigenous scholars to explore relationality is to set up class discussions as visiting. Visiting is seen as a traditional way to build relationships, to practice governance, and diplomacy, but it is also emerging as an Indigenous research method (Gaudet, 2018). The next subtheme will explore the importance of visiting within teaching.

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*Visiting*

Building relationships was an important theme brought up by the participants, but specifically the importance of visiting. It seems like a simple concept to just visit people, but there is something intrinsically ceremonial about visiting between Indigenous Peoples. Stories are shared about family, communities, trauma, and more that lead to everyone building relations with each other, but also with each other's ancestors and territories. Visiting was a way for communities to govern themselves. One participant shares their connection to visiting and how it connects them back to the land.

That's been a driving force. I've been able to intellectualize those really strong and core values to who I am as a Metis person, visiting community collectivity, nationhood, peoplehood. Like all those things are starting to take shape in making sense of how I grew up. [L]et's keep talking about St. Laurent, [it] is this really important site of multiple years of visiting. Like a gravity well of visiting. Like the sentiments of visiting, it's happened in those spaces. So, for me, those places can give a lot back to you as you give back to it. You know, that reciprocity, and I think that's where it's like language [of the] land, those feet are ideas that help us understand the world in that certain way. - Participant #2

It is important to note that visiting goes beyond the visits between people. Indigenous Peoples go back to their communities, back to their homeland, back to their traditional and ancestral lands to visit the land. They put their feet where many of their ancestors have been before. When you visit this land with family and Elders, you start to hear stories of the land, how your family hunted or gathered on the land, and hear about the ceremonies held on that land. This connection to land connects visiting to relationality but also to ancestors and the importance of connecting our future generations to the land. Visiting is an important part of teaching and, as one participant shared, the current Covid-19 pandemic and the social distancing requirements and travel bans have impacted how Indigenous Peoples have visited their families and land.

It's really about going back and making, continuing, those visiting connections. Because of COVID I feel really sort of alienated by not visiting anymore. And if I

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really want to go home and touch, it's touching base and revisiting the spaces that I grew up with. I really want to go back to Saskatchewan again, to make those connections, because I'm thinking a lot, but I need to practice it more.  
(Participant #2)

Visiting is important for passing along teachings, building relationships, and learning more about Indigenous knowledge systems, but it is also an important tool for innovation. Bringing Indigenous Peoples together, who are from different parts of Canada, can encourage knowledge dissemination and transfer between Indigenous knowledge systems. It is a way for Indigenous Peoples to validate certain aspects of Indigenous knowledge, share common practices, and learn how their culture is different from other cultures. As one participant shared, it can lead to new ways of thinking:

And in that talk with [individual], my team, they visit there, and they do group discussions, and they visit and apply in a creative and artistic way, those ideas of how relationality is part of this world that is engaging these stories, right.  
(Participant #2)

Along with visiting as a way to build relationships, visiting is an important part of working with Indigenous communities in research. Engaging Indigenous communities in research goes beyond ethics to a space where there is an accountability and responsibility to building trusting relationships with Indigenous Peoples. There has been a history of non-Indigenous scholars making their careers in conducting research on Indigenous Peoples, instead of with people. As Smith (1999) states, research is seen as a word that is dirty and is connected to European imperialism and colonialism (p. 1). Currently, there is an expectation in many Indigenous communities that researchers take the appropriate amount of time to meet with Indigenous Peoples along with committing to work along with them. One participant emphasizes the need to focus on the accountability and responsibility of developing respectful relationships

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with Indigenous Peoples while struggling with the challenges of what is expected of scholars in the academy:

Within that experience, community driven research takes a lot of time and a lot of visits. I'm not there, so it means a lot of time away from the office and me just visiting, going there, having meetings, but also just participating in community events. That, in and of itself, is a challenge, because as we know with the work that we do in this academy, nothing is patient. (Participant #4)

Another participant reflects on the Keeoukaywin (Gaudet, 2018) way, visiting as an Indigenous research method in their work as an archeologist. This is especially important when you think about how Indigenous Peoples visit land to connect with stories, teachings, and ancestors. Instead of viewing land as an object to be dug up, analyzed, and tested, it should be viewed as a relative that you are accountable to and responsible for; these require visiting and keeping that connection.

So a number of my colleagues, who are Cree or Métis, have been drawing on concepts like [Wahkohtowin] and then my ... colleagues [Gaudet] talking about Keeoukaywin, which is the visiting way. This idea of doing research is more [about] visiting, and less about studying or observing, but just being with. So I've been thinking about those concepts because they're connected to my histories and my families and my communities, about how they might help me make sense of the archeology of those communities. (Participant #3)

It has become clear that visiting has become a method of being accountable to nurturing and maintaining trusting relationships with and between Indigenous Peoples and communities. This accountability goes beyond ensuring that Indigenous scholars commit the time to appropriately and respectfully engage with Indigenous communities, but there is also an importance of reciprocity. Scholars are no longer able to solely focus on research that will further their career; rather, there is an expectation from the Indigenous community that the research will benefit the community. Even more so, the Indigenous community will expect to be involved in the development, planning,

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implementation, and knowledge dissemination of research. The next subtheme explores Indigenous scholars' experiences of reciprocity with Indigenous communities.

### *Reciprocity*

That's the dynamic between the institution and the community, right, that they're not inherently separated. But there should be a reciprocity between both, all the time. (Participant #2)

Any researcher working with Indigenous communities and people must be accountable to the community in a multitude of ways, including but not limited to research priorities, processes, ownership, control, and impacts. This is no different for Indigenous scholars doing research with Indigenous Peoples and communities. The practice of “nothing about us, without us” still needs to be applied when Indigenous scholars are leading Indigenous-focused projects. This approach leads to reconciliation and decolonization as identified in the TRC Calls to Action (Canada, 2015). Calls to Action #43 and #44 specifically refers to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) (United Nations, 2007) and the responsibility of the federal government to implement it. The UN Declaration stresses the importance of Indigenous Peoples and communities being involved in decisions made about them, which is the concept of “nothing about us, without us”. This approach needs to be taken up by non-Indigenous scholars by either learning how to implement this approach, co-lead with an Indigenous scholar, or co-lead with an Indigenous community. One participant demonstrates their commitment to reciprocity by their decision not to partner when a commitment to reciprocity on the part of the partner was lacking:

So I started at the university in 2007, and I started in the [name of faculty], and my job was to create [an Indigenous program]. And so, I think my faculty has thought about this and obviously is ... I mean, it's their prime goal to support Indigenous communities and think it through; [my faculty told them], if you really are committed and want more programming, you need someone actually in your faculty or in your school that does this work. And that decision, that wasn't taken

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up, at a time when there was free funding to do that. Right? Of hiring people, and so the ethical decision we made [was not to do that partnership because that commitment wasn't there ... then once it's seen as successful, then it seems like the benefit goes to the other faculties and the financial resources and that were almost seen as doing pro bono work without that reciprocity. (Participant #5)

Reciprocity is integral to the other emerging themes of relationality, visiting and nationhood. When put into practice, these emerging themes, each one also representative of Indigenous values, is living Wahkotowin. Focusing on reciprocity may demand that you prioritize the relationships in research over the research itself. For community, the research is a means to an end and the relationship between the researcher and community is as important as the research outcomes. Being in good relationships is practicing reciprocity with community. The outcome is that Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars start to focus on being in good relationships with everyone and approach discussions in the academy this way. The following quote provides an example of a time when relationship and reciprocity overrode the expectation of individual achievement and honour. The participant spoke about the challenge of the academy with its academic freedom; the debates, discussions, and possible harm that could come from this, and how that may conflict with Indigenous knowledge systems of being in good relationships with others:

And you start to think about our role and our networks in the academy from a relational perspective. Well, academic freedom, you know, doesn't make quite as much sense, you know, because there's actually something to being in good relationship with each other. - Participant #1

For Indigenous scholars that focus on being community-based researchers, accounting for reciprocity is fundamental to their methods, theory, and ethics of working with Indigenous communities. It goes beyond being accountable to the demands and requirements of research to being accountable to the stories and teachings they grew up with. It is an accountability to your ancestors and the future generations. In this way, Indigenous scholars are held to the standards

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and expectations of both scholarship and Indigenous knowledge systems. One participant shares the importance of reciprocity within these two systems:

It's now changed and adapted, as it should, to community needs and so for instance, the community wanted to preserve their sacred stories of the community. Again, because this is community driven, this was not necessarily part of the research project per se, although it was. It was in response to the reciprocity that I was to show as an Anishinaabe researcher. However, because I'm a community driven researcher, and in particular an Anishinaabe researcher, that automatically instigates specific responsibilities, reciprocities, accountabilities, ethics, value. I have to not only live these values in terms of my scholarship. I have to live them with my everyday life and my everyday intentions. I think that's the difference. My caution would be we can't get to the good parts in creating that warm, loving transformative space until we go through all the hard parts. It is the hard parts that allow us to create that loving space. It's very cyclical ... and it doesn't just happen one time in learning. It has to be a part of it all the time. We can't think linear[ly] about this process ... When you [are] invited in and when you [are] given teachings, for instance, or you're given these spaces to continually enact your reciprocity, to continually enact your accountability, not just in the moment where as researchers, we know we signed a consent form and we are demonstrating our accountability, our ethics, but that has to be in every aspect of the research project. (Participant #4)

Reciprocity doesn't just apply to research. This same responsibility to practice reciprocity applies to Indigenous scholars' roles as teachers and supervisors of Indigenous students.

Indigenous scholars need to ensure students understand the responsibility that Indigenous scholars have to maintain a reciprocal relationship with Indigenous communities and peoples.

Some Indigenous scholars intentionally build their courses with this reciprocity in mind, such as one participant who prioritizes the long-term relationship and commitment to reciprocity when developing the community service learning component of their course:

... almost all the courses I teach have an [applied component], and I partner with community service learning, so I have that kind of CSL component to them, and so there's that reciprocity piece, which isn't cut and dry, it takes some navigation and I've been trying to think through that a little bit more, because sometimes if it's just one student with one organization and it's a 20 hour project, and for the graduate it's 30 hour, but the time that the organization spends on the student can sometimes be tipped over into what the student is able to give back in that time. (Participant #5)

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The Indigenous scholars that participated in this research have a deep sense of accountability and responsibility to be reciprocal with the Indigenous communities and peoples they work with. This approach positions the many over the individual with any work being done within Indigenous communities bringing benefit to the community as a whole. It's not a surprise that Indigenous scholars think about the whole or collective over their own interests as many Indigenous Peoples in Canada have the teaching to think about seven generations when making decisions. To be a good leader is to make decisions that ultimately take into consideration what you want to leave for your great, great, great grandchildren. Making decisions with this in mind is an act of self-determination and sovereignty, but even more so, it is an approach based on collectivism and nationhood. The next subtheme explores how nationhood and collectivism are important for Indigenous scholars and future Indigenous scholars.

### *Nationhood and Collectivism*

Indigenous Peoples have always gathered. Gathering is an act of politics, relationship building, and diplomacy. In fact, Edmonton, Amiskwaciwâskahikan (Beaver Hills Lodge), has historically been a traditional gathering place for many nations. Indigenous Peoples gathered amidst a shared understanding of nationhood and the importance of the collective. This commitment to each other meant there was a commitment to the future generations (seven generation principle). Gathering as nations was a way of working through visiting, building relationships, trading and passing teachings along to each other. Indigenous scholars' desire or preference to gather and visit in the academy aligns with the ways Indigenous Peoples historically gathered to exercise nationhood and collectivism. There is also importance to maintaining relationships that was part of this way of working through gathering. The way of

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working through visiting and assessing students through building and maintaining relationships was shared by one participant:

It's all of these places that we visit that add up to who we are and who we relate to. For me, Indigenous knowledge is located in those moments where we would come together as communities, and as peoples and as communities to speak our language. Even when we speak English, if we're still teaching Metis values or Cree values, that's speaking in our language and having that opportunity to hear multiple generations talk to each other; you just feel each other, be together, eat together and then have those story places speak back to us. [Indigenous relations] is not something that is an object of study, but an affirmation of values that are motivated and are like relationality that affects our languages, our governance structures, our worldview. I've made a decision a long time ago to say that instead of saying that people work hard, I say they're very good at relations. So everything that I frame, in terms of their capacity, is how they relate to each other and to the work. I start to value relations and relationality in their being a good person, instead of saying that they're the best, that top 5% of their class. That little thing has really changed the way I speak and the way I think, and then the way I communicate. (Participant #2)

By centering Indigenous languages and knowledge systems, Indigenous scholars are being political. Not by discussing politics, but rather by connecting to their teachings and ancestors, which leads to them connecting with their identity and culture. Making these connections are political acts due to the efforts of colonization to assimilate and erase Indigenous peoples. Being able to practice Indigenous languages is an act of self-determination that is in direct resistance to oppression. As stated by the participant, even if Indigenous scholars don't speak their Indigenous language, simply by engaging in conversations and visiting with other Indigenous scholars they are practicing relationality and sovereignty. Visiting is foundational in Nehiyaw and Metis teachings and is one method to pass along stories and teachings to family, friends and future generations; such as my experience of visiting around my nohkom's kitchen table. Within these visiting spaces, there is also the opportunity to hear how other Indigenous scholars are pushing discourses of sovereignty and self-determination in different ways. As one participant

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shared, they get inspired by one of their colleagues who pushes against colonialism in their field:

She's very honest. She's centering Indigenous relations at every step of her work and is extremely critical of white possessiveness and all in DNA and science, technology, all the things that she does. I feel that her being in our faculty, she can do that there. She's not going to get fired, she's not going to get kicked out. She's going to be supported by the whole institution. (Participant #2)

Politics, governance, nationhood, and collectivism are learned through these conversations. It is vital that Indigenous scholars share these stories as well as their own failures and successes when working with Indigenous communities. When these Indigenous scholars teach and supervise junior Indigenous scholars, it is important that they pass along these stories and teachings to them so they work respectfully with Indigenous communities. Additionally, being part of a collective would support junior Indigenous scholars, decreasing the chances that they might put themselves in situations that are traumatizing and discourage them from pursuing research. One participant reflects on their own experience as a graduate student and how non-Indigenous scholars (who seemingly didn't have much experience conducting research with Indigenous communities) put her in a vulnerable position:

Because we had the [name of First Nation] and we had the [name other First Nation] folks. Basically there was a lot of politics happening between these two groups and I am in the middle of all that ... Because they're like, that's not our name, right. So they were really in the mode of, we are not them, because, in a large part because of treaty and because of the nature of treaty process, it says here's the line of your territory ... Politics and challenges, and that wasn't the only cause of that cause of that, but as an academic, that is one that I can think through. I'm not a lawyer, I'm not a politician, but I can think about the role that academic knowledge played, and how academic knowledge is defined, valued, and held up in Western systems, and so I reflected a lot about the ways in which ... the positive relationships we create with community can create inequity within a Western, colonial system where one community has all this work that's done and another does not. And then that creates a power imbalance because of how knowledge is valued in Western sub-colonial environments. This is especially played out in law, and oftentimes with the treaty process or with ... oftentimes archeology ends up in court, for title and rights and that kind of thing, so the

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knowledge we generate is seen as, because it's scientific and objective, it's seen as having inherent value to prove or disprove oral history or the claims of any given community. (Participant #3)

Ensuring there are more Indigenous scholars in universities is important and even more so in fields that aren't traditionally occupied by Indigenous Peoples. This collectivism and nationhood approach could provide a supportive space for Indigenous scholars in these fields. There is importance in Indigenous scholars not feeling they are alone in faculties and when they move to transform that faculty that they have support from other Indigenous scholars. One participant shares their experience with incorporating Indigenous knowledge in a field that does not recognize Indigenous science and the challenges they face when changing the language of rigor:

It's so true though. I mean and I fight against [the constructed superiority of western knowledge] now in my own discipline, of scientific supremacy. It's like white supremacy and they're tied up together, they're intertwined. But it's this idea that only Western scientific knowledge is held up as valid, it's the only truth, it's the only right way, which I think is our next big hurdle. Because, guess what? Other systems of knowledge have their own internal checks and balances, systems of rigor, ways in which knowledge is passed on to whom by whom, who's allowed to receive what knowledge at what point, and this may be different across Indigenous nations. They'll have them, internally. It's not invented, made-up fantasy knowledge. This is grounded, and placed in history, in experience, in observation. (Participant #3)

Collectivism and nationhood instill a connection between Indigenous scholars and future Indigenous scholars fostering opportunities to create a space within the academy that allows them to visit, be relational, and practice reciprocity with communities. Each of these require a deep sense of responsibility and accountability to Indigenous knowledge, teachings, and stories. Ultimately, these findings show that Indigenous scholars want to transform the academy to make it more welcoming for Indigenous students and for future Indigenous graduate students to conduct research ethically and

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safely with Indigenous communities. The next theme explores strategies that Indigenous scholars use, as TribalCrit practitioners, to transform the academy.

*I've been working within a post-secondary for the past three years and the amount of energy needed to consistently push against the system and move it to transformation is exhausting. For an Indigenous person to work within a post-secondary institution, there is a constant need to build the capacity of your colleagues to understand why providing supports and programs to Indigenous students is important, justifying why there needs to be certain initiatives to reduce barriers for Indigenous students while it is not offered to other students, providing that Indigenous voice in spaces and tables that require that intersection to be represented, and there are many other examples of Indigenous employees focused on capacity of others instead of developing strategic initiatives that are focused on transforming the institution. If I didn't have the consistent support of my colleagues, all Indigenous, in the Indigenous Relations team, I would not be able to engage in these conversations and spaces without regularly second guessing and silencing myself because I didn't want to be 'that person'. I couldn't help but think of my own experiences while the participants shared their stories and I am truly grateful they gave me the language to express my frustration, but, more importantly, my hope.*

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**Chapter 5: Discussion**

Indigenous Peoples in Canada have a long history of being oppressed through colonialism, but the history also includes an unbroken will to resist cultural genocide, assimilation, and historical erasure. It is no surprise that Indigenous Peoples are now moving into spaces that were once not accessible to them, including post-secondaries, due to the enfranchisement clause in the Indian Act prior to 1985. There has been a notable increase of Indigenous students in post-secondary since the amendment to the Indian Act; however, there is still more work to be done in transforming post-secondaries to be welcoming space for Indigenous students and scholars.

The following sections will explore ways to transform the academy to make it more accessible and welcoming to Indigenous students. The first section describes how the academy can become a safe and welcoming space for Indigenous students. The second section shares how waves of Indigenous students and scholars have paved a path and are breaking new ground in the academy. The last section explores how the academy can improve how it establishes and maintains a reciprocal relationship with Indigenous communities.

*When I began my Masters program in the fall of 2018, I had just started a new job after leaving a leadership position in a non-profit organization. It was an intentional move to leave a leadership position to focus on school, family, and have a job that allowed more balance. Little did I know that my studies, job, and volunteer work would begin to intersect throughout my time in graduate school. At the time, my job was as an Indigenous Community Engagement Advisor, so I was able to apply what I was learning in school immediately into my job. My life began to revolve around education both as a student, administrator, researcher, and instructor. There was no clear line when my work turned to studying or vice versa, but it wasn't a bad thing. This led*

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*my work, student, and family life to be more of a heavily overlapping Venn diagram instead of my life being compartmentalized into silos. It felt like each of my roles in my life were finding balance and I was getting opportunities to work with communities, work on interesting projects, and work with diverse people. These opportunities then led to more leadership roles as I was offered an Acting Manager position, offered to sit on two non-profit boards, and started to co-lead or lead engagement planning projects with an Indigenous-owned consulting firm. The most exciting part of all of this is that I was accepted into a PhD program that will provide me the opportunity to be mentored by someone highly respected within Indigenous governance, which aligns well with my proposed research in decolonizing operational policy and practice. I'm excited to share all of this, but I am also grounded by my teachings of humility. My teachings also ground me in moving forward in a good way, which for me, is to have my community and family in mind through this work. With this, I approach all these roles and opportunities with the perspective of transforming and decolonizing systems that will address injustices against Indigenous peoples in Canada. This is a lofty goal and one that continually makes me feel an immense sense of imposter syndrome and accountability to community. Through this research, I see the importance of creating space to share successes, fears, and failures with my Indigenous colleagues. As I move forward in my career and studies, I will be holding the conversations I had with the participants in the research close to my heart and their advice as a guide to moving forward in a good way.*

### **Safe and Welcoming Space for Students**

Creating a safe and welcoming space for Indigenous students was a common theme with the participants. It didn't matter what the field was or how they taught, each felt there was a need

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to explore how the institution incorporates Indigenous knowledge while supporting Indigenous students to navigate the complexities of the institution. Absolon (2011) shares that:

Indigenous re-searchers work from their own sacred place. For Indigenous methodologies to manifest, they must have space for that to occur. Creating space allows shifts to occur so that Indigenous searchers can forge pathways for Indigenous methodologies in Indigenous searches. (p. 136)

Creating space fosters an environment of knowledge dissemination and innovation for Indigenous scholars to further explore Indigenous knowledge systems and methodologies. Although, there are still institutional and systemic barriers to creating these spaces and discussions about how Indigenous knowledge can be incorporated into the academy. One participant spoke about the conflict between Indigenous knowledge and institutional processes, the benefits of constructive discussions, and reiterates the importance of creating space:

And [non-Indigenous students] asked him about free speech and the [Elders] thought about free speech. The elders [answered] we don't have free speech. They're like, 'people don't have free speech, but the way in which you're coming at this from a totally different tradition, because the reason why free speech is important in our society today is because Canadian society is built upon a British system'. And so, a free way of thinking, that's not a right, that you have to just be vicious to people because you can. If you do that you're stepping out of balance. We want to be able to prevent situations where things go really poorly, but also you are part of living in a society where you just live around people that you disagree with. And some of those disagreements need to be addressed in very serious ways. But it's not the processes you need to follow or not too. It's impossible to create processes where you just stamp out disagreements entirely too and these are just stuff that you have to deal with. How do we [and] how are we able to create spaces, where we're able to create supportive environments for Indigenous students. Also where we have an impact on how non-Indigenous students think about Indigeneity, and colonialism. And where all of these things can have ripple effects in our broader society, in our ability to address the conditions and structures of settler colonization. (Participant #1)

Creating a safe and welcoming space would also apply to Indigenous scholars. For students and scholars alike, there is more to being Indigenous than just the academy. For many Indigenous students and scholars, dealing with personal, family, or community issues that are the

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result of intergenerational trauma is a common occurrence. A safe and welcoming space could act as a community space to feel supported when dealing with this trauma. As much as Indigenous scholars advocate for creating a space for themselves, there is always an accountability they feel to ensure they advocate for Indigenous students to be welcomed in that space as well. Wilson (2008) shares that there is an interconnectedness between Indigenous scholars that is meant to lift each other up and continually share opportunities for each other to grow and learn. He also shares that this interconnectedness is meant for Indigenous students to learn and grow as well. I have been given many opportunities through my graduate studies because of the interconnectedness of the Indigenous scholars at the University of Alberta. For one participant, they shared the need to create that space within their faculty, but also the importance of it for Indigenous students:

I mean, even in terms of our faculty, we in some ways are a family to each other, but also supporting each other when someone's family member is murdered, or someone [needs support]. We see it not just in our family life, but in our workplace life. I guess the other piece is we're here because we believe in the work, and we see the need, and that this is one space where Indigenous peoples come to. And so, that it would be a welcoming space, and that it would be a positive space for Indigenous students to learn. Whether that be in the community, whether that be in the university, and that right now, we have over 1000 Indigenous students also that are needing more ethical and respectable spaces on campus. (Participant #2)

Ultimately, this space will be welcoming to non-Indigenous scholars as well. The non-Indigenous scholars who have shown a commitment to building ethical and respectful relationships with Indigenous communities will be welcomed into this space. This can be seen in the work by McMahon et al. (2019), Kato (2018), and Lange (2018), who all worked with Indigenous communities and scholars respectfully and collaboratively to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into their work. However, creating this space should not become a place where non-Indigenous scholars come to begin their journey in learning about Indigenous Peoples. The

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amount of energy and resources it takes to build that capacity can be overwhelming and, if done in that space, may be more harmful than beneficial for Indigenous students and scholars. There are many resources available now for non-Indigenous scholars to walk that journey themselves and, when they have shown they have changed their approach to research with Indigenous communities, then they can enter that space. One participant shares their hope for this space to be welcoming for non-Indigenous scholars that have done the initial work on that journey:

My hope is to create ... I don't know what the word is, but to create a community within these academic institutions where Indigenous scholars and non-Indigenous scholars who are committing to this relationship or committing to these actionable and demonstrable acts and accountability can meet to co-create a community together. That's my hope. (Participant #4)

This hope is what drives many Indigenous scholars and students. The hope is that all the effort, time, and resources of creating a safe space in university will lead to transformation within the institution, in the community, and in larger society. The hope is that conversations, discussions, and storytelling will have ripple effects onto the views and perspectives of non-Indigenous families and communities. This hope is reiterated in work by Strega and Brown (2015), that creation of space, discussing ideas, and sharing insights, specifically through new literature inspires a new wave of “resurgence of knowledges founded in a diversity of spiritualities, philosophies, cultures, languages, and experiences” (12). A step towards realizing this hope is to see Indigenous knowledge throughout the academy. One participant shares a great analogy of water as a way to fill the gaps of the academy with Indigenous knowledge and the importance of seeing successful Indigenous colleagues in the academy:

[Indigenous knowledge as water would] just flow into the cracks and eventually we'll kind of fill it out. Where I've also used that we built the ivory tower, I don't want to take it all down right now, but I want to put enough cracks in it that eventually it'll become structurally unsound and then it will start to fall apart and then we'll have to be like, well, what can we do, what can we build it in a different way. So my purpose is not to be like, blow it all up, but to be like, insidiousness

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or success, and to be like water, to flow into those places where it can make a difference and then to create enough of a flow that it just sort of starts to rush, you know what I mean? And there's been other times where I've been triggered about dispossession where, there was this one experience I had where there was this woman at an archeology conference and she stood up, she's this powerful Indigenous matriarch, and she grounded herself and both of her family lines and in the places that she was from and she just stood in her power of who she was and her nation and her identity and I just, I had this wave of, that was taken from me. That's the power that I had a right to, and it's taken from me, and I'm slowly trying to re-braid, reweave those connections, re-bead those connections. For me it's hard work, but I also ... it's important for me to say that I'm doing that reconnecting, and to do that reconnecting. Because of the ways in which my identity has, the ways in which a Métis identity's been taken up right now, so I have to be very clear and I have to be saying, I'm doing this work. (Participant #4)

The connection to family and kinship is important with this work as it builds the foundation of Wahkohtowin. There is a common greeting between Indigenous Peoples which is 'where are you from?'. At an initial glance, this seems to be a very direct question, but there is kindness within this question. The greeting is meant to find out how the other person might be related to you either by family, community, or land. It is a question steeped in Wahkohtowin as the purpose is to find out if they are relatives. Many Indigenous scholars and students start relationships with other Indigenous colleagues as a way to place themselves (another term for this greeting based in Wahkotowin) and will end up finding relatives, as one participant shares their experience with events:

I love it. Because we're just like, and oh this is how we're- basically every time I meet a Métis person right now, or not even Métis, like all the Cree folks and stuff, we're like, so ... One of the students at one of the events, she's like, so I think I'm your cousin. So then we do that, let's pull out the family tree and I love it. I love it so much. So, anyway. (Participant #4)

Creating space for Indigenous students and scholars leads to conversations, knowledge dissemination, reciprocity, and new relationships. All of this is integral to Indigenous Peoples being successful in the academy. As an Indigenous student and junior scholar, seeing Indigenous scholars being successful in the academy, pushing for innovation within their fields, and carving

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the path for Indigenous Peoples like me is inspiring. Witnessing the success of Indigenous scholars in the academy shows future Indigenous scholars that, not only is there space for Indigenous Peoples in the academy, but there is potential to transform the academy to reflect the knowledge system and experiences of Indigenous Peoples. This transformation is the essence of being a TribalCrit practitioner. Brayboy (2005) states that “TribalCrit endeavors to expose the inconsistencies in structural systems and institutions - like colleges and university - and make the situation better for Indigenous students” (p. 441). The next theme section will explore this path paved by existing Indigenous scholars.

### **Following the path and breaking new ground**

It is becoming clearer that there are more and more Indigenous scholars in the academy; so much so that many of the Indigenous scholars that led the program development of my undergraduate degree are now nearing retirement. This is leaving a door open for emerging Indigenous scholars. One emerging scholar shared the influential Indigenous scholars that supported them in their studies.

I've taken courses from like Val Napoleon, Chris Anderson, James Dempsey, Leroy Little Bear, Taya Guilford, Glen Coulthard, Sheryl Lightfoot, Angela Wilson, and even today, [learning from these many Indigenous scholars] is still a very unique experience. But I was lucky enough to be in institutions where that stuff [Indigenous faculty] was kind of established and valued. (Participant #1)

Not all post-secondary institutions are the same in Canada, especially with how many Indigenous scholars are in the faculties. Obviously, this has an impact on the amount and level of Indigenous knowledge in some institutions. For post-secondary institutions that don't have many Indigenous scholars, this can put overwhelming expectations on newly hired Indigenous scholars to bring Indigenous knowledge in. Nonetheless, there is an importance of having Indigenous

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scholars hired into post-secondaries, especially since the release of the TRC Calls to Action. A first step for post-secondary institutions to move forward with reconciliation is to hire more Indigenous scholars. Once these Indigenous scholars are hired, there starts to become more conversations about Indigenous knowledge and what the academy can do to move reconciliation forward. Even before reconciliation was identified, there were many Indigenous scholars that found existing methodologies didn't provide the framework to properly explore Indigenous knowledge systems, which led to important work by Wilson, (2008), Absolon (2011), Kovach (2009), Archibald (2008), and many others. When there are conversations about Indigenous knowledge, many Indigenous scholars will begin that conversation by identifying there is diversity of Indigenous knowledge systems in Canada. This is a simple idea, but it is very important for non-Indigenous scholars to understand, so they don't unintentionally put Indigenous students in awkward and potentially harmful situations to explain what Indigenous knowledge systems are in a classroom full of non-Indigenous students. This scenario could lead to generalized discussions about Indigenous knowledge that would lead to understanding Indigenous knowledge through a pan-Indigenous approach. One participant shares their concern about this pan-Indigenous approach as it doesn't reflect the diversity of Indigenous knowledge systems in Canada, but it starts to put boundaries on what Indigenous knowledge is and limits conversations on what Indigenous knowledge could look like such as lived experience:

But, you know, one thing I would say is that we shouldn't be too quick to relegate it to what I would call traditional knowledge. This is knowledge prior to settler colonialism [and I] probably wouldn't [make this] the kind of boundary that I would draw. When we start putting up too many boundaries and distinctions around what gets to count as Indigenous knowledge and it is not to be based on how Indigenous Peoples live their lives and the knowledge they use to survive today, then it's really easy to slip into fundamentalisms. (Participant #1)

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Indigenous Knowledge is moving in a direction of looking at different fields and topics through the intersection of relationality, Indigenous Knowledge systems, and nationhood. Some of the exciting and innovative areas explored by Indigenous scholars in different areas include, but not limited to, Indigenous futurisms by Hernandez (2019) and Nixon (2016), or Tallbear (2017) who explores the intersection of technoscience and Indigenous governance. These explorations are found in spaces where Indigenous scholars can visit, share stories and build relationships. It is relationality and Indigenous research methods in action. Creating spaces for Indigenous scholars to share new ideas, gather feedback on new approaches, or to be inspired by their Indigenous colleagues. These spaces can also lead to new collaborations between Indigenous scholars that push boundaries of fields. For some Indigenous scholars, this space exists within their faculties, and they are able to manifest brilliance with their colleagues. While other Indigenous scholars in faculties with little to no Indigenous colleagues struggle to have Indigenous knowledge and new ideas recognized. One participant shares their experience being in a faculty full of Indigenous scholars and provides insight into how some Indigenous scholars can struggle in other faculties:

But a lot of us are Indigenous, young professors. So, we are constantly talking in these terms. You know, we're confident talking about peoples in place. We're talking constantly about critical Indigenous theory about gender and the importance of sexuality, gender, and gender fluidity. We're constantly thinking about governance. All these things are part of the way we're thinking and talking about the world already. And I see my colleagues outside of the faculty here, are constantly being questioned for those kinds of ideas, those kinds of values.  
(Participant #2)

Current Indigenous graduate students and future Indigenous students will be following the path paved by brilliant Indigenous scholars before them. These brilliant Indigenous scholars have built the foundation for Indigenous junior scholars, graduate students, and undergraduate students to learn about critical Indigenous theory, Indigenous research methods, and relationality.

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Even more so, this foundation is continually being built upon with new ideas and innovation.

One important approach being prioritized by junior Indigenous scholars and graduate students is the commitment to working with Indigenous communities. There is a growing recognition that working with Indigenous communities will lead to more transformative and widespread change.

In the next section, the concept of community and reciprocity will be discussed.

### **Community and Reciprocity**

There is a long history of post-secondary institutions exploiting and extracting Indigenous communities to access funding, to build the reputation of the institution, and for Settler scholars to excel in their careers (Smith, 1999). Indigenous communities have hesitancy if asked to work with post-secondary institutions due to this history. Add that many Indigenous communities are now either exploring or implementing their own sovereignty and nationhood. Today, Indigenous communities are no longer just research subjects; they are leading or co-leading research projects in their communities to address their own issues and concerns. Additionally, non-Indigenous scholars are starting to recognize the time and resources needed to work respectfully with Indigenous communities; which can be seen with Castelden et al. (2012) who describes how they spent the first year drinking tea before diving into the research.

Post-secondary institutions are now moving into a space that recognizes the need to ensure all scholars and students at their campus know how to develop ethical relationships with Indigenous Peoples and communities. One participant shares their hope that their post-secondary institution will begin to foster and encourage all graduates to respectfully engage with Indigenous communities:

I guess what could be is that the 30 000 students that we have every year would, when they come through the U of A, would have some beginning understandings of how to be in ethical relationships with Indigenous communities ... And so, even thinking about long term research partnerships, starting to think of, okay my

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job in terms of these long term relationships is that the communities themselves have the infrastructure and the supports so they take on the research, and they take on whatever it is that they want to do themselves, and that the university then leaves. So, there is a need for us at this moment in time to do better work and the whole campus to do better work. But then, there is also that reminder of, to what end? Perhaps there's that balance, that we're aware in our position of privilege in the university, that we are giving back to communities and funneling resources to them to help them with what they desire to do. (Participant #5)

The way Indigenous knowledge is being introduced into teaching is moving beyond the guest speakers of Elders and Knowledge Keepers to a space where you transform the outline of a course or assignments within the course that is informed by Indigenous knowledge and lived experience. As one participant states, they have structured the course outline to cover topics over several weeks instead of a different one each week. This allows students some freedom on missing classes due to unforeseeable circumstances (which is a common encounter for Indigenous students). This trauma-informed approach allows students to overcome personal obstacles without the strict consequences of a rigorous course outline. They come back into a topic if they have to miss a week because their community had a death, their family had a crisis, or they have to help a family member navigate a system (welfare, justice, etc.). An Indigenous person's life goes beyond the walls of the institution and building a course outline that allows for a trauma-informed approach is something only an Indigenous scholar with lived experience would know unless an instructor begins to engage with a community to inform their course development.

Another subtle way to infuse Indigenous knowledge is shifting discussion and group assignments to the activity of visiting. Visiting is seen as a way of building relationships as a priority and the intended outcomes or objectives as a by-product of those relationships (Gaudet, 2019). Changing these assignments or assessments to a visiting approach based in Indigenous knowledge allows students to see teaching, pedagogy, and the academy from a different lens that

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positions Indigenous knowledge as an authority in teaching. Framing assignments and discussions around visiting can also influence the way students eventually approach their careers and work with Indigenous communities. They may approach working with Indigenous communities through visiting and relationship building rather than consultation. There are ways to change the classroom, but there is also a need to ensure this transformation isn't isolated and this transformation is occurring across the academy.

Along with the small acts of self-determination and sovereignty, Castagno (2012) shares the following that can support the work of transforming pedagogy within the academy:

[First], contextualizing and localizing curriculum and pedagogy so that it resembles the knowledge and learning of local communities; [second], the knowledge, norms, values, resources and epistemologies of communities are viewed as legitimate and are intimately integrated into schools; and [third] students are engaged and learning “school knowledge” at the same time and through experiences that also facilitate the learning of local community knowledge. (p. 17)

Castagno's focus is on secondary schooling, but these three areas can be implemented into post-secondary institutions as well. This approach can build upon the changes within the course outline shared earlier. There is still a need for Elders and Knowledge Keepers in the classroom. As one participant stated, they are knowledgeable about culture, but are not Knowledge Keepers or a lodge keeper. That knowledge still needs to be invited into the classroom. Elders and Knowledge Keepers are community members, so they provide an invaluable lens into the community, protocol, and history. The ideas stated before are ways to ensure Elders and Knowledge Keepers see that they are not only an external expert asked to speak, but rather an expert who can emphasize the importance of Indigenous Knowledge infusion into the classroom and academy.

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### **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

Transforming the academy and classroom are daunting tasks for anyone, but it can be outright unattainable for Indigenous scholars. This transformation can be overwhelming for Indigenous scholars as it requires an immense amount of resilience, commitment, and passion. For many Indigenous scholars, the motivation that keeps them moving forward is their commitment to relationality, Indigenous knowledge systems, and community. There is a responsibility felt by Indigenous scholars to ensure Indigenous students are experiencing post-secondary education in a better environment than they did and can build upon or be innovative in their research. This commitment and responsibility are the foundation of being a TribalCrit practitioner.

As a TribalCrit Practitioner, Indigenous scholars “take part in the process of self-determination and in making institutions of formal education more understandable to Indigenous students and Indigenous students more understandable to the institutions” (Brayboy, 2006, 441). This process will consist of steps towards self-determination, relationality, reciprocity, nationhood, and sovereignty. There is considerable impact from the small act of changing course outlines, such as changing group discussions to visiting or structuring lesson plans to be in blocks instead of week to week. Indigenous scholars are being innovative and thoughtful about how they incorporate Indigenous knowledge into their classrooms. Similarly, Indigenous scholars are just as innovative when attempting to transform the academy.

Creating space for visiting, knowledge sharing, relationship building, and sharing failures, successes and risks, is an important aspect of incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the academy. It is a safe and welcoming space for Indigenous scholars and students. It is a space for Indigenous colleagues to learn about what has been done before them, what is currently going

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on, and what can be done in the future. Not only does this include teaching and research, but it is a way for Indigenous scholars and students to learn more about community. Of course, community can be built into teaching with community service learning, inviting guest speakers, and experiential learning; but including community in that visiting and relational space can impact the academy. This invitation can lead to reciprocal relationships between Indigenous scholars and community; while also giving community members, especially Elders and Knowledge Keepers, the opportunity to share how the academy can be transformed to serve the community. They will also hold Indigenous scholars accountable to ensure Indigenous knowledge is respected and attempt to eliminate the dilution, extraction, exploitation, and appropriation of Indigenous knowledge.

This focus on the community, future students, and transformation of the academy is at the heart of TribalCrit. I share Brayboy's hope that TribalCrit will serve as a way to address the issues and experiences described in this paper and that "research will lead both to a better understanding of the needs of Indigenous communities and to changes in the educational system and society at large that benefit Indigenous communities" (p. 441). It was evident in this research that Indigenous scholars are moving in this direction, and this hope is not a basis of 'what if', but rather a 'when' this transformation will happen.

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